

blossom of snow, bloom and grow

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76815636) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76815636>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander , Hayden Pike , other side characters
Additional Tags:	Established Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Mpreg , Male Pregnancy , Pregnant Shane Hollander , Morning Sickness , Fluff , Fluff and Angst , Hurt/Comfort , Emotional Hurt/Comfort , Pregnancy , Protective Ilya Rozanov , Smut , Babies , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Happy Ending , Slice of Life , Domestic Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-31 Words: 31,912 Chapters: 1/1

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by [imbihesgay](#)

Summary

“It’s not something we’ve discussed too much,” Shane admits reluctantly. “I mean, I think we talked about it once or twice, after being around Hayden’s kids. But...I was afraid...I don’t know if you want...” His sentence falters and he presses a hand to his stomach, inhaling slowly like he’s trying to soothe more nausea.

It takes Ilya’s brain a few moments to process, to catch up, to piece together this half-filled puzzle Shane’s laying out for him.

“We talked about having babies,” Ilya supplies, arching an eyebrow, “are you trying to say we are...having a baby?”

Shane sucks in another slow, controlled breath. “Um, yeah. That’s what I’m trying to say.”

“You are pregnant?”

Wincing, the shorter man nods. “Mhm.”

-or, vignettes of shane's unexpected pregnancy-

Notes

i literally don't even know what to say omg.

warnings for mpreg, smut, birth, general adult themes? the smut gets kinda freaky. ye be warned.

this is my first time writing for these two, after reading both books and watching the show (over and over and over)

i hope you enjoy, forgive me if its ooc, but pls don't come for me lol.

thanks for reading xx

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

-8 weeks-

He is most beautiful like this.

It's the thought that won't leave Ilya's mind, even as his fingers indent shapes into the soft curvature of Shane's hips. Even as he hears the uncontrolled, floaty sounds spilling from the other man's pursed mouth. Even as he finds himself struggling to hold on, make it last longer, keep those happy little noises coming out of Shane as long as he can possibly withstand it.

At the start, there had been more talking. Slippery, messy, muttered sounds.

"Ilya...oh...oh fuck."

"Oh god, shit, right there, oh-oh!"

"Fuck, fuck, that's so good, oh god."

But now, even though the ecstasy is still plainly written across his features, Shane has gone quiet. He's riding Ilya so well, like a very good boy, but he's mostly just *breathing* now. Heavy, thick sounds, from deep in his chest. Almost as if he is struggling to find air.

Ilya knows he is not breathless from exertion. He is in very good shape, and he has only been riding his cock for... well, he doesn't know exactly, but not *too* long.

But he was talking before, moaning, throwing his head back and reacting in a way he isn't now. Maybe he is just focused? But it is not like him, usually, to be so quiet.

It had started a little aggressive, more so than they are used to. Which is saying something, Ilya thinks. They'd thrown each other into walls -well, Ilya did most of the throwing- and cursed each other's name and generally just *went at it*, as they say.

Normally this is not too much. Shane likes this, Ilya knows. He likes to be bossed around, told what to do and where to put what, filled to the brim with good, dominant cock.

"Hollander," Ilya grunts, glancing up through his eyelashes at the thin bead of sweat dewing on Shane's forehead.

Shane doesn't answer, eyes sort of glassy, looking faraway, somewhere else.

"Hollander," Ilya repeats, voice a bit more stern this time.

Shane blinks down at him, hips not stopping their vigorous motions. "What?"

"Are you..." Ilya hesitates, tightening his grip on the other man's waist. "Everything is fine?"

"Obviously," Shane says, shaking his head. "Why?"

"You went quiet," he replies, unsure.

At that, Shane arches an eyebrow at him, sort of teasing. “Oh, you need me to talk you through it, do you?”

Upon noticing he’s apparently fine enough to be a little shit, Ilya sweeps an arm around his back and swiftly rolls him over. At that, Shane goes stiff, and not in the good way.

“What is your problem?” Ilya asks him, brows furrowed as he looks down at Shane’s face. He’s a little pale.

“Why’d you stop?” Shane’s voice gets a bit whiny at that, eyes narrowing, nose wrinkled as his hands claw at the meat of Ilya’s lower back.

“Because you are acting weird and that is not sexy,” Ilya tells him flatly.

With a scowl, Shane tips his chin up. “Fuck you.”

“I know you would like to, but first, what is wrong?”

“What’s wrong is I’m hard and you’re not-”

With a huff of annoyance, Ilya thrusts his hips forward, sheathing himself deeper within Shane’s entrance. The other man’s words cut out in a guttural gasp, and his blunt nails dig into the skin of Ilya’s back.

“That’s it then? You want me to fuck you and then you will tell me your problem?”

“I don’t have a problem.”

“Why are you-”

“Oh my god, Ilya, just *fuck me already*.”

That is hard to argue with. Ilya rolls his hips forward again, pleased when Shane lets out a small, high-pitched noise of relief. That is a good sound- content, happy, pleased.

Carefully, Ilya begins moving again, feeling the tight, warm walls enclosed around him. He closes his eyes for a moment, body moving rhythmically in sync with Shane’s.

His eyes open again only when he feels a hand pressing into his chest, and he looks to see Shane shoving him off, one hand flat over his mouth.

Confused, Ilya immediately slips out, which makes them both grunt in discomfort, and falls backward on the bed as Shane scrambles out of it, making a beeline for the adjacent bathroom.

Ilya’s feet are moving before he consciously decides to do so. He’s two steps behind Shane, then on the floor next to him as he bends over the toilet and expels what little he’s had to eat today.

There's no hesitation as his fingers come out to draw slow, smooth lines down the knobs of Shane's spine. Shane doesn't resist, just grips the toilet seat and retches miserably.

This is still so special for them, this intimacy. Since they'd decided to be together without fear, it's been...better. These types of things feel right, easy, smooth. The barriers lift, and they're *partners*. In it together, not at each other's throats.

"I see why you act weird," Ilya notes as Shane leans back and struggles to catch his breath, "you are sick."

Shane grimaces, reaching over and flushing the toilet. He doesn't reply, just takes a few slow breaths.

"You been around someone sick?" Ilya asks, studying his pale face.

Shane stays quiet.

"Well, Ginger Ale will help, no?" Ilya gets to his feet and extends a hand toward Shane, who glances at it warily.

"I'm not sick," he says, voice trembling.

Ilya glances between the toilet and his partner, eyebrow quirked. "This is not sick? You throw up for fun, then?"

"Fuck you," Shane mutters, head dipping low between his shoulders.

Ilya purses his lips, scrutinizing Shane- his bowed posture, his haggard eyes, his scratchy voice. He'd known something was up the moment Shane first walked in today, but he tried to ignore the nagging feeling in his gut that alerted him to his concerns. Shane is a grown man. If something is bothering him, Ilya thinks at this point in their relationship, he would probably bring it up. They are committed to one another. They love each other.

"Shane," Ilya says quietly, squatting down in front of him. His voice is tender around the syllables of Shane's first name, a moniker that has the other man looking up solemnly.

Those big, baby deer eyes are just about enough to make Ilya's chest explode, but he keeps his composure for both of their sakes.

"You want to tell me what is going on?" Ilya asks him, reaching out to brush his fingertips along the freckled map of Shane's cheekbones. "I don't like guessing anymore, you are looking ill."

Shane's lashes flutter. He licks his lips, drawing closer to Ilya's touch almost instinctively. He glances up and meets his eyes, anxiety shining clear in his gaze.

"It's not something we've discussed too much," Shane admits reluctantly. "I mean, I think we talked about it once or twice, after being around Hayden's kids. But...I was afraid...I don't know if you *want*..." His sentence falters and he presses a hand to his stomach, inhaling slowly like he's trying to soothe more nausea.

It takes Ilya's brain a few moments to process, to catch up, to piece together this half-filled puzzle Shane's laying out for him.

"We talked about having babies," Ilya supplies, arching an eyebrow, "are you trying to say we are...having a baby?"

Shane sucks in another slow, controlled breath. "Um, yeah. That's kinda what I'm trying to say."

"You are pregnant?"

Winching, the shorter man nods. "Mhm."

Ilya blinks at him in disbelief. His eyes cast down from his pale face, the slope of his bare chest, the trim flat span of his stomach. He doesn't look any different, just a little nauseous.

"How...long have you known?" he asks cautiously.

Shane sniffs, wiping a hand across his mouth. "Um, just since this morning. That's actually why I wanted to come over, so we could talk about it but we got...distracted."

"Oh." Ilya leans back, trying to take this in. It isn't exactly a *surprise*, given the fact that they've been...frankly less careful than they should be as of late. Still, he hadn't expected Shane to be telling him this today.

Shane laughs dryly, the sound thick with unsaid emotion. He presses a palm flat against the wall, moving to stand on trembling legs.

Ilya's arm shoots out on instinct to hold him, help guide him to his feet. They're both still naked, standing in the bathroom, wide-eyed and unsure.

"It would never work, right?" Shane says, and that small, phony little half smile crosses his face, like he's trying to convince them both of the words coming out of his mouth. "I mean, the season is coming up, and we're not ready to tell the whole world about us, and we're not...ready for this, are we?"

Ilya takes a moment to absorb everything Shane is saying, trying to reconcile his logical thought process with the feeling slowly beginning to crescendo in his own chest.

We are having a baby.

"I think...is not about any of that," he says evenly, "do you want to have my baby, Shane?"

Shane makes a noise in the back of his throat, a startled, half-choked sort of sound. "I-I mean, we can't, right? We-"

"Not what I asked," Ilya interjects, voice firm. "Do you *want* to have my *baby*?"

With each word, he takes a careful step closer, running his touch gently up Shane's arm, then his bicep, his collarbone, his neck, the cut of his jaw. Shane is trembling again, uneasy on his

feet, face a bit green under his pallor skin.

Their eyes meet, something like static zipping between them as they move closer. Ilya feels the heat of Shane's body, his pulse thrumming underneath his warm skin, the butterfly quick beat of his frantic little heart, the fear and reluctance to admit what he actually wants, when faced with the logical choice.

"Yes," Shane's voice is barely a whisper, as the truth slips from his mouth before he can catch it and lock it away. "I want to have your baby, Ilya."

He's afraid- that much is clear. Ilya is too. How could they not be? Their friends and family may be in the loop on their romance, but the world is not. *Hockey* is not. And to Shane, few things are more important than the latter.

Well, Ilya likes to think, just one thing.

"You can take one season off," he reasons calmly. "Coach will understand- it's medical. We don't have to tell whole world if you don't want. Doesn't have to be anyone's business but ours."

Shane hesitates, inching closer. "I don't see how it works out."

"You don't have to, I see for us."

"You didn't say that you want this," Shane says.

"What?"

"You asked me if I want it. I said yes. But you haven't said." The other man licks his lips, frantic energy rolling off of him in waves. "Do *you* want this, Ilya?"

Ilya realizes then that this anxiety, this fear and nervousness pouring out of his partner like a pitcher of lemonade being dumped all over the sidewalk, isn't actually about hockey, or the world, or any of that other bullshit that makes their lives trickier than they'd like.

Shane is afraid of Ilya not wanting this. Not wanting him.

"Oh, *sweetheart*." Ilya's tone goes impossibly soft, and the next moment their bodies are crushed together. He buries his face in Shane's dark hair, feeling the other man curl into the embrace, arms wrapping around his waist, face pressed against Ilya's bare chest. There's warm, wet liquid coming from his eyes, but he doesn't let the sound of upset leave his lips. He's composed, as much as he can be, while Ilya holds him, and murmurs quiet reassurances.

"I am here," he coos, "I want this too, Shane. I want this so much."

"Y-you do?" Shane's voice is wobbly.

"Oh, of course I do. I want you, I want babies, I want life together. More than anything."

Shane lets out a small, wet laugh. “Bab-ies? Why don’t you slow down there? Getting full of yourself already.”

“Mm, no I think *you* are full of me, darling.”

“Ugh.” Shane pulls back, wiping at his eyes until his expression has smoothed over to one of composure. Their gazes meet again, his long lashes sticky with tears, face flushed under his freckles. He exhales again, wrapping his arms around himself tensely, like he’s just remembered he’s still naked. “It’s cold in here.”

“We will get dressed, and get you some Ginger Ale,” Ilya suggests, “good for your upset tummy. Is morning sickness, I think?”

Shane nods. “I guess so.”

“Come with me.”

Shane accepts the arm that wraps around his shoulders, allowing Ilya to lead him back into the bedroom, where he offers him a pair of soft joggers and a big cotton t-shirt. He looks so fucking *cute* with his hair all ruffled, swimming in Ilya’s big shirt, standing unsurely in the doorway of the bedroom with one arm pressed against his stomach like he’s guarding whatever is growing there.

“Come on,” Ilya says, kissing the top of his head as they walk toward the kitchen, “we just relax now. And we will figure the rest out tomorrow, mm?”

“That sounds so fucking good,” Shane admits, lowering himself gingerly down on to Ilya’s large sofa. He tucks his legs up underneath him, rubbing at his eyes tiredly. Ilya drapes the throw blanket on the back of the couch over his body, and Shane glances up at him, a bit surprised at the action.

“You did not eat today, I assume?” Ilya murmurs, running his knuckles delicately down the slope of Shane’s soft cheek.

Leaning into the touch, his eyes close and he exhales. “No.”

“I make you something.”

Shane grimaces. “I don’t think that’s a good idea. Not unless you want a repeat of what just happened in the bathroom.” He pauses, opening his eyes to look up at Ilya’s face, suddenly appearing contrite. “I’m sorry- about...we were in the middle of something and I stopped us. I-”

“Shane.” Ilya presses his index finger to the little bow in Shane’s lips, shushing his ridiculous apology. “You can stop that for any reason at all, whenever you feel like it. Stopping for that was a very good reason.”

Shane’s lashes flutter, expression bashful.

“I make you something,” Ilya says resolutely, “better to eat, even if it comes back up.”

Surprisingly, Shane doesn't argue.

Ilya steps into the kitchen, exhaling a somewhat uneven breath. Making Shane something to eat is just as much an escape for him to gather his thoughts as it is concern for his wellbeing.

He'd meant what he said. He is in this with Shane, every step of the way. But he's bumping into something sort of confusing.

This is supposed to be scary. Shane is obviously very afraid. This could completely ruin their careers, both of them. It most certainly will affect Shane's. Not to mention the fact that Ilya doesn't exactly have the best models for parenting under his belt. Two dead parents, only one of whom he'd ever actually have considered letting near his future child.

Future child.

That should be scary, no? So why does he feel so...warm inside? His chest is buzzing with electricity and strange excitement. He knows it will be complicated with hockey, and the public relations side of it, and the inevitable life-altering event that *is* having a child. It will be monumental for him, and Shane, and both of them together.

Still he...he can't find the fear.

He hums quietly to himself while he makes Shane some toast, and scrambled eggs. He's halfway through plating the eggs when he wonders if something like this might make him feel more ill. Eggs can be dicey on a good day. He doesn't know if Shane really likes them on their own.

He does know that Ginger Ale is safe.

Ilya decides to separate the eggs and toast and offer them on their own, to gauge how Shane feels. He tucks two Ginger Ale cans under his arm and brings his haul into the living room, to find Shane with droopy eyelids, watching an old Admirals game.

Cute is the word that comes to mind again. *Beautiful*, too.

"Toast?" Ilya passes him the plate.

Shane accepts the plate in one trembling hand, taking a slow, controlled breath. He furrows his brow, glancing up at Ilya unsurely.

"What?" Ilya asks. "Make you feel worse?"

"It's just, it's all carbs," he says, "and is that butter?"

Ilya arches an eyebrow. "You want eggs?" He holds the plate out invitingly.

Shane presses a hand to his mouth, recoiling. "God, no."

"Toast it is then." Ilya sets the Ginger Ale on the coffee table in front of him, then heads back into the kitchen to dispose of the offensive eggs.

After scarfing down three scrambled eggs in record time -standing at his kitchen island- Ilya returns to the living room to find Shane nibbling on the crust end of one slice of toast. The Ginger Ale can is cracked open, and when he taps it with his finger, feels significantly lighter.

“Helping?” he asks, gesturing to the can.

Shane nods, but his green hue doesn’t look quite resolved.

Ilya sits heavily beside him on the couch, reaching over to rest his hand leisurely on the other man’s thigh. Shane settles a bit, breathing out in a comfortable manner, the tension in his body sort of seeping away.

Quietly, they watch the rest of the game. Shane nibbles on the toast, but doesn’t get much down. He finishes a whole can of Ginger Ale and starts on another, but stops before he can clear it halfway.

“You’re staring at me,” Shane says, setting the can back down beside his mostly uneaten toast.

“I was just wondering,” Ilya replies conversationally, “when you think it happened?”

“When I think what happened?”

Ilya snorts. “When you think you got so dumb?”

Shane narrows his eyes. “Fuck you.”

“When the *baby* happened, Hollander.”

“Oh.” Shane purses his lips, glancing down at his unchanged middle with a thoughtful expression. “Remember, that night after the Greek restaurant? We went with Rose and Miles to that place with the-”

“Ah, yes, the dreamcatchers.” Ilya smirks. “You let me fuck you in dirty bathroom of weird little shop.”

“It wasn’t weird, I liked it there. And you *begged* me to let you.”

“Mm. Who could blame me?”

“Well, we weren’t exactly careful.” Shane rolls his eyes. “I should’ve known your sperm would be stubborn enough to get the job done in one try.”

“English is not my first language, but I think word you are looking for is *potent*, not stubborn.”

“You’re gross. That’s the word I want.”

Ilya chuckles dryly, keeping his eyes glued to Shane’s face. Shane pointedly does not look in his direction, but there’s a visible quirk at the corner of his lips, a smile he’s suppressing in

favor of trying to look annoyed.

“Shane,” Ilya says, voice a bit more solemn.

Shane glances over at him, attention caught by the sincerity in Ilya’s voice.

“Yeah?” Shane asks, swallowing visibly.

Ilya sits up, scooching closer until their thighs are touching. He reaches out tentatively, tracing lines down Shane’s leg, which makes the other man shudder.

“Is going to be okay,” he says, hoping that the small assurance is enough to wipe the anxiety from Shane’s body language. “We are going to be okay.”

Shane softens at that, letting the gentle smile break through. He brings his hand down to lace his fingers through Ilya’s, squeezing, and it feels like being injected with pure hope.

“You’re probably right,” Shane says, “for once.”

“Da! I am always right of course.”

“Jesus Christ.”

“You like it.”

“Yeah. I do. I really am an idiot.”

“Agreed.”

“Fuck you.”

Shane’s leg is tapping nervously against the gray carpet. His stomach is twisted up in knots, and he can’t tell if it’s anxiety, lack of proper food, or the morning sickness that decidedly does *not* only come around in the morning.

Ilya is sitting beside him, idly stroking his fingers down the column of Shane’s spine. It’s a comforting gesture usually, but right now, with how anxious he is, the feeling just makes him want to crawl out of his skin.

He’s feeling pretty weird all over, out of control in his own body. It’s been a week since he found out about the pregnancy, and already his mind is going haywire. He’s fallen into a rabbit hole of researching what can go wrong, and right now, *so much*.

The wear and tear on his body from years of hockey will make this whole thing no easy feat, not that it *ever* is for anyone. Not to mention, the inevitable shit that’s going to come along with having to announce it to people.

By the time the season starts, if he’s estimating correctly, he’ll be nearly four months pregnant. Not exactly a solid candidate to be throwing his body in front of the puck and

taking hits into the boards.

So, he's spiraling a little about his career, but he's also kind of okay with it, in a weird way. Because he really wants the baby. It's weird. He used to think there was nothing he could ever want more than hockey. Then Ilya came along, and that was no longer true. Then for a while he thought there was nothing he'd ever want more than Ilya.

But then came...this *longing*.

This pull in his chest whenever he sees Ilya sweep down and scoop up one of Hayden's kids, obnoxiously messing with them but always making sure they never get hurt. The constant nagging from Pike about "*when are you two finally gonna get it over with and pop a few out?*" It's an annoying question every time, but Shane can't deny that it makes him...yearn.

It isn't like he got pregnant on purpose. This wasn't planned, and they aren't out to the whole world, and even though they're pretty serious these days, they definitely weren't *intending* to have kids so soon.

But again, he can't lie and say he isn't...well, fucking excited.

He hopes to god Ilya feels the same way and isn't just putting on a show to make him happy or reassure him. He can't help but feel paranoid about that, wondering if this is all some sort of obligation or guilty conscience. He tries to push those feelings down because he knows Ilya loves him and wants a life with him.

"Hollander."

The voice calling his name is not Ilya, but instead a nurse in pink scrubs, smiling at him warmly. They're in a small clinic in Montreal, somewhere he hopes to god is discreet. It's not like he's an A list celebrity or anything, but a lot of people in the area know his face, even if they aren't sure where they're placing him from. Probably usually a Reebok ad.

Shane looks at the nurse almost uncomprehending, until Ilya takes his arm and helps pull him to his feet. It's not smart for them to be here together, if word got out, they'd be, well fucked. But Shane couldn't do this alone. He couldn't bear the thought. And Ilya wasn't going to let him anyway.

"Come on," Ilya says in his ear, "let's see baby."

Shane's face feels warm at the poorly hidden eagerness in Ilya's voice. He nods and allows himself to be led through the door behind the nurse, Ilya on his heels.

"Well, Shane, we're going to get you started with some triage." Luckily, the nurse doesn't seem to recognize him. "Can you step up on the scale for me?"

Shane nods at her. "Yes, thank you."

He turns to set his jacket down, noticing Ilya's confused expression, before he realizes they've both been speaking French.

“Oh, sorry,” he says to Ilya, and then to the nurse, “parles-tu anglais?”

“Yes, of course.” She smiles, switching to English with no issue.

“Thank you,” Ilya murmurs, looking relieved. It’s clear he wasn’t excited about the idea of not knowing what was going on during the appointment.

Shane smiles at him, then allows him to take his jacket before he steps up on the scale. She takes his height and weight, and he’s a little surprised to see he’s shaved off quite a few kgs.

The nurse jots this down and asks him, “is this normal weight for you?”

“Um, no actually.” Shane clears his throat, pretending not to notice Ilya’s intense eyes on him. “I’ve been pretty sick. Think I’ve dropped down a few.”

Her expression clouds with sympathy. “You had a positive at home pregnancy test, yes?”

“Three of them, actually.”

“Oh! Well, that definitely sounds like it could be some morning sickness. Let’s get you back into a room and we will discuss this further.”

They follow her to an exam room, where he’s first asked to step out and leave a urine sample. Then, she draws a blood sample, which isn’t particularly fun, but he sucks it up because he has no choice. She places a blood pressure cuff on his bicep and a pulse ox reader on his finger, and sits across from him on a little roll stool.

Ilya sits in the companion chair, not speaking, but watching every moment.

“À quelle fréquence tombez-vous malade?” she asks, a portable laptop on her knees.

“Chaque matin et chaque soir,” he replies, then curses, “sorry, um, every morning, every night. It sort of feels like all the time, really.”

“Oh, I’m sorry I forgot,” she says in English, looking apologetic. “So you are throwing up, how many times per day?”

Shane furrows his brow, trying to think. It’s so overwhelming when it happens, it’s hard to keep track.

“Few times in the mornings,” Ilya interjects, voice soft. “He wakes up feeling very sick and spends a while throwing up before he can keep down water and fruit. Then he is okay at lunch, but dinner time is hard for him.”

She’s nodding thoughtfully and typing furiously on her laptop as Ilya speaks. Shane looks at him gratefully.

“Is that...not normal?” Shane asks her, a little embarrassed at how small his voice is. He’s nervously tugging at the hem of his dry-fit sweatshirt.

“It is perfectly normal, though I know it's not pleasant,” she replies sympathetically. “We have some suggestions to try and can prescribe medication to hopefully help reduce that symptom. We do not want you to lose any more weight.”

Shane swallows thickly. “No, yeah of course. Um, how much should I be gaining exactly?”

“Everyone is different,” she replies. “You are obviously a very fit person. Do you exercise, lift weights?”

He nods. “Yeah.”

Ilya smirks, but doesn't interject.

“There is no set number, everyone is different,” she says, “as long as baby is healthy and Papa is healthy, that's what we are concerned about. There are some goal posts we need to hit throughout the pregnancy, but you should not worry about a specific number.”

“Shane is very good at worrying about specific things,” Ilya says, but it doesn't come out like an insult, it's more like a warning. Like he wants the medical team to be aware of this, so they can better take care of Shane.

“I'm not worried,” Shane insists, in a tone that accentuates his blatant worry.

“Other than the morning sickness, how are you feeling? Have you had any nipple sensitivity? Headaches? Constipation? Sore muscles? Trouble sleeping?”

Shane blinks at her. “Um...yeah, all...all of the above.”

“Okay.” She nods, clacking away on her laptop. “Any cramping pain in your lower abdomen?”

He shakes his head. “No, I mean it feels a little tight, I guess.” He runs a hand over his stomach, feeling the tenseness of the skin there. “I'm pretty bloated, so I figured that was why.”

“Perfectly normal,” she tells him. “Your urine and blood test did confirm pregnancy. We are going to have an ultrasound technician come perform one for you, and then the doctor will be in to go over some things. Do you have any questions for me in the meantime?”

Shane has about a million questions, but his brain is feeling scattered and unnerved and all over the place. He keeps repeating her words in his mind.

Confirmed pregnancy.

So, it's real. The baby is there, growing inside of him, preparing to exist in the world.

Even though he figured the at home tests were right, considering how shitty he feels, it's a different thing entirely to have it confirmed like this. It's suddenly so real.

It's scary but...but it's really exciting.

“No. Thank you,” he says to her as she gets up.

“Thank you,” Ilya parrots him.

“Of course. We will be back shortly.” The nurse smiles at them both and heads out, shutting the door behind her.

Shane lets out a breath he didn’t know he was holding.

“You look a little sick,” Ilya tells him, worry laced in each word.

Shane chuckles. “The sterile smell is kind of turning my stomach.”

Wordlessly, Ilya gets to his feet, closing the distance between them. He rests his palms flat on Shane’s thighs, leaning in to press their foreheads together. With Shane on the high cot, they’re about eye level.

“Nipples are sensitive, are they?” he asks roughly.

Shane’s face flushes with warmth. “Don’t be a dick right now.”

“Mm. I would like to know just how sensitive they are.”

“Knock it off.” Shane shoves him back playfully, though he can’t deny that he appreciates his boyfriend’s willingness to attempt lightheartedness right now.

“Look at me.” Ilya’s low voice is serious, commanding.

It’s humiliating how quick Shane obeys. Their eyes meet, Shane’s wide and anxious, Ilya’s calm and cool.

“Everything is okay,” Ilya tells him, “we are okay. You and me and baby, we are gonna be okay.”

Shane’s face feels warm with the gentle words, and his mouth quivers with emotions he isn’t sure how to let go of.

Luckily, he doesn’t have to.

There’s a gentle knock on the door and the ultrasound technician enters. There’s a brief flicker on her face when she takes them in, like she recognizes one or both of them, but she quickly glosses over it and heads toward the machine.

“Good morning Shane, Ilya,” she greets them with a smile, “are we ready to take a look at the baby?”

“We have never been more excited to look at anything before,” Ilya says calmly, pulling back from Shane with a cheeky wink that makes the shorter of the two roll his eyes.

“And Shane, you feel the same?” The tech grins at him.

“I actually do,” he admits with a breathless chuckle.

“Amazing. Go ahead and lay back for me, roll up your shirt and lower your pants a bit so we have good access to your whole pelvic area.”

“I can help, if you need,” Ilya offers.

“Stop it.” The heat returns to Shane’s face as he scooches down until he’s lying supine, and rolls his shirt up, lowering the hem of his pants. He feels weird and exposed. His skin is itchy, cold but also sweaty all at once, and the crinkly paper under his back is uncomfortable, and-

Mercifully, the tech flicks off all the lights.

He takes a slow, deep breath in, cherishing the sudden release from the bright fluorescent bulbs above.

“Better?” Ilya whispers to him, and he startles a bit, realizing his boyfriend is standing at the head of the cot, threading his fingers through Shane’s hair.

He nods quickly. A little better, at least.

“Oh!” He startles again, wincing at the cold squirt of blue gel that splatters on his stomach with no warning. The sensation is sudden and surprising, and he gasps a little.

“Next time, you let him know before you do something, please.” Ilya says, voice significantly less playful than it had been a moment ago.

“I-it’s okay,” Shane stammers.

“No, he’s right, I apologize.” She shakes her head. “Muscle memory for me, I’m sorry Shane. I know that’s a bit of an unpleasant surprise.”

“It’s really okay,” he repeats.

“I’m going to be placing this wand on your tummy,” she tells him, holding up the little white device. “The gel helps me get visibility. The pressure might be a little uncomfortable on your belly, let me know if it gets to be too much. The first trimester everything tends to be a bit more sensitive, so don’t be afraid to be vocal if something is uncomfortable. Okay?”

He nods. “Yeah, okay, thank you.”

“Thank you,” Ilya adds, sounding pacified.

“Of course. Alright, here we go.”

She presses the wand into his skin, and it *is* actually kind of uncomfortable. Nothing that he can’t handle, but she’s pressing the thing down so hard on his belly he’s wondering if this is going to squish their baby into a pancake.

She's speaking, so he tries to focus on her words. She's pointing out a lot of things about his anatomy, gestational sac, placenta, uterine wall-

And, oh.

A tiny little thing. A blurb. A little *nothing* really, when you look at it like this.

But also, at the same time, *everything*.

"Is that-" Ilya falters, glancing between Shane's belly and the screen.

"That's your baby, gentlemen," the tech replies with a smile. "Everything looks great so far. If our estimates are correct, I'd put you at around eight or nine weeks. It might be far enough along to hear the heartbeat, but don't be discouraged yet if we don't today. Often times eight weeks is a bit too soon."

Shane nods. Ilya nods. They exchange a glance. Shane hopes the anxiety isn't written so plainly across his face as it is in his heart.

Then, the heartbeat warbles into the air, and they both let out a shuddering sort of gasp.

"There we are," she says, "about 170 beats per minute."

"What?" Shane's voice goes up an octave. "Isn't that way too high? Is something wrong with them?"

"It is on the faster side, but still within normal range," she assures him, "fetal heartbeats are much, much faster than ours."

"That is...the baby?" Ilya asks, eyes big and disbelieving.

"That's right."

"Everything looks..." he hesitates, almost like he's afraid of the answer. "Is everything okay with Shane, and the baby? Are they okay?"

Shane's chest feels tight at the casual note of his voice, clearly layered over deep concern and worry. Ilya's not good with the idea of losing his people.

"I'm afraid only the doctor can read the results," she says gently.

"But you've done a lot of these before?" Ilya presses. "You'd see if something was wrong?"

"Ilya," Shane warns.

Sympathy is written across the tech's face. "Only the doctor can really say, but, I have no bad news for you, based on this ultrasound, Ilya. About either of them."

A small, shaking breath leaves his lips, and he nods gratefully. "Thank you."

“Of course. I know how unnerving this can be. You two settle in and the doctor will be right with you.”

“Hey,” Shane says once they’re alone, reaching his hand out toward Ilya, who instinctively takes it.

“Don’t,” Ilya says, “I am fine.”

“So am I,” Shane tells him, hoping his words come out steady and sure. He squeezes Ilya’s hand tightly, emphasizing. “So are *we*.”

And it’s odd to say outloud, the fact that Shane has now, for the next 8ish months, become a *we*. His body a shared unit. It’s something he’s going to have to get used to.

But glancing over at that little gray blob on the screen, and the surprising ferocity in Ilya’s protective gaze, that concept is getting easier and easier to swallow.

-16 weeks-

“So how did the Voyageurs take it?” Yuna Hollander asks as she ladles out a portion of soup for Ilya, who is waiting patiently at the kitchen island for seconds. He’s already forgotten the name of the soup, but it has green onions and mushrooms and a tangy, sort of sour broth that is warm and flavorful.

“Shane did not tell you?” he asks, arching an eyebrow with surprise.

Yuna exhales, glancing at the doorway that leads into the den, where Shane and his father are eating their own dinner while watching some old hockey movie about a miracle and ice. Ilya had been bored, and hungry, so Yuna brought him in for more soup.

“He doesn’t want me to worry, I don’t think,” she explains gently. “But, I can tell he’s upset about not playing this season, and I can tell his coach didn’t take the news well, based on the guilt I see all over his face.”

Ilya nods thoughtfully, dropping his gaze down to the swirling liquid in his bowl.

“And you,” she adds, “the guilt all over your face too.”

“Is not for the team,” he mutters.

“I know. It’s for Shane.”

“He is having a hard time,” Ilya admits quietly. “I know he wants to be back out there with his team. And I think part of it...part of it is that he feels like he let them down. His coach definitely made sure of that.”

At the tail end of his sentence, Ilya’s lips curl up in anger. The Voyageurs team is not like the Centaurs. They don’t...*care*. Shane had left the meeting with his coach in tears, calling Ilya

on the phone from his car with wrecked sobs that nearly made the other man skip his own practice and drive two hours just to go hold him.

“Is he allowed to skate still, at least?” Yuna asks, serving herself more soup and sipping it from the rim of her bowl, spoon forgotten.

Ilya winces. “Is, how do you call it? An ouch subject?”

She smirks. “Sore subject?”

“Ah, yes. Doctor says he can maybe ice skate until his belly is too big and he cannot balance. Then he should probably be careful. And she doesn’t recommend skating at all, because risk of falling. When he told her he is professional hockey player and he skates better than he walks, she got a little annoyed, I think. He left the appointment very annoyed himself.”

Yuna purses her lips. “He doesn’t fall very often.”

“I would catch him if he did,” Ilya says.

“So he hasn’t skated?”

“I took him with me to free skate at the public rink, two weekends ago, when it got late and everyone left,” Ilya tells her, “but he would not go on the ice, even though it was just us there. I think doctor made him nervous. And if he falls, he will think it is his fault for something going wrong. With the baby.”

There’s a note of sadness in Ilya’s voice that he hadn’t expected to come through. He hates that he’s done this to Shane. Taken him out of the season, ruined skating for him, not to mention made him throw up at the smell of things that were usually his favorite foods.

“Well, he can find other ways to get the skating itch out,” she says hopefully. “Maybe swimming. It might help with that lower back pain he’s having.”

She pushes off the island with her bowl in one hand and heads toward the den, Ilya on her heels. He thinks over her words, but he suspects he’d have a hard time trying to get Shane into swimming, especially with his growing belly.

The scene in the den when they enter is nearly too cute to cope with. David is sitting upright on one end of the sofa, elbow resting on the armrest, chin on his fist. He’s half-heartedly watching the movie, and he glances over at them when they enter.

Beside him, slumped over with his head on David’s shoulder, is Shane. He’s out cold, lashes drawn down over his freckly, flushed cheeks, lips parted, a small snore building in the back of his throat. He never used to snore before, but he’s been having a clogged up nose more often lately. The doctor said it was normal. *Pregnancy rhinitis*. It can come and go, or last a long time. Ilya hopes it goes soon, Shane is tired of having a stuffy nose and sounding like he has a cold.

“Aw,” Yuna murmurs as they enter, grinning. “Look at my boys.”

“He just drooped over on me,” David whispers back pleasantly, “hasn’t done this since he was a little boy- fallen asleep on his old man.”

Ilya takes his phone out and snaps a photo. “You must have a comfortable shoulder.”

“It was Shane’s favorite place to nap growing up,” Yuna says fondly. “He’d come home after a long practice, while I went to make us dinner, David and he would curl up on the couch. Poor thing would be so beat that he’d fall asleep right there on dad’s shoulder.”

David smiles down at Shane’s dark hair on his arm. “Some of my fondest memories.”

Ilya can’t help but feel that familiar pang in his chest at the words, the images. If only he’d had a father whose shoulder he could lie on at the end of a long day. A safe den to curl up in, while someone cooked him a filling dinner. Two people who loved him more than anything, and stuck around long enough to see that through.

That, he thinks, is what their baby is going to have.

Against his will, he imagines Shane, a bit older, hair grown out and slightly grayed at the ends. Lounging on a sofa in a cozy, dimly lit den. Ilya is talking to him from the kitchen, while the sound of something sizzling on the stove highlights the air. Tucked safely under Shane’s arm, is a little girl. Dark curly hair, a spray of freckles over her nose. She’s wearing athletic gear, her cheek is smushed into Shane’s shoulder, and he’s holding her so close, so tight, it’s as if he never wants to let go.

The child is at peace. She is loved, and seen, and whole.

“Honey?” Yuna’s hand on his shoulder is what snaps Ilya out of this thoughts. She and David are both looking at him with concern.

“Sorry,” he manages a small smile. “Just...he is very... I love him very much. And you two. You know that.”

“We do,” David assures him gently.

“I should get him to a proper bed, or his back will hurt.”

“Good thinking. If you two want to stay over, it’s no bother,” Yuna says.

Ilya nods. It might be easier to scoop Shane up, bring him to the guest bedroom, and try to lie him down without waking him if they stay over at his parents instead of the cabin just minutes away.

But he knows Shane will wake up sooner rather than later, face all scrunched up with discomfort, hair a wreck from the pillows and fuzzy sheets, and want to know why he isn’t in his own bed, his own home.

Or, more recently, *their* home.

“I should get him back home,” Ilya says, “but thank you.”

“Hey, buddy,” David says, nudging Shane gently, “come back to life.”

With a small grunt, Shane’s lashes flutter, and those beautiful brown eyes flicker awake. He blinks at everyone in visible confusion, like a baby deer skirting the highway for the first time, then his surprise settles and he yawns noisily.

“Time for bed,” Ilya tells him, unable to help the fond grin that pulls at the edges of his mouth.

“Okay,” Shane mutters, voice still groggy and not fully coherent. He holds his arms out like he’s expecting Ilya to scoop him up under the armpits.

“Come on.” Ilya takes his wrists and carefully pulls him to his feet. Shane wobbles a bit, bracing himself on Ilya’s arms. “Are you okay, Shane?”

“Mhm,” he replies sleepily, “fucking *exhausted*.”

“Of course you are, you are growing bones and lungs and a brain.”

“And still running your own,” Yuna adds.

“Exaclty. Is a lot of work.” Ilya brushes hair off his forehead, fingers tender and fond. “You want me to carry you to the car?”

“Nuh-uh.” Shane shakes his head, wiping his eyes clear and then finally letting out a long exhale. “Okay, I’m awake. Am I driving?”

“Absolutely not. Say goodbye and we’ll go.”

At the front door, Shane accepts his parent’s hugs and the mug of to-go soup his mom presses into his hand once she deems it steady. He smiles at them, still sleepy and soft, but a little more awake now.

“Bye mom, bye dad.”

“Bye sweetheart.” Yuna waves and Shane steps out onto the porch, yawning again.

“Thank you for dinner,” Ilya tells them.

“Don’t be silly.” Yuna leans in and squeezes him once, followed by David. “Come over anytime. Get home safe. Thanks for taking care of him.”

Thanks for taking care of me, he wants to say, but it seems like too much, so he just nods and smiles.

Once they’re alone, walking down the porch steps, Shane says, “the sun is barely setting now.”

Ilya follows his gaze to the mountains, where a bright beam of orange is slowly descending into nothingness.

“Yes?” he agrees, confused.

“It feels like I ran a marathon,” Shane says, “and the sun hasn’t even set yet.”

“I told you, sweetheart, you’re growing a person. It’s tiring stuff. And you worked out today, hard.”

“It’s just pilates.”

Ilya snorts, opening the passenger door for him. “Yeah, it’s shit.”

“It’s good exercise.”

“Running and lifting weights is good exercise.”

“Balance and core strength is just as important.”

“Mm. I would like to see you show off your core,” Ilya purrs in his ear, pressing a kiss to the shell of it.

“Gross.” Shane rolls his eyes as he hauls himself into the car, but the tone of his voice is fond.

The drive back to the cottage is brief, and Ilya gets out of the car quickly enough to open Shane’s door for him again. Shane huffs a little at the needless show of chivalry, but accepts Ilya’s outstretched hand.

Coming down from the jeep, his sneaker just misses the edge of the running board and he slips, cursing. Ilya is quick to lurch forward and grab his hips, stabilizing him.

Their eyes meet, and Shane huffs a quick laugh. “Shit. I almost fell.”

“Yeah,” Ilya says pointedly, “do not do that again.”

“It was an accident! It’s dark, I couldn’t see the foot thing.”

Ilya exhales. “I know. I know. Come on.”

The cottage is dark when they enter, so Ilya flicks on a few lights, but keeps them on the dim setting. Shane shuffles into the living room and flops over on the couch.

“Bed is upstairs,” Ilya reminds him as he heads into the kitchen to fill a few water bottles.

“Where’s your first game this week?” Shane asks, ignoring the prompt.

“I fly to Pittsburgh on Thursday,” he replies, “did you forget?”

“Mhm,” Shane replies, already sounding half asleep.

“Shane,” Ilya says firmly, “come on, up to bed. You will have a hurt back if you sleep on the couch.”

“Okay,” Shane agrees, voice pliant. He allows Ilya to pull him up off the couch, then leans against his side as they begin a slow ascent up the stairs.

They undress as they walk, clothes littering the floor until they make it to the bedroom. There was a point where this kind of thing would’ve driven Shane crazy, but lately, he’s too exhausted to care much about some of his more neurotic tendencies.

Falling into bed together, Ilya pulls Shane close, nuzzling his neck with the tip of his nose. He smells like aftershave and deodorant, fresh and crisp and clean and *Shane*. Everything warm, good, *home*.

“You want to come to free skate with me when I get back?” Ilya asks quietly, lips brushing the shell of Shane’s ear.

Shane clears his throat. “You won’t be back for a month.”

“So we should not plan to have any fun when I get back?”

“No I meant...” Shane hesitates, and in the darkness, Ilya feels him adjust. “I’m already sort of...getting bigger. In four more weeks, my balance might be messed up. You heard what the doctor said.”

“Yes, of course,” Ilya murmurs, “but how will you know if you do not try?”

“Because *trying* might hurt the baby.”

“I would not let you fall, Shane.”

The other man exhales. “I just don’t want to do it, okay?”

“That is okay if it’s true.”

“It is.”

“But you tell me how badly you miss the ice, and, I thought-”

“I miss *hockey*, Ilya, not just ice skating.” Shane’s voice is a bit sharper when he says these words. “Can you just drop it?”

Ilya frowns, Shane’s words echoing in his mind. He’s known this was true of course, and he doesn’t blame Shane because he would miss hockey too if he suddenly could not do it at all. Still, it hurts to hear, knowing it is Ilya’s fault.

“I am sorry,” Ilya says, voice hollow. “I...I don’t know what to do. I do not want you to be unhappy, but we both know you can not play hockey with a baby growing inside of you.”

“You don’t...need to do anything.” Shane shuffles around in the bed, turning until their noses bump together. “And you don’t need to be sorry. I’m not unhappy, Ilya. I’m just...” He shakes his head. “I dunno. I have cabin fever I guess.”

“Cabin fever?” Ilya inquires, unsure of what the phrase means.

“Yeah.” Shane chuckles, sitting up a bit on his hand. “I sit at home while you travel, I read the pregnancy book and do my workouts and make food and text Hayden and Rose, and...” He hesitates, brown eyes illuminated by the silver moonlight through the bedroom window. “I’m not *unhappy*. I know this is all going to be worth it. I guess I just...miss who I was a few months ago. You know?”

Ilya blinks down at him, expression softening. He is right. Throughout the past few months, Shane’s life has changed drastically due to the pregnancy. He no longer has hockey, or gets to travel, or has anything to go *do* since he’s no longer doing endorsements or playing games. Reebok does not want a pregnant man modeling their shoes. Rolex wants him sexy, svelte, not waddling with a baby bump.

And hockey is too dangerous to let him play.

Meanwhile, Ilya is traveling, enjoying his season with the Centaurs, getting to win games, though not many. He’d never tell Shane, because it would sound like he’s complaining when Shane has it much worse, but Ilya isn’t all that happy himself. He misses Shane, their baby, and the season has only just begun.

“I have suggestion,” Ilya murmurs.

“Time machine to jump seven months from now?”

“Yes, obviously, you figured it out.”

“I’m pretty smart.”

“What if you came with me?”

“What?”

“If doctor says it’s okay for you and baby, do you want to travel with me for a little while?” Ilya arches his eyebrows. “You could come to games, watch practice, we could go have dinner after and then fly together to next place. Maybe going to games, being around the team, getting to travel you will feel...more yourself?”

Shane’s eyes soften a little. “What would we tell people? I mean, it would be so suspicious, me traveling with you while I’m...”

“Knocked up?”

“Who taught you that phrase?”

“I don’t know if there is much more hiding left in me,” Ilya admits, “you are having my baby. Why not let the world know?”

“Are you...serious?” Shane asks.

“Well, it’s that or I stay here with you. Then we both get so cabin-fever that you kill me before baby comes and then she grows up to be huge boring nerd like you.”

Shane reaches over and flicks his forehead in response.

“Ow! Huge, boring, *violent* nerd!”

“Are you sure about this?” Shane asks somberly. There’s no trace of sleep in his voice anymore. “This would mean...the world will know. Your teammates and coach, your friends, everyone.”

“That is what I want,” Ilya says. “Is it...okay with you?”

“It’s really fucking scary,” Shane says. His hand draws down to cup the small, barely noticeable slope of his belly. “But, so is this, and we’re doing it. Maybe...maybe we get all the scary things out of the way now, so when she comes, we’re really ready.”

Ilya can’t help the wide grin that bursts across his face as he leans in and kisses Shane’s mouth greedily. It’s hot, thick with tension, heavy air passed between them.

And *love*. Ilya cannot believe this is happening, that Shane has agreed to this, but he’s so fucking elated he does not stop to care.

“I love you,” he says into Shane’s slightly swollen lips.

“I-I love you too,” Shane gasps, pressing his hand flat against Ilya’s bare chest. “We have to stop, I’m so fucking sensitive right now.”

“Mm, then why stop?”

“Ilya,” Shane says, suddenly sounding so deadly serious that it makes the other man’s heart go still.

“Yes?”

“You...you were wrong, just now. When you said traveling and watching the games is going to make me feel like myself.”

His face falls. “Oh. I’m sorry, Shane, I hoped-”

“No, Ilya. Getting to be with *you* is going to make me feel like myself.” He leans in, and presses their lips together, brief, chaste, but monumental in a strange way.

“You are boring and lame,” Ilya tells him fondly, feeling the warmth flutter in his chest at the undeserved words of affection.

“Yeah, well, you’re the idiot who knocked me up.”

Ilya tilts his head back and howls a laugh, feeling Shane’s body tighten with giggles beside him.

He is not an idiot, but he *is* really glad Shane Hollander let him knock him up.

-20 weeks-

“Jesus, Shane, are you okay?”

Shane glances up from his aching feet to see Ilya’s teammate, Wyatt, paused in the doorway of the locker room.

It’s been nearly a month since Shane started traveling with Ilya. He was astounded Coach Wiebe had actually *agreed* to this, but he figured the pregnancy and Ilya’s thinly veiled threat to leave the season if he said no, probably had something to do with it. Wiebe is a good person, and he’s not willing to lose his best player by being inflexible.

Shane has kept off of social media, so he’s not sure exactly how big the scope of their relationship being discovered has been, but he’s also not interested in finding out. He’s in this quiet little bubble lately.

The baby is growing nice and healthy, they have an ultrasound scheduled next week to make sure her development is on track. Of course, this means a host of new symptoms for Shane, as his belly gets bigger, his back is killing him, old injuries in his hips and knees are beginning to act up. His body is sore all the time, especially with the frequency of travel, even though their doctor has consistently given him the all-clear for now.

“What?” Shane asks, brows furrowing. He’s been hanging out in the locker room, waiting for practice to finish, and he’d just stepped out to get some air. After accidentally stepping in a puddle -sensory nightmare overload-, he’d decided to come back to the locker room and change his socks, leaving him barefoot as Wyatt looks at him with concern.

“Your feet,” Wyatt says, gesturing to them. “They’re really swollen.”

Shane follows his gaze, adjusting his hips to peer -with some difficulty- down at his feet. Wyatt is right. They’re swollen from the ankle down to his toes, puffier than he’s ever seen them.

“That’s new,” he says thoughtfully.

“I’m going to get Ilya.” Wyatt starts to turn, but Shane stops him.

“Wait, practice is over in ten minutes. I probably just need to put them up.”

Wyatt hesitates. “Does it hurt?”

Yes, always.

“No, it’s fine, don’t interrupt practice for my giant feet.”

Wyatt rolls his eyes. “Like everyone on the team wouldn’t throw away a cup if you and that baby needed it.”

Shane's face feels warm. "I would hope not."

"Trust me, you've won them over. That play you gave Wiebe last week that won us the game? I'll be amazed if he doesn't start paying you an assistant coach salary."

Shane's lips twitch into a small smile. "The Vouyaguers never wanted to use that play."

"That's dumb. It was perfect."

He sits back against the lockers, thighs spreading almost reflexively to make room for the small swell of his middle underneath his jacket. "I'm glad...I'm glad everyone is okay with me being here."

"Maybe after the baby comes you can just join the team for real," Wyatt says dismissively as he begins rifling through his locker for something.

Shane huffs a laugh, and watches as Wyatt heads back out to practice with a pair of spare knee pads. He furrows his brow, wondering what it might be like to play for the same team as Ilya.

He's having a lot of fun right now just "assistant coaching". It's an interesting thought.

He snaps a photo of his swollen feet and sends it to Jackie and Hayden in a groupchat, typing:

S: Is this normal?

It takes only two minutes to get a flood of responses.

J: You are 20wks, right? Mine started to get swollen around that time too. It's normal! Just fluid retention, but you should probably prop them up and get some rest, Shane.

*H: *scream* no you're a freak of nature!*

S: Awesome. Thank you JACKIE.

J: Anytime my darling.

H: You bored of tag teaming with the Horses yet?

S: They're centaurs.

H: Same diff?

J: Any chance we can take the hockey-talk to another chat?

H: I wish my wife loved me.

S: Then you should act different.

The sound of feet pounding and cheerful voices gets his attention, and he looks up from his phone to see the Centaurs piling into the locker room. Everyone is stripping off gear, wiping sweat from their foreheads, laughing.

The camaraderie on this team is truly something to envy. Shane's only really gotten this close with Hayden, and he's been with his team for a long time.

He sees a beautiful pair of eyes and damp curly hair and a gold crucifix and feels lips press against his. He's lost to the world for a few heartbeats, until Ilya pulls back with a frown.

"Shane, your feet."

"I know. Jackie said it happened to her too."

Ilya looks worried.

"Ice and rest, is all," Shane assures him.

"Maybe we should call the doctor, move up next week's appointment," Ilya says anxiously.

Shane pushes himself to his feet, ignoring Ilya's outstretched hand to assist. "We don't need to do that, don't spiral. We are fine. I'm going to meet you outside, the smell of these guys is making me remember what morning sickness felt like."

"Okay." Ilya kisses the top of his head as he breezes by, shoving his feet back into his sneakers with a grimace of discomfort. He hates the feeling of shoes with no socks, but it's better than wet socks.

He pretends as he walks, that he can't feel Ilya's eyes on him the entire time.

They go to a small restaurant just outside the city for dinner that night.

It's a tiny place, a hole-in-the-wall with dark, dim lighting. It's weird being out like this, on a *date*. An honest-to-god, real date. Two men, together, having dinner underneath orange lighting.

Shane used to be so afraid of this. Part of him still is. But the life growing under his jersey deserves more than hiding and secrecy. She deserves for her parents to live freely, to love openly, and share all of that with her.

"How are your feet?" Ilya asks, glancing over his menu as Shane adjusts uncomfortably in the stiff wooden-backed chair.

"They're fine," he assures him. After icing them and elevating them in the hotel room for a bit, they don't hurt anymore. The swelling isn't much improved, but Jackie had told him it was normal.

"And how is everything else?" Ilya continues without missing a beat.

“You aren’t going to be ready when the server comes by,” Shane tells him.

“Then you’d better answer quickly.”

With an eye-roll, Shane replies, “I’m fine, Ilya. You know this. We spend every day together.”

“I am busy at practice,” Ilya says, a small hint of guilt edging into his voice. “What did you do today, before you got back to the rink?”

“I walked into town and went to that smoothie place we saw,” Shane says absentmindedly.

“What did you order?”

Shane arches an eyebrow. “A kale apple smoothie.”

Ilya’s nose wrinkles. “Why you do this to my baby? She wants delicious food I am sure.”

“I also went to the bookstore,” Shane says, glossing over his partner’s nitpicking of his diet. He’s been having a hard time with the whole...*gaining weight* thing. He knows it’s normal, and it’s fine, really it is. But with how out of control everything about his body is right now, still having some semblance of restraint over his diet is the only thing keeping him sane.

Even though he’d really, *really* love a big pile of french fries with hot gravy right now, more than the grilled chicken and leafy greens he’s about to order.

“Did you buy a boring book about making boring food?” Ilya teases, setting his own menu down as if he’s decided on his order.

“How did you read the menu and bother me all at once?” Shane mutters.

“I am very talented.”

Shane huffs his breath out, taking a sip from the Ginger Ale in his glass. The waiter had given him a perplexed look when he’d ordered that, but he decided not to let it bother him.

“I bought a book about sleep training,” he admits, which kind of *does* sound boring. He’s sure Ilya will give him hell for it.

“Sleep training for the baby?” he clarifies.

Shane nods, sucking another sip of Ginger Ale through his straw.

“That is important,” Ilya says, surprisingly. “We should read it together, no?”

Shane fights the smile threatening the corners of his lips. “You don’t think it’s too early?”

Ilya shrugs. “We already read pregnancy book, and newborn book. We are ahead of schedule and better parents than anyone else in the world.”

Scoffing, Shane replies, “that’s a sweeping statement right there.”

“I want to read sleep training book with you,” Ilya says, with no traces of teasing in his voice. “Do not start without me please.”

“I won’t,” Shane says, biting his lip to contain his grin.

The server comes over shortly after to take their orders. Shane rubs at his forehead, wincing a bit at the onset of a frustrating headache. He’s been getting those often this week. Maybe lack of sleep, or old concussions rearing around.

Ilya distracts him by asking him about hockey plays, and they eat in companionable chatter. As much as he’s always reveled in their sex life, sometimes these moments with Ilya are Shane’s favorite. Where they can just be together, share a meal, talk about their shared interests and go back and forth in riveting discussion.

By the time dinner is over, his headache is really sinking in, throbbing behind his eyes. They have a flight tomorrow, early, but at least it’s heading back home. He hopes he feels better by then. His head is killing him, and so are his feet and back, and he’s regretting eating so much chicken. His stomach feels weird.

“Are you okay?” Ilya asks after their tab has been paid. He’s standing beside the table, arm extended to Shane to help him up.

Shane nods. “Just a headache, I’m fine.”

He accepts Ilya’s hand and allows himself to be pulled upright, surprised when his knees wobble. He hitches forward a bit, balance unraveled by the small bump under his shirt. Ilya lurches toward him and braces him upright, voice urgent.

“*Shane?*”

“I’m fine,” he repeats, blinking as he realizes his vision has gone fuzzy. “Ilya-”

“Shane?”

“I’m not completely sure, but I think I might be about to pass out.”

“*What?*”

“M’okay,” is all he gets out, before his head slumps forward and everything goes black.

It’s not even a minute later that he opens his eyes to a terrified Ilya, crowding over him, saying his name frantically. His vision is still blurry, and he’s struggling to find purchase with his shaking fingers, even as they come up to touch Ilya’s cheek.

“Shane,” Ilya repeats, voice wrecked, “are you with me, sweetheart?”

“The ambulance is almost here, sir,” another voice says.

“Ambulance?” Shane groans, rubbing at his eyes. “No, that’s-”

“You are going to the hospital,” Ilya interjects, “do not argue while you are lying here in my arms *unconscious*.”

Shane doesn't argue. Instead, against his will, his brain goes back to that cold day on the ice, staring up blearily at medics while agony radiated through his shoulder and head. He hadn't been aware of it at the time, but Ilya was by his side until they took him away.

“Shane, talk to me,” Ilya says now, urgent. “Keep your eyes open.”

“I'm okay, I just got a little dizzy,” he assures him, but the weak sound of his voice isn't exactly comforting.

A crowd of people has started to gather, murmuring voices. He sees phones, sneaky photos being snapped. He's sure this will be all over the internet in moments. Oh god.

The sirens outside the window distract him, and he resists the urge to groan. This is such a spectacle.

“Can you stand?” Ilya asks him frantically. “Is there any pain?”

“I can stand,” Shane says, “I'm okay, I swear, no pain. I just stood up too fast.”

“Wait for the- the uh-” Ilya curses quietly under his breath in Russian, clearly too overwhelmed to remember the English word for *paramedic*.

“EMTs,” Shane says quietly.

“Fuck. Yes, wait for them to help you up. Just in case.”

Shane waits for the help of two very nice EMTs, who help him to his feet while Ilya hovers nervously, keeping one hand pressed to the small of Shane's back the entire time. He assures them he's okay to walk, and Ilya caught him, completely bracing his fall. He didn't hurt anything going down. He's a hockey player for fuck's sake, this is nothing.

Still, after taking his blood pressure with their little portable cuff, they tell him he needs to go to the hospital.

Ignoring the onlookers, Ilya and Shane load up into the back of the ambulance. Shane lies flat on the little rolling gurney they provide, chewing on his bottom lip harshly. He hadn't been worried until they saw his blood pressure and *they* were worried. If the pros think something is wrong, something is probably really wrong, right?

“C-can you...check the baby?” he asks once he finds his voice, turning his head to the EMT closest to him. Her name is Rebecca.

Her expression softens at the palpable fear in his words. “I can check their heartbeat with the doppler, how does that sound?”

Shane nods quickly. If nothing else, knowing his baby is still *alive* might give him...well, some piece of mind at least.

Ilya moves swiftly into action and takes the hem of Shane's shirt, rolling it up over the small rounded swell of his belly. His fingers brush along the stretched skin momentarily, a lingering, yearning touch. Gentle and possessive and terrified all at once.

Then, his fingers find Shane's, and they both squeeze. Shane tries not to let the tears filling his eyes spill over his cheeks, staring at the roof of the ambulance while Rebecca presses a cold wand against his skin.

It's quiet.

"Oh god," Shane says, propping himself up on his elbow and looking at her with wide eyes, "there's no heartbeat? There's no--"

"Hey, hey, take a breath," she tells him softly, "give me a moment to locate the heartbeat, okay? Sometimes these take a moment. Just breathe."

"Ilya," Shane looks at him frantically while Rebecca still probes around his belly.

"Is okay," Ilya tells him softly, though the words come out pained, "just breathe, she's going to find the heartbeat."

"Oh my god," Shane wheezes.

"Shane--"

"Is my baby--"

Blub blub blub blub

"There we go!" Rebecca smiles at him gently. "Your baby is still here, Shane."

He doesn't even know what to say, too overcome with breathtaking relief to reply. His eyes squeeze shut against a flurry of emotions he doesn't know how to process or express, his entire body tightening. Ilya's hand in his grips more firmly, and he hears a low, soothing voice in his ear.

"Baby is still with us, Shane," Ilya murmurs, stroking his thumb along the tense joints of Shane's hand, "you are both still here, and it is going to be okay. I love you."

It's those words that somehow help him survive the rest of the ambulance ride.

The hospital is an overwhelming, overstimulating chaotic mesh of events. Shane is stripped down and put into an itchy hospital gown that makes his legs feel way too exposed and irritate his already sensitive chest. They make him wear grippy socks so he doesn't slip on the linoleum floor. They take his blood and his urine and all sorts of vitals, Ilya hovering over his shoulder for every single moment.

He's uncomfortable and scared and just going through the motions. He answers when they ask him a question, voice flat and unaffected- just trying to *get through this* without absolutely losing his fucking mind.

They say a doctor will be in soon with the results, and he's left alone with Ilya in the private room. The lights overhead are making him feel like a germ under a microscope, and the IV line in his inner arm is pulling at his skin in a way that sort of hurts, and the cot isn't sitting right underneath his aching back. And he still has to call his mother and tell her what's going on.

If he finds out what's going on. This is taking so long, and while he guesses it's good they don't think he's an emergency patient, he's starting to go a little bananas from the *waiting*.

"Shane," Ilya urges him, standing beside the bed with one hand smoothing small circles over his belly.

"I don't want to be here," is what comes out of his mouth, though it's not what he planned to say.

"I know," Ilya whispers, "we are almost done, okay? You are doing a really good job."

He shakes his head, brows furrowing. "I- I'm not doing anything. I'm just sitting here. *Waiting.*"

"That's all you can do right now. You didn't want the IV but you held still and let them. And you didn't want to wear the gown but you put it on and did not complain. And you don't like the socks or this bed but you're wearing them and sitting in it. You are doing everything right for the baby."

Shane looks at him, expression screwed up with confusion. He hadn't told Ilya any of that.

"You think by now I don't know you at least a little?" Ilya chuckles, brushing the backs of his knuckles along the smattering of freckles on Shane's cheeks and nose. "Will it help if we turn off the big bright light?" He points to the ceiling.

Shane is already nodding.

Ilya clicks off the light, plunging the room into moderate darkness. There's illumination from the wall-mounted TV, and the monitor on his belly that's thankfully reading a consistent heartbeat, but otherwise it's dark.

Shane lets out a long, painful breath.

"There we go," Ilya says softly, "already a bit better."

"I'm scared," Shane manages, glancing up at Ilya through his eyelashes. He doesn't know how to properly express to Ilya this feeling- that if the doctor comes in with the devastating news he's hoping he never has to hear, that he doesn't know what he'll do. He can't lose his baby.

Their baby.

"I know you are," Ilya murmurs, leaning in to press a long, chaste kiss to his forehead, "I am scared too. But you are here, and the baby is here. That is what we have right now."

Shane swallows back a sob.

“How can I help?” Ilya asks. “You are uncomfortable, I can tell. You don’t like hospitals?”

Shane grimaces. “Um, not really.”

“You seemed okay after your accident with Marlow.”

“Well, I was pretty doped up.”

“You were very cute. Was hard to resist grabbing you and kissing you right there in the hospital room.”

“Good thing you held back.”

“So, what is it?” Ilya asks, gesturing around them to the dark room. “You are scared of hospitals?”

“No, not really.” Shane shakes his head. “I um, I trust the doctors and stuff. And the needles thing isn’t *fun* but I don’t...I’m fine with it, I know it has to be done. It’s just...all of it, I think.”

“All of what?”

“Well, like, they made me put on this gown, and wear these socks. And they gave me the IV line in case they decide to give me medicine. And they told me not to eat or drink anything yet. And they told me-” He hesitates, exhaling shakily. “I know they’re doing all of this for a reason, it’s to help me. So I would never argue with them. It’s just how *out of control* I am here, I guess. It makes me...uneasy.”

“You do not like being out of control,” Ilya says. It is not a question.

“No,” Shane answers anyway.

Ilya hums thoughtfully, still stroking Shane’s cheek. “Remember what we read in pregnancy book, about birth? In the hospital, they are going to tell you what to do.”

Shane swallows dryly. “I know.”

“Are you sure you want that, while you are having our baby?”

Quirking an eyebrow up, Shane meets his eyes. “It’s kind of my only option, isn’t it?”

Before Ilya can reply, there’s a knock on the door, and mercifully, a woman in a white coat enters. She’s young, maybe mid-thirties, with a shock of curly black hair and big warm eyes. She looks at them with a gentle smile, shutting the door behind her.

“Shane Hollander?” she asks. If she recognizes him, she gives no indication of it.

“Hi,” he says anxiously.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Miller. How are you feeling?”

“Um, okay,” he says. “Just...a little nervous, I guess.”

“Well, you did the right thing coming to the ED,” she tells him, pulling up a stool to sit in front of his cot. “Your blood pressure was alarmingly high, 150/110.”

“Whoa.” Shane blinks. “It’s not usually...it’s never been that high.”

“I know we triaged you and asked all of this stuff, so just confirming, have you had any of the following symptoms? Swollen hands, feet, or face, headaches, dizzy spells?”

“Oh. Yeah, um, my feet are pretty swollen. And I’ve been having headaches.”

She nods. “Unfortunately, it’s looking like we might have a case of preeclampsia here. Do you know what that is?”

Shane’s breath catches. “Y-yeah, we read about it in our pregnancy book.”

“Is bad,” Ilya fills in, jaw clenched.

“Well, the good news is, we caught it now before it got worse,” Dr. Miller says firmly. “There are a lot of things we can try to help resolve your blood pressure. I would like to start you on medication and have you try light bed rest for a week, and see if that helps resolve your symptoms. This may be something we can take care of, it does not always develop into full fledged eclampsia. We have your OB as Dr. Harada, in Montreal, right?”

Shane nods, unsure of what he’s supposed to say right now.

“Okay. I’m going to get with her office and confirm your diagnosis and care plan. I want you to try the medication and bed rest for one week, and then follow up with her moving forward. I know you’re a long way from home here in the states, so before traveling back, I’d like you to come by my office for an appointment so I can clear you to fly. How does that sound?”

Shane is overwhelmed. What is he supposed to say?

He looks at Ilya desperately.

Ilya squeezes his hand and looks at the doctor. “This medication, have you had success with it before?”

“Yes, we have,” she replies easily. “I am hopeful by getting Shane off his feet for a little while and allowing the medicine to do its job, we can get everyone back on track for a normal, healthy pregnancy.”

He nods. “Are there side effects? Something that could hurt him from taking the medication? Or the baby?”

“It’s very safe for Papa and baby,” Dr. Miller assures him.

Ilya looks down at Shane, offering him his best confident smile. “How does it sound to you, hm? We will rest up in the hotel for another week, order room service, just relax. You can take some medicine to help you feel better and then we’ll go home, okay?”

Shane swallows the lump in his throat. He knows he has no choice, really. If he ignores this, and his blood pressure gets worse, and he develops eclampsia, it’s dangerous for the baby and for him. They could both die. He has to do this, take the meds, do the bed rest, hope and pray it works so that he can even *go home*.

It’s not really a choice. He’s going to agree to the doctor’s plan.

But, hearing Ilya ask him if he’s okay with it...in some weird way, it helps.

“Yeah,” he manages weakly, “let’s do what we gotta do.”

“Excellent.” Dr. Miller stands, patting his foot under the itchy hospital blanket. “Let me just get on the line with your OB, we’ll get our plan all mapped out and get back to you. Do you need anything in the meantime, Shane? Some water? Something to make you more comfortable until you leave?”

He shakes his head. “I’m okay. Um, if it’s okay that we keep the lights off?”

“Of course it is. I’ll be back in soon with our update.”

“Thank you.”

The doctor departs, leaving Shane and Ilya alone in the quiet, dark hospital room.

“Shane?” Ilya whispers, tentative and unsure, like he knows the other man is on the precipice of falling apart.

“It’s fine,” Shane says, and then he bursts into tears.

“Oh, sweetheart.” Ilya draws up close to him, pressing his face into Shane’s hair, rubbing his back, shushing him gently. “It is going to be okay. I am going to take care of you both. I promise.”

Shane cries into his shirt, nodding. “I-I know,” he blubbers, “but I need to cry about it right now.”

“Okay,” Ilya agrees, rubbing his back and holding him, “you cry. Is okay.”

Shane clings to him, not caring how pathetic and clingy he looks, and lets Ilya just hold him there. He wants to believe Ilya and the doctor that everything will turn out alright. Hell, he’s *got* to believe it.

Still, it’s not his fault that in this moment, the only thing his body can think to do, is cry it out.

Maybe once the tears dry, he’ll be a little more ready to face all of this.

“Where do you think you are going?” Ilya’s voice is flat and unamused as he stops Shane halfway through his escape attempt.

Shane heaves a sigh, turning to face him in the doorway. He’s only just planted his feet on the floor beside the bed.

“Going to refill my water, that’s all,” Shane says.

“I refill your water. You are on bed rest for three more days.”

Ilya glides over to the bed and bends down. He picks up Shane’s swollen feet, slowly, carefully lifting his legs until they’re laid back flat on the bed. He wishes Shane was not wearing compression socks and sweatpants so he could kiss every inch of his skin.

Although, he does look very cute with his little belly round underneath the *Ottawa Centaurs* t-shirt he’d stolen from Ilya.

“The kitchenette is literally right there.” Shane points, almost accusatorily, at the small attached kitchen in their hotel suite.

“Stay put.” Ilya takes his water and refills it, returning swiftly. “Let me see your feet.”

“Pervert.”

“Sometimes.”

With a sigh, Shane nods his consent, and Ilya slides the socks off his feet. The swelling does seem a little better, less painful looking at least, and his ankles are completely back to normal.

“Do they hurt?” Ilya asks gently, running the pads of his fingers along the skin of his foot.

Shane shakes his head. “Not anymore.”

He nods. “That is good.”

“Ilya?” Shane prompts, arching his eyebrows curiously.

Their eyes meet.

“Thanks for taking care of me,” he says, cupping his arms underneath the swell of his belly a bit bashfully, “taking care of *us*. This has all been so shitty and kinda really scary and you’ve...I dunno, made it...okay.”

Ilya forces a tight smile on his face, shuffling up on the bed toward Shane. He leans in, pressing his lips delicately on Shane’s. The other man sighs contently, lashes fluttering above his freckled cheeks.

“I am glad,” Ilya murmurs, “I am here, whatever you two need.”

The truth is, this has all been pretty terrifying for Ilya as well. When Shane had gone down in front of him in that restaurant, when he'd watched the color drain from his beautiful face, watched his body go limp, frantically grabbed at any part of him he could catch so he didn't hit the hard floor- it had reminded Ilya of that day on the ice when Marlow broke Shane's collarbone.

Ilya hadn't even known, for a brief moment, if Shane was *alive*. It was a horror he never, ever wanted to experience again.

Experiencing it again, while Shane is carrying *their baby*? Well, that hadn't exactly been easy.

But it's his job to be strong right now, for Shane. Shane is the one going through all of this, the one in danger, the one on bedrest, the one who needs to be cared for. Ilya cannot burden him with his own selfish emotions, not when he needs him to be strong and capable.

"And you?" Shane prompts quietly, bringing his own hand up to card through Ilya's curls. His voice is soft, tender, like somehow through all of this he's found it in himself to be concerned for *Ilya*, who is not pregnant or in danger of having a stroke from high blood pressure, or premature labor, or-

"Ilya?" Shane asks again, a little more worried this time at the lack of a response.

"I am okay," Ilya tells him, though he leans into the touch of Shane's fingers in his hair a little too eagerly. "I am hoping we can go home at the end of the week."

"How pissed is Wiebe that you're missing tomorrow's game?" Shane asks, running his teeth over his lip in an anxious manner.

"Wiebe is just worried about you and the team baby," Ilya retorts, cupping his hand around the small bump of Shane's belly. "He told me to keep our little mascot safe and not worry about hockey. Which is exactly what I am going to do."

Shane's eyes grow soft at this, a little longing. "That's...he's a really good guy."

"He is," Ilya agrees.

"Theriault texted me when he saw that Barstool article about my 'near death experience'. Basically, even after my paternity leave, I'm benched until they can *figure out what to do with me*." Shane looks down at his protruding stomach, almost accusatorily.

"He is not happy about who the father of your baby is?" Ilya guesses.

Shane's eyes tighten. "He was already pissed about me *abandoning* them at the start of the season. But having a baby with a rival?" He exhales heavily, shaking his head. "My career is pretty much torched. He even accused me of throwing games for you."

"As if you would ever give me the satisfaction."

"I tried to tell him."

Ilya's brows furrow sympathetically. He doesn't know what to do, how to make this right. He can't fix it for Shane, and it's all his fault, and it kills him a little. He is responsible for all of this. Shane's career, and strain with his team, and the physical danger he's in from the pregnancy, it's all because of Ilya.

How can a person begin to atone for doing so much damage to the person they love most?

"Well, anyway," Shane stiffly changes the subject, offering Ilya a smile that doesn't reach his eyes in any way shape or form.

He opens his arms in invitation, and Ilya scooches closer, curling up at his side and resting his head on Shane's chest. He listens to the steady thrum of his heartbeat, eyes closing after a moment, soothed by the sound of Shane's liveliness pressed against his ear.

"I love you," Shane says into the quiet, fingers still tangled in Ilya's hair.

Ilya bites back hot tears that want to spill. "I love you too, moya lyubov."

"I love the baby too, you know?" This time, the words are gentler, softer around the edges. "This all fucking sucks, I can't lie, and I'm really scared of the future. But I know it's all going to be worth it. I can't wait to hold her."

"I can't wait either," Ilya says, and against his will, this time the tears do fall.

Shane pulls him in tighter, squeezing him against his side. Ilya's hand drifts to his belly, laying protectively over the swell. For a moment, it's quiet besides Ilya's breathy tears.

"Are you okay?" Shane whispers.

"Was scary," Ilya admits, unable to help himself, "when you passed out. So glad you are getting better."

"Thanks to you," Shane murmurs, "you're taking such good care of us."

Ilya doesn't have the heart to tell him this is all his fault. Shane doesn't need the burden.

"Hey," Shane brushes his fingers along Ilya's tear-damp cheek, as if he can sense there's more he isn't saying. "We're okay. We're gonna be okay."

"I-I know," Ilya manages weakly.

"I know you know. But don't forget that, okay? And we're so fucking *lucky* to have you."

"I don't think so."

Shane takes his face between two fingers, firm this time as he turns Ilya's head to face him. Their eyes meet again, Shane's burning with a surprising intensity Ilya hadn't expected to see there.

“There is no one else I would rather be doing this with,” Shane tells him, and there is no hint of teasing or lightheartedness in his voice. “You’re...you’re my best friend, Ilya, and my fucking rock, as corny as that shit is. I love you so much sometimes it really scares me. I’m so happy we’re doing this together. I just need you to know that, okay?”

Ilya is overcome. The tears continue to fall, even as Shane swipes them aside with his thumb.

“You’re going to be such a good dad,” Shane says, voice breaking a bit on that last word.

His eyes squeeze shut, and it’s an instinct to shake his head no.

“Yes,” Shane argues with words he hasn’t even said. “You are going to be amazing. She’s so lucky to get you as her dad.”

“I don’t know how to do it,” Ilya admits weakly, “I didn’t...have one to teach me. Not the way I wanted, at least.”

“I have no idea what I’m doing either,” Shane replies, “but we’re gonna figure it out, together. Our baby has us, and her grandparents, and so many people who love her. Rose is already crocheting her little hats.”

At that, Ilya lifts his head, sniffing. “Does Rose crochet?”

“Nope. The hats are hideous. But the point is, this kid is so fucking loved already.” Shane joins Ilya’s hand where it’s still resting gently over his belly, and smiles briefly. “We’re gonna be okay. All of us.”

It’s quiet for a few moments, heavy breathing and the lingering sniffles from Ilya’s stuffy nose. He does feel a bit calmer here, encircled in Shane’s arms, hand protectively splayed over the space where their baby is growing. Shane’s words, while they don’t fix all of his fears and guilt, do mean something. He believes them. Believes Shane when he says there is no one else he’d rather do this with, because the same is true for Ilya.

Shane is everything.

“I can make baby hats,” Ilya mutters, voice coming out a bit more green with envy than he’d meant.

Shane busts up laughing, his midsection rumbling under Ilya’s hand. “Oh my god! You are so jealous of her!”

“Why is she making my baby hats?” Ilya demands. “I can make sure our baby has hats, do not need Rose Landry to do it.”

“And I guess I’ll tell Svetlana to return all of those baby sneakers she sent?” Shane challenges with another hearty laugh.

Ilya rolls his eyes and shoves off the bed. “Is like you do not even love me.”

“Oh my god, I’m *having your baby!*”

“And yet you treat me so terrible!” Ilya moves toward the kitchenette. “Lucky, I love you more so I am still going to feed you.”

“Wow, I am lucky.”

When Ilya turns, Shane is sitting up against the headboard, hands cupped under his belly, knees tucked up. He’s smiling, brown eyes warm and inviting, freckles wrinkled over his scrunched up nose, dark hair a mess. He’s the most beautiful thing Ilya has ever laid eyes on, even now.

“No,” Ilya tells him, voice earnest, “I am the lucky one.”

And looking at Shane, he really does mean it.

-28 weeks-

Things get harder, once Shane is back home.

Luckily, the medication and his week on bed rest had helped lower his blood pressure, and it’s been consistent since. He was allowed to go home, with Ilya right by his side for the first week after. But, he’s not permitted to travel anymore, until after the baby comes. His OB had advised it was too risky.

So, Ilya is back on the road with the Centaurs, despite insisting he would leave right now and go stay with Shane. He needs to work to keep his visa while he applies for Canadian citizenship, so that’s important. And, Shane would never forgive himself for making Ilya miss an entire season just because of him.

He knows it’s the right thing to do, it’s what they have to do, be apart. But it still...well, it really really sucks.

His parents come over a lot, trying to be supportive. Hayden and Jackie check in all the time, as well as Wyatt and Troy and other Centaurs players, so does Rose. Even J.J. seems to have come around, though he was pretty pissed about Shane and Ilya when he first found out.

But, he’s going to be a father in a few months. Which is fucking insane, but it also means sometimes he’s gonna have to do hard things. Being without Ilya right now is pretty much the definition of *hard*, but he’s toughing it out.

“I don’t think this green is the right shade.” His mom’s voice distracts him momentarily from his tumultuous inner thoughts, and Shane turns to see her furrowing her brow at a few paint swatches laid out across the kitchen table.

“It’s nice,” his father disagrees.

“We’re doing blue,” Shane tells them, leaning over with his forearms pressed against the counter, back bent a bit, trying to get some relief on his aching sciatica.

Yuna frowns. “I thought you said you were hoping for a girl?”

“We are,” Shane says, “I mean, we’ll be happy with anything, of course. But Ilya thinks it’s a girl. And I kind of do too. He still wants to wait though, so we’re waiting.”

“Well, what if you do blue for the nursery and it’s a girl?”

Shane arches an eyebrow. “Then, the nursery will be blue, and the baby will be a girl?”

“But-”

“Mom.”

Yuna purses her lips, shaking her head. “You’re right, you’re right. It’s just a color, I’m being silly. I like this sky blue, something nice and soft, reminds me of outside.”

“I like that one too,” Shane says.

“Have you thought of a theme yet?” she asks, plucking out a few paint colors she likes best.

Shane exhales. He isn’t sure how to say he’s just trying to get through most days without losing his mind here alone, so no, he hasn’t thought up a theme for the nursery.

“Does it need a theme?” he asks hesitantly. “It’s just a room. She’ll spend most of her time in our room anyway, I’m sure.”

“I guess that’s true,” Yuna agrees thoughtfully. “I loved decorating your nursery though. It felt special.”

Shane swallows, trying not to let on that her comment sort of hurt his feelings. He knows she didn’t mean it that way, but it still makes him spiral a bit. Is he not doing something right? Should he care more about the color of the walls? Should he have thought up a theme? He’s really mostly been focusing on the perfunctory things- what giving birth is going to be like, what postpartum will be like, how to get her to feed easily, how to put her to bed properly so she’s not at a higher risk for SIDS, how to-

“Why don’t we take you shopping?” David suggests, perking up a bit. “Maybe it will be good to get out of the house.”

He resists the urge to sigh. He knows his parents are worried about him. He’s been holed up by himself in the cottage for weeks now, surviving off of disgusting sexts and late night Facetimes whenever the two of them can make it work.

“I don’t really want to go out,” he admits, running a hand over the expanse of his belly, which seems to get bigger every day. He’s graduated to a size up in his joggers, and only Ilya’s t-shirts are fitting over the stretched skin now. His back is killing him pretty constantly- it already always hurts from the exertion of his career and too many hits, but with the added weight on his middle putting so much pressure on his lower half, he’s pretty miserable. If Ilya were here, he knows he’d be getting a massage every night, so the emptiness hurts a little.

“Honey,” Yuna says softly, “we’re getting sort of worried about you, alone up here.”

“I’m not alone,” he insists, “you guys come by all the time, and Rose even said she’ll come by when she’s done filming in Atlanta.”

“Does Ilya know that?” David asks with a grimace.

“Yes.” Shane rolls his eyes. “Anyway that’s not the point, the point is I’m fine.”

“You’re isolating yourself,” his mom says. “And you’re pregnant, Shane, it’s not good for either of you.”

Shane’s teeth grit together, and he sucks in a slow, deep breath. He knows his mom is objectively right, that *is* what’s happening. He doesn’t want to go out and be photographed and bothered and have more articles coming out about his condition. He doesn’t want to put on a fake smile with Hayden and Jackie, pretend he’s doing great and is completely content. He misses Ilya so much it makes his teeth ache, and there’s nothing he can do about it, and he feels too shitty to pretend right now.

Part of him wishes he could just ask his parents to leave right now, but he isn’t that rude.

“Honey,” David murmurs to her, clearly seeing the distress in Shane’s face.

“I’m sorry,” Yuna says, “we won’t push. We love you Shane, just know we’re here, okay?”

“I love you too,” he says reflexively. “I promise, I’m okay. You guys don’t have to worry about me.”

It’s clear that they don’t believe him, but they’re good parents, so they don’t force the issue.

-

Later that night, as Shane is rummaging around in the fridge, desperate for something to satiate the sudden craving he’s just gotten, his phone rings. He’s quick to pick it up off the island and smile at the familiar face that brightens his screen.

“Ilya!” he coos, immediately melting at the sight of his partner’s big, cheesy smile.

“Hello moya lyubov,” Ilya greets him, grinning. “Oh, I like these glasses.”

“Oh yeah?” Shane wags his eyebrows, nudging the glasses higher on his nose. His prescription has gotten worse, so at his latest eye appointment last week, they’d sold him some new frames to go with his thicker lenses. “You don’t think I look like Velma?”

“What is Velma? I am sure you do not look like. Unless he is really hot.”

“From Scooby D- actually, nevermind. Where are you? How was the game?”

“You did not watch?”

“No, I’m sorry my parents were here helping with the nursery.”

“Oh! Good. Did you pick nursery color?”

“Yeah, it’s blue, but I was waiting to see if you like it before I buy more. How was the game?”

“It was fine, boring. Can I see the color?”

“Uh-huh.” Shane walks the phone over to the table and flips the camera so Ilya can see the sky blue swatch.

“Oh.” His voice softens through the crackly line of the receiver. “It’s very pretty, Shane. I like it.”

“Okay, good, so do I. I’ll order more.”

“Show me you again. Miss your face.”

Shane flips the camera around, offering him a smile.

“What are you doing right now?” Ilya asks. “Can I see belly?”

“I was just looking for something to eat,” Shane replies, heading back toward the kitchen. He props his phone upright against his water bottle and turns to the side, standing back so his whole body is in frame. He glides his palm flat across the expanse of his belly, emphasizing the shape, which has grown significantly in size since Ilya saw him a few weeks ago.

“Shane...” Ilya breathes in disbelief. “Baby is getting so big... when did this happen?”

“I know,” he manages a small laugh, cupping his hand under the weight of his belly. “She’s definitely growing. My back is killing me and she throws a solid ten kicks into my bladder like, once an hour.”

Ilya’s brow furrows a bit. “Is it okay? Does it hurt you? Is it um...I forget what is English word, when sensation is too much?”

“Overstimulating?” Shane asks.

“Yes, that. Is it okay? Not that?”

“It was the other night,” Shane admits, “I was trying so hard to fall asleep and she just wouldn’t calm down. I felt like I was going to crawl out of my skin.” He exhales, glancing down at his belly. “But it’s not her fault, and I’m glad she’s passing the kick count, it gives me some peace of mind. Knowing she’s okay in there.”

“I wish I could feel,” Ilya murmurs, melancholy dripping in his voice.

Shane clears his throat, trying to sound upbeat. “Just a few more weeks and you get a break, yeah? We’ll be together again.”

“Yeah,” Ilya says, though it doesn’t sound assured.

“Well, I need your help right now anyway. I have no idea what to eat.” Shane rubs his belly thoughtfully.

At this, an opportunity to be somewhat useful, Ilya brightens a bit. “What are you craving?”

You, he wants to say.

“Something salty,” he admits, “like a vinegar dressing, and also something light and sweet, like whipped cream.”

“I see why you are having trouble.”

“It’s late in the day for all of that sugar anyway,” Shane muses, “whipped cream wouldn’t be smart.”

“Shane, you are pregnant. If baby wants whipped cream, you get whipped cream. You are allowed.”

“I know,” he replies gently, “it...it does sound really good.”

“Do you have any?”

Shane laughs. “You think I’m keeping this fridge stocked with sugary cream?”

“I will not say a *cream* joke because I am taking your craving very seriously, but know it was hard.”

“I appreciate the sacrifice.”

“Did you eat a proper dinner?”

“Not yet,” Shane explains, “I was working on putting together that bookshelf for the nursery. The instructions were in Swedish, and my translator was off, so it took-”

“Hold on,” Ilya interrupts, “you were building bookshelf, or your parents?”

“Oh just me, they left a few hours ago.”

It’s quiet for a beat, and Shane realizes why Ilya looks so frustrated after a few moments of reflection.

“I didn’t lift anything heavy,” he assures him, “I mean, nothing heavier than what I lift at the gym.”

“You are supposed to be *resting*.”

“I’m cleared for regular activities! My blood pressure is all good!”

“Building furniture is not regular. Why didn’t you wait for me?”

“We’re kind of running out of time here Ilya,” Shane reminds him, “not sure if you noticed, but I’m huge these days. That’s not just for fun, it means she’s going to come out soon.”

Guilt washes over his face, and Shane immediately regrets saying that.

“You are right,” Ilya murmurs, forehead wrinkled. “I just...do not want you building furniture. Is not your job right now. You are building baby. You should not have to worry about anything else. I hate this.”

“I know, but we’re almost done. The baby is due in April and by then, you could potentially have some time off,” Shane says, trying to sound optimistic. The truth is, this is killing him too, but he doesn’t want Ilya to feel worse than he already does.

Ilya’s voice is strained when he replies, clearly an attempt to change a sore subject. “You need to eat dinner.”

“Yes, right, keep getting sidetracked from that.” Shane walks back to the fridge and pulls it open, pursing his lips. “I have salmon and chicken breast.”

Ilya mutters something in Russian that Shane is sure is derogatory. “Skip cooking tonight, I will order you something to fix your craving, okay?”

“You don’t have to-”

“I want to, please. I am not there to cook for you, let me at least do *something*.” His words are surprisingly serious.

“Okay, Ilya,” Shane agrees.

It’s another half hour of talking over the phone before the doorbell rings with the announcement of his delivery. Shane heads over to see the driver has left it on his porch. He bends down with some difficulty, grunting at the pain in his back, and brings the bags back into the kitchen.

“Is your back okay?” Ilya worries over the phone.

“Yeah, I’m fine, just aching.” He sets the bags down. “What did you order?”

Before Ilya can even answer, Shane’s opening the bag, eyes going wide as he realizes there are two different restaurants in here. One is from a dinner place they frequent often, and it’s Shane’s favorite, go-to order. Hoisin beef with noodles, fragrant with garlic, and an entire container of egg rolls. In the other box, a local bakery. He pulls out a full cheesecake, with a huge tub of whipped cream packaged on the side.

It’s fucking *perfect*.

“This is just what I wanted,” he says, even though he hadn’t realized it himself.

“Good, eat,” Ilya says, “eating for two, do not hold back.”

Shane doesn't.

He sits on the couch with his phone propped up and Ilya's handsome face still on the screen. He eats the entire serving of hoisin beef and noodles while Ilya tells him about the game today. He polishes off almost all the egg rolls while he tells Ilya about his doctor's appointment and that the baby is measuring in the 90th percentile.

He globs way too much whipped cream on a generous slice of cheesecake, eyes closing contently as the texture hits his tongue perfectly. Against his will, he lets out a lewd moan.

"Oh...god," he breathes, feeling the ache in his teeth abate. The baby kicks against his side, and he rubs the spot tenderly, but it feels more like a happy kick than anything. "This is so fucking good, this is so perfect. *Fuck.*"

"Jesus Hollander, are you eating the cheesecake or fucking it?"

"Seriously considering how I can do both."

"Hey, no fucking cheesecakes, I am here for that."

"To fuck cheesecake?"

"To fuck *you*, idiot."

Shane licks a bit of whipped cream off the edge of his lip, grinning into the camera. "Well, you aren't here so...I might have to just settle for the cake."

He knows he's being a little shit, but he can see how riled up Ilya is by the pleased noises he's making, and it's hard not to lean into that and tease him.

"I can make you come over the phone faster than that cake could in person," Ilya growls, and the sentence is so patently ridiculous they both laugh a little.

Still, that promise is too much to ignore. With his belly full of good food, baby happy and settled inside him, and his best friend right there on his screen, Shane wants to make the most of how good he feels right now.

He waddles over to the couch and lowers himself down, one leg slung over the arm rest, hips open. The position twinges his lower back a bit from the weight of his distended middle, but he adjusts until it's somewhat comfortable.

"Prove it," Shane says, holding up the plate with his cheesecake. He takes a bite, lips lingering around the fork, eyes closing. "*Mmmm, oh god, that's good.*"

"Fuck, Hollander, those fucking noises." Ilya's voice begins to take on that low, deep thrum, the one that tells Shane he's getting hard but trying to keep composure. "You like that? The cake I sent for you?"

"Uh-huh," Shane replies softly, taking another bite, "making me so full, feel so good."

“You wish it was me,” Ilya says, “you wish it was me making you full, making you feel good.”

Yeah, I fucking do.

“Shane,” Ilya says, “show me all of you.”

Shane sets his phone down on the coffee table, propped up so Ilya can see his whole body. He hears a quiet swear from the other line, probably at the somewhat obscene way he’s sitting with his legs open.

“Fuck, you look so pretty,” Ilya breathes, “big belly, so pretty with my baby inside of you.”

God, those words do something to Shane. The thought of the changes in his body happening all because of Ilya- because of their love. It makes his brain feel like mush in all the best ways. The only time he likes being out of control in his body, is when he’s surrendering control to Ilya. This is the ultimate representation of Ilya’s ownership of him- claimed so deeply that they created life together.

He’s probably demented, but it turns him the fuck on.

“Spread those legs for me more, baby,” Ilya orders, and Shane does it so quickly it’s almost embarrassing. “You are hard for me already, can see it through your pants.”

Shane nods, eyes drifting shut at the commanding sound of Ilya’s voice.

“Take another bite of cheesecake.”

Shane scoops more onto his fork and takes another bite.

“Is good?”

“So good,” Shane practically purrs.

“Put your hand in your pants, and touch yourself,” Ilya tells him.

With his other arm, Shane slowly drags his fingers down his body, curving a slow sweep over his round belly, down to the hem of his pants, and gliding into the fabric. He palms his dick over his underwear, gasping a little at the sensitivity of the half-hard member.

“Take another bite of cheesecake,” Ilya says, “and stroke yourself.”

Shane’s body feels like a live wire as he follows Ilya’s instructions. With one hand, he scoops more sweet, fluffy cheesecake past his parted lips, and with the other, he strokes his cock.

“*Oh*, ” he stutters out, surprised at the sensation. The sweet, fulfilling treat in his mouth, lingering on his tastebuds, and the relief of his hand around his cock.

“Feel good, to take care of yourself like this?” Ilya coos at him.

Shane can barely even nod. His glasses are still on his face, and his pants are feeling too tight for comfort now, both from how much he's eaten, and the strain of his now fully hard dick.

"Take your pants off."

Shane does as he's told, loving the way his brain shuts down and immediately transfers his consciousness into obedience. Any other time, he gives Ilya absolute hell. But not in these moments. In these moments, he completely lets go, loses all control, and Ilya calls the shots. It's the most beautiful, sweet bliss he could ever hope to find in the natural world.

"Keep eating," Ilya urges, "and let me see your pretty cock while you touch yourself."

Shane moans at the words, but takes another bite of cheesecake, stroking his now exposed dick in front of the camera. He should feel disgusting, splayed open and exposed like this on a Facetime call, swollen belly filling out his frame, one hand jerking his own dick while the other indulgently spoons cheesecake into his mouth.

But he doesn't feel disgusting. He feels utterly gorgeous. He feels worshipped, and loved, and revered. He can hear the quiet moans Ilya can't help but let out, even through the phone.

"Want to see all of you," Ilya says, "shirt off, show me that pretty belly."

Shane strips off his shirt so fast it nearly gives him whiplash. Now, fully naked in all his third-trimester glory, he jacks off for Ilya, all while working his way through the massive slice of cheesecake on his plate.

The sensations are overwhelming. The saccharine filling in his mouth, the overly sensitive head of his cock being worked over by his own expert hands, Ilya's encouraging voice over the phone, telling him he's beautiful, telling him to keep going, telling him to come all over his big belly.

It's through a final bite of cheesecake that his orgasm hits him like an unexpected freight train. He gasps, a bit of whipped cream clinging to the corner of his mouth, hips twisting upright as he paints the underside of his belly with come. His eyes roll back, body jerking off the couch as he lets out a truly obscene moan that rattles his entire chest.

Shane is left lying there, panting, legs spread, cheesecake cleaned off the plate, head thrown back over the couch cushions. He can't move. He can't speak, or breathe, or even figure out what to do with his spent, overindulged body next. He can hear Ilya's heavy breathing, an indicator that he too, has crossed the finish line.

This is the part where Ilya takes over.

"Shane," a gentle voice on the line urges him, and he forces himself to look at Ilya's slightly concerned face.

"M'here," he breathes out.

"Okay, good. How do you feel?"

In lieu of a reply, Shane holds up a trembling hand in a thumbs-up motion.

He laughs softly. “Good, very good. You did so well, sweetheart. You are so fucking perfect for me.”

Shane’s face and chest flushes with warmth at the praise. “Finished...the whole slice.”

“Mmm, good boy, yes you did. I am proud of you.”

Shane smiles sleepily, seeming to forget he’s currently on display.

“Shane,” Ilya sounds more serious this time. “You have to clean up and get dressed, okay? I am not there to do it, but you need to. You cannot fall asleep like this on the couch.”

He nods. “Yeah, I know. Just...so spent.”

“Oh, baby, I am so sorry I’m not there. You have to do it, though, okay? Come on. Get up and just get some towels from the kitchen, is close. You can do it.”

“Okay.” Shane forces his body upright, grimacing at the uncomfortable feeling of warm, tacky ejaculate on his belly.

“I know, I know,” Ilya coos, “just go get a towel and then you can put your clothes back on and rest.”

He takes the phone with him so Ilya can keep talking him through what he knows are simple tasks, but his brain is too fried to process. He cleans up his tummy, and redresses in his comfortable nightclothes, and heads up the stairs without cleaning up any of the mess that he’d made.

When he falls into bed, plugging his phone in, he finds Ilya’s eyes in the darkness, and thinks about what he’d said on the line.

“You wish it was me.”

“I miss you,” he tells Ilya in a humiliatingly fragile, cracked voice.

“Oh, Shane. I miss you. So much.”

“The baby misses you,” he adds, cupping the spot on his lower right side where her feet are currently battering him. “She’s kicking me a lot, probably because she hears your voice.”

Ilya closes his eyes for a moment, like he’s gathering himself before he replies, “this is torture.”

“Yeah,” Shane agrees in a haunted whisper.

“I need to touch you. Soon.”

“Me too.”

“Are you okay, Shane? Do you have water?”

“Yeah, I’m okay. Don’t worry.”

“I am going to be there to take care of you, as soon as I can. I promise.”

“I know.” Shane offers him a weak smile. “Don’t get mad if I fall asleep while we’re on the phone. The baby is sucking up all my energy, and that ridiculous orgasm didn’t help.”

“Mm, you are pretty when you sleep. Just don’t forget to take off your glasses so they do not get squished.”

“Oh, right, thank you.” Shane slides his glasses off and sets them on the end table, exhaling.

Ilya pouts. “You are so pretty with your glasses on.”

“Well, good news for you is I don’t think they’re just for reading anymore,” Shane admits, “the eye doctor said he thinks pregnancy is making my eyesight worse. Apparently that can happen.”

“Oh no, poor me, have to look at my sexy boyfriend with his sexy glasses on all the time.”

“I’m going to get contacts for hockey.”

“I am going to hide them from you.”

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Oh, I thought you missed me?”

“I do.” Shane leans into his phone, pressing what he knows is a *ridiculous* kiss to the screen with Ilya’s face on it. “I love you.”

Ilya’s expression can only be described as a *kicked puppy on the side of the road*. “Hollander, did you just fucking kiss me through the screen?”

“Yes, no one will ever believe you.”

“Fuck. I fucking miss you so much. I love you too.”

Shane laughs tiredly. “Don’t hang up, okay? I want to fall asleep looking at you.”

“Me too, Shane.”

And so, they do.

Ilya’s footsteps are quiet, demure as he pads into the bedroom doorway. It’s dark, only silver moonlight casting shadows across the snoring frame in bed. Shane is lying on his side, with a pillow propped under his swollen belly, snoring like a bear. It’s hard to see too much of his

features in the darkness, but the moonlight illuminates those beautiful freckles, and Ilya has to refrain from leaning in and kissing each one.

Instead, he sets his duffel bag down beside the bed, strips off his shoes and shirt, and carefully climbs in beside Shane. He doesn't want to wake him when he knows he needs the sleep, but he cannot help himself. He hasn't touched him in weeks.

He wraps his arms around Shane, palms flattening across his belly, and buries his face between Shane's shoulder blades.

It takes all of two seconds for the other man to gasp awake, shoving frantically and shouting in a half-coherent, sleep-dazed whirl, "who?!"

"Is me! Is me!" Ilya tells him, pulling back as Shane struggles to sit upright with his belly in the way.

"Fuck," Shane wheezes, pressing a hand over his heart.

"Christ, I am sorry Shane, it is only me." Ilya reaches over and cups his cheek, thumb brushing across those pretty freckles.

Even though he has accidentally scared the shit out of him, there is something that settles like relief in Ilya's body at finally having Shane back in his presence. It has been like trying to survive without oxygen for so many weeks. The pregnancy has made being apart intolerable.

"Why are you here?" Shane asks, still catching his breath.

"Nice to see you too," Ilya muses.

"Fuck." Shane pulls him close, pressing his face into the crook of Ilya's neck, like he needs to smell him. "You aren't supposed to be back for a few more weeks."

"I came home early," Ilya says into his hair, eyes closing. "I am taking a leave of absence from team."

At that, Shane pulls back, eyes wide. "What? Did something happen?"

"Yes, something happened. We are having a baby."

In the darkness, it's hard to see much besides the glint of Shane's watery brown eyes. He blinks a few times, sniffing. "Are you...Ilya...are you sure?"

"I am still employed by Centaurs, work visa is safe," Ilya says quietly, assuaging Shane's concerns before he has to voice them. "I will not be playing again until after baby is born though."

"Are you sure that's what you want? I won't ask you to give up-"

"Shh, moya lyubov," Ilya murmurs, leaning in until their lips are centimeters apart, "I am giving up nothing. Getting so much. And you are wasting time talking to me when we have

not kissed in weeks.”

Shane’s answering giggle is interrupted by Ilya pressing their lips together. Shane tastes like sleep and if he’s being honest, a little bit of morning breath, but Ilya’s never minded. He loves every part of Shane, right down to the most human ones.

“Oh fuck, I missed you,” Shane breathes out, the sound almost a whimper in his chest.

“Missed you more,” Ilya replies, gliding his hand up to cup Shane’s cheek. The skin of his face is soft and warm, cheeks made a bit rounder with the pregnancy. “Fuck, Shane, I need to see you.”

Shane’s already obliging him, such a good, obedient man he is. He strips out of his briefs, leaving him stark naked on the sheets, erection already visible under the swell of his belly. He fumbles at Ilya’s clothes almost desperately, peeling off his joggers, fingers brushing flushed skin.

“You are so fucking beautiful,” Ilya murmurs, dragging his lips down the curve of Shane’s jaw- little peppered kisses on his trim neck. Shane tilts his head back and lets out a lewd moan, unafraid to be vocal while they’re alone in the serenity of the cottage.

“Let me touch you,” Ilya pleads, bringing his hand down to cup the round shape of Shane’s stomach, surprised at how little his hand covers these days. “Oh, she is getting so big in there.”

Shane huffs a laugh. “Yeah, no kidding.”

“You are doing such a good job,” Ilya adds, bringing his lips down to kiss Shane’s chest. The other man lets out a shuddering sigh, leaning back against the pillows, splayed out and ready for whatever Ilya wants to do to him. “You are so strong, so beautiful, so amazing.”

“Stop,” Shane deflects, though his eyes are closed and his hips are writhing.

“Absolutely not,” Ilya murmurs. Still cupping Shane’s tummy, he brings his lips back down, teeth grazing lightly over his nipple.

He goes utterly still when Shane gasps and his body tenses up entirely.

“Shane? Are you okay?”

“S-sorry,” he manages, “sensitive. Really sensitive. Um, you’d better be careful with...that area, Ilya.”

“Does it hurt?”

“No.” He shakes his head, grimacing. “It’s just that...since you’ve been gone...it’s been... um...” His voice falters, embarrassment making his cheeks flush red.

“Been what?” Ilya demands.

“Nothing, fuck it, just please-”

“No, Shane, what is going on with your nipples? I want to know everything I missed.”

“It’s humiliating.”

“*What* is?”

“I’m leaking milk!” Shane exclaims, frustrated. “It’s every bit as gross and embarrassing as you think it would be, okay? I’ve ruined like, four shirts. So just don’t *suck* that area, alright?”

Ilya arches an eyebrow, glancing down at the sensitive bud of Shane’s dark nipple. Pursing his lips, he brings his thumb down and draws small circles around the shape of it. Shane lets out a quiet whine, and Ilya can feel the hard press of his cock against their thighs.

“Seems like it is good kind of sensitive,” Ilya guesses, “does not hurt?”

“No, it- it doesn’t hurt,” Shane repeats. “It’s just humiliating.”

“Is not humiliating,” Ilya argues, still tracing his nipple with one finger, while his other hand cups the weight of Shane’s belly. “It is so beautiful, you are creating *life* with your body. You know how incredible that is?”

Shane shakes his head stubbornly. “You’re just saying that because you’d be an asshole if you didn’t.”

“I thought I *was* an asshole?”

“A bigger asshole.”

“You do not believe me, that I think it is beautiful? *Sexy* even?”

“No, I fucking don’t.”

“Okay, I guess I just show you then.” Ilya shrugs, and brings his mouth down to Shane’s chest. He parts his lips slightly, and before Shane can grasp what he’s doing, he drags his tongue over the sensitive little nub.

“Oh!” Shane gasps, and his hips would’ve jerked off the bed if Ilya didn’t pin them down with his hands. “Ilya!”

“Feel good, no?” he mumbles around Shane’s nipple, lips curving in a smile as he licks it again, this time a bit more forcefully.

“Fuck,” Shane whines, fists gripping the pillows beside him. His cock is leaking, pearly white dewdrops of precum dripping down the hard length of it. He’s a vision here, naked in the moonlight with his body taut like a bowstring, submitting to Ilya’s desires.

He tests the waters a bit, lapping his tongue over the nipple a few times before he purses his lips again and gives it one, firm, *suck*.

“*Jesus, fuck, christ,*” Shane pants, chest heaving, “*Ilya!*”

“So sensitive.” He’s a little in disbelief at how intense this seems to be for Shane. He’s hardly doing anything.

With his other hand, he glides his fingers toward the opposite nipple, pinching it lightly between his fingers and rolling, careful not to put too much pressure. Shane whines again, head thrown back. Ilya takes a moment to admire the contours of his throat- the stern column of it, tilted upward. He has such a beautiful mouth and throat, like something chiseled from marble.

Ilya continues to suck and kiss Shane’s nipple, pausing only when he tastes something.

Oh.

Shane gasps, shuddering, and glancing down as Ilya pulls back, a few drops of thick white liquid on his lower lip. The substance is beading around the edges of Shane’s nipple, not flowing or drizzling down his torso, but seeming to gather there, like it needs help falling.

“I warned you,” Shane grunts, embarrassment tinting his voice, “I’m sorry, I-”

“*Sorry?*” Ilya demands, and then brings his lips back to the nipple, sucking hard. Shane cries out, and Ilya practically purrs at the sound of his pleasure. The taste is hard to describe, warm and homey in ways he’d never expected. He would never do this with anyone else, but this is *Shane*. This is of his body, sustenance created from him, to keep their baby alive and fed and cared for. There’s nothing like the knowledge that *he’s* done this to him, put this baby in him and thus triggered his body to do all of these incredible things.

“Oh, fuck,” Shane moans, “Ilya....Ilya... Jesus Christ, what the fuck?”

“Feel good?” Ilya asks, parting his lips around the swollen bud of Shane’s nipple.

He whines, a high-pitched sound of ecstasy that makes Ilya’s own hard cock throb almost painfully. Shane is too overcome to answer, apparently, but Ilya surmises from the loud pleased noises, that yes, it *does* feel good.

They continue like that, Ilya lapping up what Shane provides, switching to the other nipple once Shane exhales with relief that the first one is tapped. He can feel both of their hard cocks grinding against one another, a sensation that’s equal parts uncomfortable and pleasurable.

It’s surreal, being this close, this intimate with him. He doesn’t want to think about what it might be like when this moment is over, this little pocket of ecstasy carved out between them in the darkness of their shared bedroom.

Instead, he allows himself to get lost in the warmth of it all. Shane’s whining, pleading moans, his soft body against Ilya’s, his desperate, leaking cock. It is all so perfect and

unbelievable- Ilya does not know how he is controlling himself.

“Ilya,” Shane begs, “please, need-need-”

“Need what, moya lyubov?”

“Need *you*. Now, *please!*”

“Fuck, you ask so nicely.”

Ilya moves down Shane’s body, glistening with sweat and swollen in all the right places. He’s hard as a diamond, and twice as beautiful.

He makes sure Shane is ready, and then some, before slowly, delicately, easing himself inside of him.

Fuck it has been too long. So many weeks without feeling this. So many weeks without Shane’s warm, tight hole around him. Ilya sinks in, deep, eyes closing involuntarily. For a moment, he loses himself in everything that is *Shane*. Utter perfection. The man he loved before he even truly knew what the word meant. His everything.

Then, fumbling hands find his bicep, and said man is whining in a broken voice, “Ilya, *please.*”

Right. He can not just sit here bottomed out and relishing in the warmth. He needs to actually fuck him.

So, he moves his hips against Shane, pleased beyond human comprehension when the other man cries out, writhing beneath him. He’s tender, delicate, maneuvering around Shane’s large belly with caution and gripping his hips gently.

After a few minutes of this, Shane groans out, “stop being careful!”

“Shane,” Ilya huffs, “you are pregnant. Third trimester. Is time to be careful.”

“No, it’s time to fuck me! Please Ilya, it hurts!”

“I am *hurting you?*”

“Fuck, no, it’s not enough! Need more! It hurts, wanting you. Please, harder, *please.*”

Jesus Christ.

Shane is asking for it, so Ilya provides it.

“Better?” he pants as his hips slam back and forth against Shane’s skin.

Shane, head thrown back, eyes closed, fists clutching the sheets, does little else but wail. It is a good sound, his exploding pleasure. Ilya wants, at all times, to be the cause of that pleasure.

It does not take long. Ilya brings his hand down and glides it along the rock-hard length of Shane's cock, once, twice, three times, and Shane is crying out, hips stuttering as his belly is painted with white come.

Ilya follows, almost immediately, right after. The sight of Shane coming all over his pregnant belly is too much.

They lie there, gasping, ragged, overindulged. It is odd because their foreplay tonight was wildly bizarre and different from anything they've ever done (considering Shane doesn't usually *lactate*) but Ilya has never felt closer to him than he does in this moment.

"I love you," Shane gasps out, broken and boneless beside him.

"Ya lyublyu tebya," Ilya whispers against the freckles across his cheek.

For far too long, they just lie there together.

-30 weeks-

"...and this here is the delivery suite!" The warm hospital staffer giving the tour spreads her arm excitedly at the room in front of them.

Shane follows her gaze, trying to find the enthusiasm she seems to be displaying. The room is definitely nice. Shiny floors, folded blankets on the cot, a tub in the corner with jets.

Against his will, he wonders when the last time the jets were flushed out and cleaned was. He is sure if he asked they'd give him an industry standard answer. And they would probably be telling the truth. But he probably wouldn't be able to stop imagining they *weren't*.

There's a stack of towels beside the tub, folded neatly, and he wonders how often they get cleaned and sanitized. If no one uses the room for a bit, do they sit there, collecting dust? Will they towel off the baby right after she's born? What if they get dust in her brand new lungs?

The light overhead is miserably bright, and he doesn't see a dimmer switch on the wall or a remote to be found. Still, this is the nicest one they've toured so far, latest out of the available options his doctor works with. And they are decidedly running out of time, delayed significantly by so many weeks on the road, and Shane's inability to pick a hospital.

"You'd have your option for the bed, or the tub," the staffer, Miranda, tells him. "If you choose the epidural though, you'll have to be on your back in the bed."

"Do the lights dim?" Shane asks, feeling rude and abrupt when her expression looks offended by how quickly he swept over her last sentence.

"The light don't dim," she says apologetically, "we need full visibility to take care of you and baby."

He nods. "Oh. Can we turn them off?"

“I suppose while you’re alone,” she says. “But, the doctor and nurses will need to be able to see. You don’t want an epidural needle going in the wrong spot.”

Same answer the last place had given him. The last two, actually.

“I don’t want an epidural,” he admits, though he isn’t sure why he’s even bringing it up. It won’t change that the lights don’t dim.

“Oh, you say that now.” Miranda chuckles knowingly.

Ilya clears his throat from where he’s standing right behind Shane. “This is nicest room here?”

Miranda arches an eyebrow. “Um, yes it is our premium birthing suite.”

“Mm.” Ilya nods, looking down at Shane’s face. He seems to see something there that makes him purse his lips. “I think, lights dimming is a deal breaker for us.”

“Well, you won’t find a hospital that lets their staff work in the dark,” Miranda replies, a bit defensive. “Shane will have an IV line in, and maybe an epidural, and will need cervical checks, and-”

“We know,” Shane replies, voice tense. His shoulders are stiff, and he feels warm under his windbreaker. The lights are so bright in here it feels like every pore on his face is exposed.

“I think tour is done,” Ilya says, reaching out to cup Shane’s bicep in his hand. “We have class to get to. Thank you Melinda.”

“Miranda,” she deadpans.

“Thank you Miranda,” Shane says to her, and allows Ilya to steer him out of the suite.

They make a hurried shuffle through the halls. Well, as hurried as Shane can move at thirty weeks pregnant. Which is, to say, not fast at all.

He can breathe again once they’re outside in the cool, winter air. He wrings his fingers anxiously, extending them like he’s trying to remove all evidence of that interaction from his body.

“You did not like,” Ilya tells him. It isn’t a question.

“No,” Shane agrees quietly, “but it was better than the last one.”

“Last one was dirty. Even to *me*.”

“Yeah, I can’t do that. But this place is…” Shane glances behind him at the tall, imposing building. He exhales shakily. “This is doable.”

“Is it?” Ilya asks him.

Shane turns back to meet his eyes. There's concern evident on the features of his handsome face.

"Hey, it's alright," Shane says, chuckling. "No one ever said giving birth was going to be a comfortable experience. I can handle it."

"Well, yes," Ilya says thoughtfully, "giving birth is going to be painful. There is not too much we can do about that. But, the other things, we should make good for you, yes?"

"The other things?" Shane inquires.

"The lights, and the sounds, and how clean everything is. You should be allowed to control that, if you want to."

Shane shrugs, beginning to walk toward the parking lot. Ilya lands quickly into stride with him. He's easy to keep up with these days, considering his walk is entirely *waddle*.

"Is *not*-" Ilyas mimics Shane's shrug with displeasure. "It is important. It is you."

"I get it, but there's not really anything we can do Ilya," he replies as he opens the passenger door and lowers himself into the seat with a grunt of discomfort. Ilya hovers, making sure he's inside before shutting the door for him.

"What if we don't do it at hospital?" Ilya says once he's behind the wheel. Shane really hates letting him drive because he goes way too fast and doesn't always use his blinker and occasionally skips a stop sign. Though he never usually does any of that with "*precious cargo*" in tow, as he has said lately. Shane's belly is too big nowadays to make driving a comfortable activity.

"You want me to give birth in the car?" Shane teases lightly. "I can barely fit in here as it is, I doubt there's room for stirrups."

"You are so funny, tears in my eyes," Ilya says with zero humor in his tone.

"It's a gift."

"No, boring, I mean give birth at home. Maybe the cottage?"

Shane is surprised to hear this. "What? You're kidding, right?"

"Is not a big thing, in Russia," Ilya admits, "hospital for everyone. Safer. But, you are very healthy. Last appointment doctor said you have a perfect cervix."

"Yes, thank you for constantly reminding me." Shane rolls his eyes.

"Something to be proud of." Ilya glances away from the road for a split second to look at Shane, before he looks back. "But, I mean it anyway. I did some reading. Midwife can deliver the baby at home, if you're healthy. Your blood pressure is normal. I bet the doctor will say yes."

Shane's eyebrows knit together. "You of all people want me to have an unassisted birth at home? I'm a little in shock."

"Is not unassisted," Ilya says, "midwife is there and brings help. And, no it is not my first choice. I prefer you be with doctors and surgeons and all sorts of pain relief. But you insist you don't want epidural. You don't want IV. You don't want lights on, or hospital germs. This seems the way to do it, da?"

The baby presses a firm kick to Shane's side, and he palms the spot gently, feeling her little foot press against his hand. He smiles in spite of himself, though it's strained.

"My mom will kill me if I try to do that," he says.

"What does your mom have to do with this, Shane?"

"It's dangerous, isn't it?"

"Childbirth is always dangerous. Things can always go wrong. Some of the time people say it goes wrong *because* of hospital. Homebirth is safe, if you are cleared. Or, so I read. We should ask the doctor, though."

Shane chews on his lower lip, forehead wrinkled. "When did you do all this reading?"

"After you had to go to the hospital, for your blood pressure," Ilya explains. "You hated it. I did not like the thought of you being so miserable when the baby comes, on top of the pain. It would be stressful for you."

Despite his reluctance to agree to this plan, Shane has to admit, he's touched by Ilya's thoughtfulness. Not only had he astutely observed how uncomfortable Shane was in the hospital, he'd actively done research to see if they could solve that problem in the future.

He's struck with this odd, sticky feeling in his chest. Love, yes, he knows Ilya feels that for him, and for their baby. It's obvious, these days at least.

But there's something else too, something that digs deeper between his ribs, settles inside of him like an anchored ship in choppy waves.

Being *known*.

Ilya sees things in him that he never thought another human being would care to notice. At first, it kind of made him feel icky and weird and self conscious. But now, sharing this experience with him, Shane is so grateful it feels like he could cry.

"Oh," is all he can muster, glancing at Ilya's side profile while he drives. "That was really nice of you."

"So, maybe if it is something you want, we ask the doctor about it at our next appointment?" Ilya suggests.

“Okay,” he agrees, voice soft, sort of hallowed. He’s touched to his core that Ilya thought to do this for him. “Thanks, Ilya.”

“You have nothing to thank me for, you are the one growing a baby for us.” Ilya waves his hand dismissively. “What you should be doing is apologizing for picking a childbirth class that is so far away. Why are we driving to the middle of nowhere?”

Shane snorts. “She’s a friend of Jackie’s. Apparently she’s very good. Her breathing techniques got Jackie through two natural childbirths.”

“Well, she would have needed all the help she can get, considering who she is married to.” Ilya rolls his eyes.

“You’re so mean.”

“No, I am right. Can you imagine *Hayden Pike* as your birthing coach? It is a miracle their kids are so cute.”

Laughing, Shane shudders. “I’d really rather not imagine it. I like the birthing coach I picked.”

With that, he reaches across the center console and wraps his fingers around Ilya’s. Ilya smiles slightly, and squeezes his hand.

“You are right, I will be amazing,” he agrees, “you should probably pay me lots of money.”

“I’ll pay you money to shut up for the rest of the drive.”

“Deal. Wait, how much?”

“I have nine dollars on me right now. Cash.”

“Oh, big stakes.”

“I am a high roller, you know.”

“Why do you have cash anyway? You don’t use card for everything like a regular person?”

With a long suffering sigh, Shane responds, “I bought a juice this morning and the place only takes-”

“Oh right, the weird hippie juice bar that is probably money laundering scheme.”

“Fine with me, the juice is amazing.”

Ilya chuckles, but wisely doesn’t offer any sort of glib retort. Despite his complaints, it actually isn’t *that* long before they get to the secluded, large house at the end of the road. There’s a sign out front that reads “*Bennie’s Birthing Babes*” which sort of makes Shane want to die.

“That is the name of the class?” Ilya asks, parking the car with visible disdain on his expression.

“Did not know that,” Shane informs him, grimacing.

There are other cars parked out front, and Ilya dodges a loose child’s toy as he crosses around to open the passenger door, holding his hand out to help Shane stand. He accepts the help, groaning in pain at the pull on his lower back.

“You okay?” Ilya asks, rubbing his knuckles over the small of his back.

“Yep, just got an anvil hanging off my waist,” Shane replies with a tired smile. Ilya winces sympathetically, pressing harder with his knuckles as they wait on the porch for someone to answer the door.

It only takes a moment before a woman answers the door, dressed in a pair of yoga pants and a dry-fit long sleeve. She’s got braided blonde hair and big, intense blue eyes.

“Shane!” she says to him with a huge grin, even though they have never met before.

“Hi, you must be Bennie,” he replies, extending his hand to shake.

She ignores it and pulls him in for a hug, which startles him. Ilya clears his throat and gently pries Shane back by the bicep.

“Not a hugger,” Ilya explains, while Shane shrinks back uncomfortably.

“Oh, I’m sorry!” Bennie smiles, unperturbed. “And you’re Ilya, aren’t you?”

“Yes, hello.” He shakes her hand as well.

“Come on in! We’re about to get started!”

They follow her into the foyer, leaving their coats on the rack by the door. Ilya keeps one hand pressed lightly to Shane’s lower back, leading him toward the large, open den where several other couples are sitting out on yoga mats.

There’s a murmur amongst the room when they enter, and Shane feels uncomfortable as Bennie leads Ilya and him over to an empty mat in the back of the class. She meanders up to the front, smiling. Ilya takes his hands and carefully helps lower him to the mat until he’s sitting on his butt, legs in front of him, hands bracing behind him.

“Yes, yes, we have a bit of a celebrity presence in class today!” Bennie announces. “Let’s get that out of the way. Welcome Shane and Ilya!”

“Welcome,” the class choruses politely. Stares linger. Shane feels like he’s under a microscope.

“Now, this class is for mommies and daddies who are in your third trimester. We are going to be discussing the best birthing positions for pain management, our breathing techniques, and

general advice for a healthy, natural childbirth. If at any time you have questions, please raise your hand and I'll be right there to help!"

There's a collective murmur of understanding. Shane hopes everyone stops glancing in his direction. He hasn't been around so many people lately, especially not people who obviously recognize him.

Shane follows along as Bennie instructs the class. It starts off as pretty basic yoga positions, which he does routinely. This time though, Ilya is behind him, pressed close, bracing a lot of his weight in ways that takes all the pressure off of his knees and hips. It's really nice, actually. He hadn't expected to get that much out of this.

"And we're going to take nice, big, deep breaths," Bennie instructs as she moves around the room, pausing in front of them. "Shane, big breath.

He sucks in a large deep breath, looking up at her unsurely.

"And let it out, honey," she adds.

Oh, right. He exhales in a whoosh, grimacing. He didn't nail that. Ilya rubs his back gently.

"Okay, let's do a little solo work here." Bennie squats down. "Ilya, you sit criss-cross here, and have Shane sit between your legs. There you go, support his back. Perfect."

Ilya curls up close to Shane, supporting his weight with his chest, arms wrapping around to cradle the belly. Shane feels the muscles in his body go soft almost instantly at the proximity.

"Ah, so we should plan to be close during labor," Bennie says to them, "I just saw Shane physically relax."

Ilya smirks. "I think he likes me."

"No shit I like you," Shane mutters.

"Now, Shane, I want you to inhale slowly, breathe in for five seconds, and then *slowly* exhale, for longer than that time, maybe five to ten, if you can manage it."

Shane nods, brow furrowed. He wants to do this right, nail the training.

"Ilya, while Shane does that, I want you to rub his back, comfort him, maybe breathe with him if he wants."

"That will bother me," Shane tells him.

"I know," Ilya assures him.

Shane smiles gratefully. Ilya winks back at him.

"Okay, then don't bother him," Bennie says with a small chuckle. "Let's act like we're working through a contraction. Starting now, Shane- controlled breathing."

Shane breathes in slowly, controlled, for five seconds, then breathes out for ten. Ilya rubs his back in smooth, rhythmic circles, resting his chin in Shane's hair.

He murmurs in his ear, "good job on fake contraction. Fake baby is almost here."

A laugh bursts from his lips before he can finish his breathing, and he smacks Ilya's knee. "Asshole! You interrupted my breathing!"

"You are still breathing, or you'd be dead."

"Oh my god, Ilya."

"Shane."

"I'm supposed to be learning how to breathe so I can give birth."

"Yes you are doing a good job."

"Stop ass kissing."

"Okay fine, you are doing terrible. You will probably be the worst at giving birth. Maybe set a record."

Shane can't help the next laugh that slips from his mouth, but he clamps a hand over it, looking at Bennie with flushed cheeks. "He's-he's just kidding."

She's smiling when he looks over at her. "I know, hon. I think he's doing a very good job of redirecting you. Keep it up, Ilya."

She winks at them, and gets to her feet, going to help another couple.

"I am doing a very good job, too," Ilya mutters, and Shane laughs again.

"Shut the fuck up!"

"Mm, whatever you need me to do." Ilya leans in and presses a kiss to Shane's neck, and Shane giggles.

He stops only when he sees the flash of something, and his head darts sideways. One of the men sitting on a yoga mat across from them is holding his phone out, and has just snapped a photo of Ilya kissing his neck.

Everyone turns to look, clearly having noticed the flash. Shane's eyes go wide, face burning with embarrassment. It's not that it's a secret anymore, but...he hadn't exactly expected to be photographed here, so intimately.

Ilya is on his feet the next instant, moving toward the man, and Shane curses his inability to stand quickly right now. He has to stop him before he decks someone at a fucking lamaze class.

“Whoa, okay!” Bennie rushes over and puts herself between Ilya and the man, who at least has the decency to look contrite.

“I- I’m sorry,” the man stammers, shrinking back away from Ilya’s intimidating stature.

“Delete the fucking photo,” Ilya spits in his direction, nose curled up with anger.

Shane struggles to his feet, breathing heavily. “Ilya-”

“No, what the fuck is the matter with you?” Ilya growls at the man, cutting Shane’s diplomatic attempt off. “You think we have not been scrutinized enough? Everyone staring at us when we walk in like we are some kind of show?”

Shane hadn’t realized that Ilya noticed. He doesn’t usually let that stuff bother him.

“Hank, this is a no-photos environment,” Bennie scolds the man, “you know that!”

“I’m sorry!” He says again. “I didn’t realize the flash was on. It’s just- it’s- it’s *Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov*. Here, at my wife’s lamaze class!”

“Your poor fucking wife,” Ilya snarls, fists clenched.

“*Ilya*,” Shane repeats, gripping his arm. Though, from the sight of the humiliated, red-faced woman besides Hank, he can’t say he disagrees.

“Delete the fucking photo, or I will stop being nice,” Ilya seethes.

“Okay, okay!” Hank turns his phone and deletes the picture, showing the room. “I deleted it! I’m sorry.”

“I think you should leave,” Bennie says to Hank, expression flat and unhappy.

“*We’re* going to leave,” Shane says, tugging on Ilya’s arm. “Come on.”

“Why should we have to leave?” Ilya demands. “We are here to help you, we should not go because of this f-”

“I want to *go*,” Shane tells him, meeting his eyes, his own humiliatingly wet.

Ilya appears to realize how upset he is, and at that, his anger seems to settle. He nods, brows furrowed, and throws his arm over Shane’s shoulders protectively.

“You don’t have to go,” Bennie says to them.

“Thank you for your help,” Shane tells her, voice breaking a bit at the end.

Ilya steers him toward the front door, grabbing both of their coats so they can head outside into the cold.

He drives back to the cottage with white knuckles. They don’t do much talking. Shane leans his head against the window, looking out at the melting snow, blinking tears from his eyes

and rubbing his hands over his swollen belly in a futile attempt to soothe himself. The baby kicks his hands and wiggles around, which makes him smile in spite of his melancholy.

He gets a text from Hayden as they're walking inside, barely glancing at it.

H: *Hey, Bennie texted Jackie what happened. Are you okay?*

S: *Yeah, fine. Thanks for checking.*

H: *Did you guys at least get some good information?*

S: *Yeah it was great. Thank you.*

Shane sighs, setting his phone down on the kitchen island and rubbing his eyes. He hears Ilya behind him, filling a glass with Ginger Ale from the fridge and sliding it in front of him like a peace offering.

"I am sorry I upset you," Ilya says cautiously.

Shane frowns, shaking his head. "You didn't upset me."

"I shouldn't have gotten so angry, I suppose. I just..." Ilya grits his teeth. "You were so relaxed and then that *idiot*—"

"Ilya." Shane reaches over and presses his hand atop the other man's. "I am not upset with you, I promise." He looks down at his belly, face twisting up. "I guess it's kind of something we have to prepare for, isn't it? At least for a little while, she'll have...*notable* parents. People might want to take pictures."

"I do not want anyone taking pictures of her," Ilya says.

"Neither do I," Shane admits.

Their eyes meet again, both unsure. There's a question there, a sort of: *what the fuck do we do now?*

"I think maybe...is time to think about...some security?" Ilya hesitantly suggests.

They both bristle a little at that. It's not like they're A-list celebrities. Their rivalry, status, and of course Shane's numerous endorsements and previous romantic entanglement with a movie star have led them to being more well-known than their colleagues. Neither of them have ever liked the idea of having to hire someone to babysit them in public. They can handle themselves.

But...a small little baby? A fragile tiny thing? Shane knows they will protect her with their lives, with everything they have. But...would it maybe be smart, at least at first until the excitement of her existence dies down to...have some backup?

What if next time it's not just a camera phone? What if someone wants to get too close? What if Shane is alone with the baby somewhere and-

“Okay, let’s not spiral,” he says carefully. “I think you're probably right? Maybe just at first. I don’t think it’s a bad idea. My mom’s been wanting me to do it for a while anyway.”

Ilya nods, though he doesn’t look happy about it. “Let’s call about it tomorrow. Today, we relax, like we planned, okay?”

“That sounds so fucking good,” Shane replies, exhaling heavily.

Wordlessly, Ilya opens his arms, and Shane is helpless to do anything but fall into them. He buries his face in Ilya’s neck, breathing in the smell of him. That musky, woodsy smell that always feels like coming home after a long trip. The comfort in familiarity, closeness, *love*.

Ilya rubs his back, buries his face in Shane’s hair, breathes contently. They stay like that for a while, until Shane’s back starts to throb, and he pulls back with a grimace.

Ilya smiles, leaning down to peck his lips. “Why don’t you go sit on the chair in the living room, I will rub your back and we can practice that breathing?”

Shane bites his lip to keep the happy grin from spreading his mouth. “Yeah?”

“Of course. You were doing terribly. Need lots of practice.”

Rolling his eyes, Shane swats him away and grabs his Ginger Ale, heading for the living room. “Oh, by the way, today was definitely another *pro* for the home birth idea. No one can bother us here.”

“I agree,” Ilya says, sitting behind him. “Take off your shirt.”

“Pervert.”

“Oh yes, absolutely.”

Shane giggles, but allows Ilya to slide his shirt off, leaving his bare torso exposed. Ilya kisses his neck, the little scar in his shoulder, and the center of his spine, before he brings his firm fingers out to press into the flesh.

Shane lets out a hiss of relief, eyes closing, body going languid at the feeling. It’s quiet, but not an awkward kind, a peaceful one. They’ve been together long enough by now to not feel the need to fill these silences. They coexist in the quiet, no sound except for Shane’s occasional, soft moan of relief.

“Keep making sounds like that, you are going to have to take your pants off too,” Ilya warns him.

“Mmmm, *ohhh god, soooo good*,” Shane teases.

“That’s it. They are coming off.”

Shane laughs wildly as Ilya starts tugging on his sweatpants. Their lips meet again, and as he lets his partner undress him for some truly disgusting, middle-of-the-day sex, he actually

finds he doesn't mind the spontaneity.

Ilya is the only person he ever, ever wants to be this close to.

-39 weeks-

Ilya dreams of his mother more often than he'd ever like to admit. Usually the dreams are hurried, chasing her down, trying to grasp her, trying to get a little more time in her arms before she's gone forever. Trying to wrestle with the underlying desire he's had in the past to maybe join her wherever she is now.

He doesn't have that urge these days, of course. But, he'd be lying if he said the idea never tempted him, especially when dreaming of her.

Tonight, when he sees her beautiful face, it is not rushing, or frantic. Tonight, she's smiling, serene. Her eyes are soft, gentle, lashes brushing her cheeks as her lids flutter. Her hair is swept over her shoulder, and she's cradling something in her arms.

Ilya steps closer. "Mama?"

She glances at him, and smiles. She urges him closer, speaking in Russian. He steps closer, surprised to look down and see her cradling a pink bundle.

He can't explain the feeling that courses through his veins at the proximity to this little pink bundle. His arms reach out, as if hoping to somehow join his mother and hold the baby at the same time.

"Mama," he whispers, awestruck.

"She is beautiful," his mother murmurs back, still in Russian. "You've done so well, little angel."

Ilya snuffles, reaching for her. He wants to touch the baby, and his mother all at once. He wants to stay here, in this warm little cocoon.

"You cannot stay," his mother tells him, smiling sadly, "she needs you, now. Okay? You stay with her. Promise me."

"I will," he says immediately.

She settles at that, nodding proudly. "Good, my darling. I love you always."

"I love you too."

"Mmmmmmmmm."

What the fuck?

Ilya opens his eyes, sitting upright with a startled breath. It takes him a moment to reorient himself in the dark bedroom of the cottage, where to his right, Shane is currently sitting at the edge of the bed. His head is tilted forward, thighs spread, and he's groaning.

Ilya moves into action immediately, scrambling out of the tangled sheets to his side. He doesn't click on the lamp, because Shane must have it off for a reason. It's the middle of the night.

"Shane?" he asks, resting a hand on Shane's knee so he knows he's close.

"*Mmm, Ilya,*" Shane moans, eyes squeezed shut.

"Sweetheart, are you-"

"Yeah, uh-huh. Contraction. Bad one."

"A braxton hicks?"

"I thought so at first but...it's been hours." Shane huffs out a heavy breath, blinking rapidly as his eyes clear and he looks at Ilya.

"Hours?" Ilya demands. "Shane, *why* would you not wake me?"

"I wasn't sure if it was real," Shane says. "Besides, you can't really do anything about it right now. It's still early. You should go back to sleep."

Ilya stares at him in disbelief.

"I'm just being pragmatic," Shane insists. "If you're tired later, you won't be any good to me. All I'm doing right now is...*contracting*."

"How far apart are they?" Ilya wisely ignores the rest of that ridiculous sentence, focusing on the important part. Shane is having contractions.

"A half hour ish," Shane replies. "I've had four."

"Sounds like the real thing," Ilya says.

"Yeah. When the sun is up we can call Kimmy and see what she thinks."

"I think she will say you're in labor," Ilya replies. He rubs a hand over Shane's thigh. "I will call her in a few hours. She may want to come check you."

Shane nods. "I was going to get up and start prepping stuff so we don't have to worry about it later. The tub, and the-"

"Shane, no. Kimmy and I will do all of that." Ilya shakes his head. "Do you know what your job is right now?"

"Um. I still need to-"

“Eh, eh.” Ilya interjects firmly. “Your job is to *rest*. Da?”

“Da,” Shane mutters.

“You should try to get some sleep,” Ilya says.

“I guess so,” he agrees reluctantly. He allows Ilya to pull him back down against the sheets, resting his head against the larger man’s chest. Shane breathes softly, one hand coming down to cup the heavy weight of his distended middle. Ilya can feel the weight of it on his hip from the angle Shane is lying at. He doesn’t envy having to carry that around.

Ilya strokes his hair, and thinks of all the things *he* needs to do.

1. Call their midwife Kimmy, inform her Shane is in labor.
2. Begin prepping their inflatable tub for labor, set out the instruments in the guest room that they’ve designated as the birthing suite.
3. Prepare the pre-approved labor snacks Shane had requested so they are easy to grab when he wants them.
4. Set all the lights in the house to dim.

5.

“Ilya?” Shane murmurs, drawing lines on Ilya’s chest with his index finger.

“Yes?” he asks quietly.

“Um, I just want to say...since it might be our last day just the two of us...” Shane looks up at him in the darkness, those pretty brown eyes glimmering. “That I know this wasn’t planned, and it’s been kind of crazy, but...I just...I just really fucking love you. And I’m really glad this happened. Is that okay to say?”

Ilya’s face crumples, and he tries desperately not to let tears fall as he pulls Shane’s face toward him, mashing their lips together. The kiss is sloppy and misplaced, lips and tongues and teeth grazing and spilling together.

“I love you so much,” Ilya breathes against his skin, touching every part of his body that he can get his hands on. Shane sighs contentedly, pulling him closer.

“I love you too,” Shane says, closing his eyes.

Ilya is too anxious to sleep, knowing that Shane is in labor. Once he’s sure the other man is sound asleep, he carefully slides out of bed, making sure Shane is propped up comfortably on enough pillows that the position won’t hurt his back.

Then, he gets to work.

After being cleared for homebirth by their doctor, they had a lot of preparation and studying to do. It is all ready to go, he just has to make sure everything is in order and easy when things are chaotic, later.

He cleans up a bit around the cottage, although it's already fastidiously tidy. Shane has been *nesting*, apparently. In other words, crawling around on the floor cleaning baseboards and refusing to let Ilya help, even though his back suffers for it later.

Once everything is in its right place, the sun has begun to rise behind the mountains. He finds himself on the back deck, looking out at the lake. It's so weird to be here now, about to bring their baby into the world. Sometimes, looking at Shane's beautiful face, the curve of his pregnant belly, the excited hitch in his laugh when they talk about baby names, it's hard to grapple with the idea that he's the same, scrappy teenager that Ilya met so long ago.

If only he'd known then, that approaching Hollander in the communal showers would lead to Ilya somehow getting everything he'd ever wanted, but never dared to hope for.

"Ilya?" A sleepy voice from behind gets his attention, and he turns to see Shane waddling out onto the deck, rubbing sleep from his eyes. He's got a blanket wrapped around his shoulders to combat the early morning spring chill. He's wearing nothing more than a pair of blue shorts and a white t-shirt that stretches rather pitifully over his large belly.

"Hello, sweetheart," Ilya says, opening his arm for Shane to nestle in beside him. "Come here."

Shane does so, pressing his face into Ilya's chest. It's quiet for a moment, serene, while they look over the orange-tinted tide.

"How are you feeling?" Ilya asks gently.

"A little better, since I slept." Shane replies, still blinking exhaustion from his pretty brown eyes. "Had two more contractions in bed."

"Are you okay?"

"Mhm. Still pretty far apart."

Ilya rubs his arm. "I will call Kimmy."

"Can you call my mom, too?" Shane asks, eyes closing again as he rests his entire body against Ilya's.

"Of course." Ilya kisses the top of his head. With his free hand, he pulls his phone out of his pocket and dials Yuna.

"Early morning phone call?" Yuna answers on the second ring, mirth in her voice. "Do I have a grandbaby on the way?"

Ilya chuckles. "It looks that way, yes."

"How is he?"

"How are you?" Ilya asks Shane, arching an eyebrow.

Shane rolls his eyes. "I'm fine."

"He says he is fine," Ilya tells her.

"You two are hilarious. Do you want me to come over? How far apart are the contractions?"

"They-"

"Shit, fuck."

Ilya's response is cut off by Shane's low, hiss of pain. His eyes squeeze shut tightly, nose wrinkling, and he cups the underside of his belly like he's bracing the weight.

"Breathe," Ilya reminds him quietly, brushing his fingers gently along the ridges of Shane's spine through his shirt. "You can do this."

Shane nods, eyes still closed. It takes another few moments before his face clears, and he huffs out a heavy exhale.

"Fine," he says before Ilya can ask, "I'm fine, it's okay. That was like, twenty minutes from the last one."

"Oh, shit. Closer?"

Shane nods again.

"Well, that didn't sound fun," Yuna says in his ear, and Ilya remembers she is still on the phone.

"Oh, yes. They are twenty minutes apart, now." He hopes his voice doesn't give away how nervous he is.

"When I was in labor with Shane, I went from three centimeters dilated, to pushing in three hours," she muses, "you'd better get that midwife in the loop."

Ilya nods worriedly, glancing down at Shane's neutral expression. "Do you want mom to come now?"

Shane nods. "Dad too, if he wants."

"Okay." Ilya speaks into the phone. "You two can come over."

"We'll get ready to head over now."

"See you soon."

"Ilya?"

"Yes?"

“Take a breath, honey.” The smile isn’t visible over the phone, but he can hear it in her voice. “You’re about to be a daddy, and you’re going to be a great one.”

Ilya’s throat feels tight. “I...thank you, Yuna.”

“See you soon sweetie.”

The line disconnects, and Ilya has to forcefully exhale to keep the emotion from overtaking him. Instead of ruminating on it, he makes himself useful, dialing their midwife’s number to let her know what’s going on. She says to let her know when the contractions are fifteen minutes apart and she’ll head over to give Shane a check.

“Are you hungry?” Ilya nudges him gently once he’s off the phone.

“Not really,” Shane says, grimacing. “Weirdly enough, I just want like, a huge cup of coffee with honey in it.”

“Coming right up,” Ilya replies easily.

They make their way into the kitchen and he makes Shane a piping hot mug of coffee, drizzled with honey, and passes it to him. Shane sips it, eyes closing, a smile peaking out at the corners of his lips.

His coffee is interrupted by another contraction, but he handles it well. Ilya tells him he’s going to start timing them. Shane nods in agreement.

“Your mom said she labored very fast with you,” Ilya mentions as they shuffle into the adjacent den. He assists Shane in lowering his body to the couch.

“I think she’s exaggerating,” Shane says with a snort. “The midwife said first labors can take days. I doubt I’ll be lucky.”

“We should keep a close eye, just to be sure,” Ilya says.

Shane shrugs. “Not like we have to time the drive to the hospital. If things go fast I’ll just... you know...head for the guest room.”

“You are very calm,” Ilya notes, situating himself beside Shane on the sofa.

Shane’s eyes dart to him, and he smirks. “Sorry, I should probably start freaking out?”

“No no, calm is good.”

With a laugh, Shane rubs his hand over the front of his stretched out t-shirt. “I *am* pretty scared, but, weirdly I also feel, kind of okay? Like, ready I guess? We’ve done so much research, and we’re so prepared. And I’m home, I feel safe here. And...*you’re* here.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat. “I am glad you feel that way. You are safe. I have you both.”

“I know.”

Ilya scooches closer, cupping both hands around the swell of Shane’s tummy. He presses a soft kiss to the apex of his middle, smiling when he gets a punch in response.

“You are going to be easy baby,” Ilya tells her, “make labor so easy for Papa that he wants ten more kids.”

“Keep dreaming,” Shane mutters, though his face is flushed red under his freckles.

They’re interrupted by a knock at the door, and a familiar voice calling, “are you decent?”

David Hollander, perpetually traumatized from what he’d once witnessed at his son’s cottage, always checks to make sure he’s safe before he enters.

“We are making passionate love on the kitchen stove!” Ilya calls back.

“Stop it!” Shane punches his bicep, though it lacks his usual upper body strength. “Come in! We’re in the living room!”

Yuna and David both enter then. They’re dressed casually, sweats and hoodies. David is carrying a few grocery bags and Yuna has a tote over her shoulder.

When she sees Shane, her eyes well and she moves for him.

“Please don’t cry,” Shane begs her as she pulls him in for a hug.

“I won’t, I won’t,” she says, but her trembling voice gives her away.

“How are you feeling, son?” David asks, brushing a quick hand through Shane’s hair.

Shane smiles at him from over Yuna’s head. “I’m good, Dad. Really.”

And Ilya feels it again- that deep pull in his chest, the longing. Shane is so safe here, so, *so* loved. Two parents who care so deeply for him, who want to be here for all the important moments in his life, even the boring part right before the big one.

The longing tugs at him, until Yuna pulls away from Shane, and offers her teary smile to Ilya. Then, before he can react, she’s crushing him in a tight hug.

“I love you, sweetheart,” she murmurs in his ear.

Ilya blinks, quickly hugging her back. The pain in his chest eases significantly. “I love you too.”

“Okay!” She steps back, drying her eyes. “We brought some things. Shane, I brought you an extra ball-”

“I have *two*-”

“And an extra body pillow, and some heated blankets-”

“It’s April!”

“And do you remember those little yogurt drinks you used to love?”

At that, Shane pauses. “The strawberry ones?”

“Mhm!” She pulls a six pack of tiny pink bottles out of the grocery bag. “I found them at the new Asian market in town. I got three packs.”

“Oh my god.” Shane holds his arms out and Yuna passes him one. He barely has time to peel the foil top off before he’s downing it. “Oh my god, Mom!”

“That’s your labor strength,” she says with a grin.

“Thank you.” Shane looks down at the drink, then his mom’s face, and Ilya knows they’re two seconds from a hormonal meltdown.

“Let me taste,” he says, distracting Shane momentarily from the sobs he was surely about to let out.

Shane passes him the bottle, and Ilya tips it back. The texture is thick and kind of unpleasant, and it’s too sweet on his tongue. He refrains from making a face and teasing Shane, because clearly he is very excited about these.

“He hates it,” Shane observes, taking the bottle back and sticking his tongue out. “More for me!”

“He didn’t even say anything!” David exclaims.

“I know him well enough by now.” Shane sips the beverage again, and winks in Ilya’s direction.

And, well, it’s a little embarrassing how good that feels.

“Shane, honey? Do you want me to rub your legs?”

“I’ve got him, Yuna.”

“But he’s-”

“*Please*,” is all Shane gets out through his gasp.

“You two are crowding him,” Dad says from further away.

Yes, Shane thinks, but can’t say it through the pain.

He’s not sure where this “*first labors take days*” shit came from. Because Kimmy just came by to check him an hour ago, and said he was only three centimeters dilated. His contractions were barely fifteen minutes apart.

Now, they're every six minutes or so, and they're intense as *fuck*. He'd thought he was doing really well, until this bout of contractions. The pain is getting worse, more intolerable. His entire body is radiating discomfort, from his belly clenching and testing, to his back pounding, his hips feel like they're on fire.

He's currently squatted beside the couch, head hanging low between his shoulders, Ilya supporting his weight in a low squat behind him. His mom is hovering anxiously. Everyone seemed to feel the shift in the air, as he went from playful and calm, to...*whatever* he's feeling right now.

Overstimulated, mostly.

"He's moving fast," Mom says, "you should call the midwife back."

"Yeah, yeah," Ilya agrees, voice worried. "Shane? Are you with us?"

Shane groans, eyes still squeezed shut. He flexes his hips a bit, trying to relieve some of the pressure. Squatting is the only position so far that doesn't *murder* his back.

"I'll hold him, go call," Mom says.

Shane can feel Ilya's reluctance, but he releases Shane's hips. There's an instant, almost alarming panic that rises in Shane's blood at the sudden absence. His arm darts out without his permission and he grips Ilya's wrist so hard he's sure it must hurt.

"Shane?" Ilya asks.

"No," he whines, "please."

"Oh, sweetheart." Ilya quickly places his hands back where they were, nuzzling his cheek into Shane's. "I am here."

"I'll call," Mom decides. Ilya passes her his phone and Shane hears him murmur a quiet thank you. He hears his dad join her in the other room.

"It's happening too fast?" Shane asks raggedly, dipping his head back to rest on Ilya's shoulder. "Is something wrong?"

"No, moya lyubov," Ilya murmurs, rubbing his fingers down Shane's sweat-damp back. "Definitely fast, but is okay. Baby just wants to meet us, she must be excited to see your pretty face."

Shane rolls his eyes, managing a breathless chuckle. "I thought you told her to be easy?"

"Mm, she is like her Papa already, does not listen." Ilya grins at him.

"Usually you tell me I'm a good listener," he mutters.

Ilya snorts. "Your parents are *right there*."

“I don’t think they’re assuming this is an immaculate conception.”

“Your *dad* definitely does not.”

Shane cackles. “Jesus.”

“Kimmy is on her way,” Mom says as she returns to stand beside them. “She wants to check your dilation again.”

Dilation checks are not fun.

“Okay,” Shane huffs. Then, the pain begins to creep back up on him, and he shuts his eyes, fingers tightening on Ilya’s hands.

“Breathe,” Ilya murmurs, “good, Shane, listen to my voice. Slowly, just like that.”

“*Mmmmfuck*,” Shane moans, body tensing, “fuck *me*, this fucking hurts.”

“But you are doing so well,” Ilya says.

The pain releases him and he pants heavily.

“Do you want to try a different position?” Mom asks, worry clear in her voice.

I want everyone to stop asking me questions, he thinks.

He just shakes his head.

It isn’t long before he hears Kimmy’s car pull up outside, and his parents go to let her in. Dad makes himself busy upstairs, probably cleaning things that are already clean. Mom hovers in the entryway of the living room, waiting for her cue if she’s needed.

Kimmy squats down beside Shane, smiling at him. They’d picked her because she came highly recommended by his doctor, and because she’s got a good sense of humor, and Ilya had liked that.

“You look comfy,” she says, tilting her head to study his face.

Shane swallows thickly. “I’m actually very uncomfortable.”

“Feel like you have an anvil on your pelvis?”

“Uh-huh.”

“Good! That pressure is what we want. Are you okay with me doing another check to see how dilated you are? I hear the contractions are closer.”

As if on cue, another one overtakes him and he groans, loud and guttural and deep in his chest. The pain tenses his entire body, and he curls in on himself, surprised by the sounds coming out of his mouth.

After it's over, Kimmy regards him knowingly. "Well, you're definitely sounding further along."

Shane just grunts in her direction, exhausted. Ilya strokes his hair, but does not add unnecessary commentary. Thank Christ.

Kimmy checks him and tells him he's six centimeters dilated, which is fucking insane because he'd only been three last time she was here.

As Ilya helps him get his shorts back on, she says, "well, things are definitely progressing very fast. Your water hasn't broken yet, I can do that for you. I think it will help relieve some of that pressure, and you'll have an easier time pushing."

"Break his water?" Mom interjects from her spot by the entryway.

"Yes ma'am. I have a handy dandy little tool here." From her bag, Kimmy pulls out a somewhat menacing-looking, hooked instrument. "Don't worry Shane, it doesn't hurt."

"Why is this happening so fast?" He asks her, voice ragged. "I thought you said it might take days."

Kimmy smiles sympathetically at him. "That is common, Shane, but everyone's different. You're a very athletic guy, you worked out your whole pregnancy, that can really help move things along."

"I was fast with him too," Mom adds.

"Sometimes it runs in the family," Kimmy agrees, "but I promise, everything looks good. Do you want to listen to baby's heart?"

Shane nods before she's even done asking. Ilya helps him rotate so he's facing Kimmy, still squatted back against the couch.

She rolls up his t-shirt, damp with sweat, and presses the doppler against the flushed skin of his belly. It takes a moment, and then they hear her fast, strong heartbeat.

"Perfect," Kimmy says, "Shane, would you like me to break your water?"

Jesus Christ.

"I-I don't know," he admits, blinking rapidly as he looks up at Ilya. "Should she?" He doesn't know why he's asking a hockey player when the professional midwife is right there, but, he asks anyway.

Ilya's expression softens. "She says it will help. Why are you not sure, sweetheart?"

Because she wants to stick a giant hooked needle inside of me?

"I- I don't really know," he stammers, "it's...it's probably what we should do."

“We can wait for it to break on its own, see if it does,” Kimmy says, “if you’d rather do that. Going this fast, it usually would have broken by now, though.”

He nods. Even though it seems like it’s going to be a sensory nightmare, he should probably let her do what she thinks is best.

“Okay, let’s do it,” he says, trying to pretend his voice doesn’t break on the last syllable.

Kimmy smiles warmly at him. “Where do you want to do it?”

Oh, right, it’s probably going to make a fucking mess.

“Bathroom?” Ilya suggests. “Maybe in the shower, Shane, you said you might want to take one anyway, da?”

“That would be good for cleanup,” Kimmy says.

Shane nods again.

“Is that what you want?” Ilya checks.

“Yeah, that would be nice,” he replies.

His parents give the three of them privacy as they make their way into the bathroom. Ilya runs the water in their large walk-in shower, and Kimmy is far too kind and accommodating in literally getting in the shower with them to break his water.

The sensory horror of it all is a little lessened by the hot water beating down his back, the steam on his muscles, and Ilya’s quiet voice talking him through it.

Kimmy steps back as another contraction comes on, hard and fast. Ilya grips Shane through it, murmuring reassurances in his ear. It feels more intimate like this, Ilya there in just his shorts, Shane completely naked under the spray of water.

“Are you leaving?” Ilya asks Kimmy as she dries off.

She shakes her head. “I think I’d better stay. Now that his waters have broken, things are going to speed up.”

“*Faster?*” Shane demands.

“Most likely,” she says. “I’ll go to the birthing suite and make sure everything is ready. You’re doing great, Shane.”

He offers her a polite grunt. Then, he and Ilya are alone.

Ilya is kissing his neck under the water, rubbing his back, whispering in his ear in Russian. Shane doesn’t know exactly what he’s saying, but it feels tender. It relaxes him, even through the pain.

“You are doing so beautifully,” Ilya says, teeth grazing the shell of his ear, “I am so proud of you.”

Shane purrs quietly, nestling against Ilya’s bare chest. His eyes close. The pain isn’t really letting up now, and he can feel everything more acutely without the cushion of his waters. The pressure is almost blinding.

“I can’t believe I’m having a baby,” he mutters stupidly.

“And in record time,” Ilya muses.

“You know me. Overachiever.”

“Mm. Always.”

Shane laughs a bit, grateful that he’s even capable of doing that right now. It’s only because of Ilya.

They stay in the shower for so long, Ilya loses track of time.

Shane’s contractions seem to blend together now. He’s gripping Ilya so hard that his fingers have left red indents. He’s mostly gone nonverbal, no longer answering Ilya’s gentle questions. Kimmy pokes her head in routinely, asking how things are going, but Shane refuses more cervical checks.

Ilya holds him through it all, continuing to encourage him, though he isn’t sure how much of it is being heard. Shane is in that mode right now, the one that’s helped him win three cups. Intense, brutal, singular focus. Ilya doubts Shane would even notice if there were an earthquake right now.

“Shane,” Ilya prompts, cupping his face in his palm. “Do you want to move?”

Shane vigorously shakes his head, though his eyes remain shut.

“Hey, open your eyes.”

Obedient as ever, Shane’s lashes flutter against the water, and he looks up at Ilya. There’s an intensity in his gaze that’s alarming. His jaw is clenched, his body taut, knees locked.

“Shane,” Ilya repeats, “we have to know how it’s feeling, if you won’t let her check.”

Shane just shakes his head, eyes closing again as another contraction clearly overtakes him. He makes a low noise in his chest, deep, hushed. Something is different this time though. His fists clench, his hips flex, and he makes a sound like he’s gasping.

“Shane, Shane,” Ilya grips his arms. “What’s happening?”

“*Pushing*,” he wheezes, eyes still squeezed shut.

“What?!” Ilya exclaims. “You are pushing? Now?!”

“No, yesterday!” Shane growls.

“Kimmy!”

She’s there in an instant, eyes going a bit wide as she sees Shane squatting in the shower, Ilya hovering over him, looking terrified.

“He is pushing,” Ilya says, embarrassed by how scared his words come out.

“Whoa, Shane,” Kimmy rushes forward, “we should move to the-”

“Everyone please *fuck off!*” Shane cries out, fists clenching.

“Shane-” Kimmy tries to argue.

“He is not stopping now,” Ilya warns her. He squats down beside Shane, cupping his face.
“What do you need, moya lyubov?”

“Catch her,” Shane gasps. His eyes shut again and he seems to be bearing down, a pained noise breaking from his chest.

Wide-eyed, Ilya backs up, seeing a sliver of the baby’s head beginning to peak out. He feels blood drain from his face, but he forces himself not to pass out.

Kimmy shuffles closer, fumbling for her gloves, but Shane doesn’t even seem to register her presence. He is a force to be reckoned with, eyes shut, in deadly serious focus mode.

“She’s coming, Ilya,” Shane cries, “please catch her.”

“I will,” Ilya says, “I promise.”

Ilya has seen Shane do a lot of amazing things. He has seen him drafted second overall at eighteen. He has seen him become the captain of an extremely successful NHL team. He has seen him take said team to victory in multiple different seasons. He has seen him learn to try scary things, like being with a man. He has seen him learn to explore, open himself up, allow himself to love. He has seen him share that part of himself with the whole world, unafraid, brave, incredible.

Watching Shane bring their daughter into the world in five pushes, well, he does not think there will ever be a moment he remembers with more clarity than this one.

He catches her in his arms. Her body is impossibly small, limbs wriggling. She is screaming and tiny and absolutely utterly *brehtaking*.

“Oh my god,” he sobs, looking down at the baby, completely frozen.

“Shit,” Shane wheezes, and Ilya looks up at him. Their eyes meet beneath the spray of the now lukewarm shower water, and they both, somehow, manage a breathless laugh.

Then, thankfully, the professional steps in.

“Ilya, let’s get her cord cut now, then get her on Shane’s chest.”

Ilya holds her, while Kimmy cuts the cord, and he passes the baby to Shane’s waiting arms. Shane gasps out a shuddering sob, pressing his face into her dark hair as he laughs and cries simultaneously.

Ilya stares at them in awe, his partner, the love of his life, and now this small piece of both of them, created by their love.

I have a family, he thinks, for maybe the first time in his life.

“Well, Shane,” Kimmy says with a relieved laugh, “I almost don’t believe it, but everything looks great. You didn’t even tear.”

Shane grins tiredly at her, though he struggles to keep his eyes off the baby. “I don’t half-ass anything.”

Ilya sobs out another laugh. “He really does not.”

The afterbirth comes quickly, and after the cleanup, Ilya and Kimmy help Shane and the baby out of the shower. It’s quick work for Kimmy to give her all her testing, determine she’s *perfect*, and get her passed back to Shane.

Before long, Shane and the baby are set up in their bedroom. Shane dressed in non-restrictive, cool cotton pajamas. The baby is swaddled up in his arms, pressed against his bare chest, visible in his unbuttoned shirt.

Ilya gets dried off and changed too, nerves alive like frayed wires. He has no idea what time it is, or how long any of that took, or even what day it is anymore.

Yuna and David quietly enter the room upon being given the okay, and both promptly burst into tears. Shane smiles at them, all sleepy-eyed and exhausted, cradling the baby to his chest.

“Oh, Shane, you did so well,” Yuna tells him through her tears, “she’s beautiful.”

“Thanks, mom,” he says.

“What’s her name?” David asks softly, trailing gentle fingers over her dark hair. She’s sleeping soundly, content against Shane’s familiar warmth.

Shane glances at Ilya, smiling wider before he answers, “Mitsuki Irina Hollander-Rozanov.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat, almost moving on instinct when he leans down to kiss the top of Shane’s head. He can’t help it. The reminder of the middle name they’d decided on is just...too much to bear.

“Mitsuki, that’s so pretty,” Yuna says.

“It means *light*,” Shane says, grinning now. He’d been so excited to pick this name. An honor to his heritage, and also a beautiful beginning for their baby girl. Always to be brought into the light, never hidden away, never a shameful secret. Where she belongs, in the sunlight with her loving fathers.

“Mitsi for short,” Ilya adds.

“Why not Suki?” Yuna inquires.

Shane and Ilya exchange an amused glance.

“Is too close to a Russian word,” Ilya explains, “that means something...not cute.”

“Mitsi it is,” Yuna replies, grinning.

“Her signature is gonna be a mile long,” David says with a fond chuckle.

“Mm,” Shane looks down at her face, unperturbed by the light ribbing. “She’s gonna be special, that’s for sure.”

“Of course she will,” Yuna says, cupping Shane’s cheek softly in her fingers, “she’s yours.”

Frankly, Ilya couldn’t have said it better himself.

When Ilya was a little boy, he often retreated to his bedroom, hiding out from his father’s rage. It was not uncommon, the way his dad spoke to him. He knows there is nothing special in this particular type of suffering, not really. Fathers, *slavic fathers*, are not known for their gentility.

His Mama, though? When he needed her, she was there. She’d stroke her fingers over his hair, shush him quietly, dry his tears with her thumb. It always made him feel like nothing could touch him. Nothing bad could get in as long as Mama was holding him.

Of course, the bad got to *her*. Took her away.

Looking down at the crying face of his daughter, it is hard to imagine letting the bad take him too.

Ilya doesn’t blame his mother. She had no help, she had no one. She was all alone, and in so much pain. He understands now, why she did what she did.

But he vows, to himself, and to the little baby in his arms with her dark hair, and her big doe-brown eyes, and the unique little curve in her upper lip that matches Shane’s, that he will never, *ever* leave her.

“Is okay, little angel,” he whispers to her, bouncing her lightly in his arms as he pats her tears dry with the soft nub of his thumb, “Daddy has you, Daddy is here, baby girl.”

“Ilya?”

A quiet voice in the doorway gets his attention, and he turns to see Shane standing there, rubbing sleep from his eyes. He's wearing a pair of gray sweatpants, and a black pullover. It's early morning hours, sunlight making his skin glow under his freckles, golden rays illuminating him as if from within.

"I think she is hungry," Ilya says apologetically, "I cannot get her to settle. Do you want me to make her bottle?"

Shane shakes his head, already sliding the pullover off. Bare-chested, he shuffles over to them, arms extended for her. Carefully, Ilya deposits her in his arms, and Shane lets out a small sigh, like she's fitting just perfectly.

He lowers himself into the plush rocker in the corner of the nursery, right by the window. Ilya joins him, sitting down at his feet, resting his head on Shane's knee. She's a good eater, thankfully, they haven't had much trouble with breastfeeding over the past week of her existence.

"Are you hungry, thirsty?" Ilya asks as Shane begins to feed her. Sometimes this makes him really thirsty.

He shakes his head. "No, I'm okay, thanks babe."

It's quiet for a few beats, other than their soft breathing and her little nuzzling noises. She makes the cutest sounds when she's eating, like she's just the happiest girl in the world.

They're both exhausted, having been up pretty much on a constant rotation throughout the past week. She eats every three hours, or cries from missing them, or poops like a little monster. It's an endless cycle of those three things, because right now, that is all she can do.

Still, it's been...honestly, the best week of their lives. He knows Shane would say the same thing. And he'd probably even include one of his cup wins in that.

"I was having a dream about hockey," Shane says, blinking down at her with hearts in his eyes.

"Oh?" Ilya purses his lips. "What about hockey?"

"You know, *playing* it."

"That makes sense."

"Mitsi was there, in the stands watching." Shane's mouth curls into a soft, tender smile. "I mean, she was a little older. But she was cheering for me."

"Hm." Ilya smiles himself at the thought of it. "That is fun to think about."

"I probably won't last that long," Shane admits, "retirement feels closer now than ever."

Ilya stares at him. "You are only thirty."

He flashes his teeth. “The Voyageurs don’t want me back.”

“Fuck the Voyageurs.”

“Ilya!”

“Shane, she cannot understand me.”

He rolls his eyes, pressing the baby a bit tighter against his chest. “Ignore Daddy.”

“Don’t tell her that!”

“Why not? She can’t understand me.”

Ilya scowls, muttering under his breath. Then, he hesitates, glancing back at Shane. “Well, who needs the Voyageurs? Really. I bet Wiebe would love to have another cup winner on the team.”

Shane looks taken aback. “Me? Play for the Centaurs?”

“Mhm. I bet if I text him right now he will ask when you can start.”

Shane glances unsurely at Mitsi’s content face.

“Not yet,” Ilya warns him flatly. “Kimmy said two months before hockey.”

“I know I know.”

Their eyes meet, Shane’s hopeful, excited, Ilya’s warm and gentle. It’s odd, in this little bubble in their daughter’s nursery, talking about the thing that brought them together in the first place.

It’s surreal, but, this is life now, and Ilya cannot fathom how lucky he is.

Mitsi makes a small noise of displeasure, and both of their attention goes to her.

“Oh, sorry baby,” Shane shushes her softly, “you still hungry? Here, let’s switch over.”

Ilya can’t help but stare, awestruck by the ease with which Shane maneuvers their daughter to the other side to feed her. It’s so natural between them, so easy, he wonders how Shane or he could have ever felt like they weren’t cut out for this.

He knows there will be times when it will be harder, they are in their little bubble right now, enjoying her. But, that really is not scary. Not when he knows he is doing this with Shane. Together. Forever.

And as Ilya watches Shane, smiling down at their baby girl, he can’t help the thought that overtakes his mind.

He is most beautiful like this.

End Notes

please be nice! im not a professional im just a whore.

you can find me on x at -imbihesgay-

thanks for reading !!!

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