

Baby Games

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77370806) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77370806>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Fluff and Angst
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-09 Words: 11,757 Chapters: 1/1

Baby Games

by [Bliss_Ink](#)

Summary

Shane and Ilya are playing together in Ottawa. They're married. They're happy. But is it time for the next step?

This starts one year after The Long Game book ends.

Baby Games

1 year after Long Game

“Why on earth are you smiling?” Shane wants to know as they head down the snow-covered Montreal street. His words form puffy white clouds that hang momentarily in the air between them. “And why couldn’t we take the team bus with everyone else?”

The team is staying at the Four Seasons, like they do every time they play Montreal, and it’s close enough to walk to and from the arena. But the team still provides a bus to transport them the three short blocks. In spring months, many players walk it instead, but this is January, and it’s a nut-numbing minus twenty.

“This weather reminds me of Regina,” Ilya says simply with what might be a shrug, but Shane is shivering too much to really be able to tell. His hair is still damp from his shower at the rink after the morning skate, and it’s starting to freeze at his neckline.

Ilya’s words sink in, and suddenly Shane isn’t thinking about the cold. Their eyes meet. Ilya’s look incredibly blue in the bright white light reflecting off the snow. Ilya smiles. Shane does too. Then Ilya admits, “Makes me want to smoke.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “You’re not allowed to smoke.”

“Okay,” Ilya says flatly, like he did that day a million years ago before the World Juniors, and then he winks at his husband.

“Hollander!” Someone yells from across the street so loudly that they hear it over the din of traffic moving across De La Montagne Street. Shane’s head swivels out of habit even though he knows better than to respond to anyone in Montreal. When his eyes find the middle-aged guy standing by the bus stop, Shane instinctively reaches out to touch Ilya’s arm.

The guy had pulls off his gloves and throws both middle fingers high in the air. “Traitorous faggot!”

Shane turns away and keeps his arm firmly on Ilya’s arm. He keeps walking up the street, head down, dragging Ilya by the sleeve on his navy peacoat. “Just ignore it.”

“Is homophobia. Is not okay, Hollander!” Ilya’s English gets basic when he is pissed off or upset. Or drunk. And the last name thing also kicks back in.

“Yeah. Fuck him,” Shane grumbles.

“No, thank you,” Ilya retorts, and a quick look shows his head is still turned and he’s glaring over his shoulder at the guy now a block away.

“Okay. Well, then let’s get back to the hotel room, and you can fuck *me* instead,” Shane offers.

“My dick will probably be frozen and fall off by then,” Ilya replies. “Why the fuck did I want to walk?”

Shane almost smiles at that. Ilya finally stops looking back and falls in step beside his husband. And then he picks up the pace, with a hand on Shane’s lower back, pushing him to keep up. “Let’s get back so we can warm each other up.”

No one shares rooms anymore due to the new player contract agreement, so Shane and Ilya have their own hotel rooms. It’s an unwritten rule that they are given connecting hotel rooms. They never ask for them, but they get them every time. Ilya has thought about telling his team’s travel coordinator there’s no need to waste money on two rooms connected or otherwise, but he has the feeling that the team and the league needed the pretense of it all. Pretense was what Shane called it anyway. Yuna called it other words like ridiculous and delusional.

Ilya doesn’t give a shit. They could put them in one room, joining rooms or entirely different hotels on opposite ends of a city, he would still find a way to sleep in the same bed as Shane.

When they get back to the hotel room, Ilya begins stripping off Shane’s layers in silence. First his scarf, then jacket, then hat. Ilya pauses to run his fingers through the damp ends of Shane’s dark, silky hair. They’re stiff, almost frozen. He brings his mouth to Shane’s. Shane’s lips are cold, but his tongue is warm and eager. Ilya will never get over how eager Shane is for every touch. It turns Ilya’s own desire up a notch every single time. It never gets old.

“I hate playing here,” Ilya whispers into the kiss as he moves his mouth to Shane’s neck.

“Everyone does. It’s Montreal,” Shane murmurs, his hands undoing the chunky buttons on Ilya’s coat.

“They are ungrateful. You did so much for them.” Ilya complains as his hands make their way under the cable knit sweater Shane wore to the morning skate. Ilya had made fun of it when they were at breakfast. Told Shane it made him look like a dad in a bad holiday movie. The kind women watch on TV from November to January. But the truth is, he likes the idea of Shane being a dad, so he likes him looking like one. He just doesn’t know if he can tell Shane that... yet.

“I know. It’s okay,” Shane replies, and then his breath hitches as Ilya’s hands – freezing cold – touch his skin just under his ribs and begin moving upward.

“Not okay,” Ilya argues, and as soon as the sweater is up over Shane’s head, Ilya’s mouth is on one of his nipples, sucking and licking.

“Not your fault,” Shane reminds him in a rough, breathy voice. Ilya knows Shane doesn’t blame him for the way he’d felt forced to leave the Metros, but Ilya blames Ilya.

“Fuck them,” Ilya grunts against Shane’s chest, and then he moves his mouth back to Shane’s and his hands to Shane’s pants.

They have a rule, no actual sex on game day, which left them both too spent, but fooling around was fine. Orgasms were helpful. It gave them both better pre-game naps. So they peel out of the rest of their clothes and fall onto the bed in what’s technically Shane’s room, and Ilya holds both their hard, leaking dicks while Shane fumbles for the lube and they rub and bump and slide their hard, leaking cocks together in Ilya’s grip until they both come on Shane’s stomach almost simultaneously.

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The game sucks. Every time Shane touches the puck, even if it’s just a glancing pass, boos shake the building. Ilya also can’t help but notice some of the signs in the audience.

Hope Your Stick Breaks Hollander.

Real Men Don’t Trip.

Traitor.

Mrs. Rozanov Sucks.

The last one makes Shane smirk slightly, but then furrow his brow. “Wouldn’t I be Rozanova?”

“No. That’s for a woman who marries a man. You would be... nothing in Russia because I would be in jail. And who the fuck cares?” Ilya had snapped as they stretched on the ice side-by-side in warm-up. “Besides, I’m Mrs. Hollander.”

He stood up and skated away to take shots on Hayes.

They were at least winning, Ilya thinks as the third period ticks down. And they would leave Montreal right after the game and be able to sleep in their own bed, in their own home, and snuggle Anya and...

Line change. Ilya shuts off his brain and hops the boards. Shane steals the puck from a Metro player almost the second his skates touch the Ice, and Ilya grins. Fuck yeah, he thinks as he skates harder and taps his stick because he’s open, mostly. Pike is on him, but he could lose Pike easier than a confused toddler in a crowded park. Shane passes the puck, a perfect tape-to-tape pass, and Ilya pumps his legs. Pike becomes a distant memory, and the puck sails right through the goalie’s five-hole and brings pure delight to his heart. Elation lasts a second.

The ref’s whistle is still squealing long after the goal buzzer. Ilya turns and sees Shane doubled over on the ice, his gloved hand up to his face, and blood dripping onto the ice.

Ilya’s entire body gets cold and then hot, moving from panic to rage. He starts to skate toward Shane, but someone puts a gloved hand on his shoulder. It’s Troy.”Rozanov...”

“What the fuck happened?” Ilya demands and then yells. “Hollander!”

A last name feels ridiculous but also necessary. Fuck, sometimes he hated this sport. They are out, but there are still so many rules. Etti-something Shane calls it. *К черту это*.

Shane doesn't answer him. He's still hunched over, but a Centaur's defensemen is helping to glide him toward the bench. A trainer meets him halfway with a towel. When he presses it to Shane's face, Shane tosses off his glove and takes it, finally righting himself and holding it to his face. He turns to look at Ilya a second before he steps off the ice. Ilya sees calm on Shane's face. There's a scowl of anger and a pinch of pain, but in his eyes, Ilya sees the calm, rigid normalness that is his Shane. His shoulders relax a little as Shane makes his way down the tunnel.

“Who?” Ilya turns to Troy.

Troy tips his head. “That rookie Satler. They're angry. They blew a lead, and they're losing the game.”

“And they hate Shane,” Ilya adds. He starts to skate towards the penalty box where the ref has deposited Satler. But he stops center ice. Shane made him promise never to react to any of the bullshit the Metros might pull.

“It will only make it all worse,” Shane had warned. “You'll be giving them what they want.”

So now, Ilya grits his teeth, fairly certain he's destroying his mouthguard, and then skates to his own bench. Their enforcer, Gallner, also got sent to the box for clocking Satler after he high-sticked Shane.

The trainer who gave Shane the towel taps Ilya's shoulder as he leans on the boards in front of their bench, trying to look casual, mentally wishing he could burn the building to the ground with every Metros player and fan still inside. “He's fine. Getting stitched up. Probably back out before the end of the period.”

Ilya grunts with a nod. “Thank you.”

“Until then, I will make them pay,” Ilya mutters to himself like a vow.

By the time Shane's back, wearing a full cage instead of a visor to protect the three dark stitches and the darkening bruise on the left corner of his chin, Ilya and Troy have both scored.

Coach puts Shane out in the final minutes of the game, with Ilya and Troy on wing. Shane wins the face-off and passes it immediately to Ilya, who makes sure to drop it back to Shane so the last goal of the night is his. It's an empty-netter, which, in Ilya's opinion, stings more for the asshole Metros.

Ilya takes a skate by the Metros bench before skating to his own for the line of congratulatory fist bumps. He does nothing but smirk, making sure to look as many in their shitty eyes as

possible. It's enough to garner a bunch of "fuck yous" from the team, boos from the fans, and a warning from the ref.

Ilya's mood doesn't lift even with the 5-2 win. He clenches his fists and barks out responses with the post-game press and declines to comment on whether he thinks the high-stick was an accident. He pulls out the classic Ilya attitude, saying, "You have to ask Hollander. I was busy scoring. I saw nothing."

He also barks, "Next question," when asked if it was harder to play well when his husband is injured. Because it was impossible to answer, and the asshole knew it. If he says yes, he looks like he's not committed to the game. If he says no, it looks like he's not committed to his husband.

Finally, after what feels like forever, they're settling into their seats on the team plane. It was only forty minutes in the air and then another twenty minutes to their house. Ilya could keep it together. He could. He had to.

Shane held ice to his face, in intervals, the entire flight. Ilya sat beside him, his hands tucked under his own thighs to keep from touching Shane. They tried to act like teammates, not a wildly in love married couple at 'work'. This was the most impossible it had ever felt.

When they get to Shane's Range Rover at the airport parking, Ilya takes the keys from Shane, who is about to hop into the driver's seat. "I can drive, Ilya. It's just a cut."

"I need a distraction," Ilya says. "I don't want to think my thoughts. If you let me drive, I will be thinking about the road and how slow your engine is instead."

"My engine is fine," Shane grumbles. "It's good even. My car is... fine. Drive."

Before Shane can walk around the car to the passenger door, Ilya puts a gentle hand to his swollen chin. The skin still has dried blood on it because he purposely didn't get it wet in his post-game shower. The ends of the stitches look like errant whiskers Shane forgot to shave. Only Shane's whiskers wouldn't be that thick. In his thirties, and he still can't grow a decent beard. Ilya teases him, but secretly likes it like that.

"Seriously. I'm fine."

"I fucking hate Montreal."

"I know, and I love you for it."

"Call your mother," Ilya tells Shane as they get into the car and reach for their seatbelts. "She has left me five messages."

"She knows you don't do voicemails."

Ilya nods and puts the car in gear. "And yet she starts every one with 'Hi, Ilya, I know you don't check voicemail but...'"

Shane smiles at the high, sing-songy voice Ilya uses to imitate Yuna Hollander but immediately winces from the pain of stretching the skin on his face. "I'll call her."

That night, although he's exhausted and needs sleep, Ilya lies awake staring at the ceiling in the dark and listening to Anya snore in her bed by the bedroom fireplace. Shane's sleeping on Ilya's left bicep, or so he thought, until he feels a hand sliding up his thigh. Ilya puts a hand on top of Shane's to still it. "You should be sleeping."

"*You* should be sleeping." Shane retorts. "Tell me what you're thinking that is so all-consuming you won't let me distract you?" Shane squeezes Ilya's thigh under his palm. Ilya laces his fingers through Shane's, lifts their entwined hands out from under the covers, and brushes the back of Shane's hand against his lips. "Could have been worse. Could have been your eye."

"I wear a visor, Ilya. For that reason."

"Could have been even worse than that," Ilya goes on. "Could have been your freckles."

Shane laughs and tilts his head to look up at Ilya. "You're losing sleep over this?"

Ilya stares down at him. "I'm losing sleep over the fact it might have been on purpose."

Shane blinks, then pulls his hand away, then his whole body as he reaches to flip on the light on his bedside table.

He rolls back and props his head up on one hand and gently cups Ilya's face with the other. "They're dicks to me, but they aren't trying to kill me. Or even hurt me on purpose. Satler is a rookie. He was frustrated and got sloppy."

"Or one of the vets told him to do it. Or that asshole coach."

"Hayden texted and told me he hoped I was okay. That they all hope I was okay and could he give Satler my number so he could apologize personally."

Ilya makes a sound in the back of his throat. Shane brushes the backs of his fingers over Ilya's cheekbone. "Thank you for not losing it on the ice."

"Oh, I was losing it," Ilya argues, his eyes dark and hooded with anger. Shane hates seeing him this way.

"Thank you for not punching anyone," Shane replies, to be clearer. "I'm okay. And this, the way the Metros hate me, it's not your fault, Ilya. It's theirs. They chose to treat me like garbage. They chose to be homophobic or whatever. You did nothing wrong. You didn't make me ask for a trade. They did."

Ilya nods, but he worries he'll carry guilt forever about this. Shane moves his hand, brushing the backs of his fingers down Ilya's chest, over his nipple, across his ribs, to his hip, and then, across his downy treasure trail to his cock, which, despite Ilya's mood, seems to think it's playtime.

Shane smiles. Ilya shakes his head. "You're injured. You need to rest."

"Well, I don't think I can give you a blow job for a while," Shane says and dips his head to trail kisses down the side of Ilya's neck. "But I can take a dick other ways. Nothing below the waist was injured."

Ilya frowns, but his cock jerks as Shane wraps his hand around it and gives him a lazy tug. "A dick?" Ilya mutters.

"*Your* dick," Shane murmurs back against the crook of his neck. "The only dick I ever want."

Fuck it. Ilya is done letting the Metros and their asshole fans fuck with his mood. He rolls over and doesn't stop until he's on top of Shane. He kisses him, forcing himself to be gentle, but Shane still winces lightly. Ilya swears in Russian and moves his mouth to Shane's neck.

Fourteen minutes later, after they've teased each other and Ilya has Shane's hole ready, he pushes the tip of his cock past the first ring of muscle, and as Shane arches his back and moans. Ilya whispers, "I wish they could fucking see this. Those assholes would be so jealous. You are fucking beautiful. This..."

"*We* are..." Shane pants. "And no one gets to see me, but you."

"Shame," Ilya pushes deeper. Shane whimpers.

They fuck slowly and gently until they can't. Until Shane begs Ilya for more. Harder. Faster. And Ilya flips his husband onto his back and grabs his hips and demands Shane come because he can't hold on much longer. Shane obeys, releasing all over the duvet and his own hand while whispering 'Rozanov' like a Gregorian chant. The nostalgia of the last name is what throws Ilya over the cliff into his own abyss. He drops over Shane, biting his shoulder as he comes so hard he swears he almost blacks out.

Shane's body is now flat against the mattress, and Ilya's flat on top of Shane. Once Ilya is sure his heart isn't going to explode, he rolls them both so he's the big spoon and Shane is the little one. He wraps his arms around Shane's chest and buries his nose in the hair at the base of Shane's neck as his cock softens inside his husband, eventually slipping out.

"When we have kids, they're never coming to a game in Montreal. I don't want them to see the way people treat you."

Shane didn't respond right away, and Ilya thought he might have fallen asleep. Maybe that was for the best. "You... want kids?"

Shane's voice was soft but not sleepy.

"You know this. This is not news."

"But... like while we're still playing?"

"Maybe?" Ilya returns softly. "Might be nice to put a baby in the Cup when we win together. Good photo for the living room."

Shane laughed softly. “Yes. Wall décor is a great reason to procreate.”

“Pro what?”

“It would be more difficult. To have a baby while we’re still playing,” Shane murmurs, gently, like he’s worried about hurting Ilya’s feelings.

Ilya kisses the base of his neck. “Hayden has four. Can’t be that hard if Montreal’s twelfth-best player can do it four times.”

“Jackie is at home all the time. They both don’t go on road trips,” Shane notes, and then. “I thought Hayden was fifteenth best?”

“Montreal has gotten worse players lately,” Ilya shrugs. “Like stupid rookies with no stick control. Sadly, Pike is better than that.”

Ilya can’t see Shane smile, but he knows he’s doing it. He starts to pull away, and Ilya lets him get out of bed, but he moans in disapproval. “We have to clean up.”

Ilya admires his husband’s naked ass before he gets up to join him.

When they’re clean and back in bed, Ilya is beyond exhausted, and it’s stupid late. Later than they should be awake, regardless of the fact that there was no practice or game tomorrow. He rolls onto his side, and Shane rolls towards him. They’re foreheads are inches apart. Ilya’s eyes are so heavy. “My parents could watch the baby when we’re at away games.”

“That’s a lot of work,” Ilya murmurs. His words feel heavy, hard to form and speak. He’s so fucking tired.

“I already kind of asked... I mean, in a vague way. My mom was thrilled with the idea,” Shane confesses. “It was a casual conversation. About, like, logistics, if we were to have kids sooner rather than later. Mom basically volunteered. But said there was no pressure.”

Ilya’s words are less sleepy now. “So you thought about it too?”

“Yeah. A lot, I guess.”

Ilya smiles, and his heart is suddenly wide awake and pounding in his chest. “We are going to do this? Soon?”

“I mean... *we* aren’t doing it. We need to find someone to do it with us. For us?” Shane’s black eyebrows pinch. “And decide which one of us... Mean there are options for like how two guys... like you could.. I mean, you like women, so you could just like actually...”

“Are you concussed? Did they check for concussion?” Ilya growls, annoyed. He cups the back of Shane’s head, bringing him closer so their foreheads touch. “Hollander, I am not fucking anyone but you ever again. We find... what is the word.. woman who agrees to carry baby for us.”

“Surrogate.” Shane clarifies. “And sometimes you also need separate donor eggs. We have to decide. And whose stuff... sperm... We’ll use.”

“Yours,” Ilya replies flatly like there is no room for debate. In his mind, there isn’t.

He comes from bad genes. Dementia and depression, and Alexei’s drug problems. It’s not fair to a baby. Shane is smart and healthy. Sure, he overthinks things, and he sees more black and white than gray when it comes to problems and life, but he’s kind and good and... not at all defective like Ilya. And has freckles. Ilya dreams of a baby with freckles and dark, sensitive eyes.

“We can decide later,” Shane says cautiously, like he knows that it’s too big a conversation for the middle of the night.

“Yes, later,” Ilya rolls onto his back, and Shane snuggles in, his head on Ilya’s chest. “We sleep, then we plan.”

“It’s not going to be simple.”

“We do complicated well. Eventually.” Ilya reminds him. “Night, Shane.”

“Good night, Ilya.”

## ***2 Years after the Long Game***

“I am proud of you. All of you.” Ilya says. The words don’t come easily, not because they’re English. Not because he doesn’t mean them, he does. But because, proud or not, he’s as devastated as they are.

The Ottawa Centaurs just lost the Cup. On home ice. In game 7. Overtime. There wasn’t a more heartbreaking way to lose in this sport. It was the Hat Trick of failure. But these guys, every single one of them, gave it everything they had. Ilya couldn’t fault them, and he was trying to let them not fault themselves. “I fucking hate the result, but I will forever be proud of you all.”

Fuck. He’s *not* going to cry. Ilya crumples down to the bench in front of his stall, covering his face with his hand and forcing himself to hold it together. Shane stands up from his spot across the silent locker room. He crosses the room wordlessly. Bood, who has the stall next to Ilya, is in the medical room and has been since he got laid out in the second period. Someone said something about a broken rib or two. So Shane takes Bood’s spot. He rests one hand across the base of Ilya’s neck and squeezes gently. When Ilya finally lifts his head with a sniff, he doesn’t look at Shane. He just starts undressing, and Shane does the same.

Shane waits for Ilya in the hallway. He sped through his post-game routine, eager to get the hell out of there. Ilya has to make a pit stop to check on Bood, so Shane meets his parents in the Friends and Family room. His dad gives him a hug. His mom looks like she might cry as she tells him. “I wanted this for you boys so badly.”

When Ilya joins them, Yuna pulls him into a hug. She squeezes him tight and rubs his back, and although Ilya squirms out of it rather quickly, Shane knows it isn't because he doesn't appreciate the motherly affection. It's because he does, and it's too much in this moment. He sniffs and thanks both of them for coming. They all walked to their cars silently. Yuna and David get into theirs with promises to reach out in a couple of days, knowing the boys need time to themselves.

Ilya drives. Shane stares out the window, but he drops a hand onto Ilya's thigh, and his shoulders drop a little when Ilya puts his hand on top of Shane's and laces their fingers. Anya greets them with slobbery kisses and a wagging tail. Shane has to admit her enthusiasm and unwavering love, feels good. They both drop to their knees in the front hall to drown themselves in her attention.

Ilya gets up first, after almost ten minutes. He walks over to the table by the front door and grabs Anya's leash. Shane's brow furrows. Usually, after a game, they just let her out in the backyard to relieve herself. "I need the air. I'm not tired."

Shane almost asks if he wants company, but he knows Ilya doesn't. So instead, he nods and toes out of his shoes and watches as Ilya hooks Anya's leash onto her collar and heads out the front door. Shane climbs the stairs to the bedroom and reminds himself not to take it personally. This is a big loss for all of them, and he and Ilya have both been knocked out of the playoffs before, but never this close to winning it all. The pain is sharper and deeper, and Ilya needs space to deal with it, and that's okay. Shane kind of needs a minute, too. The sadness feels stronger when they're in it together.

He undresses, folds his clothes, and tucks them away in their massive walk-in closet and then crawls into bed, naked, every muscle aching just as hard as his heart aches. He feels the loss everywhere. All he wants to do is sleep so he can stop feeling, but he forces himself to stay awake until he hears the front door open again. Once he knows Ilya is home, he drifts off.

He expects to wake up with Ilya snoring softly beside him. Ilya always snores during playoffs, and Shane thinks it's because he's so much more exhausted than normal. But the room's silent, and when he reaches across the king-size bed, his fingertips are met with nothing but cool, empty sheets. Shane's heart stutters in his chest, and he sits up with a start. He blinks furiously, his brain feels like it's swimming in soup. He's still exhausted, but now he's panicked. Where is his husband?

He makes his way out of the room, down the hall, down the stairs. Everything on the first floor is dark. His heart starts really pounding, and his senses are being jostled awake by the confusion and panic coursing through his veins. He stands at the bottom of the stairs with the living room directly in front of him, the front door to the right, and the kitchen to his left. The dining room is behind him, the games room beyond the living room. There's not a sound coming from any direction, no light from under the basement door either, which leads to their home gym.

"Ilya?" Please may he not have left the house again?

Shane hears the familiar click of Anya's nails on the hardwood. She appears in the doorway of the living room, looking sleepy but still wagging her tail. Shane goes to her, bends slightly

to scratch her ears, and glances across the dark room. There's a lump on the couch.

Shane lets out a breath he didn't realize he was holding and moves to it. He kneels down beside Ilya who's asleep, curled into the fetal position. He's holding his cross loosely between his thumb and forefinger as it hangs around his neck. Shane brushes his fingers across the curls resting on Ilya's forehead and then over his cheek. "Ilya. Come to bed."

Ilya's golden eyelashes fluttered as he struggles to open his eyes. "You're naked."

Shane glanced down. His cock hung softly between his legs. "Yeah. I should have thrown on something but when I woke up, and you weren't there, I panicked."

"Is okay. I'm here."

"Come to bed. Our bed." Shane urges, and Ilya slowly unfurls his big body and gets to his feet. Shane takes his hand and leads him up the stairs, and then he stands in front of Ilya on Ilya's side of the bed and helps him undress. Shane resists the urge to take his clothes and put them away in the closet.

His urge to feel his husband against him, skin-to-skin, trumps his obsession with order tonight. Shane lifts the covers, and Ilya crawls underneath, but instead of letting Shane walk to his side of the bed, Ilya pulls Shane down on top of him. He wraps his arms around Shane's broad back, shifts his legs so Shane's right is nestled between Ilya's, and he kisses the top of Shane's head. "I wanted you to win so badly."

It's a hoarse whisper, so Shane isn't sure he hears him at first. "I wanted *us* to win."

"Yes, but you... I wanted it for you so you would not regret coming here. To Ottawa," Ilya goes on, still only in a whisper. "To me. I wanted it so you would never regret."

Shane lifts his head and stares at Ilya. It's dark, but he can make out the whites of his eyes, so he knows Ilya is staring back.

"Ilya, I don't care if I ever win another Cup. I would never regret getting to play with you. Be with you every day. Every road trip. Every fucking loss." Shane brushed their lips together. "This is all that really matters. You. I love you more than hockey or Cups."

"Still..."

"Ilya, no. No still. No buts. I love you more." Shane kisses him now. Not gently, not a peck. He claims his husband's mouth with confidence, and need and love. So much fucking love. "I love you more than anything."

"*Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu. Bol'she vsego na svete,*" Ilya repeats Shane's words, like an oath in Russian.

"I know you feel that way," Shane whispers against Ilya's cheek, proud that his online Russian classes have helped him understand at least this tonight. "I need you to believe I do too."

“I do... I think. I do.” Ilya yawns, and Shane rests his head on Ilya’s chest and listens to his heart beat until he drifts to sleep.

The loss is still heavy in his chest as Shane slowly floats back into consciousness. He has no idea what time it is, but the sun is poking through the gap in the curtains, and his stomach rumbles slightly. He knows Ilya is still in bed with him. He can hear his heavy breathing, but more importantly, Shane can feel him. Ilya’s front is molded to Shane’s back. Shane can feel Ilya’s nipples against his back, cock is pressed into Shane’s left ass cheek, and it’s hard. Ilya’s left arm is thrown over Shane’s left hip, and Ilya’s hand is grazing Shane’s own erection.

Without opening his eyes, he takes Ilya’s hand and moves it so it’s pressed against Shane’s shaft. He places his fingers over Ilya’s and gently pushes them, manipulating them until Ilya’s strong fingers are wrapped around Shane’s cock. Ilya makes a sound, like a groan or a moan. He rocks his hips, slowly pushing his own dick into the smooth skin of Shane’s ass. Shane arches, pushing his ass into Ilya and causing his cock to pull back. Ilya’s grip stays strong because Shane’s hand is still holding Ilya’s in place. The result, Ilya stroking Shane. Shane fights a shiver and lets out a heavy breath and does it again.

Shane tilts his hips, and Ilya responds by rocking his own. The rhythm starts slow and unsteady but grows faster and with an urgent, steady pace. Shane keeps his one hand over Ilya’s so they jerk Shane off together, but he moves his other behind himself so his fingers can brush Ilya’s cock as he rubs it against Shane’s butt cheek. Ilya lifts his hand and holds it palm out in front of Shane. “Spit.”

Shane knows there’s probably ten bottles of lube in the house, one or two in the night tables alone, but he doesn’t bother to get them. He spits into Ilya’s hand and shudders as Ilya’s wet palm wraps around Shane’s dick again.

It doesn’t take long after that. Shane is so tuned in, so desperate for this closeness. “Come for me, Hollander. I want to watch you spill all over my hand.” Ilya sucks on the skin above Shane’s collarbone as Shane fucks his hand and then, suddenly and violently, Shane’s orgasm rips out of him and he spills all over Ilya’s hand.

He quivers and shakes as Ilya uses his free hand to grip Shane’s hip and rub his own dick harder against Shane’s ass cheek. He can feel Ilya’s precum against his skin. He turns, rolling over until he’s facing Ilya and then pushing him onto his back. He shoves Ilya’s thick thighs apart and crawls between them. Ignoring the ache that still haunts his tired muscles, Shane wraps a hand around Ilya’s cock and presses the flat of his tongue to the leaking slit. Ilya’s body melts, and his hands rake through Shane’s hair. “Oh fuck... Hollander.”

It used to be Shane longed to hear his first name on Ilya’s lips, once he got over the initial freak out. Now, though, when Ilya used his last name, it made him absolutely feral with nostalgia. This morning, it was all the encouragement he needed to wrap his lips around Ilya and start sucking his husband off like their lives depended on it.

He kept one hand around Ilya’s throbbing shaft and moved the other to play at the entrance of his hole. Ilya didn’t bottom, and Shane had no urge to become a peg instead of a hole, but recently, Ilya was into a little ass play. A finger pushing past the first couple rings of muscle

was usually greeted with Ilya chanting Russian obscenities and whispering Shane's name like he was a God Ilya was praying to.

Today, in the gentle morning light is no different. Shane pushes a finger into Ilya and takes even more of his cock in his mouth, and Ilya arches his back and tugs the ends of Shane's hair. An embarrassingly short time later. "Shane... oh fuck... I'm close... I'm gonna."

It was a polite warning. Shane usually moved away to watch Ilya come, but today he wanted to feel it, not watch it. So Shane's lips stay on Ilya's cock, suck harder, and he pushes his finger just a little bit farther inside his husband until he feels that special spot. The one Ilya can find inside Shane with pinpoint accuracy after all these years. Ilya gasps, and Shane feels him explode against his tongue. He stills, lets Ilya's hips ride it out, and when they finally still, Shane pulls off and wipes his mouth on the back of his hand.

Ilya stares up at him through glazed eyes. He cups Shane's face. "I love you."

"I love you too." Shane moves to sit on the edge of the bed and leans down to kiss Ilya's forehead. "Are you hungry? I'm starving."

"But you just ate..." Ilya grins, and Shane shoves his shoulder and gets up off the bed.

"That was just a snack," he mutters, and he's blushing, and he sees Ilya's smile deepen.

"You go let Anya out, and I'll start pancakes."

Ilya's wide awake now. "Pancakes?"

Carbs and Shane do not mix, but Shane just shrugs. "Fuck it. It's the off-season."

Shane walks into the closet and pulls on some underwear while Ilya peppers him with excited questions. "Real pancakes, not those protein powder cottage cheese things you call pancakes? Can we make bacon? What about chocolate chips? I think there is a half-opened bag in the pantry."

"Yes, real pancakes with whatever sugary shit show you want to add to it," Shane walks out of the closet and throws a pair of sweats at Ilya, who is still sprawled on the bed. "See you downstairs."

His phone pings on the bedroom table, so Shane pauses to get it. Ilya lazily leans over and glances at the name on the text as Shane unplugs the phone and heads out the bedroom door with it. "Tell Rose hi!"

Shane waits until he's downstairs, completely alone, to open the text.

**ROSE: What did he say?**

Shane bites his bottom lip and writes back.

**SHANE: Haven't asked him yet.**

**ROSE: The suspense is killing me!**

She follows up with a bunch of upside-down happy faces. Shane laughs softly.

**SHANE: We lost last night. Been a rough 24 hours. I just need to find the right time.**

Shane put his phone on the counter and walks over to the pantry to get the pancake supplies. Anya yawns from her bed. “Hey, girl. Your dad will be down in a minute to take you out.”

Shane pauses. He likes saying that.

“What are you smiling at?” Ilya wants to know as he appears in the doorway to the kitchen.

“Nothing. Anya.” Shane says vaguely and starts laying out all the ingredients on the kitchen island, in the order he will be adding them to the recipe.

“Are you making your dad smile, sweet girl?” Ilya coos at the dog as he enters the living room, and she starts to pull herself out of her bed to make her way to Ilya.

Shane’s smile deepens. *Dad*. What a cool word.

“Okay. I take her around the block. Will give her a longer walk later,” Ilya says once he’s got Anya on her leash. He kisses Shane’s cheek as he passes through the kitchen. “Don’t want to miss pancakes.”

Shane chuckles.

A few minutes after Ilya’s gone, Shane’s phone chimes again. He brings over the bowl with the pancake mix and stirs as he reads it.

**ROSE: Don’t be mad at him if he says no. I might still be a sore spot.**

Shane pauses what he’s doing and grabs his phone after wiping his hands on a dishcloth.

**SHANE: You aren’t. He’s over it.**

**ROSE: Yeah but this is... this might be triggering.**

Shane thinks about it. Will this bother Ilya? When Rose suggested it, Shane immediately felt good, like it was the right call. The perfect solution.

Shane walks over to the griddle and checks the heat.

**ROSE: Make it crystal clear we won’t actually be making a baby. Not by bumping uglies anyway.**

**SHANE: There is nothing ugly about you but yes he knows that. He’s not gonna jump to that conclusion.**

**ROSE: You never know. Your man gets irrational over you. It’s adorable.**

Shane drops some butter onto the griddle, the fancy French stuff he keeps in the freezer. When it's sizzling, he scoops some pancake batter. The back door opens and closes as he's flipping the first pancake. "Anya wants to stay in the yard. She didn't lose the game of her life last night. Has too much energy."

"You didn't lose the game of your life either," Shane reminds him, and it hits him how much more this game mattered to Ilya and how weird that is. I mean, yes, Shane hates losing. Loathes it. He wanted the Cup so badly he could taste it, but now... It's the hardest loss he's ever had to swallow, but he's confident they will do it. Next year? The year after? Soon. They'll do it soon, and they'll win next time. He will lift the Cup with Ilya, and their names will be etched on it together. Forever. "We'll win it next time, and when we do, it'll be perfect."

"Mmm.." Ilya doesn't sound like he believes it, but when Shane glances over, he realizes his husband is busy stealing chocolate chips out of the bag on the counter.

His phone buzzes again. "Rose is chatty today."

Ilya's words are casual. Shane nods and concentrates on flipping another pancake. He has a nice stack, enough for both of them, and he can smell that his bacon is ready. He cooks it in the oven. Ilya taught him that trick. Shane always thought it has to be cooked in a frying pan, which is always so messy. Oven bacon was clean and crispy, and delicious

He piles all the pancakes on a plate and bends to pull the tray of bacon from the oven. "Baby, can you grab the syrup and some plates?"

Shane transfers the bacon to his own plate and then grabs the plate of pancakes in his free hand and turns to see Ilya staring at him. His mouth's shut in a firm line. His eyes are narrowed and his expression hard. "What is Rose talking about?"

"What?"

I saw part of the message flash on your screen." Ilya exhales. "Maybe have the clinic explain it."

Oh. Oh fuck.

"What? Shane?"

Shane walks over to the island and stands across from where Ilya sat next to Shane's phone. He carefully places down the plates of bacon and pancakes. "I'll explain while you eat. I don't want it to get cold."

"I want to puke, not eat," Ilya told him, his voice uneven. Now his eyes are wide. "Is something wrong? Are you sick?"

"What? No. God, why are you jumping to that?"

Ilya lifts an eyebrow and points at the phone. "Clinic! Your ex-girlfriend wants you to take me to a clinic."

Oh. Shane shook his head. “Ilya... I’m fine. And if I wasn’t, you would be the first to know, not Rose.”

“Well, is she sick then? Did she give you... something?”

“Ilya!” Shane snaps and stares at him like he’s completely lost all common sense. “I haven’t been with Rose in years! She didn’t give me anything. I will never tell her you even suggested that. How insulting.”

“I like Rose. I’m sorry. I just... why do you need to take me to a clinic?” Ilya demands.

Shane huffs out a breath. Why is it that every time he has a dream that something will go smoothly, it does the exact opposite? He walks over to the cupboard and grabs two plates. Back at the island, he fills one with three pancakes and four strips of bacon, crispy just how Ilya likes.

He puts the plate down in front of him. Ilya gently pushes it away. Shane frowns. “Eat, and I’ll explain.”

He waits until Ilya grabs a slice and aggressively bites off a big piece. Shane starts to fix his own plate as Ilya chews. Then he picks up his phone and reads Rose’s message. Ilya leans over the island, trying to read it too, and Shane lets him because it’s all coming out now anyway.

**ROSE: Maybe take him to the clinic and have them explain how it works. Then take him home and bring up the eggs part while giving him a blow job. My boyfriends always say yes to anything after blow jobs.**

Ilya’s eyebrows get higher and higher with every word. But he’s confused, and you can see it all over his pretty, unshaven face. His playoff beard is truly a thing lumberjacks would indoctrinate into their hall of fame. And Shane wants to feel it against his inner thighs one more time before he shaves it off. “Eggs? Like Chickens? What does a clinic and eggs mean? But I do agree about the boyfriend thing. I will say yes to anything after head. Is that why you let me come in your mouth? Because you want me to say yes to something.”

Shane frowns. “No. I wanted that because sometimes it’s hot as fuck.”

Ilya takes a bite of his pancakes, but he doesn’t look like he’s enjoying it. He looks like it’s a task he’s performing. And he doesn’t bother with the chocolate chips or whipped cream. “She is talking about a fertility clinic. And human eggs. Female eggs. *Her* eggs.”

Ilya looks genuinely concerned. “Is Rose trying to get pregnant? Is she okay?”

Shane swallows a bite of bacon. “Yes. I mean no. I mean... no, she isn’t trying to get pregnant, and yes, she’s fine. So fine in fact that she has offered... she has offered her eggs to us.”

Ilya looks relieved, and then he freezes, and then he chokes. His whole face turns bright red in less than a minute. Shane rushes around the island and pounds on Ilya’s back, but Ilya

waves him away and motions for liquid, so Shane hurries to the fridge, grabs the entire bottle of orange juice, and thrusts it at Ilya. He drinks straight from the bottle. After a second, he wipes his mouth and then wipes his eyes, which had started to tear up with the choking. They look so blue when they water. It's fucking gorgeous. "Rose Landry wants to give us her eggs?"

Shane nods. "She has the next few months off with no projects. She can do the procedures and harvest the eggs, and then we can use them whenever. We can freeze them, but I mean, they say it can be better to use them right away."

"Right away? This summer? With movie star eggs?" Ilya's brain is short-circuiting. Shane can literally see it. He abandons his pancakes and sits at the stool beside Ilya. Shane reaches out and puts a hand on top of Ilya's

"It's just an idea. We can talk about it. I didn't say yes."

"But you want this?" Ilya asks softly. Timidly, which is so out of character it makes Shane's heart skip.

"I want kids. With you."

"But they would be with her," Ilya says quietly.

Oh fuck. Shane cups the side of Ilya's face, his beard scratching Shane's palm as he turns his face to make Ilya look at him. "She's a donor. Same as a stranger except not. We know her background. Her medical history. We like her as a friend. But she wouldn't... she doesn't want to be a parent. That would be on us. And..." Shane knows this will set Ilya on another lap around the anxiety pool, but he says it anyway. "And it might very well be you having a baby with her eggs, not me. Depends on which boys get the job done."

Ilya blinks. That suggestion lands inside him like a lead balloon; Shane can see it as the color drains from his face. "I told you. Your sperm. Not mine."

"I know you said that, but—"

"Yours. I am..." he just shakes his head and averts his eyes. "Yours."

"You are perfect," Shane tells him firmly. "You are beautiful and talented and kind and loyal and funny, and I would love to see all of you in any kid of ours."

Ilya sniffs and gets up off the stool. It's never a good sign when he tries to put distance between them. "Ilya."

He shakes his head. "I go check on Anya."

Shane knows enough to let him go, but it kills him. It always fucking kills him. He sighs and takes the uneaten pancakes and puts them in the warming compartment in the oven and waits.

Ilya comes back a little over twenty minutes later. He looks like they never even had a tough conversation. He smiles as he opens the door and ushers Anya in, and then he beelines for the oven. Grabbing a mitt, he pulls the pancakes out of the oven. He dishes up two new plates for him and Shane and piles his with chocolate chips and whipped cream. He takes Shane his plate to where he's sitting on the couch in the living room. Shane normally doesn't like when they eat in the living room, but today he's willing to make an exception.

They eat in silence for a while, and then, when Ilya is almost finished, and Shane has gotten up to get them some long-overdue coffee and returned with the mugs, Ilya says. "She is nice to make such a generous, selfless offer."

"Yes."

"Kids could inherit that from her. Selflessness."

"I can be selfless."

"Yes, and boring," Ilya notes, and Shane smiles. Ilya doesn't, though. "I've done research. I know it's good to know the donor. I know it helps with the process. I know she's pretty and not boring and smart, and a good option. But she also loved you. You know... she is someone I thought would take you and... now she will have you in this way."

"Ilya, that's your heart being irrational," Shane says gently as he moves to sit beside Ilya on the couch.

"Okay, so I will ask Svetlana, and I will use her eggs."

Shane feels a sharp pain in his chest. It's fleeting. "If Svetlana wants to be a donor and you want Svetlana, then let's talk about it."

Ilya looks startled. "Oh, so I'm the only jealous husband?"

Shane laughs and puts his mug down on the coffee table, then reaches to take Ilya's. Then he moves into Ilya's lap, straddling him. "I get it. My first reaction to Svetlana is fuck no too. But you wouldn't be *sleeping* with her. And we like her. She's a good person. And she's got your heritage, and so if you—"

"I just said that to annoy you," Ilya admits. "I wouldn't ask Svetlana. She has her own family now, and I don't give a shit about my heritage."

Shane wishes he didn't look so sad when he said things like that. He kisses Ilya and lets his fingers sift through his soft curls. "I read up on this way that you can have twins. You use both of us and two eggs at the same time, and, I mean it's up the fate whether it works or not, but then it's fair."

"I don't want fair Shane. This isn't a hockey game," Ilya replies, and his hand starts moving slowly up and down Shane's back, rubbing him gently. "I want babies with freckles and boring DNA, not... what my family has."

Shane sighs. “I want you. I want to look at a baby and see those eyes that get impossibly light when you get emotional and that smirk that makes me want to forgive anything.”

“That’s very bad power for a child to have. Especially when they’re teenagers. They’ll run all over you.” Ilya advises sternly, and Shane laughs.

“Yeah, but you’ll call them on their shit.”

“Oh, so once again I’m the asshole?”

“Always.” Shane kisses him, and Ilya kisses him back, and they tip over on the couch and forget about the heaviness of their morning and lose themselves in each other’s bodies again.

The next day, Shane hears Ilya on the phone when he gets home from his parents. He’s laughing, and then he says. “Okay. Yes. We have a lawyer too. I will text you her number.”

Shane takes off his shoes and wanders until he finds Ilya in the games room, in front of the giant TV with a video game on pause. He smiles at Shane as he walks in. “Okay. Good. Thank you, Rose. I can’t say it enough, but thank you.”

Ilya ends the call and looks up at Shane, and Shane can’t breathe. Ilya nods. “Yes, I think it’s a good idea.”

“Oh my God.”

“Yes. We are going to try and have movie star hockey, baby,” Ilya announces and grins. “With freckles and a weak backhand.”

Shane’s eyes fill with tears, and he throws himself on his husband and holds on for dear life.

## **Two-and-a-Half Months Later**

Pre-season games are off to a hell of a start, but Ilya tries not to get too excited. Pre-season means nothing, and there are months of games to win. Months and months. So he concentrates on something that is just as daunting — their appointment at the clinic tomorrow. Shane has to jerk off in a cup. Rose came to town three days ago and had her eggs harvested.

Ilya had been freaking out internally ever since because this is real. This is happening. Shane was oddly calm and even upbeat. It’s like their nervous systems have switched bodies. Yuna and David noticed, hell, everyone probably noticed, as Ilya was jumpy and slightly unfocused at practices. He managed to pull it together for games, so at least the coach isn’t worried about him.

They’re watching Sports Centre on the couch and drinking the horrible bedtime tea Shane swears is good for their muscles and sleep patterns. The silence between them is a sure sign that something isn’t normal. They usually chirp the highlight reels on these shows. But

tonight, silence. Even when they show a clip of Scott Hunter scoring a hat trick against Buffalo.

And that isn't the only sign. They're tangled up in each other like old Christmas lights. Shane's left leg is over Ilya's right. Ilya's right arm is looped through Shane's left, and their fingers are tapping, pushing, and playing with each other's where their hands meet. Shane's head, when it's not upright to drink this horrible excuse for tea, is resting on Ilya's shoulder.

"Are you freaking out too?" Shane finally asks without looking at Ilya

"No."

"Liar. You just watched Hunter score a pre-season hat-trick and didn't say, 'Old man forgets to save his real moves for when it counts.'"

Shane used a horrible, deep, ridiculous Russian accent to mimic Ilya made Ilya's jaw drop. "I don't sound like that! Never do that again."

Shane giggles. Ilya shoves him away and tries to untangle himself from Shane, who puts his tea on the end table and tries to crawl into Ilya's lap. Ilya fights him, but he's still holding his tea, so he can't do much without spilling the horrible drink. Finally, Ilya gives up, Shane straddles him, and while holding his face in his hands, Shane claims a kiss. It's soft but deep, and Ilya almost spills the tea again.

Shane pulls away, takes the half-empty mug, and puts it on the closest end table, and then settles into Ilya's lap again. They stare at each other for a heartbeat and then hug. Both close their eyes and nestle their heads into the other's shoulder. Ilya can't decide if feeling Shane's heart hammering as hard as his is comforting or just reinforces his panic.

"I can't believe we're actually doing this," Shane whispers.

"I know. This time next year, we might be parents." Ilya says softly, and his heart skips a beat entirely.

Shane's lips brush the column of Ilya's neck. "There's still time for you to change your mind."

"No."

"Okay," Shane says softly, but Ilya knows it's not okay for Shane. He really wants Ilya to donate too. Ilya hates that he's denying Shane something he wants so badly, and he's lain awake so many nights trying to convince himself it would be okay to donate. But the fear is too deep.

The doorbell chimes, and Anya starts barking and runs for the front hall. Shane looks down the hall and back at Ilya, who shrugs. He has no idea who would be here at almost ten at night.

They both get up off the couch and walk over to the door. Ilya pulls it open to find Yuna standing there in sweats with her Uggs slippers on.

“Mom?”

“What’s wrong?” Ilya asks

Yuna gives him a small smile. “Nothing. I’m sorry to bother you. I just... can I come in?”

“Of course,” Shane widens the door, and Yuna steps in. She looks at the boys, both wearing pajama bottoms and nothing else.

“Sorry,” she says again. She holds up an envelope. “I was going through the mail from the PO Box for the Foundation. I... I usually pick it up once a week, at the post office, but I forgot for the last couple of weeks. We don’t usually get much mail anyway. I just... I...”

“Mom...” Shane looks confused and annoyed, having no idea what she’s going on about.

She holds up the letter again and turns to Ilya. “This was in the mail. It’s for you. From an Irina Kristina Rozanov.”

Ilya’s heart stops. His whole body freezes. It’s like his blood isn’t even circulating. “What?”

“Your niece?” Shane asks with his mouth hanging open as he stares at the envelope with the foreign stamps in the corner. He reaches and takes it from Yuna, looking at the handwritten address of the foundation on the front. Ilya leans in to examine it as well. The writing is large and bubbly and very young girl. Irina would be... Sixteen? Yes. Sixteen.

Ilya takes it from Shane. “Are you sure?”

“I mean... I didn’t read the whole thing.” Yuna says. “It starts with ‘Please give this to my uncle Ilya Rozanov. My name is Irina-Kristina. I am the only daughter of his only brother, and I would like to reach him.’”

Ilya stares at the letter, terrified of why Irina would be reaching out. Yuna keeps talking. “I stopped reading after that and brought it straight over.”

“Thank you,” Ilya says quietly. He takes the letter and walks away, into the living room. Anya trails at his feet. “I’ll take Anya out for last potty.”

He walks right through the living room and opens the back sliding door, and disappears outside. He knows Yuna and Shane are staring at him, but he doesn’t care. He needs the darkness of the backyard with only the sound of the crickets and Anya rustling in the bushes to give his thoughts the attention they need.

He has two theories on why Irina is reaching out. The first is to tell him she found out about him and the fact that he married a man, and that she wants to tell him he’s horrible and gross, and she is embarrassed he exists. The second is to tell him Alexei is sick, like dad, or dead. There’s one more possibility... she wants money. In the years since his father died, Alexei reached out three times – always to beg for money, and Ilya ignored him every time. He stopped reaching out entirely once Ilya and Shane became public knowledge. Alexei didn’t even want the money from a bisexual brother. Svetlana had told him that Russia had taken his

name off the plaques and trophies he had won for the country at junior levels. They didn't announce it, they just did it. Erased him quietly.

That's why he wanted desperately to make the next Canadian Olympic team. Fuck them. He stares at the letter and moves to stand under the motion light by the barbecue. He pulls out the simple sheet of paper that appeared to be written on.... Hotel paper? A Marriott hotel... in Switzerland.

He drops down to sit on the edge of one of the loungers and begins to read. The first thing that surprises him is that it's in English. Good English. Much better than Ilya's was at sixteen. Her penmanship, although bubbly, is neat and clean.

It starts exactly like Yuna said.

*Please give this to my uncle, Ilya Rozanov. My name is Irina-Kristina Rozaov. I am the only daughter of his only brother, and I would like to reach him.*

*Uncle Ilya, if this is in your hands, I hope you read it. I don't know what you think of me. I don't know anything. I remember you. I remember laughing with you and going to the park with you, and all the gifts you'd bring me back from America. But then you were gone, and my parents would never tell me why. They don't let me ask about you either. Dad kept saying you're dead, but I knew you weren't. People in Russia do talk about the defector. The gay traitor.*

Ilya closes his eyes for a moment and braces himself for whatever insult comes next. Then he forces himself to keep reading.

*I'm in a girls' hockey tournament in Switzerland as I write this. I am a center like you and very good. My teammate Oksana found your Foundation. We can Google here and get better results than in Russia. I see you are Canadian now. Good. That's better than Russia. And I saw you are married. He's a good hockey player and VERY cute!!!!*

Ilya smiled at that. And his shoulders started to droop as his muscles relaxed.

*I hope he loves you the way you deserve. The way this family didn't. I'm sorry we drove you away, Uncle Ilya, and I want you to know I still love you. Always! If you think of me sometimes and wonder how I'm doing, the answer is great! I am happy. I want to get a scholarship to a school outside of Russia when I'm older. Maybe Canada. McGill has a good girl's team. Anyway, my life is good, and I hope yours is as good as it seems on Google.*

*Be well. Hope we meet one day again!*

*Your niece Irina-Kristina (I go by Kris now, dad hates it).*

"Everything okay?" Shane asks gently, but Ilya still jumps. He didn't even hear Shane come into the backyard. "Mom left."

Ilya nods and sniffs and fights tears. He hands the letter to Shane. "She is good. She misses me."

“Ilya, that’s... good. It’s nice,” Shane replies softly. Ilya’s tone sounds angry, he knows, but he’s just choking on emotion and guilt. He left this poor little girl with Alexei and his wife, Nina. Nina was better than Alexei. She was good and kind to Irina-Kristina. A good mother, but she was also willfully ignorant of what a piece of shit she’d married. Still, what could Ilya do? He had to leave. He couldn’t steal his niece away with him. She would get a big chunk of money when she turned eighteen. That could pay for McGill or anywhere else she wanted to go.

He *did* think of her. Often. He worried. Now, that worry felt lighter. So did the guilt.

“Ilya, this is....” Shane doesn’t finish his sentence, and when Ilya looks up at him, he’s brushing his thumb over his eyelashes, wiping away his tears. “It’s great.”

“Yes. She seems good.”

“Is there a way you can write her back?”

Ilya thinks about it. “I could send something through Svetlana. She would be able to get it to Irina... Kris and not want Alexei to know. But I worry that if he did find out, he would punish her. Maybe it’s best I don’t.”

Shane rubs his back. “I knew she played hockey. Svetlana keeps tabs for me. At first, she got treated badly sometimes because of her gay, disgraced traitorous uncle. But she is so good of a player, people are ignoring that now.”

Shane smiles. “I didn’t know you were keeping such close tabs.”

Ilya nods and watches as Anya trots towards them, finally done with her nighttime potty routine. He reaches out, and she nuzzles her furry head into his palm. “I always worry she’s struggling, inside. But now I know for sure she is happy.”

“Maybe one day we can see her in person,” Shane says softly. “Meet somewhere in Europe, or she can visit us here. When she’s an adult and can make her own decisions. And has her trust fund to make those decisions.”

“Maybe,” Ilya says quietly. He didn’t want to hope.

He stands, turns, and wraps Shane in his arms. He holds him there, silently, for a long time. Until Anya whines in annoyance. He takes a deep breath. “I think maybe...”

Shane looks up at him, waiting for the rest of that sentence, but Ilya can’t say it. He’s terrified he’s even thinking it. So he swallows the words down and changes the subject. “I think we should get some sleep. Big day tomorrow. We make tiny freckled babies.”

“Shut up,” Shane laughs.

Ilya wraps an arm around his shoulders and guides him back into the house. Before bed, he tucks the letter into the top drawer on his side of the closet. Next to wear, he keeps his watch collection and his mother’s wedding ring, which he’d stolen from his father’s home when he’d been there for the funeral. He’d always thought he took the ring to one day give to his

niece. It was a family heirloom, and she was, after all, named after Ilya's mother. But now he wondered if they had a daughter, him and Shane, should he give it to her?

Ilya didn't sleep a wink. He watches the sunrise through the slight gap in the curtains and thinks of his happy, healthy, hockey-playing niece. The Rozanov family may not be cursed. Maybe Irina-Kristina has broken free of the darkness. Maybe... if Ilya fathered a baby, they would be free too? Maybe he could make sure of it?

Maybe.



The clinic is clean and smells faintly of bleach. The lady at the reception is polite with kind eyes. She brings them into a waiting area filled with pictures of babies who started in one of these rooms. Ilya's knee bounces until Shane lays a hand on it. A nurse comes and walks them down the hall to a small room. It's like a doctor's office, but less formal, and still white and sterile. She hands them a list of instructions and a clear plastic jar with a lid. Tells them to ask her if they have any questions, she would be down the hall, and then she leaves, closing the door behind herself.

Ilya stares at the jar. Shane stares at Ilya.

"This is so not hot," Ilya complains, and they both laugh.

They keep laughing until there are tears in their eyes and they're leaning on each other for support. "I don't even think I can do this."

"Liar. You get hard when I accidentally brush your thigh," Ilya reminds him. "You can do it."

"Will you help?" Shane asks softly and puts a hand under Ilya's jaw, tilting his head so he can cover his mouth with his own.

It was a wildly Shane Hollander kiss. The kind that made Ilya feral, where Shane starts tentatively, like he isn't sure what he's doing or if he's allowed to do it, but immediately becomes dominant and possessive and so fucking needy you can taste it on his perfect tongue. Ilya cups the back of his head and kisses him back with every part of his soul.

"Okay..." Shane pants against Ilya's lips, and his hands move to his pants. Ilya's hands join Shane's but not to help him undress, to stop him.

Shane's eyelashes flutter, and he pulls his eyes to meet Ilya's. Ilya inhales sharply. "Maybe I join you."

"Yeah, watching you jerk off would be hot as hell," Shane agrees, the real point Ilya was trying to make coasting right by. "I love when you touch yourself."

Ilya's skin heats at the praise. "We have to be careful, keep things... separate, and sadly, no blow jobs. Saliva can ruin—"

"I meant with my own cup."

Shane stills and stops talking. He takes a step back. “What? You mean... You changed your mind?”

“I mean... yes. Maybe. I don’t know. Probably.”

Shane huffs out a breathy laugh. “You kind of have to be sure. It’s not something you can take back.”

“I am.. I think. I mean.. if you want.”

“I want. I really fucking want,” Shane grabs Ilya and hugs him. When he speaks again, his voice is thick, and Ilya knows he’s fighting tears. “I want our babies to be both of us. I want to see you. I want.”

“It may not take. Still no guarantee.”

“I know. I’ll be fine either way, but I want you to try,” Shane pulls back and holds Ilya’s face and gives him a watery smile. “I want you to want to try.”

“I do. I do now.” Ilya kisses Shane’s forehead. “But if the baby is an asshole, remember, you asked for it.”

Shane laughs, his whole body shaking, and Ilya pushes him away. “Go stand in the corner and stop being hot. I have to calm this thing down and go get a cup.”

When Ilya comes back, they make out until they both feel like they might spontaneously combust. They take off each other’s pants and jerk each other off whispering dirty and sweet words, when they’re lips weren’t busy biting, sucking, nipping each other’s necks and jaws, and mouths.

Shockingly, Ilya comes first, turning away from Shane and aiming as best he could into the cup. Watching him come sends Shane right over the edge, and he almost drops the cup; his orgasm is so intense. They shakily put lids on their samples, fight to catch their breath, and clean up what didn’t make it where it was supposed to go. Then Ilya kisses Shane. After they’ve pulled up their pants, Shane reaches over and fixes Ilya’s hair. Shane had been gripping it in his fingers, and it was sticking up awkwardly on one side. Ilya smiles at him and down at the samples. “It is still fucking weird.”

“Yeah, but...” Shane kisses him. “Memorable.”

Ilya smiles. “I love you.”

“I love you too.”

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