

Just to feel you breathe from underneath me

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Just to feel you breathe from underneath me

by [iume](#)

Summary

It's funny, if he doesn't think about what it entails, that only three months after seeing Ilya play with those kids in the pool, Shane finds out he's pregnant with Ilya's baby.

Notes

everyone's here in the tag so here i am too to give you mpreg shane which means that the most important thing is to knock that omega up and not timelines or hockey references. the fic's all in my head i just have to write it down so let's hope for my sake and yours it doesn't take that long (i am going through a psychosis so i mostly breathe eat drink and dream writing)

also don't worry it's happy ending i just like the hurt first

Chapter 1: APRIL 2017

They don't tell him as soon as he's awake, out of surgery and mostly out of his own head, not truly understanding what's going on. Shane only knows about his physical injuries, that he's out of the game for the rest of the season because his collarbone needs to heal without any kind of complication.

Only after most of the heavy drugs for the pain are out of his system and his head's slowly killing him, a doctor and a nurse come to his room with faces that look too serious for a simple check-up.

Shane looks at them, suddenly uncomfortable and anxious, and knows, *knows* something's wrong. It must be, since they wouldn't have any reason to be there if his condition had stayed the same. They must have found something, maybe in his blood, or from his brain CT scan—maybe it isn't only a concussion? They must have found something wrong with his brain, much worse than a concussion, and they're there to tell him.

Shane feels his stomach drop somewhere really low, then looks down at his hands, moves his fingers, slowly, closing them into fists and tries not to spiral. He can't know, not until they speak to him, he can't assume the worst. But Shane's good at that, he's exceptionally good at assuming the worst and in a hospital bed, lights above his head so bright that they hurt his eyes and make the headache feel like it's going to split his skull in two, he can only do that.

Assume the worst.

Shane won't be able to play anymore. He will lose the mobility of his hands, or maybe his legs. Or both. There's something in his brain that will make it deteriorate and that will—

“Mr. Hollander,” says the doctor, which interrupts his train of thoughts and makes his head snap up to look at her face. She still looks too serious, not a polite smile on her face, ignoring the chart at the foot of his bed. She isn't there to check on him, she's there to give him some sort of information, to tell him that he's going to—

“Yes?”

She clears her throat.

Shane wishes his parents were there, but maybe they would? If it were that bad? They wouldn't tell him there's something wrong with his brain without letting Shane have some kind of familiar comfort close by. They would've asked his parents to be there, too, right? Shane doesn't know. He doesn't know how this works.

“There is no easy way to say this,” she speaks in a polite tone, but Shane doesn't really notice any of it because he already knows what she's going to tell him.

It's his brain.

"We always check, it's protocol more than anything, considering you're an omega," she continues, and Shane wants to scream, say *Tell me, just tell me, don't go around it in circles.*

She clears her throat again.

"Your blood results came back positive for pregnancy."

Shane hears the constant beep of the monitor by his side suddenly get faster, but he can't feel the way the sound must match the beat of his heart in his chest. There's something hollow inside himself, as if all of a sudden he can't feel any part of his body anymore.

"Pregnancy?" he asks, more a sound rather than a word. It's only the doctor and the nurse in the room, but somehow, Shane feels like there are hundreds of eyes on him, as if the whole hospital has stopped only to hear what's going on inside Shane Hollander's room.

"Yes," she confirms, professional and all, "you're four to six weeks far along, but only an ultrasound can determine the exact number."

Shane doesn't know what to say. It's like there's static in his head, but at the same time, there are so many words, so many voices, all overlapping, that he isn't sure he's able to understand what any of them is saying—it's all a tangled mess of *hockey, pregnancy, four weeks, six weeks, ultrasound, blood results came back positive, hockey, hockey, hockey, pregnancy, pregnancy—*

Ilya.

Ilya, Ilya, Ilya—

"Of course, there are other options too," she gets his focus back to reality once again, "it's your choice, Mr. Hollander. We're here to assist you the best we can."

Shane nods, slowly, not to worsen his headache. He doesn't know what his choice is.

"Thank you, doctor," he only says, then.

She must understand, somehow, since she doesn't try to push further about what he wants to do.

"We will be ready when you are, Mr. Hollander," she reassures him before leaving, which doesn't really reassure him much because it means he has to choose. He can't just pretend like nothing's happening and go on with his life—let his concussion and his collarbone heal, let summer pass and go back on the ice as if nothing ever happened. But if he doesn't do anything, by then, by the end of summer there would be a bump, probably, maybe not that big, but still there and Shane wouldn't be able to keep pretending anymore.

That night, as expected, Shane doesn't sleep. For hours, once he is able to reign all his emotions in and put a lid on them, he goes through all the options he has.

The right and logical choice would be abortion, Shane's aware, get rid of it and forget about it, heal and go back on the ice for the next season.

It'd be easy and nothing would change because Shane would be able to keep playing hockey, which is what matters the most to him. Injuries happen, and even if he's out from the playoffs, it's only a matter of months before he's back on the ice—a pregnancy would take much longer, at least another season, which means a whole year off the ice. A year lost from his career. A year lost when he's at the *peak* of his career and nothing guarantees he will be able to go back to that peak after the pregnancy.

Shane knows he would be able to, only because he has reached it once and he's certain he can do it another time, but as much as he hates to admit it, he also knows the League wouldn't make it that easy, not for an omega with a kid.

Shane can't ignore what happened to those few omegas that got pregnant while they were still active players—they just never came back. Mostly for the pressure coming from the public, since an omega's supposed to take care of their child, not play hockey and stay away from them for weeks or even months. Besides, as much as the League prides itself on being inclusive, Shane knows it isn't, that if omegas are tolerated it's only because it means they're too skilled to be chased out. Over the years, Shane has had his fair share of comments directed right at his face and behind his back, and not even being one of the best players in the League saved him from that. After all, he will always be an omega first.

The other option, the one that a part of him can't stop thinking about, that he can't put aside and pretend it isn't there, taking more and more space with each passing minute, is the exact opposite. Do the ultrasound, schedule all the check-up appointments, put his career on hiatus, stay off the ice for a year, maybe even more, and let the baby grow inside himself.

Give birth to a baby that he keeps imagining with curly hair and blue eyes.

Shane can't do that. He just can't. It'd go against everything he's been building and everything he sacrificed to be where he is—hockey is the most important thing in his life, he can't just put it aside, not for something he never wanted, surely not as much as he has always wanted to play hockey and be the best at it.

But that's the problem, right? He keeps telling himself he doesn't want it, but deep down, a part of him that he's been trying to shove further and further down for months, knows that it isn't true.

Last year and the years before, it must have been true, at least most of it, but since Tampa, since the All-Star Game, something has shifted, not fundamentally, like a revelation or something he thought was completely out of reach and suddenly it wasn't anymore. It was more like an anchor, it was there, it has always been there floating around, but Tampa was the moment it reached the seabed and stuck.

Seeing Ilya playing with those kids, carefree, goofing around and all laughs, made him realize that it could've been a reality.

Ilya was so good with kids that it was natural for Shane to wonder if Ilya had ever thought about wanting to become a father, which had led, mostly as natural as it had been to think about Ilya with kids, to think about himself. Contrary to Ilya's kids, which he imagined them as only Ilya's, the way Shane had been able to think about his own was related to Ilya. Until that moment, he never really thought about any of it, but then, he had just needed to see Ilya play with strangers' kids for Shane to start thinking not only about his own kids, but his and Ilya's. Together, as parents, which was the only way that made sense in Shane's head.

It's funny, if he doesn't think about what it entails, that only three months after seeing Ilya play with those kids in the pool, Shane finds out he's pregnant with Ilya's baby. If he believed in the universe, or all those energy manifestations, Shane would take the pregnancy like a sign, but of course he doesn't believe in any of it and he knows that it doesn't mean anything. It just happened—he doesn't even know how, since his heats are programmed to be in the summer and they have always used protection. He almost laughs at the thought, at the proud grin that would adorn Ilya's face if he knew he was able to knock Shane up when nothing was in favor of a pregnancy.

But Ilya won't know, since Shane's getting rid of it, right?

It feels wrong, something inside his chest clenches at the cold-heartedness, *getting rid of it*, as if it's trash, as if it's something he can discard with a click of his fingers and pretend it was never there, even if it's been there, growing inside himself for only a month, and Shane has known for a bit more than seven hours.

In the silence of the night, so dark around him that he can barely see his own hands and no eyes on him that would judge him for his decision, Shane feels warmth when he thinks about a small mass of cells that aren't only his growing inside himself. On the contrary, he feels his chest freeze over when he thinks about the emptiness a rational choice would bring.

It doesn't matter that he has known about it for less than a day, and even if he's scared, *terrified* of it, he feels that he'd be more scared if he were to let it go. Of himself, mostly, of the person he would become if he were to experience that emptiness. He knows he would be making the right choice—the right choice for Shane Hollander, Captain of the Montreal Metros, and for the hockey player, but would he be able to live without any resentment towards this part of himself? That part awakened in Tampa, that seemed growing stronger and stronger the more he felt Ilya's touch pressed into his skin, would resent the choice.

Exchanging a year of his hockey career for someone—a *baby*, a small voice whispers, tender and careful, that he will have forever sounds easy. It shouldn't, not when hockey is the most important thing in his life, not when he devoted himself to it, and yet, it sounds like the easiest thing Shane would ever do in his life.

There's a knock against the door, but Shane isn't expecting anyone.

His parents are supposed to come back in the afternoon, only because Shane put his foot down and forced them to leave, to go somewhere and have a real lunch, and also because he hasn't told them yet and having their eyes on him, scrutinizing each of his movements, feels like they are a step away from finding out. Which is crazy, but the more time he spends stuck in the hospital room, the more he feels like he's going to lose his mind and just blurt the truth out.

It isn't like he wants to keep it a secret, Shane wants to tell them, but he can't find a way. He can't find the right words to voice it out. Shane doesn't want to admit it to himself, but he's aware that he's scared of his Mom's reaction—his Dad would be surprised, shocked even, but Shane knows that sometimes he worries about the way Shane relates to hockey, the way he has let it be his whole life pushing everything else away, and that even if he doesn't say it, he wishes Shane would just step back a little. The pregnancy would be an occasion to step back, to have another reason to live, so Shane knows that his Dad wouldn't be against it, that he would be the parent that will need a bit of time to process it, but that will be happy in the end.

On the other hand, he knows his Mom won't react that greatly to it. She would go with the logical option, wait for another moment, maybe in a few years, when he will have won more Cups and cemented his role as pivotal even more. Shane has thought about it—it isn't like this will be the only chance he will have, but the chance isn't the problem, it's the person he has had it with. What they have, Shane and Ilya, is too fragile to be certain it will last for a few more years. Maybe it's selfish—no, it *is* selfish, but he's scared to lose this chance. He's scared he will regret it for the rest of his life.

Then, there's another knock, short and not that loud.

"Come in," Shane voices out, pushing himself further up on the pillows behind his back with his good arm.

The door opens with a muted click and after, much to Shane's surprise, Ilya's getting inside with a certain kind of urgency. Shane watches him close the door behind his back, leaning against it.

"Hey," Shane says, almost a whisper in the sudden silence of the room. Even the sounds coming from the monitor by his side seem distant, since all Shane can focus on is the way Ilya looks. His curls are styled back and there's stubble on his face, as if he hasn't shaved in a couple of days. He looks so handsome, but the problem is that he always does, no matter what.

"Hey," Ilya says back, eyes not moving away from Shane's face. Shane's certain he's looking at the bruises under his eyes.

"How are you?"

I'm pregnant, he wants to say. *I'm pregnant and it's yours, obviously.*

"You know, not that bad for the way Marlow sent me flying," he answers instead, which isn't a lie, but it isn't what Shane wants to tell him.

Ilya whispers something in Russian to himself, then takes a few steps towards the bed. He looks guilty, worried too, and Shane wishes he could reach his hand forward and let him understand what he wants. He stays still, though, and waits.

“Marlow is sorry,” Ilya tells him, “he didn’t mean to hurt you like this.”

Shane smiles at him. “It’s okay,” he reassures him, having already accepted what happened because it’s nothing compared to him being pregnant. If it was different, if it was only the injuries, he’d probably be angrier, more sore about not being able to play for the rest of the season, but there’s something much bigger than the injuries going on with his body and Shane can’t bring himself to care like he should.

“It’s part of the game.”

Ilya nods, and then, as if he has talked himself through it first, he takes the last steps that separate him from the bed and stands right by Shane’s side.

Shane looks up at him—he’s wearing a scent patch, so it’s mostly just his cologne what he breathes in, but somehow, it still comforts him. He didn’t let himself believe Ilya would’ve come to the hospital, but he still hoped for it, and now that he’s there, looking at him as if he were the one that sent him flying hard against the ice, there’s only one thing that Shane wants to tell him.

“I was excited about the other night, you know,” he says then, aware that if he lets the silence go on, he will let a different kind of words slip out. “Since I wanted to ask you something.”

Shane watches Ilya breathe in, slowly, and after, almost as if it pains him, he shakes his head. “You can tell me another time,” he whispers, “you need rest now.”

Shane shakes his head too—he has been resting for two days and he’s starting to get tired of it. Then, since he knows Ilya won’t let it happen if Shane doesn’t ask for it, he finally reaches his hand towards him, palm up, a clear invitation that it’s impossible to misinterpret.

Ilya only looks down at his hand.

“Shane,” he says under his breath, “you know is dangerous if—”

“Please,” Shane cuts him off, suddenly craving the touch like nothing else. He needs to feel Ilya’s skin against his. He *needs* it.

Ilya sighs, but then, he takes a step even closer and takes Shane’s hand into his.

His thumb brushes against Shane’s skin into a slow circular motion.

Shane smiles, “Better,” he murmurs, aware that Ilya has heard him. His face’s neutral now, guilty and worry tucked away and not letting anything pass through, but Shane wishes he would, that Ilya would tell him what’s on his mind. He must have been scared, Shane watched the replay on his phone, he saw the way Ilya just stood there, close, trying to get a response from the medics and the referees, until someone pushed him away.

At the thought, something in his chest tries to get out, but Shane doesn't want it out in the open, not yet at least, even if it would be only Ilya.

He wants more time, he doesn't know for what, but if he doesn't tell anyone, not yet, it's like he can control it. He knows it's there, growing in his womb, and it's safe. Shane wants it there, has decided that he wants it there, but he's scared to face what his parents or Ilya would think about the matter. It isn't like they would force him to do anything different from what he has chosen, that they wouldn't accept his choice and try to change his mind, but telling them would still mean being confronted with other realities and different points of view. Shane's aware that he's the only one that has any right to decide, no matter what anyone else thinks, but it'd be a lie if he said he isn't frightened at the thought of their reactions.

It's why he doesn't say anything in the end, because he wants to keep it to himself, safe and untouched, not like a dirty secret, but more like a way to preserve it for a bit more.

"Will you come to my cottage this summer?" he asks instead—he had a whole thing planned, but Marlow fucked that up, so now Shane's asking it from a hospital bed. Things have changed from two days ago, too, but he still wants Ilya. He still wants to be with him, to cradle in his arms whatever is starting to grow between the two of them, to let it grow even bigger. Even if he's scared and even if he doesn't know where it will bring them. They can figure it out together, as long as Ilya doesn't start to regret it, since Shane knows he won't.

Ilya sniffs, scratches at his nose, and, "You know I have to go back to Russia," he says, which doesn't sound like a rejection, but more as if Ilya feels like he can't pull back, as if it's his duty to go back to Russia each summer, even if his Father's dead now.

"Don't go, come to the cottage, it's so private and we can have a week, or even two," Shane says back, firmer. "We'll be completely alone. I'll text you the address later so you'll see how private it is."

Ilya looks at him, his thumb still softly stroking against his skin.

Shane looks back at him, waiting.

"Maybe," he relents, in the end, "yes, maybe. We will see."

Shane knows maybe isn't a yes, but it isn't a no either. It's still better than what he imagined, than the blunt rejection.

Ilya lifts his other hand towards Shane's face, then, and gently brushes his fingers against the bruised skin under his eyes, it's barely a touch, barely warm on his skin, but Shane still closes his eyes and soaks into it. Ilya's fingers are soft, soothing in a way that doesn't make sense and that it's all in his head, and for a moment, Shane imagines that it would be like this, if he were to tell Ilya. That he'd be gentle and careful, that he'd whisper reassuring words to Shane, tell him they would find a way, that he wouldn't leave him on his own, that he wouldn't be alone.

Shane knows that it's what *he* wants—he can't be certain Ilya would accept the pregnancy wholehearted, but imagining the exact opposite scares him even more and Shane doesn't

want to think about that, even if he always assumes the worst to prepare himself, he doesn't want to do it about this. For once, he hopes it won't be bad, that it won't be a nightmare.

"When are you leaving?" Shane asks, once he opens his eyes, looking up at Ilya again. He wonders, then, if Ilya would be able to smell it if Shane wasn't wearing a scent patch, probably not, since it's still too soon and the change would be too imperceptible, but he still wonders, only because then he wouldn't need words and Ilya would just know.

"Tomorrow, flight is early," he says, voice still mostly a murmur, stroking his knuckles one last time against his freckles and taking the hand away. Shane almost whines at the loss, but he restrains himself.

"They will let me go home tomorrow morning," Shane informs him, almost giddy at the thought that he can go back home, even if it's his apartment in Montreal and probably his parents will want to stay with him for a while.

"Call me after you land, okay?"

Shane will tell him then. It will be easier on the phone, even if it's more selfish, but Shane's scared. He's so fucking scared to see the rejection on Ilya's face.

Ilya nods, "Okay," he agrees easily, which makes Shane feel even more scared.

Shane smiles at him, almost shy, and Ilya smiles back, but it's more muted.

"I have to go," Ilya tells him, then, looking back at the closed door even if no one's there.

"Okay," Shane murmurs, kind of dejected. He wishes Ilya would stay more, but he knows it's risky. They could just brush it off as the Captain's opposite team coming to check on him, to apologize for his teammate's foul play, but the way Ilya's holding Shane's hand wouldn't have an excuse.

"Goodbye," Ilya says, taking a step back, which makes Shane's hand slip away from his hold. "Get well soon, Hollander."

The words sound cold, as if there's someone else in the room witnessing their exchange and Ilya has to make sure nothing transpires, and Shane knows he shouldn't, but he still feels hurt.

"Bye," he murmurs, "fly safe."

With a last nod, Ilya turns around and leaves, not looking back once.

Shane keeps staring at the door even after Ilya disappears behind it. He doesn't realize until later, when he snaps out of it, that after Ilya let his hand go, Shane unconsciously placed it on his abdomen.

Shane doesn't tell his parents in the end. He wants to tell Ilya first because it's *theirs* and Shane wants him to be the first to know. It's the reason why he has been keeping his phone close by for the whole morning, not to miss Ilya's call. Shane waits—he doesn't have much to do, not with his arm in a cast, so he waits for the call.

He has lunch with his parents because they will be in Montreal for a week, but they chose to stay in a hotel, which makes Shane feel relieved, deep down, even if it shouldn't. He loves his parents, he loves them so much, but he also wants to be alone.

After they leave in the afternoon, once Shane has reassured his Mom for the fiftieth time that he's fine, seriously, he can remain alone in his own house for a day, Shane keeps waiting, but his phone remains eerily silent.

He knows Ilya's busy, the Raiders are still in the playoffs and they have a game tomorrow evening, but he agreed to the call, so maybe something happened. Shane doesn't want to go there, not when he's already a ball of anxiety threatening to explode at any given moment, so at some point, late in the afternoon, he leaves his phone in his bedroom, on mute, and goes to the kitchen to make himself dinner, something completely different from hospital food, even if he isn't that hungry.

The thought doesn't leave his mind, though, not really, and as soon as he's done cleaning everything he used to cook the dinner and the counter, he climbs the stairs to go back to his bedroom and check his phone.

There are a few texts, two from his Mom, one from Hayden and another from Rose, but nothing from Ilya.

Can I call you? he ends up texting, because all of a sudden, he feels like he can't keep it to himself anymore.

He needs the words to be out.

He needs Ilya to know.

Ilya responds only after a few minutes, a single *Yes*, which Shane barely reads before he's already pressing the button to call him.

Ilya lets it ring a couple of times and it feels like an eternity, phone pressed against his ear, hearing his own breath in his lungs and his heart in his throat.

“Hey,” Ilya answers then, “how are you?”

It feels like *deja-vu*, but Shane doesn't want to repeat what happened in his hospital room, he doesn't want to talk about how he is feeling or whatever else. He wants to tell Ilya he's pregnant, that in the end, he agreed to the ultrasound and found out he's five weeks pregnant. It must have happened before their game, before Ilya had to fly back to Russia for his Father.

“Hi,” he greets him, leaning his back against the pillows and crossing his ankles on the bed. “I’m fine, already sick of doing nothing.”

Ilya laughs, brief and low, “Yes,” he murmurs, “typical.”

Shane smiles to himself, and then, he takes a breath, even if he knows it won’t calm him down, not at all.

“Ilya,” he starts, “I want to tell you something important.”

For a second, Shane wishes he could see his face, that he could see the way he’d react. It’s something too big, Ilya wouldn’t be able to mask it, not for the first few moments, and Shane would be able to understand, even without words. Though, then, the second after, he tells himself it’s better like this, that if it doesn’t go that well, at least Shane won’t have to see his face. It will be only words, which will hurt less.

Ilya hums. “Me too.”

“Oh,” he murmurs, suddenly thrown off by his words. But maybe it’s about the cottage, Shane sent him the address, so maybe he saw with his own eyes that it would be safe if he came, that no one would find out.

“You go first, then.”

Shane’s aware that it’s a way to give himself more time, to sit on his words until they will feel like they are bigger than him and swallow him whole.

“Okay,” Ilya agrees, not trying to make Shane go first. It’s weird, but Shane can’t hear any kind of emotions in his voice, not since the first word he spoke, but he knows Ilya, he knows that most of the time he doesn’t let anything pass through.

There’s silence, then, even if Ilya’s supposed to speak. Shane can hear himself breathe, but he can’t hear anything from the other end of the call, not even Ilya breathing. It’s completely silent.

“Ilya?”

His heart’s beating in his throat and even if he doesn’t know what Ilya wants to tell him, Shane still feels like he’s about to throw up all the food he had for dinner, he can feel it sitting in his stomach, heavy and wrong.

Then, Ilya says something in Russian, and like all the other times, Shane wishes he could understand it, that he knew Russian, but this time that wish is even stronger, because it feels like they are the first words Ilya has spoken in hours and Shane can’t understand them.

“I’m sorry, Hollander,” he says and Shane suddenly feels a knot form in his throat. “I don’t think is working right, between us.”

The back of his eyes start to burn.

“What... what do you mean?”

Shane knows what he means, of course he knows, Ilya’s breaking up with him, if there ever was something to break up in the first place.

“Maybe, maybe we should stop,” Ilya explains, still devoid of any emotion, “is too risky, you know.”

There are tears in his eyes, Shane can feel them burn, vision blurry, and even if he wishes he could say something, *anything*, probably even beg, he finds that he can’t. That the knot in his throat is so thick he can’t get any words through, stuck somewhere in his aching chest. He only grips his phone tighter, not really sure about what he’s supposed to do.

“You should find proper alpha,” Ilya keeps saying, taking the silence as acceptance, maybe, Shane doesn’t know. He doesn’t know. “Alpha you can rely on, that is always there with you and not secret.”

But Shane wants him. Shane *wants* Ilya. Only Ilya. He doesn’t want another alpha, he doesn’t want anyone else.

“Ilya,” he says, then, voice broken and barely a sound, “I don’t—”

Something in him makes him stop, cold and painful. Shane’s *pregnant*, he’s pregnant with Ilya’s baby and Ilya’s shattering all of his hopes, breaking whatever they had. He’s telling Shane he doesn’t want him anymore. Every word, every image and wish Shane had, they all slip through his fingers, like sand, destroyed by a handful of words that don’t hold any truth for Shane.

“Okay,” he whispers eventually, and even if the words hurt, even if they feel like blades against his throat, “maybe you’re right,” he agrees.

Ilya exhales into the phone.

“What did you want to tell me?”

“It doesn’t matter,” he’s quick to answer, urgency in his voice, all he wants to do is end the call and cry himself to sleep.

He will never tell Ilya, not after this, not when it’s clear that Ilya doesn’t want Shane. That it never meant much, not like it meant to Shane. He thought it did, that Ilya meant it when he said that it had been nice, in his house, but Shane just fooled himself, right? He just let himself believe what he wanted.

If Shane tells him, it will be only a burden for Ilya. Something that will bind him to Shane, that will force him to be always connected to him, and Shane doesn’t want that. He doesn’t want Ilya to feel like he has to be present only because the baby is his too.

Shane doesn’t want any pity or resentment.

“I have to go,” he says in the end, too hurt to try saying something else, maybe ask for a better explanation or understand why Ilya’s doing this. But it’s simple, isn’t it? Ilya doesn’t want him. It’s just so simple. Ilya never truly cared, it has always been only sex for him.

A thought occurs to him, then, Ilya didn’t come to the hospital to check on him—he came to say those words to his face, to break things off, to tell Shane that he *deserves* another alpha, when in reality, it’s just Ilya that doesn’t want him. But then, Ilya must have seen his face, the bruises, the cast, and felt pity for him, he must have felt sorry for Shane and decided it was better not to. Ilya must have seen him weak, lying on a hospital bed, asking for his hand to be held, begging him to come to his cottage, and must have thought about how pathetic Shane was, seeking comfort from someone that has only ever considered him for the sex.

At the realization, knowing that Shane has always meant nothing to Ilya, he feels raw and exposed in a way he has probably never felt.

“Goodnight.”

Ilya hums, then sniffs, but not as if he’s crying or trying not to, it’s his regular sniff, the kind Shane noticed he does sometimes.

“Okay. Goodnight.”

It’s Shane that ends the call, or maybe it’s Ilya, he isn’t sure, but what he knows is that he can feel his heart break, right in the middle of his chest. He curls into himself, on his good side, and for the very first time, he wishes there would already be a bump, so at least he’d have something to cling onto.

Chapter 2: MAY 2017

Chapter Notes

here we go don't scream at me i promise they will be happy in the next chapter

“He looks angry,” his Mom comments, sat right by his side on the couch, her fingers massaging Shane’s feet in a slow motion.

“Angrier than usual, I mean.”

Shane nods, even if his Mom’s eyes are glued on the screen of the tv, just like his own.

“Yeah,” he agrees, “two penalties in only fifteen minutes is a lot for him, too.”

It’s the game that will determine if the Raiders will advance in the playoffs, so Shane gets why Ilya’s willing to slam the opponent team’s players into the barriers more than usual, but it’s still too much, too brutal, even for Ilya Rozanov.

“He’s also less focused than usual,” his Mom comments again when Ilya slams himself into the barrier to get out of the way of another Raider and avoid tripping him. Shane doesn’t say anything, but he can clearly see that Ilya looks like he isn’t playing to win, but more like to get as much anger as he can out of his system. It won’t end well if he keeps that up, at best he will get ejected with a game misconduct and at worst he will seriously injure himself and other players, if he doesn’t drop the gloves first and directly starts to hit them.

It’s been a month since that call—not much has happened, besides going back to Ottawa and trying to patch his heart up, get all the seams stitched back together, which Shane’s failing miserably, but at least he isn’t totally alone. His parents know, not about Ilya, Shane would never tell them that, but about the pregnancy. They don’t know whose baby it is and Shane will probably bring the secret to his grave, but at least they know that in less than seven months Shane will pop out a baby and they will become grandparents.

Strangely, it was easier than he thought. His Dad was the easiest, accepting it even quicker than Shane believed he would’ve, but what surprised him the most was his Mom. He thought she would’ve tried to tell him that maybe it wasn’t the right time, that he had to think about hockey first, but she didn’t. She just asked if he was really sure and once Shane had told her that yes, he was sure, she had just nodded and hugged him.

Shane doesn’t like that he’s lying to them, that he told them he didn’t really want to speak about the baby’s alpha since the alpha doesn’t want to be involved in any of it, but Shane had to do that. He had to, since the other option would’ve been revealing all the years of back and

forth between him and Ilya, or the way it ended, and Shane doesn't want to open that can of worms. He truly doesn't, not with his parents and probably not with anyone, so he will just let it rot.

"Look at him," his Mom says, after Ilya bodyslams at full force an Admirals' player right into the glass and keeps him pinned there, which gets him another penalty. Shane's looking at him, of course he has been looking at him, even when the puck is far away from his stick. He has been keeping his eyes on him since the game started. He can only see Ilya because the other players don't really matter.

"He's gonna make the team lose if he keeps that up."

Shane doesn't understand what's wrong with him, why he seems so angry and frustrated, or why he isn't playing like he usually does and it's more like he's just looking for a fight, for someone to drop gloves and give him a reason to attack, risking to lose the game and the Cup only to be a complete asshole.

A part of him tells him it's the first time Ilya's like this on the ice—he's always an asshole, riling the opponent team's players up, slamming into them and chirping in a such an annoying way that only a few are able to, but not like this. Never like this, not with blood in his eyes and a twist of his lips that almost resembles a snarl and that can only mean he's being fueled by pure anger.

It's hard not to think that there must be a reason for it, of course there is a reason, and it's even harder not to think it could be related to what happened between the two of them.

Shane doesn't want to fool himself, he doesn't want to think that Ilya actually cared about him, that he's feeling the same kind of loss and emptiness Shane's feeling. Or that at night, when he's in bed, alone, all he can do is replay the moments shared together to find the truth, to find the moment it became more than sex for Ilya. Shane fooled himself into believing it had been Tampa, the way Ilya opened up about his family, the slow and tender sex they had after, but maybe he was wrong. Maybe he saw and felt what *he* wanted to, not what it actually was.

Right then, with Ilya on the screen, slamming players into the barriers and losing the puck more than usual because he isn't focused enough, Shane almost wishes the reason why he's acting like this was connected to what happened—Ilya's an alpha, a strong and dominant alpha, and even if it was only sex for him, even if it didn't mean anything, his alpha can't really understand that. His alpha has known, dominated and knotted an omega for years, only to find himself suddenly without.

Shane knows that at least a part of Ilya, even if small, might be feeling the loss, probably not like Shane is, with the alpha's baby growing in his womb, but even if it's only physical it must still be affecting him in a way. Shane wants to believe that, it's logical, it's instincts and just the way nature is, but it also hurts. It aches deep into his core, all of it, and it's better to think Ilya's just being an asshole, that he has a temper left unchecked, to let it be a clean cut because the uncertainty, the whispering hope that maybe, *maybe*, Shane isn't completely alone in this sea of devastation hurts only more.

At the end of the third period, the Raiders lose, which isn't a surprise, and both Shane and his Mom watch Ilya break his stick in half with his knee, as if all the violence during the game wasn't enough.

His Mom scoffs at the scene, "What was he expecting with that behavior," she comments under her breath, and Shane can only agree with her.

He doesn't tell her that a part of him, the same part that had broken at hearing that *we should stop*, wants to believe Ilya's behavior is because of Shane. He's a complete fool, hurting himself even more than he already is, but he can't help it. Shane wishes it could be that easy, accept and forget about Ilya, but he can't. The fact there is his baby growing inside himself makes it even worse, because as much as Shane wants the baby, as much as he will love them, they will always be a reminder and Shane hates it. He fucking hates that his baby has been already tainted like this even before their birth.

Then, his Mom gets up from the couch, kisses the top of his head, and, "I'm gonna help your Dad with dinner," tells him.

Shane nods up at her, but before she can go into the kitchen, "Mom," he stops her, feeling kind of sad and tired, "can I sleep here tonight?"

Shane knows it's stupid, that he doesn't need to ask, that his parents would never tell him no, not even when he will be fifty and with a kid, but he still feels like he has to ask for permission, as if he's intruding into their life when he should be independent, have his own life and his own house to go back to.

His Mom's face softens, a smile on her lips that Shane hates to recognize as sad.

"Of course, baby," she says, gentle, and Shane's glad he's wearing a scent patch, that he never leaves his house without wearing one, since her tone makes him feel even more miserable than he was already feeling.

"You don't have to ask."

Shane nods, whispers, "Okay," and knows that he will ask next time too, and also all the ones after.

The next morning after a big game, as usual, still in bed, Shane scrolls through various articles, reading about technical commentary from hockey experts, about expectations for the teams still in the playoffs, and tries to ignore all the articles that have his name in it. Ilya, too. Especially Ilya.

At some point, though, while scrolling, an article from a gossip tabloid Shane avoids like the plague gets his attention, reading the title before he can scroll past it.

ILYA ROZANOV: NEW FLAME? *After losing the game and the chance to win the Cup, Ilya Rozanov consoles himself with a new flame.*

Shane knows it's clickbait, he knows, it has happened thousands of times, and yet, he can't stop himself from not clicking on it. He's a masochist—it's like he wants to suffer even more than he already is, like he wants to make sure that Ilya doesn't want him, as if he hasn't already made it clear.

The article isn't written even that well, but Shane still reads each word—Ilya was at a VIP Party in New York Shane has never heard of, and it's all speculation, because of course it is, but then, when he's about to close the tab and pretend he never read any of it, he scrolls a bit further down for one last time and sees the top of what can only be a picture.

His stomach drops even before he can see it in its entirety, maybe because he already knows what he will see.

It's a man standing outside, giving his back to whoever took the picture, so Shane can't see his face, but something visceral inside himself knows it's Ilya—the shoulders, the curls, the back of his neck, all parts of his body Shane touched, kissed, that he has memorized over the years, that he would recognize anywhere. Facing him, only mere inches apart, there's another man, slightly smaller, back leaned against the concrete wall, looking right at Ilya's face. He's smiling, one of his hands curled around Ilya's bicep, the other holding an empty cup, meanwhile Ilya's index finger and thumb are holding his chin, as if he wants the man to look up at him. With his other hand, Ilya's holding an empty bottle from its neck of what Shane assumes is vodka.

What hurts the most, though, besides everything the picture implies, is that Shane can't see Ilya's face. He can only imagine what expression is on it—if he's smiling back at the man, if he's grinning, like a predator that got exactly what he wants in front of him, or if his eyes are closed, a second away from kissing him.

Shane scrolls further down, intending to hurt himself even more, expecting to find a kiss picture, but there isn't. That picture is the only one in the article. He scrolls back up, then—there's something magnetic in it, the sane part of his brain is aware that he should stop staring at it and close the tab, but it wouldn't change much. Shane has seen it, he could stop staring at it, but it would still be seared with fire behind his eyelids.

The man's mostly in Ilya's shadow, but it doesn't mean that Shane doesn't notice that he isn't wearing any kind of scent patch, neither is Ilya, or that his hair is very dark, straight, or that he's Asian. Maybe he's even an omega. He must be, a vile voice corrects him. Shane almost laughs out loud, a cold and painful laugh that grows in his chest and scratches at his ribcage.

The problem has always been Shane, not his looks, not that he's an omega, but *Shane*. Good enough to fuck, to knot and breed in secret, but not to love.

Shane knows that they had a silent agreement, that what happened between them had to be a secret—but that was at the beginning, when they were rookies and it was natural to depict them as rivals, frothing at the mouth and full of hate for each other. But after years it could've changed, they could've found a way to change the narrative, if they had wanted. Shane

wanted it, even before finding out about the pregnancy, he had started to think that maybe it could've changed, even if slightly, slowly, but Ilya hadn't. It's clear now he never intended to change any of it because Shane wasn't worth it.

In the past month, sometimes, since he can't help himself, Shane has thought about the what ifs—what if he had told Ilya anyway, what if he had told him he's pregnant, would something have changed? It would've, but not because suddenly Ilya would've changed his mind about Shane, but because he would've felt an obligation towards Shane. He doesn't believe Ilya would've been that kind of asshole, the kind of alpha that abandons the knocked up omega and doesn't want to know anything about the baby, but it still would've been only about the baby, not about Shane.

Maybe it's wrong and foul of Shane, not having said anything, not letting Ilya decide on his own, but it'd hurt too much, knowing that Ilya would want to take care of the baby, but not of Shane. It's selfish, it's so selfish, but for once, Shane needs to be. He needs to protect himself from Ilya, from the rest of the world, and he needs to protect his baby.

There are tears pooled in his eyes, Shane can feel them burn and sting, but he refuses to let them fall.

He has cried enough tears for Ilya in the past month.

One week later from the Raiders' loss that got them out of the playoffs, Shane wakes up to two texts.

They're from Ilya, one sent at around two in the morning and the other almost two hours later.

Miss you

Sorry ignore it

Shane stares at his phone, not really sure he's awake or if he's still dreaming. He reads them again, then, to make sure, as if they are paragraphs full of words and not only five words.

It doesn't make sense.

Why would Ilya send something like that? Was he drunk? He probably was, partying left and right, maybe he was supposed to send it to someone else and opened the wrong chat because he was too drunk to really understand who he was texting. It explains the second text, since of course he wouldn't miss Shane, why would he?

Why would Ilya miss Shane when he's the one that broke things off and that only saw Shane as a hole and a mouth to fuck?

Shane's so tired of hurting, of feeling like a hundred of hands violently tore through his flesh and his ribcage to reach for his heart and rip it out. He feels hollow—he feels so lonely, so fucking lonely, that he isn't sure it will ever go away. He keeps telling himself he just needs some time, that it will pass eventually, but it's almost as if it's engraved, intertwined with his own soul and body, and like it will never leave him, not completely at least.

He doesn't answer the texts, not because he doesn't want to, not because he doesn't want an explanation, even if it would hurt, but because it would just make it all worse and Shane's sick of feeling rotten inside.

Shane knows there are eyes on him as soon as he goes through the clinic's doors.

People could assume he must be there for the injuries he got on the ice, even if he isn't wearing the soft cast anymore and his bruises have healed, but he actually isn't there for that.

Shane's eleven weeks pregnant and he's there to check that everything's alright with him and the baby, especially to make sure nothing's wrong with the baby. His Mom suggested she could've come with him, but Shane refused, even if the anxiety has been eating him alive for the past days.

If something's wrong with the baby, this will be the moment Shane will have to choose. Again. As if the first time hadn't already been hard enough.

He doesn't want to think about that, he doesn't want to think the baby wouldn't be healthy, of course he doesn't want to, but the worm's there, slowly eating at him from the inside and Shane doesn't know how to get it out. The only real way would be for the baby to be healthy, to be growing like it should be and for their heart to beat strongly, but he can't know until the doctor won't tell him, so Shane just keeps spiralling into his own thoughts, one worse than the other.

The fact that he's in the Gestation's waiting room doesn't help because why would Shane Hollander be there? Everyone knows he's an omega, so it'd be the easiest thing to put two and two together and understand. Shane Hollander, Captain of the Montreal Metros, pregnant, but is he there for a check-up? Or is he there to get an abortion? Who is the alpha that knocked him up? Shane doesn't even want to think about the kind of articles and posts that would spread if something leaked to the public.

He chose the most private clinic he could find in Ottawa, one that prides itself in the privacy of their patients, and he even called the clinic before scheduling all the appointments, making sure that what their site said was true and not just some kind of false advertising.

It wasn't enough, though, since Shane's being paranoid, even neurotic, wearing sunglasses and a cap, looking behind his back and around himself as if someone with a phone or a camera would walk out of the walls and take a picture of him, but he can't help it. He just

can't help it. There are so many factors, the baby, the check-up, the possibility of being seen there—it's all too stress-inducing and the only way Shane knows how to make it go away is to have everything under control. Too bad that he can't, not with this, so it's just an endless cycle he can't get out of.

His leg's jumping up and down while he waits, looking around himself, but also keeping his head down at the same time to not make it too obvious. Rationally, he knows that no one's looking in his way, that no one cares, not if they're in a clinic and their health must be their only priority, but that other part of his brain that doesn't work on logic and reasoning tells him all the eyes are on him, that someone will recognize him and let the whole world know.

Shane wishes he had accepted his Mom's offer.

A quiet voice in his head whispers that he would've liked for another person to be there with him, not his Mom.

Shane pretends he can't hear it, that it doesn't matter, even if the first thing he noticed when he sat down in the waiting room is that he's the only one by himself. Everyone has their partner by their side and Shane's alone.

Then, another thought occurs to him that makes him panic even more than he already was. They're going to call his name, a nurse will have to call his name to make him know the doctor's ready to see him. With cold sweat running down his back, hands slightly shaking, Shane looks around himself—there's only six other people waiting, which is six more than he wishes there were.

In a hurry, he gets up from his chair and walks to the nurse station.

"Excuse me," he says under his breath, getting the nurse's attention, if she recognizes him she doesn't make it obvious. Shane hopes with all of his heart no one in the clinic is a fan of hockey.

"I have an appointment at twelve, but I... I have a weird request, sorry—is it—is it possible for my name to not be called out loud when you let me know the doctor's ready?"

Shane knows he sounds and looks totally crazy, who would even ask for something like that, especially if she doesn't know who he is.

"Shane Hollander?" she asks, looking completely professional.

For a panicked moment, Shane thinks she has recognized him, that she's asking if it's really him, but then he realizes that he didn't give her his name so she's just checking if it's him. Shane just nods, feeling completely pathetic.

"Yes, sure," she tells him, too polite for a request so absurd, "I'll come get you myself."

Shane smiles at her through the anxiety as best as he can, "Thank you so much."

Shane goes back to sit down, keeps his eyes fixed on his lap and hopes that it won't take long, that the moment he will be lying down with a wand pressed against his abdomen will

come soon and everything will be alright. He imagines himself back at the cottage, in his own bed, a small picture of his first real ultrasound in his hands to stare at and to keep on his nightstand—maybe he'd ask for two, to give one to his parents too.

He likes to imagine they'd put it on their fridge, like they do in the movies, replacing it every time after the latest ultrasound, a gray blob of his baby, bigger and stronger on it, until they would have a real picture of the baby, all soft and pink skin, curly hair, maybe dark, and blue eyes. Shane wonders if the freckles would be there too, all scattered on their face. Shane would make sure they'd love their freckles, no matter what, that they would find them beautiful and not just some small dots on their skin.

A gentle touch on his shoulders gets his attention—Shane looks up and finds the same nurse she spoke to earlier.

“Doctor's ready,” she tells him.

Shane nods and follows her inside the doctor's office, stomach churning for the anxiety even worse than it does for his morning sickness, which hasn't even been that bad most of the days.

For the whole time, until he's lying down on the examination table, Shane keeps thinking about the way the baby would look, not because he actually cares about it, but because it helps him going through all the doctor's questions, the blood test results, which are perfect, at least that's what the doctor confirms and at the words Shane can breathe just a little easier.

He imagines the baby old enough to run outside in the grass around the cottage and for some weird reason, he imagines a little girl, curly and dark brown hair tied into two ponytails that are kind of a mess, all askew, and when she looks back at him, to grin at him with one missing teeth and wave, her eyes are blue, shape similar to his own, bright and full of life. For a moment, if things were different, he wonders if she would have Ilya's mother's name.

At that, his heart clenches and he knows he has to stop thinking about it before it's too late.

The cold of the gel on his bare skin is enough of a distraction—Shane knows how this goes, he has read so many things online about it that he knows it by heart. He wishes there would be a hand to hold, that he could cling to someone, only not to feel alone in this huge thing, but Shane knows that the faster he gets used to this, to being alone, to being the only parent, the better it will be.

“Is everything alright?” he asks at some point, voice low and unsure, once the silence in the office becomes too unbearable and he feels like the doctor has mapped the entirety of his womb with the ultrasound.

The doctor smiles at him, then turns the monitor to let him see the screen. There's only a small shape, something round that resembles a head and then the rest of the body, a slightly bigger shape, longer than the head. He thinks he sees the arms and legs, but he isn't really sure.

“Your baby’s completely healthy,” she says, which makes Shane break into a grin, eyes glassy.

“Really?” he asks, almost incredulous to hear the words he has been wanting to hear for days.

“Of course, Mr. Hollander,” she confirms, “totally healthy and eager to keep growing.”

Shane nods, too emotional to say more, brushing his fingers under the rim of his eyes.

“Do you want to hear the heartbeat?” she asks, then.

Shane knows it’s just a standard question, but it still makes him nod excitedly.

The room’s filled by a clear sound, constant and rhythmic, a bit faster, but Shane already knows it’s normal, that at first a fetus’ heartbeat is faster. Something in his chest warms, wishing he could hold that sound close to him, that he could hear it every time he needs to reassure himself that everything’s alright.

“All good,” the doctor tells him, “strong little heart.”

Shane can’t take the smile off his face and maybe for the first time in more than one month, since that call, he feels truly happy.

After the news is out—**Shane Hollander, Montreal Voyageurs Captain, a year away from the ice?** *The injuries sustained in his last game in the season against the Boston Raiders seem worse than what we believed*, reads one of the first articles Shane reads, but then he decides that it’s better if he doesn’t look at his phone, that he doesn’t see what people have to say about him.

Once the statement was out, he texted Hayden, Rose, J.J. and a few other people to let them know he’s alright, it’s just an injury that needs more time to heal, that if he doesn’t answer it’s because his phone will be turned off and that he wants some time away from everyone and everything. He knows it’s a dick move, that they will worry about him, about this sudden news, about an injury that doesn’t actually exist, but he can’t find the strength in himself to face any of it.

Shane’s lying to the whole world to protect himself and the baby. He knows he will tell Hayden or Rose at some point, it isn’t like he will be able to keep it a secret forever, but for now, he just wants time.

Shane needs time.

It’s why he keeps his phone off for three days straight and stays away from his parents’ house. At some point, everyone will stop talking about it, the team that will win the Cup will bring all the attention away from Shane and he will be able to live for the rest of the summer

in peace, away from the public eye and mostly forgotten by everyone by the time the bump will start to show.

When he turns his phone on, three and half days later, only because he knows that the more he stalls the worse it will be, he's expecting all the texts, the e-mails and the calls left unanswered, but Shane only replies to the most important ones, leaving the rest for another time.

What he isn't expecting are the texts from Ilya and the three missed calls.

The first texts are from the day the news got out, sent only a few minutes after Shane turned his phone off.

Call me, the first only says.

Then, it's a string of others, Shane thinks there are at least ten texts.

A couple of others *call me*.

You said you were fine.

How bad?

Sorry.

I just want know how you are.

The last one is only from twenty minutes ago, *Please call me I'm going crazy*, it says.

Shane reads them again and again, and doesn't understand. It's almost like Ilya entirely forgot the way he ended things with Shane, as if he still has any right to send this kind of texts and expect Shane to answer.

A weak part of him wants to believe Ilya must care, that if he spent three days texting him, trying to get a response from Shane, it's because he actually wants to know how he is, but he's also so hurt, completely shattered by Ilya's words, that it's hard to actually believe it's something more than... curiosity? Can Shane even call it worry? Why would he even worry about Shane? It isn't like he retired definitely—Ilya can read the statement and the articles and get all the information he needs, so why would he still text and call Shane?

Shane can't find an explanation, he tries, he tells himself that maybe he's just pitying him once again, he's sorry his teammate gave him those injuries and he feels like he has to apologize, or maybe Ilya regrets what he did, what he said, but even if he was being genuine, if he actually cared, it still wouldn't erase any of the hurt or magically fix what went wrong.

In the end, Shane doesn't call him. He doesn't answer the texts back either.

After the last text, *Please call me I'm going crazy*, Ilya doesn't send anything else.

Chapter 3: JUNE 2017

Chapter Notes

haha what did i say in the last chapter? “they will be happy in the next”? guess what i was kidding but they’re slowly getting there in this chapter and they will for sure in the next. what can i say i like torturing people.

The New York Admirals win the Cup and Scott Hunter does something that shocks everyone, something no one would’ve expected from a hockey player in the League.

Scott Hunter kisses his boyfriend in front of the cameras, a boyfriend that is an alpha, just like him, and marks a turning point in the history of hockey, since no player before him ever dared to make their same secondary gender relationship public.

Shane watches it with his parents and just like everyone else that must be watching, shock is everything he feels at first—he’s aware Scott Hunter isn’t the only alpha in the League that has a relationship with another alpha, or that there are other omega players in relationships with omegas, but everyone always keeps it under wraps and sometimes not even teammates know about it. Scott Hunter was one of the players that kept it a complete secret, even among other players, so the kiss in front of the entire hockey world feels even more like a breakthrough.

After the shock dissipates, Shane feels a sort of sadness—not for Scott Hunter, he’s actually happy for him and for all the other players that will feel more accepted for their secondary gender preferences—but for himself.

Shane lied for years, not only to the world, but also to the ones around him, to the people that love him the most, and he hasn’t stopped yet, just one lie different from another. He’s lying to his parents, who have been nothing but supportive, and as if he has no shame, Shane just keeps lying, like it’s the only option he has, like there isn’t a way out. There is a way out, Shane knows there is because Scott Hunter just proved it, but Shane isn’t Scott Hunter.

Shane’s a coward, but most of all, he’s afraid. He’s fucking afraid to even tell his parents, to tell them he fucked Ilya Rozanov for years in hotel rooms, scared to be seen, scared someone would find out he was fucking his rival, like it was a crime. Then, as if that wasn’t already enough, he went and somehow managed to also get himself pregnant by Ilya Rozanov.

Shane already created an inexistent injury to hide his pregnancy, but the lying won’t stop. After this, since he will be too frightened to come clean, his life will just become a big lie he won’t know how to come out from.

He can hide a pregnancy, he can stay in the cottage for the whole time so no one will see the bump, but how is he supposed to hide a baby? Shane doesn't want his baby to be a secret, and yet, faced with the reality that he could've told the truth, that he would've found a way just like Scott Hunter will find a way to remain a hockey player in the League, he realizes he has been more than selfish. Shane could've found his own way to be the first omega with a kid to go back on the ice and remain in the League, he could've found a way to be a father and hockey player at the same time, but he's just a coward.

What he thought was protecting his baby is actually only protecting himself, making it all easier for himself. Shane should be ashamed and he definitely deserves the guilt that he can slowly feel growing inside his body.

He knows it isn't too late, but he's still all alone in this and he's scared. He's so fucking scared.

There's someone at his door, ringing the bell.

Shane wasn't expecting anyone, though, since most of the time his parents let him know when they will drop by. Besides, it can't be them, not when Shane saw them just that morning. He's also pretty certain he didn't order anything online so it can't be that either.

The ringing doesn't stop, not even after a few moments, and instead it actually gets pretty aggressive.

Shane frowns, confused, but he still gets up from his couch and slowly walks towards the front door. Not many people have his cottage's address, so if they're there, ringing the bell without any intention to stop, it must mean Shane knows them. Maybe it's one of his parents, maybe they forgot something, or maybe they need something and didn't bring their key along, in a rush to get there so it's also why they didn't call Shane. At the thought that something might have happened, Shane walks closer to the door, not really anxious, not yet at least, but still nervous.

Whoever's ringing is hidden by the wooden pillar and Shane can't even check who it is from the glass window, so the only option he has left is to open the door.

When he finally opens the door, he finds the person he least was expecting to see.

Ilya's there, right there, standing on his porch, standing right in front of Shane, his hand lifted in the air close to the buzzer.

Ilya's there and Shane isn't wearing a scent patch.

"Hollan—"

“What the fuck are you doing here?” Shane cuts him off, shocked to his core, hand tight around the door handle.

He should just close the door right in Ilya’s face, not even let him explain himself, just shut the door in his face and pretend it never happened. But Shane’s always been too weak with Ilya, relented too easily when he shouldn’t have, like that time in that bathroom in Las Vegas. Nothing has changed since then, it can have only gotten worse instead, and it’s exactly why he doesn’t slam the door shut.

“Please, Hollander,” Ilya says, taking a step closer, but Shane glares at him, and Ilya just steps back. Shane notices the way he almost lifts his hands up in the air, but then forces himself not to and closes them into fists by his sides.

“Just hear me out.”

Shane almost laughs, humorless and all, *Just hear me out*, as if it isn’t all his fault. As if Shane isn’t hiding there, in his own cottage, afraid of everything and everyone because of him. Because Ilya left him alone in something much bigger than himself.

“No, the fuck, I don’t want to,” Shane tells him and he’s so angry, not only at Ilya, but at himself too, because he knows that if he really didn’t want to hear him out he would’ve already told him to fuck off and closed the door, but he still hasn’t. He still hasn’t and there are tears in his eyes that he *won’t* let fall down, no matter how much they burn.

“Shane,” Ilya tries, which is such a low blow, Shane’s aware, he can see what Ilya’s doing and it just infuriates him even more, since he also knows it’s working. He doesn’t want Ilya to be there, he doesn’t want to see him or hear his voice and what he has to say, but he still can’t bring himself to completely shut him off, to turn his back and walk away.

“I am sorry,” Ilya admits, “you weren’t answering and I was worried.”

Ilya’s wearing a scent patch and Shane despises the fact he can’t smell anything coming from him, that he can’t smell the desperation, if the look on his face means something. Shane has never seen him looking like this, not even in the video of his injury on the ice—back then, Ilya looked shocked, worried too, but not like this. Not totally desperate that he has flown over to Ottawa to come and knock at Shane’s door only because Shane wasn’t answering his texts and calls.

“Whose fault is that?” Shane bites back, aware that his emotions are all in the open for Ilya to dissect them, to poke at them and understands exactly what he’s feeling.

Another thing’s there, too, and Shane doesn’t know how to rein it in. He wishes he could hide it, but he doesn’t think it’s possible, not without a scent patch. He doesn’t want Ilya to understand he’s pregnant, not when Shane can barely look at his face without feeling so heartbroken and so angry at the same time.

Shane tells himself there’s still time, that if he actually closes the damn door, Ilya won’t find out, but Shane can’t. He tells himself, *close the door, just close the fucking door*, but his arm doesn’t listen. It’s like his body is completely disconnected from his brain.

“Shane, please,” Ilya says, which makes Shane feel crazy—he can’t just say his name like that, not with a voice so broken that it can’t be faked, not in such a way, as if he’s truly hurt and almost in physical pain. Shane can’t believe it. He doesn’t want to believe he wasn’t the only one suffering because then it would just be more painful, knowing this could’ve been fixed much sooner, or not broken at all in the first place.

“Don’t, Rozanov, just—”

“Wait,” Ilya says then, louder, much firmer, which makes Shane shut his mouth with a click.

All of a sudden, Shane feels the fear paralyze him.

He can see the moment something clicks right on Ilya’s face—he inhales, louder than the way it would be if he was only breathing, once, then again, and his eyes go wider.

Something inside Shane screams at him to just close the door, but it’s already too late, isn’t it? He should’ve closed it the moment after he saw who it was.

“Is... are you...”

Shane shakes his head, jaw locked tight.

He’s frightened, but he won’t tell Ilya. Not right then, not when he feels like there’s fire running through his veins. He needs to calm down. He needs to be alone and freak out by himself. What he doesn’t need is Ilya finding out he’s pregnant like this.

“Go away,” he says, words mostly a whisper, but they hold all the anger he’s feeling inside his body, all the hurt and the pain too.

Ilya looks panicked, he sends a glance behind Shane’s shoulder, looking inside, as if he would find someone that would help him, that would make Shane see reason.

“What? No—”

“I said go away, Rozanov,” Shane says again, louder, even angrier than a few seconds before. A small part of him protests at his own words, outraged, the omega part, the one that craves for an alpha, that craves Ilya like nothing else, but Shane fights it, like he has fought it for most of his life since he presented and like he has fought it since the moment his eyes fell on Ilya Rozanov, probably failing.

Ilya takes a step closer and this time he actually lifts his hands up, like he wants to placate Shane, to buy himself some more time.

“Wait, wait, please—”

Shane glares at him with all the hatred he can convey on his face.

“Fucking leave. Now.”

At those words, cold and detached, Ilya must understand Shane's deadly serious, that he wants him to actually leave, since his shoulders drop and he suddenly looks completely drained. He looks at Shane, silent, searching for something Shane can't understand what could possibly be, and after a few moments, he just nods.

"Okay," he says under his breath, taking a step back, then another and another, but never looking away from Shane, not even when he has to go down the few stairs to go back to the rental car.

Ilya keeps looking at Shane and Shane can't bring himself to look away from him either.

He's so angry, he's just so angry that he doesn't know if his body is big enough to contain all the emotions he's feeling. Shane doesn't know how to get rid of them, he wishes he knew, but he doesn't, has never learnt how.

He watches Ilya get in the car, movements slow, not glancing away from Shane, not even for a brief moment. They stare at each other like this, Ilya from the car and Shane from the front door, only for a second, but it's during that moment, with Ilya's eyes on him, that Shane feels the last piece inside himself break.

Then, Shane watches Ilya drive away.

Once he closes the front door with a muted click, Shane feels lonelier than ever, in a house too big that only knows silence.

Shane keeps thinking about it, of course he keeps thinking about it.

It's all he can think about, day and night.

Ilya was there, standing right in front of him—he came all the way to Ottawa because Shane wasn't answering the phone, because he was *worried*. It doesn't fix any of it, they're so far from fixing what was broken, but Shane can't pretend it means nothing. He can't just pretend that it didn't happen.

Ilya was there. He was *there*, at the cottage, and Shane told him to go away.

He's still angry, but he doesn't know at what anymore.

He thought he was only angry at Ilya, and he is, he is so angry at him, but he's also angry at himself, and most of all, he's angry at the rest of the world.

He's angry because he had to give up on a year of hockey, because he was forced to choose what he wanted the most, which should've been hockey, and yet at the same time, thinking about the possibility of an abortion made him feel physically sick, even if it would've been the easiest choice, even if it's what everyone would expect from him.

He's angry because he isn't sure the League will let him back on the ice, if the Metros will still want him as their Captain, not if he reveals that he has had a baby, and also because he knows, he *knows* that no matter what, there will always be people that will feel like they have a say in the way he lives his life. They will tell him he's loyal to hockey instead of his family, but at the same time, they will still tell him that he should've been more careful, that he should've prioritized hockey first because how can a player like him not be careful, not avoid everything that could damage his career.

Shane knows why he lied, but he's starting to have doubts, he's starting to consider that maybe it really wasn't the best choice, the simplest, sure, but not the best—and now, as if that wasn't already a mess, Ilya knows, too.

It was right on his face. Ilya understood, he smelled the pregnancy on Shane and he left with the explanation he was looking for, but probably more confused than before.

Shane wonders, because how can he not, if Ilya thinks it's his, that Shane's pregnant with his baby. Or if it isn't, which is even a worse thought than the other. If Ilya believes the baby's some other alpha's Shane fucked. Maybe Ilya would think that after he broke things off, Shane went and fucked some other alpha, which got him pregnant. Shane knows it's something he would never do, but does Ilya know? Maybe he's leaving Ottawa, right then, convinced Shane doesn't want anything to do with him, that he has moved on and he has already found another alpha to start a family with.

The mere thought is hilarious, and also kind of morbid, but Shane can't know what goes through Ilya's head, if he actually thinks Shane could ever have sex with an alpha that isn't him so soon after breaking things off.

Shane knows he wouldn't, but Ilya doesn't.

Before the moment Shane found Ilya standing right behind his front door, he thought it was over, definitely, that he would've seen Ilya only on the ice, as rivals, but now, after knowing Ilya flew to Ottawa because Shane wasn't answering his phone, saying he did it because he was worried, it's like something shifted, like Shane's faced with a new option he didn't think he had. He's angry and hurt, but he still doesn't want to lose this option, to see it disintegrate in front of his eyes. Maybe Ilya doesn't love him like that, maybe he isn't *in* love with Shane, but he still cares enough to show up in Ottawa, to want to know how he is, not only with a text or a call, but in person.

Shane's hungry, has always been, since the first time he laid his eyes on Ilya, even if he still didn't realize it, so he knows he will accept everything, even the scraps. He told himself he couldn't have accepted it, but he was just fooling himself, forcing himself not to crave any of it, completely shutting himself off.

Now, not so deep down, he's aware that if he doesn't do anything, he will just regret it and he will wish he had done something when it will be too late.

It takes him almost four days since the day Ilya showed up at the cottage to call him—Shane has to physically force himself into holding his phone in his hands and pressing the call button.

He's doing it by the kitchen counter, because it seems better, standing up instead of sitting down, it makes him feel more focused, less relaxed and less prone to say things he doesn't want to say.

It doesn't ring for long, almost as if Ilya had been expecting the call and kept his phone close by. For the whole time, Shane can feel his heart stuck somewhere low in his stomach.

"Hey," it's the way Ilya greets him, soft and almost surprised, maybe waiting for Shane to start talking to him the same way he did when he saw Ilya on his porch.

Shane grips the edge of the counter.

"Hey," he says back, trying to keep all his emotions in check, out of his voice. He doesn't want to sound angry, or hurt, or whatever else. Shane wants to have a normal conversation. He doesn't want to scream or cry, he just wants to talk.

"Where are you?" he asks then, because the thought of Ilya having left, of not being able to see him for the rest of the summer, and maybe even more, kind of kills him.

"Do you want truth or lie?"

Ilya's voice is gentle, low, a bit different from what Shane's used to. Totally different from their last call. It isn't cold or detached, almost intimate instead, kind of careful, too, as if he's thinking twice about what he should say and not just splurting out the first thing that comes to his mind.

"Truth."

Ilya sniffs. "Ottawa."

What Shane feels spread through the entirety of his body can only be relief, a deep sense of relief that Ilya's still there.

He grips the counter a little tighter.

"What about Russia?" he asks, not accusatory, but because he needs to know that Ilya isn't leaving in a couple of hours or tomorrow.

"Don't you have to go back for the summer?"

"No," Ilya says immediately, "I prefer Ottawa, is really nice. Might go visit the Cold War Museum."

Shane laughs at that, actually really laughs, thinking about Ilya searching for what places to see and visit in Ottawa.

It feels like it's the first time he laughs like that in a very long time.

"Really?" he whispers, a small smile refusing to leave his lips.

"Yes, why not. Bunker might be fun."

"No, I mean, you preferring Ottawa," he explains, voice becoming a whisper when, "even if we wouldn't see each other?" he adds, aware he probably wouldn't let that happen, but Shane still feels the urge to ask.

"Yes, really," Ilya answers, and Shane doesn't know how he knows, but something in him tells him Ilya isn't lying, that he wouldn't lie about this.

"I will stay in hotel for the whole summer."

"Ilya... that's..."

Crazy. What if someone sees him there in Ottawa? It's completely crazy and something he should not do. Not when they aren't even—

"Shane."

Maybe it's the way he says his name, gentle, holding so much Shane's scared to find out what it all is, or maybe it's because Shane realizes he has missed it, the way Ilya's voice sounds around his name, even if he has heard Ilya saying it only so many times.

Shane doesn't know what it is exactly, but he suddenly feels like he has to apologize for the way he treated him when he came to the cottage. He knows he had every right to be that hard, to tell him to go away, but right then, all of a sudden, he feels almost guilty. Even if he was angry, even if he was hurt, maybe he should've let Ilya explain.

"I'm sorry for the way—"

"No," Ilya cuts him off, voice firmer for the first time since he answered the call, but still not hard, nor cold, just firmer, as if he just doesn't want Shane to apologize. "I am sorry, for everything. I am the asshole. Big, big asshole."

Shane laughs, low, "Yeah, you are."

Ilya sighs. Shane imagines him running his fingers through his curls.

"I know. I am sorry, really, really sorry. You should be more angry with me."

Shane is, he's angry at him, has been for more than a month, together with all those other feelings, but when he thinks about it, when he thinks about everything that happened, he finds that he's tired. He's sick of it and he just wants a bit of calmness.

“You’re making it really hard not to, you know, if you just show up at my house,” he tells Ilya then, trying to open up because he has to, or nothing will come out of it. Everything will stay the same and Shane doesn’t want that.

“Yes, sorry about that too,” Ilya says and he actually sounds guilty, “I didn’t know what to do anymore and I was going crazy.”

Shane smiles, a corner of his lips moving up, and then, he releases the grip on the counter.

“You know,” he murmurs, heart beating quicker for what he’s about to say, “no alpha has ever done something like that for me.”

It’s true, mostly because there was no other alpha before Ilya, but Ilya doesn’t need to know that.

“Then you have met bad alphas, alphas that don’t deserve you,” Ilya says, resolute.

“What about you, then?”

“I’m bad alpha too, but I am sorry. So sorry,” he answers and Shane can actually hear it in his voice, how much the guilt must be eating at him. “I hope you can forgive me someday because I will apologize each day for what I said.”

Shane hasn’t forgiven him, not yet, but he can. He knows he can forgive Ilya. He hates the situation they are in now, he hates that he still hasn’t clearly told Ilya he’s pregnant, that the baby growing inside himself is Ilya’s. Shane wants to, he has wanted to tell him since the moment he found out, so having to hide it has been a complete torture.

It’s true Ilya’s an asshole, on the ice and out of the rink, Shane has always known, but throughout the years he has also learnt that it isn’t all Ilya, it isn’t truly what he is. It’s mostly something he has had to learn to protect himself, not to let himself get crushed. Now, Shane knows he wasn’t being a total asshole just because he felt like hurting Shane, like it could’ve been *fun*, that maybe he didn’t consider him just a body to fuck. There must have been a reason for the way Ilya acted, so Shane wants to know why.

Shane sighs, turning around and leaning his lower back against the counter. The hand not holding the phone goes on his lower abdomen, which is still unchangingly flat, but Shane has noticed he does this often since he found out about the pregnancy, just placing his hand there, searching for something he can’t touch yet.

“What about... that man?” he asks then, because Shane has to know before he starts thinking about things that could hurt him if they’re revealed to be things he couldn’t actually have.

“Back in New York?”

“Who?” Ilya says, clearly confused, but Shane doesn’t believe him.

“C’mon, Rozanov, don’t play dumb,” he says back, kind of annoyed.

“No, I’m serious. Who?”

Shane breathes loudly, mostly just to let Ilya know he's annoyed. Maybe, *maybe* a bit jealous, but he won't ever admit that to Ilya.

"There was a picture..."

"Ah," Ilya exhales, accent suddenly thicker, "that."

"Yeah."

"Don't remember him, didn't matter. Besides, nothing happened."

Shane chuckles under his breath, mostly just air out of his nose, kind of suspicious at the revelation. *Really?* he wants to ask, because he isn't sure he can believe Ilya on this, it isn't like Ilya ever hid the fact he had sex with other people, but this is different, isn't it? It's completely different from everything they ever had, so Shane wants to believe he's telling the truth, that after what happened Ilya's willing to be honest.

"You looked really close, though," he comments anyway, just to hear what Ilya has to say about it.

Ilya hums, then clicks his tongue. "I was drunk. I was having hallucinations."

"What kind?"

Shane *knows* he's asking too many questions and the only reason why Ilya's answering all of them, without even trying to tell him he's asking too many, is because he probably knows he has no upper hand, that Shane could just end the call. Shane wouldn't do that even if he stopped answering, but Ilya doesn't know.

"Bad kind. Or good, depends how you see it."

Ilya doesn't need to explain further, Shane knows what he means with *hallucinations*, not when there are too many coincidences with the way that man looked.

It isn't all magically fixed, there's still so much he wants to talk about with Ilya, but Shane doesn't want to do it on the phone.

Then, as a way to give himself some kind of courage, he curls his fingers against his abdomen, thumb slipping under his hoodie, right against his warm skin.

"Would you come to the cottage, if I asked?"

The silence that comes from the other end of the phone is deafening and Shane has to force himself to keep breathing.

"Yes, I would," Ilya replies, clear, words slow.

Shane nods to himself, grips the phone a bit tighter, "Can you come to the cottage?" he asks then, heart in his ears, "Tonight?"

“Yes.”

Shane exhales and feels like a heavy weight has just disappeared from his shoulders.

“Okay.”

“See you tonight,” Ilya says, almost a whisper, and something inside Shane’s chest clenches, but not in a bad way. Definitely not in a bad way.

“Bye.”

“Bye, Shane.”

When Shane ends the call, he realizes he’s smiling to himself and he just can’t stop. For a moment, he wonders if on the other side of Ottawa, Ilya’s smiling too.

Chapter 4: JUNE 2017, PT. 2

Chapter Notes

i'm truly sorry for the delay, forgive me, i was getting my master's degree so now i'm finally free from any academic torture and here we are. time for me to feast on your feelings

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

When the doorbell rings, only once, it feels like a deja-vu.

Shane has been sitting on the couch for he doesn't know how long, waiting, overthinking, spinning his head in a loop of words that just won't leave him alone, no matter how much he tries.

This time, though, Shane knows who it is. What to expect too, considering the time he spent going through all the possible scenarios. The one that stuck the most is, of course, the worst. The one he keeps going back to makes his chest feel tight because in this scenario Ilya's furious about Shane not telling him about the pregnancy, and he also doesn't want anything to do with him and the baby. Shane has imagined him storming out of the front door so many times it almost feels as if it actually happened. The images and the words keep replaying in his head, again and again, and Shane doesn't know how to stop them, so he's almost glad when he hears the bell ring. At least now, he will find out about what will happen and he will be able to stop tormenting himself about it.

When he opens the door, Shane knows to brace himself for the person he will see. He's also wearing a scent patch, not like it will do much, but it will still keep a portion of his emotions hidden.

Ilya doesn't look much different from four days ago, still kind of distraught, curls messier than usual, but his scent is what hits Shane the most, since he isn't wearing a scent patch—it's still Ilya's, a mix of something fresh and cold, like mint and maybe green tea, with what Shane associates to whiskey and tobacco, but there's also a different undertone, kind of sour, that almost makes him frown. *This is new*, Shane realizes, and only after a few moments he understands it's guilt. That Ilya feels so bad, so guilt-ridden, it has even permeated his scent in such an evident way.

Shane tries to smile at him, not really sure it doesn't look like a complete pained and anxious smile, and, "Hey," tells him, his hand still wrapped around the door handle, as if it would give him the strength he needs.

Ilya nods at him, "Hey," he says back, voice low, "how are you feeling?"

Shane feels like dying, kind of, if the way his stomach feels deep down in his feet means something, but he also feels uncomfortable because he doesn't want to have this conversation.

"Fine," he replies, moving to the side to let Ilya in, "come in, please."

Ilya doesn't say anything, he just steps inside and takes his sneakers off with calculated movements which is such a normal thing to do, but coming from Ilya, with his different-but-not-different scent and his messy and flattened curls, Shane feels like it's unusual. He feels like Ilya wouldn't be so careful if it was all different, like he would just start wandering and take a look around. Instead, right then, he's just standing there, looking so out of place and waiting for Shane to direct him.

Shane despises everything about it, but he can't do anything to change it, and unhelpfully, his brain tells him it will get even worse.

While he walks towards the open space of the kitchen, the nerves make him start babbling about the cottage—that it was built—or the well and the water, or definitely about things that don't matter and that he shouldn't be talking about because they aren't what he should really talk about. Ilya doesn't care about how many bedrooms there are or if the water has a certain and different taste from bottled water.

"It's kind of the reason why I decided to—"

"Shane," Ilya cuts him off, standing by the window, serious, eyes on him. Shane's glad. He's so fucking glad he put a stop to his nonsense babbling.

"You know I'm not here to talk about the water," Ilya tells him then, once Shane has sealed his mouth shut—Shane feels like dying even more.

"Yeah," he nods, moving his hand around in the air without a real purpose, which he stops doing once he realizes he's doing it, "you're right. Sorry. Sorry, I'm kinda nervous."

Something on Ilya's face softens, Shane isn't sure what or how, but if the second before he was all hard lines, jaw locked and serious, the second after, at Shane's words, he just looks a little more relaxed—maybe, if Shane's eyes aren't playing tricks on him. He thinks they aren't, but he can't really trust himself right then.

"All fine," Ilya says, voice low, but kind of comforting, "I'm nervous too."

Shane nods, once, then again to psych himself up. He just needs to blurt the words out, besides, it isn't even the first time he tells someone, he already told his parents so it should be easy. Easier, at least. It isn't, though. It really isn't, but Shane has to do it.

"I... I don't think there's a way to ease you into this," he murmurs, but then he realizes that maybe he should raise his voice, since he's standing by the couch and Ilya's still standing by the window near the kitchen island.

Shane clears his throat, looks down at his hands, which he's keeping closed into fists to avoid any weird movement, and, "I'm pregnant, Ilya," he says, all in one breath, but differently from what he expected, it doesn't make him feel better, or lighter.

Nothing changes.

It's the reason why, "I guess you already kinda figured it out," he adds, hoping something might change, that the words would suddenly feel enough.

Nothing changes on Ilya's face either, which is already an answer, but Ilya confirms it with his words.

"Yes, kinda," he says and the guilt, that sour scent permeates the air. Shane doesn't know what to do about it, what to say—*it isn't your fault*, as if it would be enough for Ilya and everything would go back to its right place. It wouldn't, nothing would change, and maybe that's why Shane doesn't feel much different now that the truth is out. He doesn't feel relief, he doesn't feel *happy*. The truth was the easy part, the hard part is Ilya and everything that comes after it.

"Is baby—"

The glare Shane sends his way is enough to make Ilya stop talking.

"If you're gonna ask if it's yours I'm gonna throw you out, Rozanov," he warns him, kind of harsh, but Shane doesn't want to even hear the possibility of Ilya thinking Shane could've fucked some other alpha and gotten himself pregnant.

"Sorry, I just... I didn't want to—you know, assume?" Ilya explains, which is fair of him, Shane knows rationally it is, but it still stings.

"Well, there was no one beside you."

Shane wishes he could hear the *for me too*, but he knows there must have been other people for Ilya, even if nothing happened with that man in New York. It's been months, of course there was someone else, Shane can't fool himself into believing things that can't be true.

"Me too, no one else," Ilya says, then, and for a second Shane thinks he hasn't heard right, that his brain's processing the wrong words, not the ones Ilya actually said, but the ones Shane wants to hear.

"What?" he asks, surprised. This is different from everything he imagined.

"Yes, Shane, I felt really bad," Ilya answers, for a moment Shane's glad Ilya isn't closer, that there's enough space between them, because that smell, the guilt, is just too strong and it almost makes Shane feel sick.

"Not only for what I said, because I'm really fucking sorry about that, but also like physical, yes? I felt not that good in my body."

The tears in his eyes sting, but Shane doesn't want to cry in front of Ilya—he doesn't want to admit to himself that all the hurt, the pain and the loneliness could've been avoided, that he suffered for nothing, that Ilya *made* him suffer for nothing. Even if Ilya feels guilty, even if he regrets what he did, it still doesn't make it better, it doesn't erase any of what Shane felt.

"You really hurt me," he whispers, chest tight, a knot in his throat.

At the words, Ilya glances away from him, looking to the side towards the window, and Shane knows what it means—Ilya always glances away when he cries.

"Sorry," Ilya says under his breath, and Shane doesn't know if he's apologizing because he's crying or because he hurt Shane, or both. But it's the truth, even if it's painful and makes them cry, Shane still doesn't want to lie. He doesn't want to lie anymore, or to hide. Mostly, though, he doesn't want to be afraid anymore. He's sick of all of it—he has been hiding for years, scared to death, not showing his true self, not even to his parents and the people who love him the most, and Shane doesn't want to do it anymore. He wants to feel liberated, he wants to feel free from all the pain and the fear because those things aren't him, they don't belong to him, not like this, not in a way so whole that they make the person he is.

"Why did you say those things?" he asks, then. Shane wants to know. It's almost visceral, the need he feels to give an explanation to those words.

"Because I was scared," Ilya answers, voice raw, still not looking at him, but Shane catches the tear-track running from the corner of his eye down the side of his cheek anyway.

"Of what?"

Ilya glances back at him—his eyes are glassy, a look on his face Shane can describe only as tender, open and void of any kind of defense that makes him the Ilya Rozanov everyone knows, on the ice and out of the rink. Shane knows that Ilya Rozanov, probably better than everyone else does, but he also knows this Ilya, he has caught glimpses here and there, small, barely there, perhaps glimpses no one has ever been allowed to see.

"Shane... I—I really like you, too much maybe," Ilya murmurs, but the words sound so loud in Shane's ears because they aren't the ones he was expecting to hear. To convince himself he had to move on, Shane made up this idea that Ilya wouldn't have ever liked him, not in that way, not for something more, but here he is now instead, proving that Shane was wrong all along.

"I was scared because I'm not good alpha," Ilya says, looking at Shane, completely honest, "I don't know how to be good. I'm not enough for you and you're so good to me, to everyone, and I just... don't know. It scared me, thinking one day you would've realized I'm not good enough."

To some length, Shane can understand why Ilya's saying all of this, because he knows what kind of image Ilya built for himself. The alpha that goes from bed to bed, that doesn't let anyone get attached, that only cares about hockey, cars and sex, and yet at the same time, he proved, maybe without even noticing, that he isn't just that. Ilya isn't a broken alpha that

doesn't know how to care for and love someone, that isn't good enough. At least not for Shane.

"So you broke things off because you were scared I could've done it first?"

It doesn't make sense. Shane wouldn't have ever done that, not after Tampa—he thought things were finally going somewhere, that something had changed after years, and he was happy. He was so fucking *happy*. Shane wouldn't have ever thought about something like that.

"Yes, you're pretty and good omega, everything alpha could want, why choose me?"

Because I love you.

It's natural, the way it comes to him. The way he loves Ilya and doesn't have to think about it, or to wonder, not even for a second. Shane loves Ilya, has loved him for a while, but he still can't say those words out loud, too scared they would be too much and send Ilya running away.

"Because I don't think that, I don't think you aren't enough," it's what he says, trying to find the words that might convey something similar, that would be enough to make Ilya stay.

"You said I should've found a proper alpha, but it's just what *you* think."

Then, Shane takes a step closer towards Ilya, something akin to a buzz running through his entire body.

"What I think is that I want you," he says, pointing at his own chest with his hand, "I don't want a proper alpha, I don't want a good enough alpha. I want you."

He takes another step closer.

"You, Ilya."

Ilya glances away again, a frown on his mouth. He shakes his head, "I don't deserve you," he whispers, maybe only to himself, as if he wants to remind himself of the plain truth. The words hurt because Shane knows they aren't Ilya's, that his Father, or maybe his brother, or both, must have put them in his head, must have said them so many times, again and again, that Ilya just started believing them at some point and didn't know which one was the truth anymore.

"No," Shane says, getting even closer until he's right in front of him, Shane would just need to lift his hand to touch him, "that's not the truth, Ilya."

Ilya shakes his head again, stronger, as if it would be enough to convince Shane he's wrong, and then, he just turns around, giving Shane his back, hiding himself.

"Hey," Shane murmurs, soft, feeling something familiar lodge in his chest—almost the same as Tampa, but this time Shane doesn't feel totally taken aback, not sure about what to say or how to comfort Ilya. This time, instead, it comes naturally, the way he slowly wraps his arms

around Ilya's torso and presses himself against his back, cheek leaned against the back of his shoulder.

"Ilya," he says, gentle, words spoken against the fabric of his shirt, "everything's going to be alright."

Those are the words that suddenly make him feel relieved—not telling Ilya he's pregnant, but this, knowing it isn't something irreparable, that there's a way to fix it, as long as they want it. Shane was hurt, he can't pretend it never happened, but he can forgive Ilya, he can understand why he did it—Shane wants him, he fucking wants Ilya, and he wants their baby to have Ilya too.

"I'm so sorry, Shane," Ilya whispers, broken, shoulders curved inwards, and Shane just holds him tighter, tears burning in his eyes.

"I'm fucking sorry."

"It's alright," Shane tells him. One of Ilya's hands lifts to hold his own, fingers warm and tight around his, pressed together against Ilya's chest, "we're gonna be alright, Ilya."

At that, Ilya makes a sound that resembles a sob, kind of stifled, as if he's trying to restrain himself back, and Shane's chest breaks into two because he knows why Ilya believes he can't let himself cry freely, why he thinks he has to hide it. Shane presses himself against him, slips one of his hands away from under Ilya's and peels the scent patch off from his neck—Ilya's scent is still sour, tainted by the sorrow, but Shane knows feeling his and the distinct scent of the baby, something his Mom described as honey with a bit of vanilla, not that strong or sickeningly sweet, but still clear and unmistakable, will help Ilya calm down.

"Shane," Ilya whispers, raw, broken like Shane has never heard him, "the baby... I'm sorry—I'm fucking sorry it happened—"

"Just stop," Shane cuts him off, moving his hands up to his shoulders to gently encourage him to turn around, to look Ilya in his eyes and tell him that it's alright, that he needs to stop apologizing, especially about the baby. Shane doesn't need to hear it again and again like Ilya promised. He understands why Ilya acted that way, they will probably need to speak about it more at some point, but he doesn't need Ilya to keep apologizing because it's clear how much it killed him, how bad it made him feel.

Ilya turns around, then, head kind of hanging low, almost as if he wants to hide the red-rimmed eyes and the frown on his face. The hurt Shane feels is physical, buried deep down into his core and breaking each seam of his body apart, making it hard to maintain a calm and steady voice.

"I'm... I'm not, alright? I don't regret this, any of it," Shane says, gesturing between them, brushing his fingertips against Ilya's chest for a brief moment.

It's then, only when he looks down at the space that separates them, when his eyes land on his own abdomen, still flat, but also with a softness to it that wasn't there before and that Shane can feel each time he touches it, that he realizes Ilya doesn't know what his choice is.

Ilya doesn't really know if Shane wants to keep the baby or if he wants an abortion—he could be standing there, wondering about it, believing that Shane would never want a baby, even less if it's Ilya Rozanov's baby. It's the rational thinking, Ilya knows hockey is the most important thing for him, and yet, at the same time, it wouldn't explain the one year off the ice because why would Shane need a year off if he doesn't want the baby? Shane doesn't know if Ilya's in the right state of mind to think rationally, to not have any doubt about what Shane wants to do.

The Shane of a few years back wouldn't have thought about it twice, he would've chosen in a blink of an eye, and would've done something about it in a heartbeat, discarding each thought about it in the same way he would've ended the pregnancy. Quick and as painless as possible. But he isn't that Shane anymore, not fully at least—something shifted inside himself and even if hockey has always stayed his top priority, he also realized that hockey was never meant to last. It has never been something permanent and in maybe ten years, fifteen if he's lucky enough, he won't have it anymore. If he had chosen differently, by then, Shane wouldn't have anything left, not hockey and not the baby. He already thought he didn't have Ilya anymore, but at least he had to cling tight onto something, he had to choose *this*, he had to sacrifice hockey for the baby.

“I want to keep the baby, Ilya,” Shane tells him under his breath, heart beating loud in his ears because this is it, right? This is what he has been thinking about for the whole day. The way Ilya will react to Shane's choice. Shane braces for the worst, because that's just what he does, always brace for the worst so that it doesn't entirely kill him, and waits for something he wishes he could completely avoid.

Ilya doesn't say anything, but he looks down at his abdomen, as if he's truly realizing there's a baby growing right there, right under Shane's skin and flesh. His hand lingers, not reaching forward, almost shy to move, but Shane understands Ilya's intentions anyway.

They're so close Ilya would just need to lift his hand a bit more to touch Shane, but Shane still feels like he has to take a small step closer, and then, “You can touch it,” he tells him.

Ilya's head snaps up to look at him, unsure, but also surprised, “Yes?” he whispers, a sudden spike in his scent Shane can only describe as something he usually picks up on the ice, mostly when the scent patches get so soaked with sweat and all kinds of scents it's impossible for them to keep working, something that smells a lot like adrenaline, like a shock that lasts only a few seconds but it's still enough to power the body up and make a player feel invincible, capable of cutting through everyone else on the ice.

Shane nods and instead of waiting for Ilya to move on his own, he reaches forward for his hand and slowly pulls it towards his abdomen. Ilya's skin is warm under his fingers and his palm feels even warmer when Shane slips it right under his hoodie to place it against himself—Ilya's fingers slightly curl against the skin, as if he's expecting to find a kind of roundness that's not there yet, and when he must realize it isn't there, he just places his palm flat against it, a bit harder against it but still so gentle.

“Too early, yes?” he asks, voice still a whisper, and Shane's almost certain there's wonder in his voice, as if he can't believe any of this is happening.

Shane nods, “Yeah, only fifteen weeks,” he tells him, but then he thinks that if Ilya hasn’t turned his back around and walked out, that if he’s still there, his hand pressed against Shane’s abdomen, then it means he isn’t running away, right? Ilya looks like he wants this, too, so he might want to know more, or maybe it isn’t that—it’s just Shane, since he has been keeping everything to himself, updating only his parents, he really wants Ilya to know too, to know everything he missed. Shane wants to tell him everything.

“The doctor said that since I’m an athlete the bump might start to show a little later than usual,” he adds then, “but everything’s good and the baby’s healthy.”

“And you?” Ilya asks, which makes Shane smile a little.

“I’m good, too, all healthy,” he answers, feeling warmth spread from Ilya’s hand to the rest of his lower abdomen. Ilya nods, but he doesn’t move his hand away. Shane doesn’t want him to.

“Ilya,” he says then, mostly to make Ilya look up at his face, and when Ilya does, almost reluctantly, as if he doesn’t want to look away from his abdomen even if there’s nothing to see, “do you want this?” he asks, because he has to. Shane needs to know, he needs to hear Ilya speak the words out loud to erase all the scenarios floating in his head.

“Shane,” Ilya whispers, eyes locked into his, a brightness into them that wasn’t there minutes before, “of course I want. I really fucking want.”

Shane nods, throat suddenly dry and heart heavy, “Yeah?” he manages to breathe out. Shane needs to make sure—it’s why he asks again, so Ilya can think about it for a few seconds more.

“Shane,” Ilya says again, even sweeter and softer than the first time, his free hand reaching for Shane’s cheek, cupping his fingers around it, and Shane just leans into it, realizing how much he missed it. How fucking much he missed Ilya.

“I—I want you, more than anything,” Ilya says, stroking his thumb against Shane’s cheek, which makes Shane want to close his eyes, to bask into the touch, both on his face and on his abdomen, but he can’t, he can’t close his eyes, not when Ilya’s looking at him as if there really isn’t anything else in the world, as if only Shane exists.

No one besides his parents has ever looked at him like that, like Shane might be the most important thing in the world, meant to cherish and love, and it almost makes his chest collapse into itself, all too much to bear on its own.

“I want you both so much, Shane,” Ilya murmurs, eyes watery, scent so strong that Shane can’t smell his own anymore—it’s all Ilya, honest and raw. “I want to be good alpha for both. I want... I want to—*fuck*—”

Ilya glances to his side, whispering something in Russian to himself, but he doesn’t take his hands away and Shane’s glad. “Hey,” Shane tells him, gentle, “it’s alright, you don’t need to —”

Maybe it's the way Ilya looks at him when he faces him once again, or maybe it's the way he presses his hand against his abdomen a little harder that makes Shane cut himself off—there's something different in his eyes, a kind of resolution, a hard line in his jaw that can't be tension, and Shane's almost scared, or thrilled, he isn't sure, to find out what it means.

Ilya says some other words in Russian Shane doesn't understand, mostly a whisper to himself, and then, "I love you so much," he says, louder, "I love you, Shane."

Really? it's the first word that comes to his mind because asking questions is what he does, what he knows best to do to understand better, but this time Shane doesn't need to understand—there's nothing to understand because Ilya Rozanov loves him.

Ilya loves him.

Ilya loves Shane and Shane loves him back.

"I love you, too," Shane tells him back because it's the only thing he needs to say, but his voice's a whisper. Shane's scared, he doesn't really know of what—maybe he's scared it might not be real, that it's only because he has imagined and fantasized about this so much. But Ilya's touch, Ilya's scent, Ilya's body, they all feel too real for it to be happening only in his head—Shane would never be able to imagine it like this, never this good.

"I dreamt about this, you know? So many times," Ilya whispers back, stepping even closer. Shane can feel the warmth radiating from his body. "About future like this."

Shane never did, not until Tampa at least, even if it was distorted and not truly clear, but the more days pass, the more he realizes he made the right choice, and now, with Ilya right in front of him, with the knowledge that he hasn't lost Ilya, Shane knows there ever was only one true choice and he's so fucking glad he never let himself crumple under the pressure and all the expectations, that he followed what his heart told him and not what the Shane Hollander everyone thinks they know so well would've done.

"I'm sorry I was not there," Ilya says, brushing his thumb on what Shane knows it's a cluster of freckles, "when you found out, I mean."

Shane nods and thinks it's a small mercy not telling Ilya the last time they saw each other Shane already knew, that he was supposed to tell him when Ilya broke things off. He will tell him at some point, but not then, not when Ilya was on the verge of breaking apart and it would only make his guilt grow stronger.

"You can be now," he says back instead, maybe because a part of him wants Ilya to keep confirming his choice, to prove to Shane he won't run away, but also because Shane wants Ilya to know Shane wants him there.

"Besides, you need to start early with Russian if you don't want the baby to only speak English and French," he jokes, then, only because he needs the air to feel lighter, to make his chest feel less tighter.

Ilya scoffs, but there's a smile not so carefully hidden on his lips.

“Baby’s first language will be Russian, of course.”

Shane chuckles, not able to keep the smile off his face.

“That doesn’t make sense, Rozanov. Their first language needs to be the one we both understand and—”

“No, no,” Ilya cuts him off, shaking his head. Shane imagines he would wave his hand off if he had one free, but it seems like Ilya has no intention of moving them away from Shane and Shane can’t find in himself to complain.

“English is stupid language, it can’t be the first. I speak Russian, you speak French.”

Shane feels weak at the knees at the thought—not once he let himself imagine what it would’ve been if Ilya had been there from the start, if he hadn’t made that call, only because it hurt too much to think about what he had lost. But now, talking about it, even joking about this kind of thing, it truly feels like a dream, like something he wished for all along but didn’t let himself indulge into, too scared to wake up and realize it wasn’t real. It’s real, though, it’s so real, and Shane doesn’t know what to do besides feeling like his body’s too small to contain all his emotions.

“Okay, but we won’t be able to understand each other, then.”

“You also learn Russian along with baby,” Ilya says, matter of fact, as if it’s the most rational way to go with the matter, “I *might* try with French, instead.”

Shane laughs. “Asshole.”

Ilya hums, serious, “You’re the smart one, what do they always say? Highest hockey IQ, no?” he asks, as if he doesn’t already know that.

Shane shakes his head in disbelief, but he doesn’t stop smiling.

“Fuck off, Rozanov,” Shane murmurs, but he still lets one of his hands slip under his hoodie to find Ilya’s and place it on top, pressing them both slightly firmer against his abdomen.

“You’re bad influence on the baby,” Ilya says, but he’s smiling, all soft, which makes Shane feel giddy.

Shane never wants this to stop. He doesn’t know how he believed he could’ve done it on his own, how he could’ve survived the loneliness.

That’s mostly why he ends up blurting his next words. “Let’s be honest, yeah?” he asks before he can truly think about what he’s saying or phrase them in a less confusing way. Shane sighs to himself, takes a moment, and, “From now on, let’s try to be honest with each other, I mean. About everything. Okay?” he asks again, clearer.

Ilya only nods, awfully serious. “Okay.”

Shane nods, too. “Okay,” he murmurs, mostly to repeat the word to himself, then, “do you want to—I don’t know, move?” he suggests, pointing to the couch behind his shoulder with his free hand.

Ilya glances at the couch, but then he glances back down where their hands are hidden underneath his hoodie and contemplates for a couple of seconds.

In the end, he shakes his head, “No,” he says, “let’s stay like this for little while.”

“Alright,” Shane whispers, moving a bit closer until he can place the side of his face Ilya isn’t holding on Ilya’s shoulder, and, “we can stay like this for a while,” he agrees, words almost pressed against the skin of Ilya’s neck.

Ilya only hums, the sour undertone gone from his scent. Shane doesn’t need him to say anything more, so he just closes his eyes and lets himself imagine a future that doesn’t seem so scary anymore. This time, Shane isn’t frightened to picture a kid with curly hair and blue eyes grinning back and waiving not only at him, but at Ilya too.

Chapter End Notes

i might and i say MIGHT write a +1 pov ilya maybe later in the pregnancy i don’t really know and i can’t promise anything but i grew fond of mpreg shane and everything that comes with it so we’ll see what my mind wants to do, unfortunately i have no rational control when it comes to writing and i can’t predict what will happen...

anyways thank you everyone it’s been fun

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