we can't be friends (wait for your love)

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by justanotherexlover

Summary

“Mr. Hollander,” Dr. Jackson said. Shane looked at her again, and got a creeping sensation up the back of his spine. She continued, “Are you aware that you’re pregnant?”

Shane blinked. Pregnant? There was no way.

He knew he was a carrier, but he’d always been so careful about birth control and condoms. Militant about it, in fact. His hand drifted down to his stomach. Shane had been feeling nauseous lately, and maybe a little tired, but he’d chalked it up to too much training. The few pounds he’d put on were written off as a result of sneaking one too many Snickers bars when he was stressed.

“That’s–that can’t be right,” Shane said, shaking his head. He felt bile rise up in his throat again, and covered his mouth. Dr. Jackson quickly reached into a cabinet and handed him a blue bag, which Shane then proceeded to empty the contents of his stomach into.

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After getting his bell run by Marleau on the ice, Shane finds out he's pregnant.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

The first thing Shane was aware of when he gained consciousness was his pounding head, and saliva pooling in his mouth as if he were about to throw up. He opened his eyes and groaned at the sunlight peering through the curtains, bringing a hand up to block it. Since when had it been so bright in his room?

He shifted to turn away from the window, and realized with a start that his mattress was much smaller than he remembered, and his arm was… restricted? In a sling, he realized. His eyes shot open, glancing around the room. He was in the hospital.

It all came back to him in a rush. Bending over for the face-off, grinning at Ilya, and taking the puck. Skating down the ice like only he could, as if he were made for it, and then all 200-something pounds of Cliff Marleau slamming into him.

He groaned again and reached for the hospital remote, tapping the 'call' button. He needed to know what was wrong with him—he needed to see his parents, to see Ilya, to assure them all that he was okay. Based on the sling on his arm and the pounding in his head, he could hazard a guess that he might be out for a few games. Plus there was the nausea. Maybe he'd be out for the rest of the season.

The door opened and a short, dark-skinned woman wearing scrubs and a lab coat came in. She smiled at Shane, and picked up a clipboard off a side table. That must be his chart. He itched to read it.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hollander," She said, and walked right up to his bedside, putting a hand on one of the guardrails. Shane sat up straighter as she continued, "I'm Dr. Jackson. How are you feeling?"

Like I'm about to hurl, Shane wanted to say. He forced himself to swallow down the bile he felt rising and gave her a weak smile back, "Okay. My head hurts."

"That's because you have a concussion, and a fractured collarbone," Dr. Jackson said, her face twisting in sympathy. Shane pressed his lips together. Definitely out for the playoffs, then.

"Where's my phone?" Shane asked, glancing around. He needed to text Ilya, to let him know that he was okay. He was sure that watching Shane get knocked down like that had to have hurt.

"Your things are with your parents, but I advise against phone use for the first 48 hours after a concussion, and limited use in the weeks after," Dr. Jackson said. Shane sighed. There was no way he'd be able to convince his mom to give him his phone.

"Mr. Hollander," Dr. Jackson said. Shane looked at her again, and got a creeping sensation up the back of his spine at the look on her face. She continued, "Are you aware that you're pregnant?"

Shane blinked. Pregnant? There was no way.

He knew he was a carrier, but he'd always been so careful about birth control and condoms. Militant about it, in fact. Ilya made fun of the alarm that went off on Shane's phone at the same time every night, and how he'd stop whatever he was doing to take his birth control pill.

His hand drifted down to his stomach. Shane had been feeling nauseous lately, and maybe a little tired, but he'd chalked it up to too much training. The few pounds he'd put on were written off as a result of sneaking one too many Snickers bars when he was stressed.

"That's–that can't be right," Shane said, shaking his head. He felt bile rise up in his throat again, and covered his mouth. Dr. Jackson quickly reached into a cabinet and handed him a blue bag, which Shane then proceeded to empty the contents of his stomach into.

"I'm afraid you are pregnant. We did an ultrasound once the test came back positive, while you were unconscious. We had to check the status of the fetus after the hit you took," Dr. Jackson explained, looking at him sympathetically. Shane's blood ran cold.

He'd played hockey while pregnant. He understood that injury was part of the job, but he didn't sign on for this. Bile rose up in his throat again, and he took a deep breath.

"And how is… it?" Shane asked, tension creeping into his voice. He honestly didn't know what answer he wanted to hear, and he hated himself for it.

"The pregnancy seems healthy. You're about eight weeks along," Dr. Jackson said. The relief that flooded through Shane was so visceral and shocking that he had to lay his head back on the pillow and take a moment. His hand drifted down to his stomach again.

"Mr. Hollander, you do have options," Dr. Jackson said, and Shane looked at her again as she continued, "I understand there is a need for discretion given your status as a professional athlete. Upon your discharge I can provide a prescription for pills to end your pregnancy at home while you recover from your concussion. Or I can refer you to a doctor that can help you see this pregnancy through."

Shane was so thankful for Dr. Jackson that he made a mental note to send her flowers once he got out of here. Her frank demeanor was good for him–she didn't beat around the bush. Oddly, it reminded him of Ilya.

Oh *fuck*. Ilya.

What was Shane going to tell him? Should he even tell him anything? There was no point if he wasn't keeping it, right? It could just be his secret.

"I'd like the pills, please," Shane said, and his heart twisted inside of his chest. Dr. Jackson nodded.

"We haven't given you pain medicine because it's contraindicated in pregnancy. The carrier's comfort is usually placed above all else, though, so we can give it to you now, if we have

your permission?" Dr Jackson asked.

Shane swallowed. His head was still pounding, and anytime he moved his right arm a hot searing pain shot down from his collarbone. And he wasn't keeping the baby anyway, right?

He found himself shaking his head, which made the back of his eyes start to throb. Some instinct inside of him wouldn't let him do it.

"Would you like me to bring your parents back here?" She asked.

He leaned back against the pillows, his gaze on the ceiling. He felt like he'd been carved out on the inside, hollow. He blinked and realized there were tears in his eyes.

"Maybe in an hour?" He asked, his voice raw. She nodded again and gave him one final sympathetic look before exiting and leaving Shane alone.

He put both hands on his stomach, and an image flashed through his mind. A little baby with curly blonde hair and grey-blue eyes. The image made the hole in his chest feel cavernous. Tears were freely flowing down his cheeks now.

For once, he allowed himself to feel. To cry. To mourn for the regular life that he couldn't have—not while playing hockey. Although he was out for the playoffs, he wanted to be back on the ice next season, and he couldn't exactly do that while pregnant.

And Ilya—they'd were better than they'd ever been, somewhat on the same page for once, but a baby? Ilya had already been clear he couldn't return to Russia if him being bisexual went public. Shane couldn't endanger him like that.

But for that hour, he let himself want. To picture that little baby in his mind. He knew it was probably just hormones, but he couldn't help it. He'd always wanted kids, loved helping Hayden and Jackie with their brood. Maybe one day, when he retired, he told himself.

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Shane didn't bother putting up a front around his parents. He was too stuck in his own miserable head, the idea of a baby ping-ponging around in his skull. Or maybe that was the headache. Regardless, they seemed to chalk it up to him being disappointed about being out for the playoffs. He let them think that.

After a few hours of visiting his shoulders began to slump, tiredness washing over him. His mom noticed right away, and it only took a few words from Shane for his parents to say their goodbyes, with a promise to return tomorrow.

The second they were out the door, Shane turned onto his side and curled up. He thought about what it felt like to score a goal, the adrenaline and pride that surged through him when the puck hit the net. And then he thought about the tears in Hayden's eyes each time a new

Pike baby came into the world, how reverent his expression would get, as if his center of gravity had shifted. Obviously it must've been an incredible experience, or else he and Jackie wouldn't have done it three times resulting in four little Pikes.

Shane wasn't sure how long he laid there, staring at the wall. It could've been minutes, or hours. His head felt like it was stuffed full of Kleenex, as if he couldn't quite think clearly. And right when he noticed the sun setting outside the windows of the hospital, he heard a soft creek, and turned his attention to the door.

"Ilya," He said, watching as Ilya slipped in and quietly closed the door behind him. He sat up and found himself observing Ilya's features more than he ever had–the same features he'd been picturing on a baby.

"I uh… I just wanted to… Are you okay?" Ilya asked, uncharacteristically nervous. Shane could see the muscles in his jaw flexing.

"Concussion and a fractured collarbone, out for the playoffs," Shane said, nodding towards the sling his arm was sitting in. He felt nervous to talk to Ilya, which was ridiculous considering Ilya had seen him naked and twisted up like a pretzel.

But this was a different kind of vulnerability. Shane knew he couldn't tell him about the pregnancy, but he wanted to.

"Marleau feels terrible, he did not mean to hurt you," Ilya said. Shane was shocked to feel white-hot rage surge through him at the reminder of what Marleau did, what he risked, but he took a deep breath. It wasn't his fault. Shane himself hadn't even known he was pregnant.

"Part of the game. We all get our bell rung eventually, right?" Shane tried for humor. It didn't land. The tension in the air was thick enough to cut through.

"Right," Ilya said. He moved closer to Shane's bedside, as if he needed to prove to himself that Shane was okay. He looked away and then added, "You scared me."

Shane felt a lump rise in his throat. He wondered how much more scared Ilya would be if he knew just how much had been at risk for that game.

"I'm sorry I didn't text you last night," Shane said.

"No, is okay," Ilya said, and he brought a hand up to Shane's face, rubbing his thumb softly across the bruises under Shane's eyes.

The tender gesture made Shane's eyes sting. He wanted to tell Ilya–but he couldn't, at least not here. But maybe… Maybe he could do it privately? Maybe they could really give this a shot–even if Shane didn't keep the baby, they could actually be something to each other. He wanted that so badly that it hurt.

"I wanted… I wanted to ask you something," Shane said, attempting to be braver than he actually felt. He'd already been considering this before… Everything, anyway, "Will you come to my cottage this summer?"

“Hollander,” Ilya started, but Shane barreled forward.

“Come stay with me. Don’t go to Russia,” He said, and it was the closest he’d ever been outside of sex to begging Ilya for anything. He looked into Ilya’s eyes and tried to plead with him, hoping he’d get the message about how important this was.

“You know I cannot do that, Hollander,” Ilya said, pulling his hand away from Shane’s face. Shane felt like he’d been hit. When had he gone back to being Hollander?

“Okay,” Shane said, his voice quiet. He wasn’t going to fight Ilya, not for this. Ilya didn’t want him now, and he didn’t want the pregnancy to change that. Then he might feel obligated to Shane. Shane didn’t want to trap him into anything.

He could do it alone.

“What are you thinking about so loudly?” Ilya asked. Shane avoided his eye.

“I just have a headache. I should probably get some sleep,” Shane said, hoping the dismissal was obvious.

“Okay,” Ilya said, hesitating for a moment and then walking to the end of the bed, “Text me soon?”

“I will,” Shane promised, and then watched Ilya leave. The hole in his chest was still there, aching, but his face was slack with exhaustion as he laid back on the pillows and stared at the ceiling.

He had no tears left to cry.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Once Shane was released from the hospital, he was brought to his parents' home in Ottawa for concussion protocol. He was still only allowed limited screen time, and spent most of his time sitting in the backyard and… Staring. At the way the wind rustled the trees, or the way dew collected on grass. He found that he didn't have the mental capacity for much more than that.

His parents tried to gently prod him, to get him to watch bits of pieces of hockey games or open up about his feelings for next season. It all went in one ear and out the other. He was certain that they chalked it up to him being disappointed about being off for the playoffs, effectively ruining Montreal's chance at a Cup this year, but Shane knew what it really was.

His hormones were fucked right now, and it might be making him depressed.

Shane tried not to think about being pregnant, about the pills burning a hole in his backpack. Unfortunately, it was as if once he knew about it, his body decided to go full throttle on this whole pregnancy thing. Every time he got a bout of nausea, or when he winced as one of his shirts brushed his sensitive nipples, he was reminded of the little passenger who'd hitched a ride inside of him without permission.

So every day he woke up on the verge of vomiting, and headed to the bathroom, turning on the shower to cover the sounds of his retching. He would shower, which was a generous term for letting the water run over his body while he stared at the tile wall in front of him.

He'd sit in the backyard until lunch, when his mom would force him inside and make him eat something–although Shane usually opted for something small, to soothe his stomach. He explained it away with comments about his diet. He'd lay on the couch for the afternoon and use his half-hour of phone time to obsessively research pregnancy, or go through his messages with Ilya, who'd texted him a few times since visiting in the hospital. Shane never responded. He always felt like the unluckiest idiot in the world by the time he handed his phone off to his mom. He'd usually take a nap afterwards. He was so exhausted all the time.

It was the kind of tiredness that made everything feel like a chore. He hadn't even worked out since coming home–not even yoga. He couldn't bear the thought of it.

Shane would wake up in time for dinner, and at that point he'd usually be starving, which he knew had something to do with the parasite in his womb sucking up all of his energy and nutrients. He'd scarf down whatever his mom made, avoiding conversation as much as he could, before disappearing into his room for the night.

It was there that he allowed himself to feel a full range of emotions. Some nights he would take his cock into his fist and think about Ilya inside of him. Some nights he would cry, tears soaking into his pillowcase until it was wet and he had to flip it over.

And sometimes he did both. So overall, he officially considered himself at rock bottom.

Shane walked into the kitchen one morning, his hair still wet from the shower and his stomach turning. He sat down across from his parents, and took in the spread his mom had made. His nose crinkled at the fried eggs, and he opted for a piece of toast instead, forgoing the butter. The idea of butter or oil nearly had him retching again.

“Good morning,” Mom said, lifting her fork delicately to her lips and taking a bite of egg. Dad muttered the same, his attention on the copy of the *New Yorker* he was reading. Shane had the sudden random urge to throw the magazine into the trash.

“Morning,” Shane said, taking a small bite of toast. It was mostly crust, but he didn’t mind. The crunchy texture, oddly, helped his stomach. He wasn’t sure why.

“Did you see Boston got knocked out of the playoffs by the Admirals?” Mom asked. Shane hummed noncommittally. He’d known his parents were watching the game yesterday afternoon, only because he couldn’t nap on the couch while they were watching. The game schedule was the furthest thing from his mind right now, as the days blurred together.

“It was a good game. I recorded it, if you want to watch,” Mom said, using her fork to point to the archway which led to the living room. Shane was gripped with a sudden panic, and he wasn’t sure if it was the idea of watching hockey or seeing Ilya, even on video. He took a larger bite of toast to stall.

“No thanks,” He said, his mouth full. Mom gave him a look, and even Dad peered over his magazine to look at Shane quizzically.

“Honey,” Mom said, placing down her fork. She placed a hand on Dad’s arm, who took that as a signal to mark his place in his magazine before closing it and placing it on the table. Mom continued, “We’re worried about you.”

Shane took another bite of toast, his eyes darting between them. He had nothing to say.

“We’ve noticed that you’ve been… Upset, lately,” Dad said, taking off his glasses and placing them on top of the magazine. Dad cleared his throat, “We understand that getting injured before the playoffs is heartbreaking, but it’s also heartbreaking for us to see you like this. We love you, and we want you to be happy. You’ll understand when you have kids of your own.”

Kids of your own.

The back of Shane’s eyes started stinging, a telltale sign that he was about to start crying (a feeling with which he was very familiar lately). He stood up clumsily, too quick, and his chair scraped against the hardwood floor, producing a sound that made him cringe.

“I’m fine. I’ll be fine,” Shane said, his voice hollow, “I just need time.”

He left the room before either of them could press further, ignoring his mom calling his name. He headed out to the back deck and walked right past the Adirondack chairs and down

the steps into the grass. Shane picked a spot right in the middle of the backyard, where he could feel the sun on his skin, and sat down, spreading his legs out.

I need time, he'd said. But time was the one thing he didn't have. He'd been 8 weeks pregnant in the hospital, and that was 2 weeks and 4 days ago. He was 10 weeks and 4 days pregnant, and the pills in his bedroom would only work up to the 11th week. Thinking about it in terms of facts and numbers helped him feel somewhat in control.

He laid back on the grass, closing his eyes to block out the sun. His headaches had mostly stopped, but he was still supposed to limit his exposure to light. He knew Mom would be out here to give him his sunglasses in not long.

3 days. He had 3 days to take the pills.

Shane worked well under pressure, he always had. While others complained about hockey coaches yelling at them or forcing them to do bag skates, Shane thrived. When the clock ticked down on a tied game and he was passed the puck, he pushed himself to unbelievable limits to score. After all, pressure made diamonds, right?

Unfortunately, Shane feared that he'd cracked under the pressure. That maybe it'd been happening for a while, even before all of this. That this was just the final nail in the coffin.

Shane turned onto his side and rested his head on his arm, curling up. The grass tickled his cheek, and he took a deep breath. Fresh air had to help, right?

The worst part of it all, perhaps, was that the only person in the world he wanted to talk to about all of this was the one person he couldn't talk to. He'd never felt alone at the top because he always had Ilya right by his side, but now he had no one.

He often wondered what Ilya would say, if he could see Shane now. He'd probably crack some joke about Shane quitting his workout routine, to lighten the mood. Then, in Shane's imagination, Ilya would sit with him and ask him if he was okay, really okay. And then ask what he wanted to do.

For the first time in what felt like days, a small smile came onto Shane's face at the thought. And then it immediately melted off, because he realized how pathetic he was. He was getting dopey over the idea of his… fuckbuddy? (That term felt too crass for what he and Ilya were to each other, especially after Tampa, but it was the most correct one for their relationship) Comforting him. Consoling him about their… baby.

A baby. Or a fetus. He went back and forth in his mind on how he referred to it.

Shane tentatively brought a hand down to his lower abdomen. It was still mostly flat, but he had a small pudge there that was barely noticeable. He wondered how else pregnancy would change his body, hypothetically. From the research he'd done, it seemed like pregnancy made it to where your body wasn't your own anymore.

Then again, Shane's body hadn't been his own in a long time. He belonged to hockey, really and truly, had ever since he first put his feet into skates. Everything in his life since then had

been striving for a place in the MLH, and then a Stanley Cup, and then a second one. Truthfully, his secret goal had always been six Cups–not a record, because some players had earned a truly insane amount when there were less teams in the MLH–but still a great amount.

He wondered if six would feel like enough. If it would fill the hole in his chest. He closed his eyes and tried to imagine himself, probably in his late thirties or early forties, lifting his sixth Cup overhead. He would skate around the arena with it and WAGs and kids began to funnel onto the ice, and Shane would have… No one there for him.

He always had his parents, of course, but they wouldn't be allowed onto the ice then. It was for partners and kids. Neither of which he had, or would probably have if he continued to play at the rate he was currently going.

There was Ilya, of course, but it's not as if they could go public and have everyone just be fine with that. He didn't even know if that's what Ilya wanted, but even if it was, it wasn't possible. There was too much at risk–their careers, Ilya's Russian citizenship…

He could admit in the privacy of his own mind that he didn't want to be alone forever. He wanted to be with Ilya–he was almost certain that he was in love with him. He tried to tell himself that it was just hormones, that the knowledge that Ilya's baby was inside of him was messing with his mind, but he'd known he was in love with Ilya in Tampa. When Shane had accidentally gotten pregnant.

A baby, he thought, would decidedly make it to where he was never alone again. He knew it was a selfish thought, and a terrible reason to consider parenthood, but didn't have the wherewithal to snap himself out of it. The idea that a piece of Ilya–a piece of both of them together–could come into the world was as alluring as it was terrifying.

Shane felt wetness on his face and realized he'd started crying at some point. He sniffed loudly and wiped at his cheeks, sitting up. He was hit with the sudden clarity that he was being a little crazy. He'd dedicated his whole life to hockey–he was basically married to the sport.

"Shane," Mom said, and Shand turned his attention to the desk. She was standing there holding his phone up, and said, "Your coach called."

And if that wasn't a sign, Shane didn't know what was.

He stood up and wiped the grass off his shirts and shorts, and grabbed his phone from his mom, thanking her quietly. He could see that he had one missed call from Coach Theirault, and he called him back quickly before he could think too hard about it.

"Hollander," Coach Theirault greeted him, his voice gruff.

"Coach," Shane replied, sitting on the stairs.

"How are you feeling, son?" Coach Theirault asked. Shane wasn't the best at reading tone, but he could tell something was off from the way his coach was speaking.

“Better. Rather be on the ice, though,” Shane said, and the words made his teeth ache. He hadn’t thought about skating in weeks.

“Good, glad to hear that,” Coach Theirault said, his tone improving. For a few moments neither man talked, and it was so awkward that Shane wanted the phone call to end immediately. Coach Theirault loudly cleared his throat and continued, “I wanted to talk to you.”

“Yeah?” Shane said, and a creeping sense of anxiety slithered its way down his spine.

“The team doctor received a report of your injuries a few days ago,” Coach Theirault said, “And uh. I’m sure you know where I’m going with this.”

Shane’s blood ran cold. In all of the scenarios he’d considered, how had this not crossed his mind? He thought medical records were confidential, but he’d signed waiver after waiver each season, giving the Voyagers the right to all of his medical history, past and present.

“I’m aware,” Shane said, and it felt like he was speaking from outside his body.

“Good, then I can get to the point. We love having you on the team, Shane. And we were willing to overlook your carrier status, because it’s usually not an issue, but… The commissioner and I talked, and we think it’s best if this is handled quickly and quietly,” Coach Theirault said.

Shane felt humiliation and anger uncurl in his chest. He knew that carriers were rare enough for there to not be a precedent for them, and he knew what it said about him to other people. About his sexual preferences. He pulled the phone away from his ear so he could run a hand over his face.

The idea of this decision being dictated by hockey, like the rest of his life up to this point, made him furious. He’d never been a violent man, even while playing a sport that all but encouraged fistfights, but right now he wanted to hit something. He was struggling enough with this as it was.

“I can’t go on IR for this season, and return for the next one?” Shane heard himself ask. He knew the second the words left his mouth that it was stupid. Coach Theirault made a noise that sounded halfway between choking and laughing.

““Pregnancy isn’t an IR-approved condition,” Coach Theriault said, still chuckling, “If you choose to follow through with this, then Montreal is prepared to buy out your contract.”

“I understand,” Shane said, shame filling him, “I’ll handle it.”

They said an awkward goodbye, and Shane threw his phone so hard across the yard that it hit the wooden fence before landing on the ground. He felt like he was going to be sick. He put his head between his legs and tried to breathe.

His mind raced as he thought about what he had to do next. He would take the first pill, bury himself under blankets for 24 hours, before taking the next one. The internet said there’d be

some bleeding and some cramping,but it should stop in less than a week. He'd go on to continue to play hockey, winning 4 more Cups and bringing his total up to 6. When he thought about it in terms of absolutes, it was easier to swallow.

He stood up and walked across the yard, picking his phone up off the ground. The screen was shattered, and he felt like an immature idiot. He blew off the bits of grass stuck in the cracked glass, and headed inside.

He fixed himself a glass of water before heading straight to his room, avoiding his mom's watchful eye as best as he could. He locked his bedroom door behind him, and dug into his bag until he pulled out the blister pack.

He unfolded the directions, and blinked at them before reaching over to his desk and grabbing his glasses, reading them over once, then twice. He popped out the first pill, turning it over in his hand. It was a big white circle, seemingly innocuous.

He closed his fist around it to try and stop his hand from shaking. He thought again about the WAGs and kids flooding the ice after a game. He got a sudden flash of a blond-haired baby with dark eyes. He considered what kind of life was waiting for him after hockey. He leaned against the wall for support, and then slid down it until his ass hit the ground.

He was pro-choice, always had been. But, he supposed, that included the choice going the other way than typically expected.

A sudden calm came over him, and his head felt clearer than it had in days. He grabbed the blister pack and went across the hall to the bathroom, and popped each pill out and into the toilet. He flushed it, and watched as they swirled down into the drain.

He was horrified to hear a hysterical giggle burst out, and he covered his mouth with his hand. He was actually going to do this, wasn't he? Have a baby, but more importantly, live his life in a way hockey had never allowed him to.

Oh *fuck*.

Chapter End Notes

I want to be clear that this fic is not anti-abortion in any way. I am pro-choice. Realistically, I think Shane would have an abortion. I just need Shane to keep the pregnancy to move the plot along lol.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane allowed himself the two weeks he had left in concussion protocol to adjust, and to try and piece himself back together again. He was dipping his toe back into the pool of life, so to speak. Building himself up little by little.

He changed his routine. Although he still couldn't stomach much at breakfast time, he chatted more with his parents. He could tell by the way they exchanged glances that they noticed his improved mood, but neither of them commented on it. Shane knew it was coming, though, because there was only so long his mom could stay silent.

He turned his backyard time into yoga on the back deck, after research reassured him that exercise was good in pregnancy. He didn't attempt anything too complicated–no crow pose for him–but kept it light. It was refreshing to use his body again, to feel his muscles flex under strain. He started going for jogs around the block, just trying to keep his body moving.

Shane kept turning the idea of a baby around and around in his head. He'd made his decision, he supposed, but with that came so much more. He'd been around babies, of course, because Hayden and Jackie couldn't stop popping them out, but holding one for a little while and giving birth to one to keep were two entirely different experiences, he was sure.

He did endless research. The carrier forums he read were full of acronyms that didn't mean what he thought they meant, like FTM for first-time mom. Some of the forums had good advice, and some of them were crazy. Shane felt like he needed a voice of reason to keep him tethered. Usually a carrier would have a partner for that, but Shane only had himself.

He was still on the fence about Ilya's role in all of this going forward. He didn't want to think about Ilya too hard, because it would either make him hard or reduce him to tears. So he deleted their text thread and blocked him, erasing almost seven years of history, to force himself to stop agonizing over it.

And a few days after the two weeks were up, he told his parents he wanted to take a drive. He got into his Jeep and put on a hoodie a size too big, dark sunglasses, and a cap. Satisfied with his ability to remain anonymous, he drove into the heart of Ottawa where Harmony Carrier Center was.

He signed into the front desk under a false name, ignoring the curious look from the receptionist. It was a private clinic, so there was no need to use his health card. And he'd be paying strictly in cash.

When they called him into the back, under the name 'Mr. Smith', he followed the nurse with a tight smile. He stepped onto the scale and watched as the numbers ticked up, until they landed on a weight that was 4 lbs more than Shane usually was. He closed his eyes and reminded himself that it was normal, he was supposed to be gaining weight.

She led him to a bathroom where he peed into a cup, which was surprisingly familiar. He was tested twice a year in the MLH for drugs. The reminder of his dead hockey career was like dropping a stone in his stomach, and he handed off the sample to the nurse without making eye contact.

Once he was alone in the examination room with instructions to take off anything above the waist, he removed his hat and glasses before pulling off his hoodie and shirt, before putting the hat and glasses back on. He slipped on the sterile paper gown and sat down on the examination table, well aware that he probably looked ridiculous.

Shane looked around the room, taking in the charts of wombs and fetal development and tried not to feel dizzy. It was overwhelming, the amount of information around him. At lest when he was researching, it was because he was seeking out information, but here it was shoved in his face. He put his head between his legs, taking a few deep breaths.

There was a knock on the door, and Shane straightened up just before it opened. A tanned woman walked in, and if she thought his disguise was ridiculous, or recognized him, it didn't show on her face.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith," She said, "I'm Dr. Ledy. How are you feeling today?"

"Fine," Shane said, nodding once. It felt like the truth and a lie all at once. He was more fine than he'd been two weeks ago, but he still felt a little bit like he was spiraling with all the changes in his life, struggling to hold onto anything.

"That's good," Dr. Ledy said, "The urinalysis confirmed your pregnancy. Do you have any idea how far along you are?"

"About 12 or 13 weeks," Shane's tone was uncertain, but he was sure it was around then.

"Okay, well we can do an ultrasound to confirm, and then we can chat. Okay?" She asked. Shane nodded and watched as Dr. Ledy opened the door to the hallway, reached out, and pulled in a machine on wheels with a screen and medical wands attached. She pulled it right up next to the examination table Shane was sitting on, before closing the door.

Shane had a good idea of what came next, from his research. He laid back and lifted the paper gown and pulled down his pants just enough to show his lower abdomen as Dr. Ledy worked on the machine.

"Okay, now I'm going to put some gel on your stomach. It might be a bit cold, so I apologize," Dr. Ledy said, shaking a squeeze bottle before hovering it over Shane's abdomen and squirting. Despite being prepared for it, he still jumped, and she gave him an apologetic look.

"The wand will feel weird because I have to push down a bit, but I'll try to keep it brief," Dr. Ledy said, placing it on top of the gel and spreading it around. She pushed down firmer, and Shane was reminded of the deep-tissue massages he'd get from the Voyagers' trainer.

“Do you want to see the ultrasound?” Dr. Ledy asked, her eyes on the screen as she pushed the wand around. Shane swallowed. He didn’t realize he’d have a choice. He turned his gaze towards the ceiling. He didn’t know if putting an image to the baby inside of him was something he was ready for.

“Yeah,” he found himself whispering. He cleared his throat and repeated himself, “Yeah.’

“Okay,” Dr. Ledy said, an easy smile on his face. She turned the monitor towards him, and shifted the wand on his stomach. He tore his gaze from the ceiling and looked at the monitor and–*Oh*.

He could clearly make out the baby’s head and feet, and it was moving. Dr. Ledy hit a button on the machine and a sound filled the room.

Thump thump thump thump.

Shane didn’t cry, he just stared, dumbfounded. He knew he was pregnant before, but to be hit with indisputable proof felt like getting checked into the boards. He was pregnant, with a baby. With Ilya’s baby.

“Okay, dad, I’m going to remove the wand now. Do you want some pictures?” Dr. Ledy said, taking the wand off his stomach. The image on the screen froze, and he wanted to ask her to put the wand back, so he could keep looking. He nodded, and it was only once she began typing that he removed his eyes from the screen.

Shane looked at the ceiling again as Dr. Ledy moved about the room, wiping the goo from his stomach, and printing from the machine before moving it back out into the hallway. He pulled down the paper gown almost as an afterthought, still too stunned to do much of anything.

“Okay, Mr. Smith,” Dr. Ledy said, and it took Shane a beat to realize she was talking to him. He sat up and looked at her, blinking slowly. She continued, “You look a little shellshocked there, are you okay?”

“I’m pregnant,” Shane said, moving a hand to his lower abdomen. He was almost afraid to touch, “I’m actually pregnant.”

“Yes sir, you are,” Dr. Ledy said with a smile, and then carefully schooled her expression, “You do have options, though.”

“Options?” Shane asked, dazed. He realized what she was saying and shook his head, almost as if on instinct, “No, I want to keep it.”

“Okay,” Dr. Ledy said easily, “You’re thirteen, almost fourteen weeks pregnant right now. Your baby is the size of a lemon. Everything looks great, you have a very healthy baby, measuring in a higher percentile for size. I’m going to give you some pamphlets on nutrition and general rules we like to stick to during pregnancy. Do you have any questions for me?”

Shane swallowed, and said, “Yeah, I have a few.”

He proceeded to ask her about everything he'd been wondering–including doctor-patient confidentiality. He wasn't very smooth about it, he was sure, but she was reassuring about how his identity and medical status would be kept a secret. She gave him some more information about diet and exercise, and before he knew it, he was dressed and finished with his first pregnancy appointment, with his second scheduled for just a few weeks away, where he'd get to know the baby's gender.

Shane drove home half-numb and half-elated, feeling like he was outside of his body. He couldn't decide what he felt, he kept flip-flopping between emotions. He'd asked Dr. Lety about his heightened emotional state, and she'd assured him it was completely normal. The drive went by in a blur, and Shane was thankful he knew Ottawa like the back of his hand thanks to growing up here.

When he walked inside his parents' house, he found himself searching for his mom. He peaked his head out the back door to check the yard, but the only person there was his dad, trimming hedges. He gave him a wave before heading back inside, making his way through the house.

He finally found his mom in her bedroom, laying out a dress on the bed. It was Tuesday, he realized–date night for his parents. It'd been that way his whole life. He stood there and watched his mom straighten the dress as it hit him that his baby would never see him in a loving relationship like that.

Well, maybe that was a bit dramatic. He could date, one day perhaps, but for now Ilya was the only one for him. The only one, and the one person he couldn't have. Nausea surged through him, and he swallowed it back and refocused himself. He needed to talk to his mom right now, he could have a crisis about Ilya later.

"Hey, mom," Shane said, and Mom turned around, smiling at him.

"Hey, honey. What's up?" Mom asked. He opened his mouth and then closed it again, like a fish. He knew that he needed to tell her sooner rather than later, but he'd never actually planned on how he was going to tell her. His hand slipped into his pocket, where the carefully folded ultrasound pictures were, feeling heavy like lead. He pulled them out and shoved them in her direction.

"What's this?" She asked, chuckling at him. She took the pictures from his hand and unfolded them. Shane watched her face go slack. She covered her mouth and sat shakily back on the bed, right on top of the dress. She repeated, her voice quieter, "What's this?"

"My baby," Shane said, his voice cracking. He knew that he was telling her more than that he was pregnant, but also that he was gay. It was a lot to process. Tears welled up in his eyes at his mom's reaction, and he put his head in his hands, "I'm sorry, mom, I didn't mean to–"

"Hey, no, no, no," Mom said, quickly standing up and wrapping her arms around him. He put his face in her neck and cried quietly as he wrapped his arms around her. Mom rubbed his back, murmuring soothing words as he let himself release the pent-up stress he had.

He might not have a partner, but he had his parents, he knew that now.

After a few minutes he pulled back and sniffled as he wiped his face, “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.”

“No, you have nothing to apologize for,” Mom said, pulling away and grabbing his hand. She pulled him over to the bed and moved the dress, sitting down and motioning for him to do the same. Shane sat down next to her, his eyes downcast.

“I just have questions,” His mom said gently, and he nodded. She continued, “Have you decided what you’re going to do?”

He looked up, resolute, “I’m going to keep it.”

She nodded once and looked away, “Okay. Okay, we can do this. I can talk to your coach, and loop in some of the bigger sponsors–this opens a whole new market, I mean, diapers, baby clothes… What?”

The more she talked, the more Shane’s face crumpled. He shook his head, “I talked to Coach Theirault. Montreal will buy out my contract if I decide to keep it.”

“What? Why?” Mom asked, “They can’t force you to do anything, carrier laws are airtight in Canada. We’ll sue.”

Shane shook his head vehemently. He’d considered this, researched the laws himself. A lawsuit would be costly and very public. Everyone in the league would know about the pregnancy, including Ilya. And when his contract was up with Montreal in two years, no other team would touch him with a ten foot pole.

“No, I don’t want to do that,” Shane said, “I’m sorry. I know you and dad did everything to get me into the MLH, but I think my hockey career is over.”

“Oh, Shane,” Mom said, bringing a hand up to cup his cheeks. His eyes searched hers, and he saw that she was coming to the same conclusion–at least about publicity, and how not all of it was good.

“I need a plan, mom,” Shane said, squeezing her hand, “I need your help.”

Shane was usually one to not only try and do everything on his own, but to try and do it perfectly. Here, though, he could admit that he was out of his depth. Losing hockey was enough of a blow, but a baby on top of that? Even he could admit that he was in over his head.

“Okay, okay,” His mom said, nodding to herself. Shane could almost see the gears in her head turning as she continued, “We talk to the Voyagers management. We can threaten them with a lawsuit if they don’t buy out your contract *and* release a statement that you’ve been permanently injured and are retiring. That statement should get you out of your sponsorship obligations.”

Ice cold fear hit Shane’s heart at the idea of facing Coach Thierault, or anyone in the Voyagers management. He didn’t want their judgement or bigotry anywhere near him or this

pregnancy.

Mom must've seen something in his face, because she added, "I can talk to them alone. I'll handle it."

Shane felt like he could weep with relief, so he didn't try to fight her on it. He nodded and let go of her hand. Since he found out he was pregnant, it'd felt like he was holding his breath. Now, he could breathe again. He wasn't alone. He had a plan.

A small part of him felt pathetic for relying so much on his mother, but he knew that was silly. She'd always managed his career for him, it was only natural that she should be the one to close it out, too.

"I think…" Shane said carefully, "I think I want to move to Ottawa. I saw a house for sale on the next street over on the way home."

"Your father and I would love to have you so close," Mom said, and then glanced down to his abdomen, a small smile coming onto her face, "Both of you."

"Yeah?" Shane asked, mirroring her smile with his own. He cleared his throat and reached for the ultrasound pictures that had fallen onto the bed when they sat down, "I'm, uh, 13 weeks and a couple days. The baby will come in October, so I want to be moved before then."

"Good plan," Mom said, and then tears were in her eyes, Shane's own eyes widened, and she shook her head reassuringly, "I'm sorry, I just–I can't believe I'm going to be a grandmother. Right in time for the holidays. Oh *god*, Shane, we have to tell your father."

Shane's heart leapt into his throat as he stuffed the pictures back into his pocket and nodded. He knew that his father would have a good, if mild, reaction. David Hollander was never one for dramatics.

Mom stood and offered her hand, and Shane took it gratefully. As long as he had his family on his side, he knew that he could do this. He could have a baby. He could find an identity outside of hockey. It was all going to be okay.

–

Ilya was fired up, and resolutely ignoring the fact that Shane hadn't texted him back.

It was a game 6, the one that would decide who would advance to the Stanley Cup finale, the Admirals or the Raiders. He'd scored two goals in the first period, but the Admirals were still up by one. He was currently in the penalty box for ten minutes for knocking out one of Scott Hunter's teeth. But who could blame him? He'd chirped about Hollander–*Shane*–somehow knowing it would get a rise out of Ilya.

Shane. He hadn't responded to Ilya's texts in weeks, not since the night before he got knocked out on the ice, and hospitalized. He'd invited Ilya to his cottage when Ilya visited, and Ilya had said no, like a coward. He leaned forward and put his head in his hands.

He wondered what Shane was doing right now. The Voyagers had been easily knocked out of the playoffs without him, but was he still watching? Ilya looked up, and his eyes searched the crowd until he found a camera. Could Shane see him right now?

He hoped so, even if he was in the penalty box.

He was hit with a sudden urge to see Shane, just to make sure he was okay. He didn't know how his concussion recovery was going, or if he was still going to the cottage this summer. Ilya hoped he was, because he was desperately close to texting him and asking if he could come along.

Ilya knew that he was in love with Shane Hollander, but he also knew that they couldn't be anything to each other, not really. Ilya still had Russian citizenship, although he did want American or Canadian citizenship eventually. But regardless of his wants or needs (because at this point, Shane was beginning to feel like a need), Ilya needed to keep himself safe. He felt like his heart and mind were at war, pulling him deeper and deeper in despair.

The rest of the game passed quickly, especially once Ilya was freed from the penalty box, but he played like shit. Now that Shane was on the forefront of his mind, he couldn't focus on hockey. He hoped Shane wasn't watching him play like this. He knew that if they were speaking, Shane would talk his ear off about all the mistakes he made during this game.

In the locker room, the mood was grim and borderline angry. The Raiders had officially lost their shot at the Cup this year. The only sounds in the air were the angry shuffling of clothes as players pulled off their gear, and huffing frustrated breaths. Ilya pulled off his gloves and reached for the top of his stall, grabbing his phone.

He shouldn't have been surprised that Shane didn't text him, but he still was. He opens their text thread and the dozen texts he'd sent Shane since his time in the hospital stared back at him. His fingers moved quickly.

Lily: did you watch the game? no stanley cup for me this year

He sent it and went to put his phone back, but did a double-take. His message was sitting there, still green, not delivered. Without thinking he pressed the 'call' button, raising the phone to his ear. It didn't even ring, just droned out a message about a failure to connect.

Shane fucking blocked him. The realization felt like *Kresheniye*, back in Russia, jumping into an ice cold lake on a freezing day. He could feel his eyes stinging, and he squeezed them shut so hard he saw stars behind his eyelids. He took one deep breath before opening his eyes.

He didn't want to deal with this. With Shane running again, just like that day Ilya had made him tuna melts. Ilya loved him, and Shane wanted nothing to do with him. Again. Had they fallen into a pattern?

He wished he could tell himself that he wouldn't fall back into Shane's grip when Shane inevitably came back around, but he knew it wasn't true. Ilya loved Shane, and Shane had Ilya wrapped around his finger.

But right now? Ilya needed something to stop the pain in his chest.

He tossed his phone into his stall and started ripping off his gear, looking around the room, "Hey, hey!"

All of his teammates looked at him, and he started speaking, his accent thick, "We might have lost this game. We might have lost the Cup this year. But Scott Hunter needed the win, because he's old and sad. There's always next fucking year, and tonight we're going to drink to that! Drinks on me!"

The speech was weak and Ilya knew it. But the team was excited enough by the prospect of free drinks to nurse their egos to cheer for him, and he basked in it with the full knowledge that tonight he was going to hopefully get drunk enough to not think of Shane.

–

At almost six months pregnant, Shane was officially starting to show. It likely took a little longer because of his athletic build, according to Dr. Lety, but eventually his body relented. His abs went soft as his belly began to round out almost overnight. He was bigger than he was expected to be at this point in his pregnancy, because the baby was apparently in the 90th percentile for size. Shane blamed the baby's Slavic genes.

Because of his size, he lived in hoodies and sweatpants almost exclusively now, even though it was the middle of June. It was frustrating him, along with his current predicament, which was Hayden and his parents refusing to let him lift anything as they helped him move into his new home in Ottawa. It was the same place he'd mentioned to his mom–a one-story contemporary home with a natural finish, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms. He wasn't sure how long he was going to stay here, but he knew that he desperately needed to get out of Montreal.

Even being in Montreal to pack up his stuff made him feel like he couldn't breathe. Although, despite not wanting to be in the city, he'd kept the building he lived in. He figured he'd rent out the unit he used to occupy, just like he did with the rest of the units. It was good passive income while he settled into his new life. Between that and investments made during almost a decade of playing hockey, he knew he could be comfortable for the rest of his life, if he was careful. It was a load off.

Shane glanced at the front door, which was propped open by a box, and then to the moving van. His parents and Hayden were currently inside. He quickly walked to the van and looked at a box sitting right behind it. He went to bend down before his stomach stopped him. He blinked and tried again, groaning as his hands barely grasped the top of the box.

He felt humiliation rise up within him and his ears burned as he realized he couldn't reach the bottom of the box. He should've known–he hadn't been able to touch his toes for a week. That had been quite the blow to his ego, especially for someone who was usually so flexible.

Shane stood up straight and groaned, reaching behind himself and putting a hand on his back, which was aching. The aches he had while playing hockey were nothing compared to the aches he got now. Shane felt like all carriers should be carted around on palanquins for the durations of their pregnancies, if they so desired.

He took a deep breath and squatted down with his legs spread wide, allowing room for his belly. He slipped his fingers under the bottom of the box and braced himself to lift.

"Hey! No! Bad Shane!" Hayden said from behind him, and Shane rolled his eyes, releasing the box. A jolt of pain shot up his spine, and he tried not to let it show. He braced both of his hands on the box and pushed himself up.

"I can lift one box," Shane said, watching as Hayden jogged up. Hayden reached down and easily grabbed the box Shane had struggled with, and easily lifted it into his arms. Shane tried to not be jealous at the physical feats he could no longer accomplish.

"Not with my goddaughter inside of you," Hayden said, nodding down towards his stomach. Shane, in spite of his frustration, smiled at the thought of his daughter.

He'd found out the baby was a girl just a few weeks ago, with his mother by his side at the scan. Privately, he'd been hoping for a little boy, figuring it would be easy to raise a baby of a same gender. He knew what kind of things boys did and liked. But when he found out it was a girl, he'd been blown away and thrilled. Mom had cried her eyes out.

It was around the same time and Shane had gone to Montreal to visit Hayden and Jackie. While there he'd told them he was pregnant, and gay. Jackie had been immediately supportive, of course, but Hayden had sat there looking stunned.

"You're pregnant?" Hayden said, as Jackie wrapped her arms around Shane and pulled him into a hug. Shane hugged her back, looking at Hayden's face over her shoulder. He was starting at the floor, looking as if someone had just told him Santa wasn't real.

"Yeah. It's a girl," Shane said, and Jackie squealed as she pulled away.

"We have so much girl clothes we can give you," Jackie said, and Shane smiled. It was sweet to think of his baby sharing clothes with the Pike kids, like pseudo-sibilings.

"But what about Lily?" Hayden asked, finally looking up at Shane. Shane's smiled dropped off his face as Hayden continued, "Your Boston girl? Oh my god, is Lily a guy? Is he the father?"

Shane clasped his hands together and shifted on his feet, uncomfortable. This is why he could never tell anyone about his relationship with Ilya–they'd connect the dots immediately. And he'd officially decided that he didn't want Ilya to know about the baby. He wouldn't put him at risk with Russia, force him to never be able to return home. Never be able to visit his parents'

graves. Shane had made the conscious decision to upend his entire life for this baby, and while he wasn't bitter about it, he didn't want the same for Ilya. The stakes were higher for him. He knew Ilya was a great guy and would stand by him and the baby, but over time the resentment would build. And keeping Shane and the baby a secret would too too heavy a weight to carry.

So Shane had decided for both of them. All three of them, really.

Jackie looked at Shane with a mixture of pity and amusement before turning to her husband, "I'm sure if Shane wanted us to know who the other father was, he'd tell us. It's none of our business, right babe?"

"Right," Hayden said, shaking his head and standing up. He offered Shane his hand, and when Shane took it, Hayden pulled him into a hug, clapping him on the back gently. Hayden finished, "We're happy for you man. And it'll suck not having you on the ice this year, but after this season, we'll get another cup, right?"

Shane pressed his lips together and shook his head, "Right, about that…"

Overall, the three of them had talked for well over two hours. Shane explained that he was retiring from hockey, and that he wasn't really sure what he was going to do besides be a parent, but that he wanted to explore life off the ice. Hayden had been heartbroken and furious at the Voyagers, but supportive in the end.

Shane, overall, had a great support system. He was immensely thankful.

"Seriously, man, if you want to do something, then go unpack some boxes. Your mom's already gotten started in the kitchen," Hayden said as he started carrying the box into the house.

"Whatever," Shane grumbled, but followed.

–

Ilya sat on his couch next to Svetlana, half-watching the Stanley Cup finals. He lifted a beer to his lips and took a sip, his eyes following Scott Hunter as he skated across the ice. Ilya swallowed thickly.

He didn't love hockey, he never had. His mother had taught him to skate as a little boy, because she'd been a figure skater before she'd been saddled with Grigori Rozanov, a man more than 40 years her senior. Skating was something Ilya did with his mother frequently before she died. When she'd passed, he'd turned his attention to hockey. It had been a good way to take out his anger, and he found that he excelled at it, he used hockey as a ticket out of Russia, away from his father and Alexei.

Even though hockey had given him everything he had, he didn't love it. He could probably comfortably say that he hated it, now that it reminded him of Shane. Of how Shane would read his boring hockey biographies in bed while wearing his cute little glasses, or how he and Shane would watch hockey together and Shane would criticize the plays passionately from his place on the couch.

Then again, almost everything reminded him of Shane these days. It'd been almost two months without any contact between them, which wasn't a lot for their… relationship, but it was a big shift from where they'd been a couple months ago, in Tampa. Where they'd both acknowledged that it felt like they were *something*, and Ilya had cried in Shane's arms a few minutes before he pushed inside of him. That had probably been the best sex they'd ever had, with Shane begging so sweetly under him, looking up at him with big, beautiful brown eyes. He'd never felt closer to Shane.

Ilya adjusted his pants and finished the rest of his beer and put it on the glass coffee table with a 'clink'.

"Ilyusha," Sventlana said, her tone impatient, and Ilya realized she'd been calling his name.

"What?" He snapped, turning towards her. She raised her eyebrows and put a hand on her hip, and he felt shameful at the tone he'd taken with her. Sventlana was the one person in the world that he knew he could count on right now, and he couldn't afford to push her away, as much as his mind was telling him to.

"For your niece," She said, and tossed him a little dress. He nodded and stuffed it in the suitcase next to him. He didn't plan on returning to Russia, but he did like to send things for his niece, like clothes and toys. He barely knew the little girl–Alina–but he hoped that she had a good opinion of her uncle in America.

"What's Scott Hunter doing?" Sventlana asked, and Ilya turned his attention to the TV. He watched as Scott gestured towards himself, obviously inviting someone down onto the ice. Scott skated to the edge of the ice as the camera focused on the man in the jean jacket heading down the stairs.

"I don't know," Ilya said slowly. It felt like the answer was right on the tip of his tongue, but… There was no way, right?

On the TV, Scott grabbed the man's hand and led him onto the ice, almost pulling him along, before he stopped. They exchanged words that the mics didn't catch, and then embraced each other in a kiss that was obviously not their first.

Holy. Shit.

Ilya reached for his phone before his brain caught, navigating to Shane's contact on instinct. His thumb was hovering over the 'call' button when he realized that if he called, no one would answer. He was still blocked.

But this changed everything, for Ilya at least. They wouldn't be the firsts. There was precedent now. Ilya found himself with a begrudging respect for Scott. He knew that if

geriatric Scott Hunter could do it, then so could he and Shane. They could figure something out. He would wait until retirement, if he needed to. He loved Shane, and he wanted to be with him. He just needed to convince Shane of that fact.

–

A week later, A doorbell rung in a condo in Montreal, and Taylor looked up from the pan of chicken he'd been grilling. He exchanged a look with his girlfriend, Gina, who was doing a crossword puzzle at the kitchen island. She shrugged.

"Watch the chicken, please," He asked, and she nodded. He made his way around the island before turning the corner and heading to the front door. Taylor braced himself for a sales pitch, or a sermon from the Mormons, before opening the door.

The first thing he noticed was a huge bouquet of flowers, in various shades of white, red, orange, and pink. They were lilies, he was pretty sure. The bouquet was so big that it eclipsed the entire chest of the man holding them. Taylor's eyes went to the man's face, took in his blonde hair and grey-blue eyes, and his mouth dropped open.

"You're–You're Ilya Rozanov," He stuttered. He glanced back into the condo, wondering if it would be weird to call his girlfriend to the door. She was originally from Boston, and a huge Rozanov fan.

Ilya Rozanov seemed equally surprised to see him. He cocked his head to the side, glancing into the apartment, and then asked, his tone flat, "Is Shane here?"

"Shane?" Taylor asked, confused.

"He owns the building," Rozanov clarified.

"Oh, like our landlord? I don't know, man, it's all done through a rental company. We just moved in a couple months ago," Taylor said. He glanced down at the flowers, and saw that the card read *For my Jane, with love.* He whistled out a breath. Maybe Shane was Jane's husband, and Rozanov was trying to sleep with her. Taylor knew that Rozanov had a reputation as a womanizer.

"Sorry, man, I don't know a Shane," Taylor reiterated, and then crossed his arms, making a sheepish face, "Can I call my girlfriend over here and get a picture, though? She's a huge Boston fan."

Taylor didn't know Rozanov, but he could only describe the expression that came across his face as devastated. His eyes were shining, and he raked his free hand through his hair.

"No," Rozanov said, his accent thick. He plucked the card off of the flowers and crumpled it in his hands before shoving the flowers at Taylor's chest. Taylor grabbed him on instinct, and Rozanov said, "Give these to your girlfriend. Someone might as well get them."

And then he turned on his heel and walked down the stairs, with Taylor staring after him. *That was weird*, he thought, as he turned around and called out to his girlfriend, “Hey baby, you won’t believe what just happened!”

Chapter End Notes

And there's chapter 3! I also realized that I'm mixing show canon and book canon, like calling the Boston team the Raiders and but the Montreal team the Voyagers. Oopsie.

Anyway, we finally get a look at Ilya and what he's going through. In my opinion Ilya is the biggest yearner, he just deals with it in a different way. He's all in on Shane though, if only Shane could realize that. Sigh.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The drive back to Boston from Montreal was uncharacteristically silent for Ilya. He didn't even play music, just listened to the low roar of his Aston Martin as he weaved between lanes at a speed that would frankly terrify most people, especially considering Ilya's vision was blurry from tears.

Shane moved. Shane packed up all of his things and moved. He still couldn't believe it. Why? *Where?*

Did he do it because he didn't want Ilya to know where he was? No, that would be stupid, right? Still, Ilya can't help but feel like this was his fault, like he did something to make Shane pull away again. He felt like he was staring at a bunch of puzzle pieces with no final picture to reference. And all the pieces were mismatched.

Maybe it was because he said no to the cottage. He felt so stupid when he thought about it now. He took for granted that Shane would always be there for him, and now that he wasn't, Ilya felt like he was dying.

He knew that he wasn't good enough for someone as sweet as Shane. Ilya had a stain on him, with these dark moods he tended to get into that he refused to name. In a small corner of his mind he thought he might be sick like his mother, but he couldn't face that. It would be too much on top of everything else.

Still, he *wanted*. He wanted Shane in the good times and the bad. He often thought of Tampa, and how Shane had wrapped himself around Ilya as Ilya cried. It'd been the most vulnerable Ilya had been around someone since his mother was alive.

Halfway through the drive he took his eyes off the road for a second to grab his phone, navigating to Marleau's contact and calling him.

It rang for a few moments before Ilya heard, "Hey man."

"Marleau. Are you still friends with the goalie on Voyagers?" Ilya asked, not bothering for pleasantries.

"Drapeau? Yeah, we shared a billet as teenagers," Marleau said, his tone confused. He continued, "What's going on, Rozy? Why do you sound like shit?"

Ilya didn't acknowledge the questions, "Can you get Pike's number for me from him?"

"I—yeah, probably?" Marleau said, "But you have to tell me what this is about."

"Marly, can you just—can you just *not*?" Ilya said, his voice cracking. A tear fell and he took a hand off the wheel to wipe at his face furiously.

Marleau was silent for a few agonizing moments, and then he resolutely said, “I’ll get Pike’s number.”

Ilya made a noncommittal grunt before he hung up, not bothering to thank him. He knew that he couldn’t tell Marleau about this, even if Marleau was his best friend. Ilya couldn’t tell anyone… Except?

He hit Sverlana’s contact and called her before he could second-guess, and she answered on the first ring. Ilya could hear the sounds of bass-boosted music in the background, and realized that Svetlana was probably out clubbing.

“Ilyusha,” She yelled into the phone, “Come out to meet me! I’m at Splash!”

Ilya rolled his eyes and hung up, before the sting of guilt hit him. He saw her name light up the screen, calling back, but he ignored it. He knew he was being an asshole but he’d apologize later.

He shifted his grip on the steering wheel and cursed at the car in front of him before swerving into the oncoming lane, pressing his foot on the gas harder until he successfully passed the car up and could merge back. He fucking hated slow drivers.

He wondered what kind of driver Shane was. Slow, probably. And careful. With a car that was probably boring. He wondered if he was ever going to find out, if they’d ever just go for a drive together. What was that English phrase–’drive into sunset’? He wanted that, with Shane.

Ilya realized that he needed to get his fucking act together. He let out something between a yell and a growl before banging a hand on his steering wheel, desperate to do something with all of these pent up feelings. He took a shaky breath, glancing over at his lit-up phone screen.

It was a text from Marleau. Just an attatchment—Hayden Pike’s contact information. Ilya took a deep breath. He needed to figure out a plan.

What did he want from Shane? Was he just frustrated because Shane was finally giving him a taste of his own medicine by ignoring him for months? He dismissed the thought as soon as it crossed his mind. Shane was more than that to him.

Ilya was worried. Not only had Shane completely fallen off the radar for him, but he’d done it to the rest of the world, too. Ilya knew for a fact that he was supposed to appear at an event for Reebok in LA last week, but was strangely absent. And he’d *moved*. Something was obviously going on with him.

Was his head injury worse than he’d led on? What if something was really wrong? It felt like an anaconda was wrapped around Ilya’s chest at the thought, wounding itself around him and making it difficult to breathe.

He knew he was in love with Shane, and he was almost certain that Shane was in love with him, and they couldn’t do anything about it. The thought made Ilya want to hit something again.

They could see each other in secret, he supposed. Driving the five hours between Boston and Montreal for stolen nights in the hockey season, waiting until they could spend entire weeks together in the summers. Ilya desperately wanted to go to Shane's cottage. He felt like a fucking moron for saying no to him in the hospital.

They could have a secret relationship—it was basically what they were already doing, except this time Ilya wouldn't sleep with other people. Easy. He'd only been doing that the past couple of years to dull the ache of not seeing Shane anyway, if he was completely honest with himself.

He would talk to Pike, convince him to get Shane to unblock him, and then… Then Ilya would talk to Shane. Beg for him back, if he had to. He would drop the exterior he'd so carefully crafted around himself to keep Shane at arm's length–he'd begun doing that anyway, after Tampa.

Ilya grabbed his phone and called Hayden Pike, wondering as it rang what fucking series of events led him to this point.

"Hello?" Pike's voice came through blearily. Ilya glanced at the clock on his dash and realized it was almost midnight.

"Pike," Ilya barked out, "I need something from you."

"What— Rozanov?" Pike asked, his voice clearer, "Fuck off, I'm hanging up."

"No!" Ilya yelled. He glanced down at the phone, waiting for the call to end, but it didn't. He cautiously continued, "I have to talk to Sh—Hollander."

"So talk to him. If you could get my number, I'm sure you could get his," Pike ground out.

"I have his number. He blocked me," Ilya explained, shame burning in his chest. He could not believe that this was his life right now, confessing these things to Hayden Pike.

"Probably for a good reason," Hayden grumbled, and added something Ilya couldn't make out. He heard a woman's voice distantly over the phone, and then Hayden's voice farther away, "Go back to sleep, Jackie. No, no, it's just Rozanov. He's calling for Shane. No, I don't know why. Why are you looking at me like that?"

Ilya heard a gasp leave Hayden Pike's mouth, and then a weird rustling noise. He glanced down at the phone to see if they got disconnected, but the call was still going. Somehow.

Suddenly Pike's voice came over the line, "You're Lily. Boston Lily."

Ilya shifted uncomfortably in his seat. He didn't know that Shane told anyone about Lily—although knowing Pike, he likely didn't. Pike was just nosy like that.

"Da. I need to speak to Shane," Ilya said, dropping all pretenses.

"Oh now you want to speak to him? After what you did to him? He's been all alone this whole time, and suddenly you come out of the woodwork? You have some real nerve you

motherfuck—“

Ilya pulled the phone away from his ear to get a break from the yelling. What was wrong with Shane? What had Ilya done?

“Pike. Pike!” Ilya interrupted him, “I have no idea what the fuck you are talking about.”

Pike stopped mid sentence, and it was silent for at least a minute before he quietly said, “You really don’t know what’s going on with Shane?”

“No! He won’t talk to me!” Ilya exploded, his car almost veering into the wrong lane. He righted it and continued, “He hasn’t talked to me since he was in the hospital. I need to talk to him.”

“Yeah, I think he needs to talk to you too,” Pike admitted, and then groaned, long and loud. It was as if he was realizing something unfortunate, which, Ilya supposed, he had. Ilya heard a woman’s voice again in the background—Jackie.

“I’ll get Shane to call you,” Pike said.

“Can you tell him—“ Ilya paused. He didn’t know what he wanted to say, what words would be enough. He didn’t want to tell Shane he loved him like this. He took a shuttering breath, pushing down his ego and said, “Tell him I said please. I’m begging.”

“Okay, Rozanov,” Pike said. His tone almost sounded… pitying. He ended the phone call, leaving Ilya alone again for the rest of the drive to wonder what was going on with Shane.

—

It was past midnight and Shane couldn’t sleep. He was sitting in his bedroom in the cottage, half paying attention to a nature documentary on TV. He would’ve loved to lay on his back, but it made him feel like his hips were breaking. So instead he was curled up at the end of his bed, watching penguins trot across an icy landscape on the TV.

Despite how tiring growing an entire human was, Shane struggled to sleep most nights. Being here at the cottage helped some, but he still usually couldn’t sleep until 1 or 2 am. His eyelids were starting to get heavy when he heard his phone ring from his bedside table.

He groaned and rolled over, feeling somewhat like a turtle stuck on its back, and grabbed his phone. He grabbed it and saw it was Hayden, and his heart kept into his throat. Why would Hayden call this late?

“Hello?” He said.

“Ilya Rozanov is Lily from Boston?” Hayden half yelled into the phone and Shane flinched. How did he even find out? Shane loved his best friend, but he wasn’t exactly known for his

brains.

“Yes,” Shane said, his voice small.

“He’s the baby’s father?” Hayden continued.

“Yes,” Shane said, pushing himself up into a sitting position. The movement made the baby kick, right near his ribs, and he rubbed a hand over his belly, trying to soothe her.

“I just got off the phone with him,” Hayden said, and Shane’s heart dropped.

“What—what did you say?” Shane said.

“Not what I wanted to! Which is fuck off, and by the way, you’re going to be a father!” Hayden said, and Shane covered his face shamefully, even though Hayden couldn’t see him through the phone.

He stayed silent. He didn’t know what to say for himself. He’d honestly been avoiding thinking about Ilya as much as he could. Every time Ilya would cross his mind, he’d find something else to focus his attention on. Lately, he’d gotten very into puzzles, like his dad. He had bought a puzzle board and everything. He was finding that compartmentalizing was a skill he excelled at.

But now everything was falling apart. Hayden knew about him and Ilya, and it was only a matter of time before everyone else did, too. Then Shane would have successfully ruined Ilya’s life and his chances of ever going home. Tears spring to his eyes.

“Shane?” Hayden asked.

“Yeah?” Shane croaked, sniffing as tears began to fall.

“You need to talk to him, buddy,”

“I can’t.”

“Why not?” Hayden asked

“Because Russia! If he chooses this, to be trapped in this, then he can never go home, Hayden,” Shane said, frustration seeping into his tone.

“Don’t you think that should be his decision?” Hayden responded coolly, “The Voyagers tried to take your choice away, and how did that feel?”

Shame hit Shane like a puck to the teeth. Hayden going to bat for Ilya was not on Shane’s BINGO card, but the last few months of his life had been crazy anyways, so why not?

“Why do you care so much?” Shane bit out.

“Because I’m a dad, Shane, I know how it feels. It kills me to be away from my kids so much for work. I can’t imagine not knowing them at all. And what—you don’t think she’ll have

questions as she grows up? Do one of those DNA tests as a teen and show up on Rozanov's doorstep?"

Shane's heart dropped. Despite normally considering as many possible scenarios as he could, lately he'd found himself living more in the *now.* Thinking of the future made him feel sick with worry.

"I…" Shane said, looking down at his belly. He pulled up his shirt and rubbed the stretched skin, unsure of what to say. Now that he'd made his decision to be a parent, he'd been all-in on it. The nursery was almost finished back at his house, and his birth plan was laminated. He'd gotten so consumed by being the carrier that he hadn't considered what it would feel like to be on the other side of things.

Ilya was a carrier, too–had mentioned it casually while watching Shane swallow his birth control pill one night years ago. It had never been a risk for him because he was a top, but if the roles were reversed… If Ilya was pregnant and tried to hide it from Shane…

He felt a burning in his chest, and wasn't sure if it was heartburn or regret. Maybe a bit of both.

"I'll tell him," Shane promised, before ending the call.

Chapter End Notes

I know this chapter is short, and they're still not reunited, but I promise the next one makes it all worth it! Check the tags for a sneak peak on what happens next. And we're close to the end, believe it or not!

And for anyone concerned that Shane is slightly out of character because of how easily he's given up hockey--trust me, it is addressed. He is coping hardcore rn.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shane had unblocked Ilya and texted him last night, just an address about two hours outside of Ottawa. Ilya realized it was the cottage, it must be. He'd pulled over to a motel and gotten a few hours of shitty sleep before hopping back in his car bright and early, driving nearly five hours straight to the address. He watched on the drive as the cityscape around him slowly turned into endless miles of trees in the Canadian wilderness.

On the drive there, he tried to plan. He still didn't know what was going on with Shane, but he was guessing that it was an injury of some sort. Something big. Maybe something to do with the concussion? A chronic brain issue? It wasn't uncommon in their sport.

If that was the case, though, Ilya would take care of him.

Ilya needed something to say. A big grand statement. Something good. Something like, in my dreams you come close to meeting my mother, but can never quite make it there. I want you to make it there, though, because I want the chance to see the two people I've loved most in my life together, at least once. Even if it's not real. I will give up Russia, because it's not my home anymore. I will give up everything, because the only time I feel at home is when I'm with you.

He swallowed back his tears as he pulled into the driveway, and half-ran to the door, not hesitating before rapping his fist against the wood. He noted, idly, that the Canadian definition of 'cottage' must be different from the Russian one. This house was huge.

"Come in!" Ilya heard Shane's voice from inside, and he hesitated before reaching for the door handle and turning it. He stepped inside and looked around, trying to orient himself with where everything was. Everything here was so modern. Mr. Real Estate indeed.

"I'm in here," Shane said, his voice quieter. Ilya closed the front door behind himself and walked out of the entryway and straight into the living room. His eyes instantly landed on Shane.

Shane, who was bundled up in blankets up to his chest, with a throw pillow sitting on his lap. His arms were wrapped around it, and his chin was resting on the top. He looked so… cozy. Adorable. Domestic.

And then Ilya remembered that it was July, so why was Shane bundled up so heavily? It was another point in the 'sick' column.

"Hi," Ilya said stupidly, all other words leaving him. He tried to remember some of the things he'd thought on the way over, but all words escaped him.

“Hi,” Shane replied, his lips twitching as if he was trying to fight a smile. Ilya wanted to kiss him right then and there.

They stared at each other for a few moments before Ilya lowered himself into an armchair across from Shane. He didn’t want to move too much and spook him, like a baby deer.

“English is hard right now,” Ilya admitted quietly. He felt stunned to see Shane right here in front of him, seemingly fine. He looked… Good, actually. Really good. Ilya had to fight every instinct in his body to not climb onto the couch next to him.

“We have time,” Shane said, his eyes on the floor. Ilya knew that Shane struggled with eye contact, especially when he was stressed. Ilya didn’t want to be a source of stress for him.

“I… I went to your condo, in Montreal,” Ilya said, “You weren’t there.”

“It’s an apartment,” Shane said automatically, then shook his head, “That’s not important. But no, I uh, I sold it. Moved to Ottawa.”

“Ottawa? What the fuck is in Ottawa?” Ilya asked, disbelief in his tone, “Did you get traded to the Centaurs? Because they are worst team in league.”

“No trade. No more hockey for me, actually,” Shane said, and he winced and shifted, propping his feet up onto the coffee table.

“Hollander,” Ilya said, more confused than ever. What did Shane mean, no more hockey for him? “You are having midlife crisis, yes?”

“No. I’m not even 30, if anything it would be a quarter-life crisis,” Shane said, shaking his head, “My priorities just changed.”

“Hockey is your life. It is who you are. That does not just change,” Ilya said, standing. He started to pace back and forth in front of the arm chair, suddenly feeling like he’d gone mad. What the fuck was wrong with Shane? Why would he quit hockey? Had the concussion also changed his entire personality?

“I can have a life outside of hockey,” Shane said, his tone defensive. Ilya paused and shook his head.

“You and hockey are like–what is English for two things that are the same?” Ilya asked, wracking his brain for what it could be. He knew he’d heard it before.

“Do you mean synonyms?” Shane guessed, and Ilya snapped before nodding his head. He watched as Shane rolled his eyes. Ilya continued his pacing.

“You are in denial about this, Shane. You love hockey. You are second-best player in league. And if you quit, who am I supposed to beat? There’s no one else at our level. You light up when you’re on the ice. You are unstoppable out there–except for when I am playing,” Ilya ranted as he shuffled back and forth across the carpet. He switched to Russian to drive the point home for himself, muttering about wasted talent and crazy Canadians.

He heard a small noise akin to a squeak, and he froze, turning his attention to Shane again. There were tears streaming down his face, and when Ilya made eye contact with him, he shoved his face into the throw pillow on his lap.

Ilya cursed under his breath and moved around the coffee table, kneeling down on the floor in front of the couch. Some part of his brain registered the fact that the blanket covering Shane seemed to be bunched around his stomach, but he was too preoccupied with Shane's tears to dwell on it.

"Hey, hey," Ilya said, reaching out hesitantly before thinking better of it and pulling his hand back.

"I'm sorry," Shane croaked, lifting his head and looking at Ilya. There were tear stains on his cheeks, "You're going to hate me."

"I won't," Ilya said, resolutely.

"I–I had to quit hockey. I didn't have a choice. I've been trying to tell myself that I was fine with it, finding other things to do, but I'm not fine with it. I spend my days waddling around and doing fucking puzzles! I'm *furious*," Shane all but yelled.

"Why did you have to quit?" Ilya asked. Shane let out a loud sigh, giving him a look that said '*really?*' Ilya felt like he was missing something very big.

"Stand up and give me your hand," Shane said, and the tone of his voice left no room for argument or further questions. Ilya stood up and held out a hand for Shane, who took it and used it to pull himself up. Ilya was surprised by how much support Shane needed, until he saw the pillow and blanket fall off of Shane's lap.

Shane looked like himself, for the most part, except for one glaring change that seemed so obvious now. Ilya felt like an idiot. Shane was wearing a sweatshirt that would probably normally fit, but was now stretched over his abdomen.

He blinked, brought his eyes up to Shane, who still had tears in his eyes, and then looked back to his belly again.

Shane was pregnant. Shane was going to be a father. And Ilya…

Oh.

Ilya stumbled back, tripping over the coffee table and just barely catching himself before he fell on the ground. He couldn't tear his eyes away from Shane's stomach.

Ilya's baby was in there.

He went through a series of thoughts and emotions so quickly that it felt like whiplash. First, shamefully, was pride. He'd overcome the low odds of getting a male carrier–*Shane*–pregnant. Anyone could look at Shane and see that he was spoken for. Ilya's ego grew so big in that moment that he thought he might tip over. Then he realized that with pregnancy would come a baby, a real, tiny, little human that relied on its parents to take care of it. Ilya was

immediately on board with this, no second-guessing. Fuck Russia. He wanted the entire world to know that he'd gotten Shane Hollander pregnant, and they were going to have a baby together.

The emotions he finally settled on, as Shane's earlier words started to click, were a mixture of anger and shame. He did this to Shane. Ilya was the reason why Shane had to give up his hockey career–because Ilya had gotten him pregnant. And Shane–Shane hadn't even *told* him!

"You–That–" Ilya struggled for words, pointing to Shane's stomach. He took a tentative step forward and held his hand flat, palm-forward, and hovered it above Shane's stomach. Shane put his hand over Ilya's and pressed it against his stomach, guiding it lower, closer to his belly button.

Ilya felt something move under his hand and he flinched, blinking rapidly. Was the baby *moving?* His eyes started stinging, and Shane grew blurry in front of him.

"Why did you not tell me?" Ilya asked.

"I… All of my reasons seem stupid now," Shane said, his voice soft, "I didn't want to trap you. I didn't want you to have to give up Russia for this. For us. So I made the decision for you."

"It was my decision to make," Ilya said, his voice low. He blinked and a couple of tears fell down his face.

"I know that now. Hayden talked some sense into me," Shane said, and Ilya felt so much gratitude towards Pike that he resolved to send him a gift. He wouldn't stop riling him up, of course, but a gift would be good.

Shane took a shaky breath and stretched his arms above his head, his sweatshirt riding higher on his belly. Ilya's eyes fell to the skin that was revealed–Shane had stretch marks on his hips now. Ilya wanted to kiss them.

Shane caught him staring and flushed beautifully all the way to the tips of his ears, and quickly pulled down his sweatshirt. He sat back down on the couch, letting out a loud sigh. Ilya sat next to him.

"Now you know," Shane said, looking down, "And I… I want you to know that you don't have to do anything. I mean, you're all the way in Boston, and we'll be in Ottawa. You can just come by in the summer, or you don't really have to be involved."

Ilya wanted to take Shane by the shoulders and shake him. He wanted to start yelling. When had Shane become so defeatist? Had giving up hockey really affected him this deeply? Ilya could believe it.

He did raise a good point, though. Ilya couldn't stay in Boston and be a present father, not one like how he would want to be. Prioritizing his job over his family was something that Ilya's father had done, and it was not something Ilya was about to do.

“Hollander. You are taking crazy pills,” Ilya finally said. He reached out and gently grabbed the bottom of Shane’s chin, turning his head so they could make eye contact. Shane’s beautiful eyes were shining as Ilya continued, “I will take the season off.”

“Absolutely not,” Shane said, shaking his head.

“Why not? You are retiring, so hockey has nothing left for me anymore,” Ilya said.

“Just because I was forced out of hockey doesn’t mean you have to quit,” Shane said.

“Wait. Forced?” Ilya asked, raising his eyebrows. He had a feeling he was not going to like what Shane said next.

“The Voyagers… They didn’t want to keep me on, after this. They basically gave me the choice between suing them or having them buy out my contact. I chose the latter,” Shane admitted. Ilya cursed under his breath and pulled his hand away from Shane’s face. His fingers were trembling.

“Sue them!” Ilya exclaimed, and Shane shook his head.

“And then what? I’d never get a contract with another MLH team afterwards,” Shane said, and Ilya pressed his lips together.

He knew that Shane was probably right—players who caused a stir like this were usually sent to the minor leagues, or bullied out of the sport entirely. And yet the MLH could protect rapists and domestic abusers.

“We will figure something out,” Ilya promised, reaching to grab Shane’s hand, “Hockey is your life. You don’t have to give it up. I would quit, if you could not play. And I am not going anywhere. That is my baby in there and I’m going to be here, yes?”

Shane stared at him, wide eyed, before he surged forward and kissed Ilya right on the lips. Ilya froze for a split second before he melted into it, his lips moving against Shane’s as if they’d never been apart. It was muscle memory at this point—pleasing Shane was built into Ilya’s DNA.

Ilya regretfully pulled away, leaning his forehead against Shane’s. He didn’t want to move too fast and risk having Shane think he was here for the wrong reasons, as much as it pained him and his rock-hard cock.

“Shane,” Ilya breathed, “We should probably talk. About us. And hockey.”

“Don’t want to talk,” Shane said, moving his lips to Ilya’s jaw. His teeth scraped against Ilya’s 5 o’clock shadow, and when he reached his neck he planted his lips against Ilya’s pulse point and sucked.

“Ah, fuck,” Ilya said, putting his hands on Shane’s waist and pulling Shane into his lap. He was heavier than he’d been before, but Ilya was strong. Shane’s belly was between them, pressing against Ilya. It made the position a little awkward, but Ilya didn’t care.

“We should—ah—keep talking. Make plan,” Ilya reiterated as Shane nipped at his earlobe. He cast his eyes upwards towards the ceiling and wondered if this was some kind of test.

Shane pulled away, his lips shiny with spit, and put his hands on Ilya’s shoulders. His expression was determined, “Something you can fix right now is how hard I am, because I’ve been so horny for the last few weeks that I’ve basically been abusing my dildo. So do you want to fuck or do you want to talk?”

And well. How could Ilya say no?

“We will talk later,” Ilya said, gently pushing Shane off of his lap, “Bedroom?”

Ilya helped Shane up, and their hands stayed joined as Shane left him out of the living room, down the hallway, and into the bedroom. The second the door closed behind them, Ilya crowded Shane against the bed until he fell back onto it. Shane pulled himself up on the bed until he was leaning back against an expanse of throw pillows.

Ilya knew this was probably a bad idea. They needed to figure out so many things—hockey, their relationship, and Ilya felt like he hadn’t fully processed his feelings… But Shane was leaning back against the headboard, staring at him with hungry brown eyes, fucking *glowing* and pregnant, and Ilya was a weak, weak man.

Ilya climbed on top of Shane, bringing their lips together again. His tongue licked into Shane’s mouth, swallowing a moan from him. He tasted so familiar, like mint and something intimately Shane. He slid a hand up Shane’s sweatshirt, exploring the expanse of Shane’s belly. He could feel Shane squirm under him, and at first he thought it was a good thing, but then Shane let out an uncomfortable grunt and Ilya pulled back.

“What is it?” Ilya asked, his eyes searching Shane’s face.

“I don’t–” Shane started and then stopped, pressing his lips together. He looked past Ilya, over his shoulder, and quietly asked, “Can you turn out the lights?”

Ilya followed his gaze to the light switch by the door, and then blinked at him. “Why?”

“I just look so different,” Shane explained, suddenly looking terrifying close to tears as he brought his hands down to rest on his belly, “It’s been hard to deal with.”

That was something Ilya had not thought about. He knew that Shane was an elite athlete, and hadn’t considered that pregnancy might make him feel insecure. To be fair, he’d just found out a few minutes ago, so it’s not like he had a ton of time to consider this from every angle. Later, he would think on it all more.

“Shane,” Ilya said, “You look amazing. Beautiful. I want to *see* you when I fuck you. All of you.”

Shane flushed, ducking his head. Ilya pressed a kiss to his cheek, and then pressed their foreheads together, “Please let me see you?”

Shane's eyes searched his, before nodding once. Ilya's face split into a pleased grin, and Shane shoved him back playfully before pulling off his sweatshirt. Ilya's eyes roamed across the expanse of Shane's chest and abdomen, overcome with the urge to kiss him everywhere.

Ilya reached down and palmed his cock through his sweatpants before lowering his head to Shane's chest, trailing kisses down until he reached his nipple. He closed his lips around it and sucked, watching as Shane threw his head back against the pillows. Ilya grazed his teeth against it and gently bit down.

"*Fuck*," Shane gasped.

Shane had always liked having his nipples played with, but he'd never reacted like this before–writhing and squirming under the ministrations alone. Ilya guessed it had something to do with the pregnancy. He switched to the other nipple, bringing his hand up to tug at the one he just finished with. After a while of licking and sucking, Ilya trailed his lips down, over Shane's belly, pausing at the stretch marks on his hips and kissing every one. He wanted to be inside Shane so badly that his dick hurt.

Something suddenly hit him, and he pulled back.

"Can we—Are you sure it's safe?" Ilya asked, looking up at him. Then he realized it was a stupid question, Shane had already admitted to using a dildo.

"Why, are you afraid you'll get me pregnant again?" Shane joked, slightly breathless, and Ilya's cock twitched.

"I can try," Ilya said, lower than he intended, and watched as Shane's eyes grew impossibly darker.

They kissed again, only breaking it so Ilya could pull off his shirt. Ilya reveled in the feeling of Shane's skin against his own, and brought a hand up to Shane's pec, squeezing. Shane let out a moan that could only be described as wanton, desperately trying to rut up onto Ilya. His belly was in the way, though, and Ilya knew they'd have to be creative in how they went about this.

Ilya slipped a hand under Shane's waistband, grabbing his cock and pumping it a few times. Shane was already leaking for him, always so wet, and Ilya groaned into his mouth.

Shane tried to shimmy out of his pants and underwear, but couldn't sit up enough without supporting himself on his hands, which were currently running all over Ilya's bare chest. Ilya released Shane's cock and pulled his pants down for him, watching Shane's cheeks go deliciously red.

Ilya stood and folded Shane's clothes, because he knew that Shane would do it himself, if it were easier for him to maneuver around. Shane had a look on his face like he wanted to jump on top of Ilya and never get off. Ilya would let him. He abandoned his own pants and briefs at the thought, letting his hard cock slap against his stomach.

“Roll over, moya lyubov,” Ilya said, making his way back into the bed. He reached for the bedside drawer, taking a lucky guess, and was rewarded with a small bottle of lube and a condom.

“I can’t lay on my stomach,” Shane said, as if it were obvious. Ilya leaned over and kissed his shoulder, looking up at him.

“On your side,” Ilya clarified. He wanted to be able to see Shane, but he also wanted him to be comfortable, and he didn’t seem very comfortable on his back. Shane rolled over onto his side, and Ilya fit his body behind him, slotting his chest against Shane’s back and running a hand down Shane’s arm, to his hip, pulling them flushed together. His cock was straining against Shane’s cheeks (which, Ilya noted with glee, had gotten bigger), and Shane pushed his hips back.

“You are so sexy. Always, but especially now,” Ilya murmured in between kisses to Shane’s shoulder. Shane’s face was still flushed red.

The idea still *floored* Ilya. He didn’t know if it was a biological instinct, or if he was maybe a bit too kinky, but the idea that Shane had physical, undeniable proof of their relationship, of what they were to each other, made Ilya feel heady. Ilya nosed at the crook of Shane’s neck, rocking his hips up against him.

“What do you want, moya lyubov?” Ilya asked, his lips against Shane’s ear. He trailed a hand down until his fingers were brushing against Shane’s hole.

“I–*uh*–you,” Shane said, and gasped when he felt Ilya’s probing fingers. Ilya drizzled lube over his fingers, circling the outside of Shane’s hole slowly, languidly. As far as Ilya was concerned, they had all the time in the world.

“I am right here,” Ilya said cheekily, nipping at Shane’s shoulder. Shane seemed to have regained some sense of nervousness, half-burying his face into the pillow as he muttered something. Ilya pushed one of Shane’s legs up.

“What was that?” Ilya asked as he trailed his hand back down and slipped a lubed finger in. Shane let out a gasp, and Ilya began moving his finger in and out lazily.

“Iwantyouraw,” Shane said, all in one breath, and Ilya froze. Shane seemed to take that as some kind of rejection, because he continued, “You don’t have to, but I’m clean, and I’m sure you are too, I know the MLH tests before every season.”

Ilya cleared his throat. He hadn’t slept with anyone else since before he’d made tuna melts for Shane, and Shane ran away. He’d been tested since then, he knew he was clean. And he trusted Shane. But he’d never had unprotected sex with anyone before. He wanted to do this with Shane, though, to take this step.

He looked down at Shane’s face, “You are sure?”

Shane nodded, blushing all the way down to his chest. Ilya continued moving his finger in and out of Shane’s hole, peppering kissing along his shoulder, until he added a second finger.

He moved them in and out, scissoring occasionally, avoiding the one spot he knew Shane wanted him to hit.

“Come on,” Shane whined, his eyes glassy and needy. He’d obviously reached the point where his horniness outweighed his pride.

“You want more,” Ilya said, and it wasn’t a question. He crooked his fingers to finally hit Shane’s prostate, and Shane let out a choked whine. He added a third finger and began moving them in and out quicker, brushing against that spot every time, enjoying the way Shane squirmed and gasped under him.

“I *need* more,” Shane moaned. He reached back and found Ilya’s cock, wrapping his fingers around it and giving it a few pumps. Ilya let out a shaky breath and pulled his fingers out of Shane entirely.

“Okay, okay, I will give it to you, moya lyubov,” Ilya said, covering Shane’s hand with his own and pulling it off of his cock. Ilya slicked himself up with lube and lined up, not hesitating before pushing inside slowly. Shane leaned his head back against Ilya, his eyes fluttering shut.

Once Ilya was seated inside, he realized that he liked the spooning position. It was intimate.

Ilya began moving in and out, cautious at first, “Fuck, you feel so good.”

He wanted to take his time–needed to, if this was going to last any significant amount of time. He wanted it to. He wanted to stay buried inside of Shane forever.

“Harder,” Shane whimpered. Ilya steeled himself and gripped Shane’s hip, pulling out almost entirely before slamming back in. Shane let out a gasp as Ilya’s hips began snapping forward, fucking into him with fervour. Ilya had been using his right hand exclusively for pleasure for months, and he was certain he might be going a little insane because of how good Shane felt wrapped around him.

Ilya kissed Shane’s cheek and then lowered his mouth to Shane’s nipple, capturing it in his mouth and biting down, like he had earlier. Shane clenched around him, impossibly tight, and Ilya saw white for a split second. He had to take a deep breath to not spill inside of Shane immediately.

“You take me so well,” Ilya panted into Shane’s neck.

“Fuck, I want–want you to come inside me,” Shane gasped as Ilya bit at his shoulder.

“Yeah, moya lyubov? Want me dripping out of you?” Ilya asked, reaching around and grasping Shane’s cock, pumping it in time with his thrusts, which were growing increasingly erratic. He tightened his abdomen muscles to stave off his orgasm, not wanting to come until Shane did.

Shane nodded eagerly, his pupils blown as he looked over his shoulder at Ilya. Ilya suddenly felt overcome with gratitude for how lucky he was, he couldn’t help but lean forward and

capture Shane's lips in a kiss. The obscene sound of Ilya's hips snapping up into Shane's ass filled the room, along with the cacophony of moans leaving Shane's mouth.

Shane pulled away with a gasp, "I'm going to come, Ilya."

Ilya pumped Shane's cock harder, trying to keep up the pace of his hips, and encouraged him, "Come for me, Shane. So I can fill you up."

Ilya felt Shane's body seize up, his hole like a vice grip around Ilya's pistoning cock, before Ilya felt Shane coming onto his own stomach, the bed, and Ilya's hand.

"Oh, *fuck*," Ilya groaned as his own orgasm overtook him, "I'm coming, I love–" *I love you,* he swallowed back, "I love fucking you."

He buried his face in Shane's neck as he stilled, unloading inside of him. His mind cleared after a few moments, and he registered the fact that it *did* feel different, having sex with no protection. He wasn't sure if it actually would, but it was better. Probably because it was with Shane.

Ilya pulled out gently, and then reached down to feel Shane's puffy hole, which had come leaking out slowly. Shane shuddered.

"It's messy," Shane murmured into the pillow, "I can feel it."

"I'll clean you up," Ilya promised, scooting off the bed and standing up. He made his way to the door he assumed was the bathroom, closing it behind him.

He cleaned himself up, including washing his hands, and was waiting for the water to get warm when he took a moment to look at himself in the mirror. Shane had left a small mark on his neck when he'd been on top of Ilya on the couch earlier. Ilya didn't mind physical proof of Shane's affection, not anymore–not when Shane was carrying around proof of Ilya's all the time.

There was no way they could keep their relationship a secret now. They'd have to go public. Ilya was surprised to find that he didn't really mind. He'd been slowly accepting that he didn't have a home in Russia anymore, and had been considering becoming an American citizen. Now he'd just have to find a way to become Canadian. Because he wanted to be with Shane, he did even before this, but especially now. Shane and this baby were his family now, a thought that made his eyes sting.

And he knew he also needed to find a way for Shane to play hockey again. Because he didn't want Shane to have to give up anything. Ilya would do anything to make Shane happy.

Noticing the water was warm, Ilya wet two washcloths before heading back into the bedroom. Shane was still laying on his side with his eyes closed, one hand rubbing his belly affectionately. Ilya was stunned by the sight in front of him and almost wanted to take a picture to save it. Shane just looked so… peaceful.

Talking could wait, maybe until tomorrow. Right now, Ilya had to clean up Shane and cuddle with him.

Chapter End Notes

Yipee, Ilya knows now! I hope the smut was okay, I'm relatively new to writing it. The story's almost over, but I have more Heated Rivalry stuff in the works!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> TRIGGER WARNING!!! for pregnancy complications this chapter, and the next. This story will contain a HEA, but I need to throw some angst in there. Be mindful of the tags. Hope you enjoy!

Shane groaned as a cramp shot through him, and blinked his eyes open. He was tangled in his bedsheets, completely naked. Everything came rushing back to him–Ilya showing up, talking to him, having sex, showering and then collapsing together in bed afterwards. He'd fallen asleep half on top of Ilya, snuggled into his chest, with Ilya's hand firmly planted on Shane's stomach.

He rubbed at his eyes, pushing himself up. The bed was empty, but he could faintly hear someone moving around in the kitchen. He was so cozy in bed, but he was curious as to what Ilya was up to. Shane also knew that they needed to talk more, even though he didn't want to. He heaved a loud sigh and swung his legs over the side of the bed, forcing himself up. Pregnancy had made everything so much more difficult.

He quickly threw on some pants and a sweatshirt before using the bathroom and then trudging out of his bedroom and down the hall, into the kitchen. Ilya was bent over at the waist, rooting around in one of the cabinets. Shane smiled.

"Looking for something?" Shane asked. Ilya startled, but recovered quickly.

"Is almost dinner. Thought you might be hungry."

Shane nodded, putting a hand on his stomach. He *was* hungry, all the time now, it seemed. He allowed himself to indulge more often than he did before–which wasn't saying much, considering he'd never indulged before–but he still ate mostly healthy.

"I can make us some chicken. Maybe a salad?" Shane said, walking up behind Ilya and reaching up into the cabinet to grab a pan. Ilya nodded, and Shane got to work.

He prepared the food almost out of muscle memory. He'd been eating a lot of the same things here at the cottage, not wanting to drive to the store for groceries. He probably could get them delivered, but he didn't want to risk shitty substitutions for his food. Shane added raw chicken breast into the pan and began seasoning them, glancing over his shoulder at Ilya.

Ilya had propped himself up on one of the island stools, and had a watchful gaze tracking Shane across the kitchen. It felt heavy, like Shane could feel Ilya's eyes on him. He wasn't sure if it was a good feeling or a bad one.

As he added ingredients into a big wooden bowl for a salad, he wondered what the fuck was going on. Ilya had said he would stay, in the heat of the moment, but was that true? Had Shane's worst fears come true, and had he forced Ilya into something he didn't want?

And *why* did he sleep with Ilya? If they were going to have any semblance of a healthy co-parenting relationship, Shane needed to keep it in his pants. He couldn't give into the pregnancy hormones that even now as he was cooking were making him tempted to drop to his knees under the counter and suck Ilya off.

He shook his head at the thought, as if he could will it away. What the fuck was happening to him? He wouldn't even be able to get on his knees without help, anyway, which would be humiliating.

"Hollander. You are thinking so *loud*," Ilya said suddenly, punctuating it with a groan. Shane flushed.

"I'm not," Shane insisted, the back of his neck heating up. He didn't risk a glance over his shoulder and instead focused on cutting carrots for the salad.

He allowed himself to think, for a moment, that they could be more. Maybe they could pursue… *something* privately. Before any of this, it had begun to feel like they were something to each other. Especially in Tampa. But the incoming presence of their baby made it impossible to keep this a secret forever. People would spot them out together and immediately connect the dots

Shane sighed as he took the chicken out of the pan and sliced it into strips, throwing it in with the salad. He reached up to grab two plates, but Ilya slinked up behind him and reached over his shoulder to grab them instead. Shane gave him a suffering look, and Ilya simply raised his eyebrows in response.

"Go sit. I will set up the food and do the dishes after," Ilya said, and Shane was tempted to fight back, but nodded instead. His back and feet were killing him from standing for so long. He made his way past the island and to the table, putting a hand on it and lowering himself into the chair. He noticed Ilya watching as he sauntered up with two plates, placing one in front of Shane and one in front of the chair directly next to him.

Ilya sat down and began eating with no fanfare, scooping food into his mouth in that ravenous way that only hockey players did. Shane wondered when was the last time Ilya ate, in his mad dash from Boston to the cottage.

They ate in silence, Ilya finishing before Shane. Ilya didn't move when he finished, but rather watched Shane eat. Under normal circumstances, Shane would be too self-conscious to finish, but he was hungry enough to let it pass. He just tried not to make eye contact, and ignored the fact that his chewing sounded loud, even to his own ears.

Once he was done Ilya wordlessly grabbed his plate and carried it to the sink, washing their dishes. Shane felt like his shoulders were permanently up around his ears with tension, and he actually flinched when he heard the clatter of dishes being slid into the dishwasher.

He didn't like the silence. He was used to Ilya chattering, filling the air with chirps and teasing comments. He always pretended to be annoyed by it–hell, sometimes he actually was–but the silence was far, far worse. He'd wanted Iya to come to his cottage, but not like this.

"Living room?" Ilya asked, and Shane turned around. He was holding out his hand to help Shane up. Shane glanced between his face and his hand a few times before taking it and hauling himself up.

Once they were settled on the couch next to each other, Shane grabbed the remote and turned on the TV. He pointedly clicked off of ESPN and instead chose a channel that was playing some mindless American sitcom, putting the volume low. Ilya was close enough to touch, if Shane would only reach out. But he couldn't..

"Talk now?" Ilya asked suddenly, and Shane could've cried with relief.

"Yes,"

"Okay," Ilya said, shifting so he was facing Shane, "Talk."

"Me?" Shane asked, shaking his head, "I don't… I don't know what to say."

"Start at the beginning," Ilya said patiently. Shane couldn't believe it.

"I… I found out I was pregnant after Marleau sent me to the hospital," Shane admitted, watching Ilya's face twist in anger, "Don't be mad at Marleau. I'm fine, the baby's fine."

Ilya muttered something intelligible in Russian, and Shane's heart clenched.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do. Well, that's not true. I wasn't going to keep the baby, even though I wanted to. But then I talked with Coach Theriault and something snapped. I decided to keep the baby, and since then I've been… Adjusting," Shane said. It was weird to review all of his choices like this.

"Waddling around and doing puzzles?" Ilya asked, and Shane's lips twitched at the reference to their earlier conversation. He nodded once, and Ilya asked, "What about me?"

"What about you?" Shane asked, and Ilya gave him a look. Shane sighed, "I…I was going to tell you, when I invited you to the cottage. But you said no and I…"

"Decided to punish me?" Ilya prompted, and Shane shook his head furiously.

"No! You saying no just reminded me that–" He paused as a squeezing pain took hold of his abdomen. It was normal, his doctor had said, false contractions to prepare for the real thing. He took a deep breath and continued, "It reminded me that you had a lot at risk, with Russia. You'd already said that we couldn't be more, in Tampa, when we accidentally made her, and I–"

"Her?" Ilya interrupted, his eyes dropping to Shane's stomach. Shane realized that Ilya didn't even know their baby's gender, and it hurt more than he expected. But it was his own fault.

“Her. The baby’s a girl,” Shane said, watching as Ilya’s eyes began to shine. He tentatively reached out and pressed a hand against Shane’s stomach.

“Keep going,” Ilya said, blinking rapidly, his gaze still on Shane’s stomach.

“Okay, I… I didn’t want to force you into anything. I didn’t want to put you in danger with Russia. And I was feeling defeated. So I just resigned myself to being alone. Or, it being just her and I,” Shane finished lamely, watching as Ilya stared at his stomach with reverence. It was a new look for Ilya, and one that made Shane feel undeniably appreciated for everything he’d been going through to grow their daughter. It also made him feel a little heady, and hot under the collar. He cleared his throat, “Are you upset?”

“I’m furious,” Ilya said with no hesitation. Shane blanched as Ilya’s eyes finally flicked up to his face and continued, “I almost missed this. I almost missed all of it, and I… I don’t know if I ever would have been able to forgive you.”

Shane blinked back tears at the thought of raising his–*their*–little girl alone. Ilya missing out on every moment, every milestone, simply because he had no idea. It was enough to make Shane’s stomach turn violently. As if sensing his distress, Ilya’s hand began stroking his belly in a soothing way.

“But I did not miss much. And I am here now. So I will get over the fury, because I am too happy to stay angry,” Ilya finished, gazing at Shane with such pure intentions in his eyes. Shane wanted to kiss him again, to press their lips together until he could tell where he started and Ilya ended, but he bit his lip instead to hold himself back.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out his phone, opening his camera roll and clicking on an ultrasound photo. He held it out for Ilya.

Ilya grabbed the phone with both hands, staring down at the picture as if waiting for it to move. He was blinking furiously, and Shane wished he could read his mind.

“That’s my most recent ultrasound. She’s doing well, although she is big for how far along I am,” Shane said, shifting on the couch to get more comfortable.

“I can tell,” Ilya said, glancing at Shane’s stomach. Shane reached over and shoved Ilya.

“It’s probably your fault,” Shane accused with no heat.

“Probably. You are so small,” Ilya said, a small, fond smile coming onto his face. Shane rolled his eyes and took his phone back, ignoring the scoff of protest from Ilya.

“I have an appointment next week, you can see her in person then,” Shane said, and then paused, dropping his gaze to the floor. That was a stupid thing to say, of course Ilya couldn’t come with him. Shane had stopped wearing a disguise to his appointments after the first one, and if Ilya was spotted going into a carrier center with him, then everyone would figure it out immediately, “Or see the pictures after.”

“No, I will come,” Ilya said, crossing his arms. Shane gave him a look, and Ilya raised his eyebrows.

“You can’t. You could be seen,” Shane said.

“So what?” Ilya said.

“So–So what?” Shane sputtered, “So–So Russia! The MLH!”

Ilya waved a hand, “I figured out plan for this.”

Shane opened his mouth and then closed it again, before asking, “Plan?”

“We announce our relationship, and our baby. I find team in Canada, one that will take both of us on IR for this year, and then we play next year,” Ilya said, as if it were the easiest thing in the world. Shane blinked. Suddenly he wanted to call his mother and loop her in on this conversation. She’d been putting out feelers for MLH teams who would take him. His brain snagged on something Ilya said, and he held up a hand.

“Relationship?” Shane asked.

“Yes, probably, I think so,” Ilya said, now sounding hesitant. He cleared his throat and continued, more confidently, “We are having baby, Hollander. We had sex this afternoon. We will probably do it again, in a couple of hours.”

“That’s not–We shouldn’t be in a relationship because we’re having a baby,” Shane said, shaking his head.

“It is not because of baby. She maybe just… speed up the timeline, a little,” Ilya said, grabbing Shane’s hand. Shane’s shoulders relaxed at the touch. Ilya continued, “I wanted to be with you, before. I was scared. But this… This makes me brave.”

Shane closed his eyes, taking a deep breath. He wished that he could say the same. He did not feel brave, not after hiding away for the last few months. He felt more scared than ever.

But at least he wasn’t alone, right?

He opened his eyes and said, “I’m not ready to go public, with you or with the baby. I need time, I don’t want the whole world looking at us right now. We can be together, but… We’d need to keep it a secret.”

Shane braced himself for some kind of pushback, and was surprised when a small smile came onto Ilya’s face. Ilya gently grabbed Shane’s chin between his thumb and forefinger, and said, “Okay. I wait seven years, I can wait longer.”

Shane smiled in spite of his anxiety and rolled his eyes, “You did not want me for the last seven years. Not like that.”

“Yes I did,” Ilya said, sitting up straighter. He put a hand on Shane’s waist and tugged at his shirt. Shane sighed dramatically before crawling into Ilya’s lap, his legs bracketing Ilya’s

thighs.

“When did you actually know?” Shane asked, his voice quiet. He put his hand on the side of Ilya’s face, rubbing his thumb idly against his cheekbone.

“Hm… Around Vegas,” Ilya said, and Shane blinked.

“Vegas? That was–” Shane did the math quickly in his head. That was *years* ago. And nothing about that encounter had been remotely romantic. Sexual, yes. Maybe even the best sex of their entire relationship, save for maybe this afternoon. Just the idea of that night had Shane’s cock twitching in his sweatpants. But Shane had walked away from Vegas feeling rather shitty.

“We didn’t even kiss that night,” Shane finally said.

“My mistake. I will make up for it,” Ilya said, leaning forward and pressing his lips to Shane’s. Shane sighed into his mouth, wrapping his arms around Ilya’s shoulders. He felt tension draining out of his body as their lips moved together, and he felt Ilya’s hand slipping down his back, until it reached his ass, squeezing the flesh there.

As their lips moved together, Shane found his mind wandering despite the compromising position he was in. Ilya *wanted* to be with him, supposedly, and not just for the baby. What would that look like for them? Would Ilya move in with Shane? Could Ilya even stop playing hockey for a year and stay in North America? Oh god, he couldn’t risk getting deported, Shane didn’t know what he’d do if that happened. He’d gone through enough of this pregnancy alone, and now that Ilya was here, he didn’t think he could do that again.

Ilya had laid out a plan for the both of them to return to hockey in a year, as if it were the simplest thing in the world. Shane knew it wouldn’t be, though. How would they manage their game schedules with a baby? They’d need a nanny, or to rely heavily on Shane’s parents. Oh fuck, his parents. They were going to flip.

“Hollander,” Ilya whispered against his lips, and Shane opened his eyes, leaning his forehead against Ilya’s. He swallowed thickly.

“What?” He asked.

“You are thinking again,” Ilya said, bringing his hands up from Shane’s ass to his shoulders, digging his fingers in and rubbing them. Shane groaned as his body relaxed, and then flushed, slapping a hand over his mouth.

“I’m not,” Shane lied.

“You are. It is bad for you. Bad for baby,” Ilya nodded down towards Shane’s stomach, pressed up against Ilya’s. Shane sighed. He just felt like they had so much more to talk about, but didn’t know where to start. He buried his face in Ilya’s neck as Ilya’s hands began to rub his back soothingly. Shane bit back a moan. At this point in his pregnancy, his body was so sore that a massage felt akin to an orgasm.

“You’re probably right,” Shane admitted in a small voice. He wished he could just trust the fact that everything would work out–Ilya seemed to be operating just fine on that mindset–but Shane wasn’t built like that. He needed a plan. He steeled himself and pulled back, placing both of his hands on Ilya’s shoulders and looking him in the eye.

“We need to talk to my parents,” Shane said. Ilya raised his eyebrows, and Shane continued, “You were right. I don’t want to stop playing hockey. And my mom handles everything with my career, and she and my dad have been with me the whole way so far. Any conversation we have needs to include them.”

Ilya made a complicated face, a scrunch of his nose combined with a downward turn of his lips, and Shane didn’t know how to interpret that. Another clenching pain seared through his abdomen and he pressed a hand to the top of his stomach, as if that could stop it. He took a deep breath through his nose, trying to ignore the cramping and focus on Ilya’s face. Shane had never been good at telling what people were thinking.

“Okay,” Ilya said carefully, putting a hand on Shane’s stomach, “We talk to them about hockey. But the baby–those decisions are yours and mine.”

Oh. Ilya was worried that Shane and his parents would steamroll decisions about the baby? Shane thought about how his mom had an intense reputation, and how she’d already been sending Shane links to French-immersion preschools. He pressed his lips together. Ilya’s concern might be well-founded.

“Our baby. Our decisions,” Shane promised, even though it terrified him. He’d always relied on his parents, as overbearing as his mother might be sometimes. But Ilya was right. Shane was about to be a parent, it was time for him to stop taking things lying down–in all aspects of his life–and start standing up for himself.

And more than that, he needed to trust Ilya. He needed to trust what he was saying, about staying with Shane and their baby. That they would find a way to make it work.

“I’ll text my mom, ask her and dad over for lunch tomorrow?” Shane asked, and Ilya nodded. Shane felt anxious at the idea of his two worlds colliding, but knew that if Ilya was here to stay, then it was inevitable. He hoped that Ilya and his parents would get along.

“Back to what we were doing?” Ilya asked, a small smirk on his face. Shane suppressed a smile and nodded, leaning forward to press their lips together. Shane relaxed into it this time, his hands finding their way to the nape of Ilya’s neck, twirling his fingers into the hair there. He suddenly wondered if their baby would have the same curly hair, and smiled against Ilya’s lips as their tongues brushed together.

Another cramp zinged through Shane, this time in his lower back and hips, and he gasped into Ilya’s mouth, putting a hand on Ilya’s chest and pushing him back. He placed a hand on his hip and tried to stretch it out, but there was a low-grade pain that had settled into his hips.

Ilya’s eyes searched Shane’s face, “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing, it’s just false contractions,” Shane said. He shifted off of Ilya’s lap and stood, figuring that stretching his legs might help. Maybe he should go do some yoga. He faced the TV and ran his hands down his sides, trying to ignore the aching. He’d had much worse pain than this, he was a professional athlete for fuck’s sake. He suddenly felt a gush of liquid between his legs and froze.

“Shane,” Ilya said, his voice hollow, “You–You are bleeding,”

He pointed to Shane’s sweatpants. Shane’s heart dropped, and he tried to turn around to look at the back of his pants, but the twisting caused another spike of pain. He began to crumple forward, but Ilya stood up and caught him.

“Ilya,” Shane said, reaching down and putting a hand on his own stomach. When was the last time he’d felt her move? He pressed down, trying to entice his baby to kick. Nothing happened.

“Come on, come on,” He said, moving his hand around, speaking only to her. Ilya’s arms were basically holding him up at this point. He felt like he might throw up.

“We need to go to the hospital,” Shane said, looking up at Ilya with tears in his eyes. Ilya nodded and wrapped an arm around Shane, guiding him to the door. Shane walked with him, his heart in his throat. He couldn’t help but think that perhaps things had been going too well. It was all too good to be true.

Chapter 7

It was only once Shane was settled into a stuffy hospital bed that everything really hit him. They'd already taken a urine and blood sample from him, let him change into a flimsy gown, and hooked him up to an IV of saline. He'd answered the intake questions on autopilot, his mind racing through every possibility of what could be happening to him. Ilya hadn't spoken a word since they'd arrived and he'd exploded at the hospital staff about finding a room for Shane *right now*. He was silent but everpresent, and Shane wondered if a part of Ilya blamed Shane for what was happening. After all, Ilya had just found out about the baby, and now she might be ripped away from him–from both of them.

"Fuck," Shane muttered, tears coming to his eyes. He hadn't actually shed any tears yet. He looked at Ilya, whose lips were set in a grim line, and desperately wanted to ask for something, anything. He sniffed and cleared his throat, holding out his phone, "Can you ask the nurse to call my parents?"

Ilya's gaze was set somewhere out the window, and he turned towards Shane, his lips slightly parted. He looked over Shane as if searching for evidence of what had gone wrong, and Shane felt guilty, as if he'd done something. And… Maybe he had?

"Sure," Ilya said, his voice quiet, taking the phone from Shane. He exited the room unceremoniously, and the second the door closed behind him Shane allowed the tears to fall.

Why him? What had he done wrong? He did everything according to the pregnancy books and blogs he'd been reading, and he had a perfect pregnancy so far. He put a hand against his stomach, and realized that he hadn't felt her move since yesterday. Shane wasn't a religious man, hockey was the closest thing he had to worship with the rink being his church, but he pleaded with any higher power that might be out there for everything to be okay with his baby. She didn't even have a name yet.

Shane wiped at his eyes despite the steady flow of tears he was now producing. The door opened, and he looked up, expecting Ilya, but saw a woman wheeling in an ultrasound machine. His heart leapt to his throat, and he quickly sat up, ignoring the jolt of pain in his lower back.

"Mr. Hollander," She said, giving him a neutral smile as she wheeled the machine right up next to his bed, "I'm Dr. Khan, the obstetrician on call this evening. How are you?"

Shane stared at her, wondering if that was a genuine question she was asking.

"Horrible," he said flatly, and it was true. This was, quite possibly, the worst day of his life. He'd give up every award he'd ever won if he could rid himself of this anguish.

"I'm sorry to hear that. I know this can be scary. I heard you had some bleeding, and some pain?" She asked, setting up the ultrasound machine. Shane wanted her to get on with it already and quit asking him questions he'd already answered. He took a deep breath.

“Yeah, uh–” Shane paused as the door opened again and Ilya slipped in, making his way to Shane’s side. Shane felt himself relax, and continued, “I woke up from a nap a few hours ago because of some pain. It’s been on and off since then, and then about an hour ago we noticed the bleeding.”

Dr. Khan’s eyes flitted over to Ilya, “This must be dad?”

Shane nodded mutely. Ilya stayed silent.

“Okay, well, I’ll introduce myself again for you. I’m Dr. Khan, the obstetrician on call tonight. I’m going to give Mr. Hollander an ultrasound to check on the baby,” She said, a tight smile on her face. Shane knew she was being professional, trying to help—it even seemed like she had some kind of social script she followed, and Shane could relate to that—but he felt irritated at her.

Shane was used to ultrasounds at this point, he’d received quite a few. He was just glad his underwear was still on as he raised the shitty hospital gown until it was bunched up around his chest, exposing the wide expanse of his belly. He felt something on his shoulder, and glanced over. Ilya’s hand was sitting there, squeezing gently. Shane let out a shaky breath and leaned his head against it.

“This might be cold,” Dr. Khan said, and Shane nodded. She squirted the familiar blue gel on his stomach before pressing the want onto it, gently spreading it around.

Shane watched as the ultrasound lit up, his baby girl coming into view. It took him a second to realize that he was looking at her little head, and the sharp cut of her nose. He heard an intake of breath from next to him, and glanced over at Ilya. There were tears in Ilya’s eyes, and the hand that wasn’t on Shane’s shoulder was gripping the Russian Orthodox cross he always wore around his neck.

Shane realized, with startling clarity, that it was silent enough to hear a pen drop. He searched Dr. Khan’s face for any sign of what might be going on, but she simply kept her eyes on the screen, which froze every few moments as she took pictures.

Suddenly she clicked a button and a loud thumping filled the air. Shane froze, and he heard Ilya begin muttering something in Russian that sounded suspiciously like a prayer.

“There’s the heartbeat. It’s strong,” Dr. Khan said, looking over at Shane and Ilya.

“But–But she stopped moving. She’s still not moving,” Shane said, even as the sound of her heartbeat continued to fill the room.

“She’s likely sleeping, or just relaxing. But I can promise you that, right now, she has a heartbeat,” Dr. Khan said. Shane let out a breath and leaned back against the pillows as the doctor began to wipe the gel off of his abdomen. *She’s okay,* he reminded himself, even as the sounds of her heartbeat went silent as Dr. Khan shut off the machine.

“So what is wrong?” Ilya spoke up suddenly, and Shane blinked. It was the first words he’d spoken in almost an hour.

“Shane had a partial placental abruption—his placenta has begun to detach. We don’t want that, because that’s where Baby Hollander is currently staying nice and safe,” Dr. Khan explained.

“So can we… reattach it?” Shane asked, certain even as he asked that it was a stupid question.

“No, unfortunately we can’t. But your abruption is mild, and you’re not in labor, which are both very good signs. What I’d like to do is give you a shot of steroids to help Baby Hollander’s lungs develop a little quicker, just in case preterm labor begins. And then I’d like to keep you here a little while, at least overnight but maybe longer, to watch out for preterm labor or further abruption,” Dr. Khan explained.

“What if labor begins?” Shane asked.

“Well you’re already–” Dr. Khan paused to grab his chart, flipping it open. Her eyes scanned the page before she looked back up, “31 weeks pregnant. The survival rate is very high for infants born at 31 weeks. They usually do have to spend a little time in the NICU, although that is a bridge I hope we don’t have to cross. Try to think positive.”

“What about when I get out of here?” Shane asked. He wanted to be back at the cottage, or at his new home in Ottawa. Ilya’s grip on his shoulder tightened almost imperceptibly.

“If the abruption stops now, labor doesn’t begin, and Baby Hollander continues to have a steady, strong heartbeat, then in a few days I’ll discharge you with directions to stay on bed rest. But we can discuss the next steps more in a few days, okay?” Dr. Khan smiled at both of them, and then closed his chart before placing it back on the table. She grabbed the ultrasound machine and began to wheel it out.

“What caused this?” Ilya asked suddenly, and Shane looked up at him. Ilya still had unshed tears in his eyes. Dr. Khan paused, and glanced cautiously at Shane before locking her gaze onto Ilya.

“It could be caused by many things, or nothing at all. Trauma, blood pressure, smoking…” She listed off a few possible causes.

“Sex?” Ilya asked, and Shane coughed, choking on nothing at all.

“No, not sex,” Dr. Khan said. Shane thought back to this afternoon—how had so much happened in so little time?---when Ilya had slid inside him like he was coming home. Ilya thought this was his fault, Shane realized with a start.

“Don’t look for blame in yourselves, or in each other. The important thing is to take care of Shane and the baby,” Dr. Khan said kindly, “I’ll be back in a few hours to check on you both.”

She exited the room, pulling the ultrasound machine with her. Shane turned his gaze to Ilya, who was wiping at his eyes.

“Ilya,” Shane said. Ilya removed his hand from Shane’s shoulder and crossed the room, to the window. He gazed out as he had earlier, his stare haunted. His right hand was flexing, making a fist and then spreading out his fingers, over and over.

“Ilya,” Shane said, bracing a hand on the bed and pushing himself into a sitting position. He placed his hands on the bed guardrail closest to Ilya and shook it, trying to figure out how he could lower it. He needed to get out of this bed, right now.

The noise captured Ilya’s attention, and his gaze turned over to Shane, who was halfway to sticking a leg over the guardrail and trying to climb over. Ilya rushed over, and pushed Shane’s leg back into bed.

“Stop, moya lyubov,” Ilya said softly. Shane looked up at him defiantly.

“Then stop blaming yourself,” Shane said, grabbing Ilya’s hand and lacing their fingers together, “If it’s anyone’s fault, it’s mine, because she’s inside of *me*. But I can’t afford to think like that, and neither can you.”

“It is not your fault,” Ilya said, cupping Shane’s face with both of his hands and leaning down. Shane could feel Ilya’s breath on his face as he continued, “You have been so good. So strong, keeping her safe.”

Shane’s lip wobbled, and he searched Ilya’s eyes for any sign of hesitation or anger. He would understand, if Ilya blamed him to some degree. But Shane saw nothing but adoration there, and the same reverence he’d noticed earlier in the day. He wanted to tell Ilya that he loved him, and had for a long time. He could feel the words clawing their way up his throat, when the hospital door slammed open.

“Shane!” He heard, and Ilya pulled away. He stayed right next to Shane’s bed, though, as if he were a posted guard.

“Mom, dad,” Shane said as his parents crossed the room to him. Mom’s face was pinched in worry, and Dad’s eyes were red-rimmed, as if he’d been crying. Mom leaned over the bed and wrapped her arms around him, and Dad came up behind her, wrapping his arms around both of them. Shane leaned into his parents’ embrace, glad that they were able to get here so quickly.

“Shane, what happened?” Mom asked, as they both pulled away.

“I can explain, but the baby’s fine,” Shane said. Both of his parents breathed sighs of relief. Mom’s hands were on the bedrails, and he watched as her gaze flitted over to the opposite side of the bed, where Ilya was standing.

“What–?” Mom cut herself off, her gaze turning on Shane. Her grip on the bedrails tightened until her knuckles were white. Dad placed a hand on her arm, and Shane flushed.

“Mom, dad, this is Ilya. Rozanov,” Shane said, and his mom gave him a look that could only be interpreted as *‘duh’*.

“Hi,” Ilya said, and Shane didn't risk glancing at him for fear of his flush getting worse.

“He’s been visiting, and we’re uh… He’s my…” Shane trailed off and shrugged his shoulders, hoping he didn’t have to spell it out.

“Baby daddy,” Ilya said, putting a hand on Shane’s shoulder. Shane crinkled his nose and let out a huff, watching his parents exchange a glance.

“No, Ilya, that’s gross,” He said.

“Lover?” Ilya tried again, and Shane squeezed his eyes shut. He wanted the floor to swallow him whole right about now.

“But…” Mom started and Shane opened his eyes. She looked shocked, “You hate him.”

“No. I mean, I see why you would think that, but I don’t hate him at all,” Shane said. In the privacy of his mind, he acknowledged that not only did he not hate Ilya, but he in fact loved him. But he didn’t want the first time he said that to be in this context.

“So where have you been this whole time, exactly?” Mom asked, turning her attention to Ilya. Shane felt Ilya squeeze his shoulder gently, and Shane put a hand over his.

“I didn’t tell him,” Shane forced out, and his parents looked at him again. He sighed, “I didn’t tell him I was pregnant. He found out today.”

“And–And did the stress of that, did it…” Dad started, gesturing down to Shane’s belly. Ilya removed his hand from Shane’s shoulder, and Shane looked up to see Ilya’s face in his hands.

“No! This was random, bad luck. It was no one’s fault,” Shane said, turning his attention to Ilya. He reached up and pulled Ilya’s hands from his face, repeating himself, “It was no one’s fault.”

Ilya sniffed and leaned down, pressing a kiss to Shane’s head.

Shane noted idly that he’d never seen Ilya so distraught, not even in Tampa, or after the death of his father. He squeezed Ilya’s hands, trying to convey to him that everything was going to be okay.

“We were going to tell you guys tomorrow, but then this happened,” Shane pulled one hand away from Ilya’s to gesture down at himself. At the reminder of their grandchild, and Shane’s current status as a hospital patient, his parents straightened up. Mom put a hand on Shane’s shoulder, and Dad took a hesitant step forward.

“We will talk about this,” Mom said, moving her eyes between Ilya and Shane, “But right now I want to know what happened.”

Shane explained quickly what he’d gathered from the doctor–his placenta was partially detached, and he needed to rest while they kept an eye on him for signs of labor. He hated the idea of being stuck in the hospital for a few days, but knew it was for the best. He’d do anything if it guaranteed his daughter’s health.

“I should’ve known,” Mom said, shaking her head. She brought a hand up to rub at her forehead, and Shane saw that her eyes were shining. Shane blinked and glanced up at Ilya, who appeared to be just as lost as he was. Ilya seemed uncomfortable, to put it mildly. And Shane rubbed his thumb over Ilya’s knuckles.

“Yuna,” Dad said softly, putting a hand on Mom’s arm.

“Mom?” Shane asked.

“I couldn’t–I couldn’t get pregnant. And when I did, it was complication after complication with you. You get this from me,” Mom said, looking up at the ceiling and blinking away tears. Shane pressed his lips together.

He’d always known that his parents tried for years to get pregnant, and after him they were unable to have any more children. His mom had avoided going into detail about her pregnancy, even as Shane’s progressed, and now he understood why. She was trying not to scare him.

But Shane was tired of everyone around him blaming themselves for this.

“Stop. *Fuck*,” Shane barked, holding up a hand. His parents froze, likely because he rarely took a tone with them, “It’s not your fault. It’s not Ilya’s fault. It’s not my fault. It just *happened*. All this blame isn’t helping me, and it’s not helping her.”

He put his free hand on his stomach, still disturbed by the lack of movement. He knew that he was being oddly levelheaded about all of this, but he also knew that the second he was alone with Ilya again, he was going to crumble. His bottom lip wobbled at the thought and he bit down on it.

“I’m sorry,” Mom said, wiping her eyes.

Shane just shook his head and laid back against the pillows, turning his gaze to the ceiling. He pushed down on his ribs, hoping to be rewarded by movement, but nothing happened. He closed his eyes and tried to remember the sound of her heartbeat just a few minutes ago, the glorious thumping that he’d do anything to hear again. Maybe he could ask for another ultrasound?

And what if that one was silent? Panic rose in Shane’s chest, and no matter how hard he bit down on his lip, he couldn’t stop it from wobbling. Tears sprung to his eyes as the events of the day came crashing down onto him. Okay, so maybe a breakdown wouldn’t be able to wait until he was alone.

A sob left him, and he pulled away from Ilya, bringing a hand up to cover his mouth. He squeezed his eyes shut to try and stop the tears, but more just leaked out.

“Shane. Shane,” Ilya said, putting a hand on his shoulder. Shane shrugged it off.

“I’m okay. I’m just freaking out. I’ll be okay in a second,” It took Shane almost a full minute to gasp out the words. He heard a plastic clicking and felt the bed shake, and suddenly arms

were wrapped around him, pulling him into a warm, broad chest.

“Hey, hey, hey,” Ilya said soothingly, rubbing a hand on Shane’s upper back, “Everything is okay. Your parents are here, your boyfriend is here, our baby is good. Everything is okay.”

Shane raised his head from Ilya’s chest, blinking at him, “My boyfriend?”

Boyfriend felt so small for what Shane felt for Ilya, and for what they were to each other. They were about to have a baby together–a little human that was half of both of them. Boyfriend didn’t even begin to cover it. Shane’s breathing slowed down.

“We talked about this,” Ilya said softly, pressing his lips to the side of Shane’s head.

“I know,” Shane said. He didn’t have the energy to explain everything he was thinking, so he just wrapped his arms around Ilya and tugged on him until he was squeezed onto the bed next to Shane. It was a tight fit.

“You look tired, kid,” Dad’s voice cut into his thoughts, and Shane looked over at his parents, who were just staring at him. Mom had a small smile on her face. He did feel tired, which would’ve been odd considering he spent half the afternoon sleeping, but this pregnancy was sucking all of his energy.

“I am,” Shane said, letting out a yawn. He was sure blood loss also probably had something to do with it.

“Is almost nine, solnyshko,” Ilya said. That was a new one. He quirked a brow at Ilya

“I think visiting hours end at nine,” Dad said regrettably, exchanging a look with Mom. Shane, privately, was relieved. He’d had a very eventful day, and just wanted to get some rest.

“We’ll be back in the morning,” Mom said, leaning over the bed and kissing Shane on the top of the head. Dad reached out and grabbed Shane’s hand, squeezing it for a moment before letting go.

“Goodnight, guys. Thank you for coming,” Shane said tiredly as his parents walked to the door. Mom gave them one last loaded look before exiting the room with dad in tow. Shane relaxed onto the bed, leaning his head against Ilya’s chest.

“We should talk,” Shane said softly, looking up at Ilya.

“Shh. Rest now. Talk tomorrow,” Ilya said, pulling Shane tighter against his chest. Shane tried to think of something to say, to organize his thoughts into words, but he could feel consciousness slipping away from him as he breathed in Ilya’s scent.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

After a full week out of the hospital and on bedrest, Ilya thought that Shane might be losing it.

“I think a little exercise would be good for me,” Shane said, his voice saccharine sweet as he innocently blinked up at Ilya from his place in bed. Ilya wasn’t buying it.

After being discharged from the hospital, Shane was sent home with strict instructions for bedrest. They’d returned to Shane’s Ottawa home, with an unspoken agreement to not speak about anything serious. They both didn’t want to risk Shane’s health. Ilya though, was of course staying with him—basically waiting on him hand and foot, actually, but he was happy to do it.

“You’ll get exercise when you have to go down the stairs later, when your parents visit,” Ilya replied, unconvinced by Shane’s sweet act. Shane frowned and crossed his arms, and Ilya suppressed a smile. He looked like an angry kitten when he was upset.

Shane grumbled something incoherent, and Ilya took a seat on the bed next to him. He put a hand on Shane’s belly, leaning in to speak to it.

“Hello, printsessa. Your dad and I are having a disagreement about whether or not he should be doing yoga. What do you think?” Ilya asked. As usual when he spoke to her, she kicked under his hand, and he hummed, “I agree, he should stay in bed so you can continue to grow.”

“You two are already teaming up against me,” Shame grumbled, putting his hand over Ilya’s. Ilya grinned, toothy and joyous, at the idea of himself and his daughter being a team together.

“Yes, we will be the best team, me and her,” Ilya said. It still sent a thrill through him when he remembered that he was going to have a family of his own. He and Shane may be in this weird in-between space where they acted like a couple but didn’t talk about it, but Ilya knew that they would label it eventually. They were having a baby together, after all. He’d been patient for almost a decade, he could wait a little longer.

Regardless, though, Ilya considered Shane part of his family now. Him and their baby. The last time he’d felt a love this strong, an urge to protect, had been when his mother was still alive.

“I’d like to be part of that team,” Shane said, quirking a brow at Ilya.

“You and her will always have a special uh… what is word? Uh… Link?” Ilya said.

“Connection?” Shane guessed, and Ilya nodded. Shane smiled, soft and small, and Ilya’s heart skipped a beat. For all the complaining that Shane did about staying in bed, he sure did look cozy leaning against a mountain of pillows and smiling so sweetly.

Ilya leaned forward and kissed him softly, unable to help himself. Shane hummed, and brought a hand up to cup Ilya’s cheek. Ilya didn’t deepen the kiss though, because they were on a strict no-sex regimen, along with the bedrest. Ilya had even inquired about orgasms outside of penetrative sex, much to Shane’s horror, but had been told that no, even the contractions from those could cause issues. Ilya would never complain about it to Shane, but he could admit to himself that he was struggling with it a bit. It was only in the privacy of the shower that he was able to relieve himself.

“Have you thought about any names?” Shane pulled back suddenly, speaking so quickly that it took Ilya’s brain a moment to catch up.

“For my printsessa?” Ilya asked, leaning back. He glanced down at Shane’s stomach and swallowed thickly.

“Yeah,” Shane said, “I know we weren’t talking about it, but… I’ll be 33 weeks soon. And you have to go to training camp in a couple weeks, and I just want—”

Ilya shushed him, “I told you, no training camp for me.”

“Ilya,” Shane said, frustration evident in his tone.

“Shane,” Ilya said, raising his eyebrows. He was serious about this. He’d spoken to his manager about skipping the season, and requesting a trade to a Canadian team. Unfortunately, his conservative Russian manager had called him insane, and Ilya had fired him last week. He knew training camp was coming, though, so he had to figure out a plan. He figured he would pull Yuna aside soon, maybe today, to ask her advice.

His relationship with Shane’s parents was still awkward, but had softened sometime during Shane’s stay in the hospital. Ilya had refused to leave his side, except for one instance in which he ran back to the cottage to shower and pack their things for the impending trip back to Ottawa. Ilya figured that Shane’s parents appreciated his attentiveness.

“I am handling it,” Ilya promised, lacing their fingers together. He cleared his throat, “And I haven’t thought of any names. Not first names, at least.”

Shane gave him a look that said, *we’re not done with this*, but accepted the subject change, “But middle names?”

“One middle name,” Ilya corrected, trying to think of a way to explain, “In Russia, middle name is like… Father’s name, but a little different. My father is Grigori, so my middle name is Grigorivich.”

Ilya had a complicated relationship with his father, even in death, and carrying his name felt more like a burden than an honor. But it wouldn’t be the same for his daughter, because he would be better.

“So her middle name would be… Ilyavich?” Shane asked, and Ilya chuckled, shaking his head.

“Ilyinichna. Daughter of Ilya,” Ilya said softly, and suddenly he could see her in his mind. He had limited experience with babies, but he knew he and Shane’s daughter would be so good, so sweet. She’d look just like Shane, with his dark hair and eyes, and she’d capture Ilya’s heart instantly.

Actually, she already had.

“Everyone would know,” Shane said softly, putting a hand on Ilya’s arm. Ilya felt hurt surge through him. He didn’t want their daughter to be a secret. He was tired of hiding. And he thought Shane was a bit foolish to think that the two of them could keep an entire baby a secret.

“Middle names are private. Did you even know mine before I just told you?” Ilya asked, and Shane pressed his lips together. Ilya continued, “I want her to be a Hollander. But I still want her name to have a piece of me, Shane.”

“Okay, okay. Ilyinichna it is,” Shane agreed, butchering the name entirely. Ilya smiled in spite of himself and resolved to teach Shane how to say it right later.

“And a first name?” Ilya asked.

“Well… I didn’t know if you’d want to use your mother’s name. I don’t even know what it is,” Shane said.

Ilya hesitated. He hadn’t told Shane much about his mother, only that she was dead. He shuffled on the bed so he could lay his head down on Shane’s stomach. He closed his eyes for a moment to picture his mama’s face. It got harder to do with each passing year, so he tried to do it as often as possible to keep her alive in his head.

“Her name was Irina,” Ilya said, “But I do not want to name our printsessa after her.”

“Irina is a beautiful name,” Shane said, and although he pronounced it the Canadian way, with stress on the I, it still felt wonderful to have him speak of her.

“My mother, she… She took her own life. I found her. She wasn’t weak, she was beautiful and funny, but she was very sad. I don’t want to settle our little girl with a… ghost like that,” Ilya spoke slowly, carefully, wanting to get every word right. It hurt to admit, and although he wasn’t angry with his mother, he thought it was best to keep her and his daughter separate, in this sense.

Shane stayed silent, but raised a hand to Ilya’s face, to wipe at the tears that had gathered in the corner of his eyes. There was so much more he wanted to say about his mother, but all of his thoughts felt jumbled in his head. He’d need to think about it more, because he did want to share her with Shane.

“Not Irina, then,” Shane said softly.

“Maybe for the next one,” Ilya said lightheartedly, trying to bring the mood back up. His smile dropped as he watched all the color drain from Shane’s face.

“Next one? Ilya, I’m not doing this again,” Shane said, moving his arms to the bed and pushing himself up so he was sitting straighter. His voice was quiet as he picked at a stray thread on the blanket, avoiding Ilya’s eye, “I already spoke with my doctor, before… all of this. Before you came back in the picture. There’s—I’m going to take permanent measures.”

Ilya lifted his head from Shane’s stomach and sat up, his eyes searching Shane’s face. He knew that overall, pregnancy had been a miserable experience for Shane. Shane loved their daughter, of course, but the sacrifices he was making to bring her into the world came at a high price.

Still, Ilya’s heart hurt a little bit at the idea of never seeing Shane pregnant again after this. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to take a moment before opening them.

“Okay,” Ilya said, nodding once, “So I carry next one. Or we adopt. Or printsessa will be our only baby. We have long time to decide.”

Shane gave a watery chuckle, and just like that Ilya could see all of the defenses he’d put up drop. Ilya leaned forward and wrapped his arms around Shane, burying his face in his neck.

“You’re not going to scare me off,” Ilya murmured quietly into his skin. Shane sniffed and wrapped his arms around Ilya.

They laid there like that, quietly holding each other, for a while. Ilya wished he could freeze this moment and stay in it forever, with Shane and their baby safe, his arms wrapped around them. And then he felt another kick from Shane’s belly, and he pulled away with a grin.

“Miss impatient,” Ilya murmured, leaning down to press a kiss to Shane’s abdomen.

“She’s not the only one,” Shane grumbled.

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A few hours later, when Yuna and David arrived, Shane was taking a nap in his–their?--bedroom. Ilya let the Hollanders in, helping David carry in the bags he was holding. It appeared that he and Yuna had gone shopping, and–Ilya glanced down at the bags in his hands–bought every baby outfit they could get their hands on.

“Shane is napping,” Ilya said, leading them through the living room and into the kitchen. He put the bags on the table, not bothering to unpack them. He knew Shane would want to see them together, and then immediately begin sorting the outfits by size and season. To be fair, it was the most exciting thing Shane was allowed to do at the moment.

“I’ll get started on dinner,” David said up, moving over to the stove. He started digging in the pantry and pulling out spices, and Ilya turned his attention to Yuna.

“Can I talk to you?” Ilya asked her, and she tilted her head.

“Sure,” she said.

Wordlessly, he gestured to the living room, and they made their way over there. He swallowed as he sat down across from her, He clasped his hands together and forced himself to look her in the eye, feeling oddly small.

“I need help,” He admitted, and then continued before she could ask, “I am due to training camp in a week and a half. I do not want to go. I tell my manager this, he argues, I fire him. I want to move to Canadian team, maybe take off whole season, if I can.”

Yuna stared at him for a moment, then placed a crooked finger on her chin as if she were thinking. Ilya didn’t blink as he observed her expression, which gave away nothing. Yuna Hollander would’ve made a hell of a poker player, in a different life.

“I’ve been in talks with the Ottawa Centaurs,” Yuna said carefully, “They’re interested in Shane, but hesitant about a year of IR off the bat. If I could give them something—someone immediate… They *almost* have the cap space…”

A stunned laugh left Ilya, and he slapped a hand over his mouth to stop it. He and Shane on the same team? Able to stay in Ottawa? It would be a dream come true.

“I will play, if I have to. If it helps Shane. We are, how you say, a package deal?” Ilya said.

“I think they would take both of you, but only one on IR. And one of you would have to take a pay cut,” Yuna said, raising an eyebrow.

“I will,” Ilya volunteered immediately. Even if it was for the best, it would be bad timing for Shane, with the pregnancy. Once they went public, it would look like that was why he took a pay cut, as if he were worth less. It would hurt Shane too much.

Ilya, on the other hand, didn’t care how he was perceived. He had more money than he needed anyway, and he didn’t want Shane to have to take the pay cut. And as for playing… It would be difficult for Shane to see Ilya leave for the rink every day, and for Ilya to leave him and their baby alone during away games, but the end result would be worth it.

“Okay,” Yuna said, standing, “I’ll reach out to them tomorrow morning.”

Ilya nodded, and stood up. There was an awkward moment where they both stared at each other, and Ilya had the urge to hug Yuna, but before he could stamp it down, Yuna wrapped her arms around him.

“Oh,” Ilya breathed, before putting his arms around her in return.

“Thank you,” She said, pulling back and putting a hand on his cheek. He didn’t know what she was thanking him for—all of it, maybe? Giving her a grandchild, sticking by Shane? Regardless, Ilya was thankful for her. He couldn’t remember the last time a mother had hugged him.

“No need for thanks. Shane is… Everything,” Ilya said, and he definitely didn’t flush.

“For David and I, too,” Yuna said, smiling softly. She looked so much like Shane that it almost hurt. Was this what Shane and Ilya’s daughter would look like, as an older woman? Like Yuna? The thought felt like a punch to the gut. Ilya was desperate to meet their daughter.

Thinking of her made him miss Shane, and he squeezed Yuna’s arm before pulling away, “Let’s go wake sleeping beauty before dinner. Tell him the plan.”

Chapter End Notes

If you'll notice, we now have a chapter count! It might end up being one chapter longer, but regardless, we're very close to the end!

If you like the premise of this fic, check out my other one "stars around my scars", which has an identical premise except Ilya doesn't find out until the kid is around 7.

And finally, like our lovely Shane Hollander, I have a praise kink, so please comment! Comment about literally anything, it drives me to update faster. <3

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Two weeks passed in a whirlwind for Ilya.

He settled into Shane's Ottawa home and made himself comfortable there as practice with the Centaurs began. Shane was terrible at staying in bed most of the day, and would regularly text Ilya 'boring' updates like *'just ate edamame'* or *'watched Princess Bride again'*. Ilya lived for those updates. His attachment to his phone was a source of friendly chirping from the other Centaurs, who he was still getting to know. He'd just grin and make a comment about having someone waiting for him at home. They all seemed surprised, given his reputation, but Ilya was fine with it. He knew Shane wanted them to be a secret, for now, but it was okay to leave hints, right?

Besides, once Shane got off IR and joined the Centaurs himself next year, they wouldn't be able to keep their relationship from their team.

Their relationship, which was as of yet still undefined. They danced around the topic, and made long term plans together, but never put a label on it. Never said 'I love you'. Honestly, at this point, Ilya was worried Shane didn't want that kind of connection with him. Maybe he just wanted a co-parent… who he kissed sometimes. And sexually things never progressed further than that because of bed rest, so it was difficult to gauge where they were at. They'd always used sex as their primary communication tool.

Ilya loved Shane, though, of that he was certain. Looking at Shane felt like looking at the sun. He just needed to find a way to tell him he loved him. And soon.

He also didn't want Shane to think it was because of the baby. Although Ilya was thinking about their daughter with increasing frequency as her arrival grew closer, he wanted Shane to know that he was valued for more than just being the carrier of their child.

"You think she'll be a hockey player?" Shane asked one day after Ilya returned home from practice. He rolled his shoulders and dropped his equipment bag at the foot of the bed. He wouldn't tell Shane, but it felt great to be back on the ice.

"A menace to the Women's Hockey League," Ilya confirmed, moving his hand to cover Shane's own. Shane shook with laughter.

"Or maybe she'll be very *professional* and let her talent speak for itself," Shane replied, raising an eyebrow.

"Boring," Ilya hummed, rubbing his hand across Shane's belly. His voice took on a softer tone, "I hope she is boring, like you."

“Yeah?” Shane asked, a soft smile on his face that was reserved only for Ilya. Ilya felt like he could melt on the spot. He had no idea what he did to get so lucky.

“Yeah,” Ilya confirmed. Every time he pictured their daughter, he imagined her looking just like Shane, with dark hair and eyes, and behaving just like him, all quiet and polite. She would be a mini-Shane, and she would be all theirs.

“Did you get any further in the baby name book after I fell asleep last night?” Shane asked, glancing at the book that was heavily annotated and sitting on Ilya’s side of the bed.

“Mhm, no,” Ilya admitted, grabbing the book and opening it. It was called Baby Names Around The Globe, and they’d been focusing primarily on names from Japan or Russia. Shane was peculiar, though, and vetoed most of them. Ilya flipped until he was in the Japan section, and his eyes moved down the list.

“Yuuki,” Ilya suggested, glancing over at Shane. Shane crinkled his nose, his eyes falling to the name on the list, no doubt looking at the kanji that spelled it. Shane could read some Japanese, Ilya learned, and had taken lessons as a child. He wondered if Shane wanted their daughter to speak or read Japanese. He would have to ask. Ilya certainly wanted their child to speak Russian.

“No,” Shane said simply, and Ilya nodded. He was used to this.

“You do know we have to pick name eventually, yes?” Ilya asked, “Because you are going to give birth any day now.”

“Nope, I’ve still got a handful of weeks,” Shane said, suborning crossing his arms. Ilya blinked at him, then down at his belly.

“Okay, moy lyubimyy,” Ilya said placatingly.

Privately, he thought that Shane was likely to go into labor sooner rather than later, not only because of the complications he’d already faced but because of how he’d been increasingly complaining of false contractions. And the fact that he looked like he was about to burst. Ilya tried not to point it out though, because he knew Shane was concerned about returning to professional sports after giving birth.

“I think I picked a name,” Shane said suddenly, grabbing the book from Ilya’s hands and closing it. Ilya sat on the bed next to him, his curiosity piqued.

“What is it?” Ilya asked.

“I want to keep it just between her and I, for now,” Shane said, a small smile on his face. He rubbed a hand over his belly.

“What?” Ilya asked, giving him a look of disbelief. Shane shrugged.

“You picked her middle name, so I thought it was fair that I pick her first name,” Shane said, his voice uncharacteristically soft. He sounded… Nervous. Ilya’s heart did a flip, and he leaned over and pressed a kiss to Shane’s temple.

“I am sure whatever you picked is great. I will find out soon, anyway,” Ilya said. This pregnancy had been hard on Shane, and as they’d discussed, it would be his only pregnancy ever, so the least Ilya could do was give him what he wanted. He would give Shane anything he asked for.

“What do you want for dinner? Pizza again?” Ilya asked, and Shane closed his eyes and hummed. Shane’s diet had mostly gone out the window in the final weeks of his pregnancy. The last two days, his cravings had called for veggie pizza. Ilya thought that still seemed like a diet food, but to Shane, it was an indulgence.

“Yes please,” Shane said, and Ilya nodded. Shane cleared his throat and quietly added, “And vanilla ice cream?”

Ilya took a moment to look at Shane, his sweet cheeks red at his own request, snuggled up in bed with his belly swollen to, frankly, an absurd degree at this point in his pregnancy. Ilya wanted to bury himself inside Shane so badly that his cock ached. But he knew that between bedrest and post-birth recovery, it’d be some months yet.

But that was okay. He would wait forever for Shane.

“As you wish,” Ilya said, smiling at him.

—

“Texting your girl again Rozy?” Boodram asked a few days later after practice. Ilya was still in just a towel, leaning against his stall as he unlocked his phone. Most of the other Centaurs had started to pull on underwear and pants or in Luca Haas’ case, were already fully dressed.

“Mind your business, Bood,” Ilya said, but there was no heat behind it.

Ilya looked at the texts he’d managed to send that morning before practice, all of which went unanswered. He saw that he had a missed call from Shane, and about a dozen from Yuna, and his heart dropped. Why the fuck didn’t they call the rink? Or his coach? He’d given the numbers to Shane. He tried to call Shane, but it went straight to voicemail.

He stormed out of the locker room and into the hallway, and called Yuna back.

“Ilya,” Yuna said the second she answered.

“Is it time?” Ilya asked, his lips twitching.

“Yes, but Ilya…” Yuna trailed off. She cleared her throat, “Get to Ottawa General as quickly as you can.

If Ilya weren’t filled with joy at the prospect of being with Shane as soon as he could, and getting to meet their daughter soon, he might’ve heard the tears in Yuna’s voice. But he

didn’t.

“I’ll be there soon,” Ilya promised, before hanging up the phone. He took off down the hall before stopping so quickly he slid and stumbled, catching himself on the wall. He couldn’t show up to the hospital in a towel, he at least needed to put on pants first. He did a quick fist pump and let out a whoop before rushing back to the locker room.

—

It took Ilya an embarrassing amount of time to navigate from the front desk to the birthing ward. There were directional lines on the floor leading to different sections of the hospital, but they were only present in some areas and on some floors. Finally Ilya stumbled out of the elevator on the sixth floor and followed the dark pink line on the floor around the corner to a desk, where a smiling woman was sitting.

“Good afternoon, how can I—”

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya gasped out, sucking in a breath. He didn’t know if it was all the running around or the anxiety that was making him feel breathless.

“Sir, there’s no one by that name here,” The receptionist said, still smiling at him. Her eye twitched.

“This is Ottawa General, no?” Ilya asked, pulling out his phone and opening up the directions app he’d used while speeding over here. He was certain he’d driven to the correct hospital, but honestly he’d been so frantic that he wouldn’t be surprised if he ended up at the wrong one.

“Ilya!” Someone called, and Ilya’s head whipped over to the double doors in the corner, where David Hollander stood. Ilya waved off the receptionist and rushed toward David, a wide smile on his face.

“Where is Shane?” Ilya asked, and it was only then that he noticed how red David’s face was, and that his eyes were puffy. Ilya felt his stomach drop, and he repeated, more frantically, “Where is Shane?”

“He’s still in surgery,” David said, and he put an arm around Ilya’s shoulders, pushing him back towards the receptionist, "He's with us."

"Surgery?" Ilya asked loudly. A noticed a few people in the waiting room glance their way, and he ducked his head. Answers would have to wait, even though his heart was pounding against his ribcage. There were too many people around.

Shane had decided that he’d put out a statement a few weeks after the birth, announcing his daughter. They didn’t have a timeline yet on when Ilya would be announced as half of the equation. It would be too much at once, Shane had insisted.

The receptionist gave him a real smile, and had him sign paperwork with his shaking hands before she gave him a guest pass. He stuck it to his t-shirt as David directed him towards the double doors.

Ilya desperately wanted to know more, but he was terrified of the answers he might get. So he let David lead him through the maze of birthing ward hallways, until David finally broke the silence.

“He started bleeding again this morning—he made an appointment with his doctor, planned on telling you when you got home. But it got bad,” David’s voice broke, “We went over for lunch like we usually do, and he was collapsed in the kitchen.”

Ilya stopped walking and braced a hand against the wall. He couldn’t get over the mental image of Shane passed out on the floor in a puddle of his own blood with no one to help. He retched suddenly and violently, and slapped a hand to his mouth, harsh breaths coming through his nose.

David put a hand on his shoulder, and gently steered Ilya forward, as he continued, “The ambulance took him here, and they brought him right into surgery. He’s still in there now.”

Ilya nodded shakily as they turned the corner to see a glass wall, and on the other side of it, a nursery filled with babies. His heart dropped, and he suddenly remembered that his daughter was at risk now, too. He’d been so caught up in worrying about Shane that she’d completely slipped his mind.

Yuna was standing on the other end of the hall, and David led Ilya over to her. She looked more put-together than David did, but Ilya could still see tear tracks on her cheeks. Yuna reached forward and wrapped her arms around him.

It was then that Ilya finally began to cry. He let out a sob into her hair and she pulled back, putting a hand on his cheek.

“He’s going to be okay,” Yuna promised fiercely, as if she wouldn’t allow any other possibility to enter her mind.

Ilya couldn’t reply, so he just sniffed and looked away, to the nursery. It was then that he noticed the little pink bundle Yuna had been standing in front of. The front of her bassinet said “*Baby Hollander - VIP*”, and she was wrapped up tightly in a blanket, wailing her little heart out, brown eyes blinking furiously. Her head was covered by a pink hat, but Ilya could see wisps of pin-straight light hair peaking out.

“Is that—” Ilya asked, as if he didn’t already know the answer. On the other side of the glass, a nurse approached his daughter and picked her up to soothe her cries. *That should be me,* Ilya thought, *me and Shane.*

“Yes,” David said, his voice hoarse. He cleared his throat, “They brought her out a while ago. She’s okay. They’re just focused on Shane now.”

Ilya looked at his daughter one more time, being rocked back and forth by a nurse. Tears sprang to his eyes. He didn't even know the name that Shane had chosen for her. He might never know it. He made his way to the wall opposite the nursery and leaned back against it, sliding down until his ass hit the ground as tears streamed down his face. He couldn't stand to lose Shane, not like this--not at all.

He hung his head and stared at nothing. He thought about Shane this morning, and wondered if he'd looked paler than usual. Had he begun bleeding before Ilya even left for practice? And how scared must he have been, to be in distress like that all alone? And Ilya couldn't even bother to answer his phone, too busy at practice.

Ilya clenched his hands into fists so tightly that he could feel his nails leaving crescent moons on his palms. He should've been there with Shane. He should've insisted on paternity leave--although Shane didn't want him to take it at all, considering their relationship, or whatever the fuck it was at this point, was still a secret. Ilya Rozanov going on paternity leave at the same time as Shane Hollander making a birth announcement would be too *conspicuous*.

Ilya didn't fucking care anymore. He hadn't for a while now. Shane and their baby were his priority, there was nothing left in Russia for him to protect. And hockey, well, it was just a job to Ilya. He had all the money he could ever need. The only issue with quitting would be getting a Canadian visa, but he was sure a lawyer could figure something out.

He took a shaky breath and wiped his face. He knew that Shane wanted to keep them a secret, but Ilya couldn't do it. If Shane--He swallowed back bile--*when* Shane came through this, Ilya would tell him that he wanted to be public. That he loved him, and wanted to do it out loud, no matter the cost. Life was too short.

But if Shane didn't survive... If Ilya was going to be a single father... He couldn't even bring himself to seriously consider the thought, because it made his breaths start coming in gasps. He had to breathe through his nose to calm himself back down.

He wanted Shane. He wanted his mama. He reached up to his neck and gripped the golden Orthodox cross that sat there, and murmured a quiet prayer in Russian that his mother had taught him when he was young. Over and over he repeated it, until the words began to sound jumbled, even to his own ears.

"Hollander family?" A voice asked tentatively. Ilya looked up and blinked, a few tears escaping. A man in scrubs with his hair covered by a surgical cap was looking at David and Yuna.

"Yes, that's us," Yuna said, sniffing and wiping her tears. She set her shoulders back, and Ilya almost flinched. It was like she was bracing for bad news.

"I'm Dr. Patel, I performed Shane's surgery," He held his hand out. Yuna shook it, and then David. The doctor glanced at Ilya crumpled on the ground, and gave him a nod of acknowledgement, "Mr. Hollander is out of surgery and in recovery."

Ilya let out a punched-out sound and scrambled to stand.

"He's on his way back to his room now, and we'll bring Baby Hollander there, too," Dr. Patel explained, "Mr. Hollander's body has been through a tremendous trauma. We performed a cesarean section, but we also had to do a hysterectomy. This has been explained to him. Mr. Hollander will need help for the next few weeks, both physically and emotionally. A nurse will come by the room to give more specific instructions."

"When can we see him?" Ilya asked, his voice strained. He had to restrain himself from sprinting the halls of the hospital and looking for Shane.

"I can take you to his room right now, unless you have any questions first?" Dr. Patel asked. David opened his mouth, then glanced at Ilya. Whatever he saw on Ilya's face made him close his mouth and shake his head no.

"Okay, follow me," Dr. Patel said, gesturing down the hallway.

Back into the fucking maternity maze, Ilya wanted to say, but bit back any smart comment. He was too busy riding the high of knowing that Shane was *alive*. He was going to be okay.

—

Ilya stepped into the room and froze at the sight of Shane laying back on the bed. His skin was pale, and his eyes were heavy-lidded. David and Yuna rushed to his side, but Ilya felt like his feet were glued to the ground.

“Hey,” Shane said, his voice gravely. He braced his hands on the bed and tried to push himself up, then let out a loud gasp and fell back onto his pillows. He blinked as if surprised at himself, and Ilya could see that his eyes were shining with unshed tears.

“Don’t try to move too much,” Yuna warned, “It’ll hurt. Just take it easy.”

“Our son taking it easy?” David joked, reaching out and putting a hand softly on Shane’s shoulder.

“Where is she?” Shane asked, glancing between his parents. His gaze settled between them, on Ilya. Ilya walked forward, until he was standing right next to Yuna. He reached out and grabbed Shane’s hand, leaning down to kiss his knuckles. He didn’t have words for what he felt.

He wasn’t a religious man, but it seemed like his prayers had been answered. He gave a brief glance to the ceiling. *Thank you, mama.*

“They’re bringing her in a few minutes,” Yuna reassured him. Ilya couldn’t take his eyes off of Shane, but in the corner of his eye he could see Yuna looking at him. She cleared her throat, “Your father and I are going to go to the cafeteria, to give you and Ilya a little time with the baby. To get acquainted. We’ll be back in about an hour, okay?”

Shane nodded, and Yuna leaned forward and pressed a kiss to his head. David put his hand on Ilya’s shoulder and squeezed, and Ilya waited until he heard their footsteps retreat and the door close before he spoke.

“Did you know, this morning? Before I left for practice?” Ilya asked. Shane’s face crumpled, and Ilya had his answer.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t think—I didn’t think it was an emergency, until it was,” Shane said, a tear slipping out. Ilya reached forward and wrapped his arms around Shane’s shoulders. Shane buried his face in Ilya’s neck, sniffing softly. Ilya knew from his own research that Shane’s body was probably flooded with hormones right now, and he probably felt crazy.

“I’m not mad,” Ilya said, which was a little bit of a lie. He was a little mad, but there was no reason to burden Shane with that. What was done was done, and all that mattered was that Shane and the baby were okay.

“Yes you are,” Shane insisted, his voice muffled in Ilya’s neck. With a start, Ilya realized that Shane was trembling in his arms.

“Shane?” Ilya asked, pulling back enough to look at Shane’s face. The tears had stopped, but his eyes were still so big and sad.

“I’m so sorry,” Shane said, his voice shaky. His body was still trembling, and he seemed to realize it too, because he looked down at himself as if he didn’t recognize what he saw.

Ilya pulled away entirely and ignored the pained whine that left Shane. He looked at the bed railing and poked and prodded at it for a few moments before he finally figured out how to lower it. He gently put his arms under Shane and moved him to the other side of the hospital bed—he could tell Shane was out of it because he didn’t protest being manhandled. Ilya climbed in next to him, wrapping an arm around Shane and pulling him softly into his chest.

“It’ll be okay, moy lyubimyy,” Ilya murmured into Shane’s hair, pressing a kiss there. What he said next was only for Shane’s benefit, in an attempt to calm him down, “I forgive you.”

There was so much Ilya wanted to say, so much he’d thought about while Shane was in surgery. But now wasn’t the time for that.

It took a few minutes of Ilya holding him and murmuring softly to him, but Shane’s breathing eventually evened out. The shaking, however, didn’t stop.

“Should we call a nurse?” Ilya asked quietly. Shane sighed and shook his head.

A knock came from the door. A nurse came in pushing a clear bassinet, with the same little baby Ilya had seen earlier. Their daughter.

“Hi dads,” The nurse said, wheeling the bassinet until it was right next to Shane’s bed. Shane’s gaze was laser-focused on their baby. The nurse continued, “This little girl has been waiting to meet you two.”

“Hi,” Shane said quietly, looking over at her. He glanced up at the nurse, “Can I hold her?”

“Of course,” She said, “It’ll help with the shaking, too—that’s a hormonal response. Skin-to-skin would be better.”
Shane nodded, and Ilya could see him rush to pull off the sleeves of his gown before he

winced. Ilya gently reached over and undid the knot at the back of Shane's gown and pulled it off of his shoulders and down his arms until it fell to his lap. The nurse raised the head of the bed to put Shane and Ilya into more of a sitting position.

"Alright dad, do you know how to hold a baby?" The nurse asked, not unkindly.

"Yeah, uh, my best friend has four of them," Shane said, nodding. Ilya thought to himself with some panic that he'd never held a baby this little before, he had no idea how to do it when it would be his turn.

The nurse picked up the baby and placed her into Shane's arms. He leaned her head against his chest. She let out a small coo and blinked up at him, with doe brown eyes identical to Shane's. It made Ilya want to cry.

The nurse reassured them that everything they needed was in the room—diapers, wipes, blankets, etc, and that the baby would stay with Shane as long as he wanted, but he could send her to the nursery so he could get some rest. Ilya could see Shane bristle at that idea, his eyes still on the baby. She showed Ilya the red call button that would summon a nurse, because Shane's attention was firmly on their daughter, and he thanked the nurse quietly before she left.

Once they were finally alone, just the three of them, Ilya leaned his head on Shane's shoulder and gazed down at their little girl. She looked so much like Shane that it was shocking, the same curve to her nose and everything.

"She looks like you," Ilya said quietly. His little girl wasn't crying, but he figured that keeping his voice down was a good call.

"But look at her hair," Shane replied, passing a thumb over a blonde-brown curl by her ear, "And her chin. That's all you,"

Ilya hummed. It was from him, and it was from his mother. Truthfully, he could see a lot of his mama in her.

"What's her name?" Ilya asked. He couldn't very well keep referring to her as 'baby' in his head.

"Kira Ilyinichna Hollander," Shane said, "It's Japanese *and* Russian."

"Kira," Ilya said softly, reaching a hand up tentatively. It fit her perfectly. He wasn't ready to take her from Shane, and he wasn't sure Shane would even let him, but he wanted to touch her. He needed to feel that she was real, so he ran a finger over her brow. Her skin was so soft that it pulled a gasp from him.

They both sat in silence, awed by her little unfocused eyes and rounded cheeks. Ilya felt like his entire world had shifted. His center of gravity was now this little girl, Kira, a less-than-ten pound miracle, as well as her dad, his Shane who had fought to bring her into the world.

“I love you,” Ilya croaked suddenly. He brought a hand up to his face and realized that he’d started crying at some point. Shane finally looked over at him, and the shock on his face made Ilya’s stomach bottom out, “I—I mean—”

“I love you too,” Shane said, letting out a breath, “Fuck, I love you so much.”

“And it’s not because of Kira—” Ilya assured him, “I loved you before.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“It matters to me.”

“I don’t want to hide,” Ilya said, his voice thick, “I can’t hide my love for her, or for you. I want to be her papa, and your… Boyfriend.”

Boyfriend. It felt so small, so inconsequential. Ilya wanted to be Shane’s husband. But there’d already been a lot of changes today, and the ring that he had sitting in his sock drawer in Shane’s Ottawa house could wait a little longer.

“Boyfriend?” Shane asked.

“Yes. I think so. Probably.”

Kira let out a loud cry, startling them both. Both of their heads whipped to look at her.

Now their lives as parents were really beginning, and Ilya couldn’t wait.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaand we're pretty much done! There will be a short epilogue, but the main portion of the story is over. I'm sorry it took me so long! This chapter is extra long to make up for it, plus I avoided the cliffhanger I wanted because I knew y'all deserved to know everything ended okay. <3

Leave a comment if you enjoyed! I want to hear guesses about the epilogue. And feel free to check out my other story, 'stars around my scars', which is very similar to this one!

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I have a lot of this fic prewritten so it should be updated pretty regularly. And I, like our lovely Shane Hollander, have a praise kink, so please leave comments and kudos if you enjoyed!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!