

Achieving What We Can

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/78254441) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/78254441>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Pregnant Shane Hollander , Alpha Shane Hollander , Alpha Ilya Rozanov , Non-Traditional Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics , Its baby time guys... , Angst and Fluff and Smut , Anal Sex , Pregnant Sex , Babies , Established Relationship , Tender Sex , Domestic Fluff , Protective Ilya Rozanov , Married Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander Needs a Hug , Mpreg , Male Pregnancy , Panic Attacks , Anxious Shane Hollander
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of alpha² hollanov
Collections:	anonymous
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-25 Words: 11,136 Chapters: 1/1

Achieving What We Can

by Anonymous

Summary

Shane's pregnant. They've beaten the impossible odds, and now they have seven months to figure out what comes next.

Or: Moments throughout Shane's pregnancy, from the first trimester's uncertainty to the final weeks, and when everything changes forever.

Notes

HELLO. Yes. This has taken me far too long... please enjoy the pregnancy. The bitching fic is maybe halfway done as well but I pivoted because I like babies

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

Week 8

The morning sickness hits Shane like a freight train at exactly 6:29 AM on a Tuesday.

He barely makes it to the bathroom before he's retching into the toilet, his whole body heaving with the force of it. Ilya appears in the doorway within seconds, still sleep-rumpled and confused, his hair sticking up in seventeen different directions.

"Shane?" His voice is rough with sleep and worry. "What is happening?"

Shane can't answer, too busy emptying the contents of his stomach. Which is ridiculous, because he barely ate anything last night. His hand grips the porcelain bowl hard enough that his knuckles go white.

When it finally stops, Shane slumps back against the wall, breathing hard. He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, feeling shaky and gross.

"Is normal," Ilya says quickly, already moving. He grabs a washcloth from the cabinet, runs it under cool water, and crouches down beside Shane. His hands are gentle as he wipes Shane's face. "Dr. Reeves said this might happen, remember?"

Shane nods weakly. He does remember. *First trimester symptoms*, she'd said. *Common with Alpha pregnancies because the hormonal shifts are so dramatic. Your body isn't designed for this, so it's going to protest.*

Still. Knowing it's normal doesn't make it feel any better.

"Come on," Ilya murmurs, helping Shane to his feet. "Back to bed. I'll get you crackers."

"I have that call with the foundation," Shane protests, even though the thought of looking at a screen right now makes his stomach churn all over again.

Ilya gives him a look, that particular expression that means he thinks Shane is being an idiot and he loves him anyway. "You're rescheduling," he says firmly. "Is allowed, you know. Even foundation presidents get sick days."

"I'm not sick," Shane argues, but his voice comes out thready and unconvincing. "I'm just—"

"Pregnant," Ilya finishes. "You're pregnant, and your body is doing something impossible, and you need to rest."

Something in Ilya's voice makes Shane's throat tight. Not just the concern, though that's there in spades. It's the wonder, too. The way Ilya says "pregnant" like it's something precious.

Shane lets himself be led back to bed.

Ilya brings him saltines and ginger tea, both of which Dr. Reeves had recommended. He sits on the edge of the bed and watches Shane like he's afraid Shane might disappear if he looks away.

"You don't have to hover," Shane says, but he doesn't really mean it. The truth is, having Ilya here makes everything feel less terrifying.

"I'm not hovering," Ilya lies. "I'm observing. Making sure you're okay."

Shane takes a small bite of cracker, chewing carefully. His stomach seems to have settled, at least for now. "I'm okay," he says softly. "Just... this is weird."

"Weird how?"

Shane struggles to find the words. "I don't feel pregnant," he admits. "Like, I know I am. The test said so, Dr. Reeves confirmed it, there's..." he touches his still-flat stomach, "something growing in here. But I don't feel different. Except for the puking."

Ilya's hand covers Shane's on his stomach, warm and solid. "Give it time," he says. "Is still so early. Only eight weeks."

Only eight weeks. Thirty-two more to go, if everything goes according to plan. If Shane's body can do this, can carry a baby to term when it was never meant to.

The statistics are terrifying. Dr. Reeves had been honest about that. Alpha pregnancies are rare for a reason. The miscarriage rate is high, especially in the first trimester. Shane could lose this pregnancy at any moment, and there would be nothing they could do about it.

"Hey." Ilya's thumb brushes across Shane's knuckles. "I can hear you thinking. Stop."

"I'm not—"

"You are catastrophizing," Ilya says, and okay, fair. "We take this one day at a time, yes? Today, you are pregnant. Today, our baby is growing. That's what matters."

Shane takes a shaky breath. Ilya is right, he usually is when Shane's anxiety spirals out of control. "One day at a time," he repeats.

"Good." Ilya leans in and presses a kiss to Shane's forehead. "Now eat your crackers and rest. I'll reschedule your call."

"Ilya—"

"Don't argue with your husband when he's trying to take care of you," Ilya says primly. "Is rude."

Despite everything, Shane laughs.

The morning sickness doesn't go away.

For the next three weeks, Shane wakes up every morning and races to the bathroom. Sometimes he makes it in time. Sometimes he doesn't, and Ilya holds his hair back and rubs circles on his back and murmurs soothing things in Russian that Shane doesn't understand but appreciates anyway.

They tell Shane's parents at week ten, because Shane is starting to show the strain and Yuna has always been able to read him like a book. They fly out to the cottage on a sunny Saturday afternoon, and Shane can barely get through the door before his mother takes one look at him and gasps.

"You're pregnant."

It's not a question.

Shane nods, his throat suddenly tight. "How did you know?"

"You have the same look I had when I was pregnant with you," Yuna says, her eyes shining. "That particular kind of exhaustion. The way you're holding yourself." She crosses the room in three quick steps and pulls Shane into a hug. "Oh, *sweetheart*. Oh my god."

Over her shoulder, Shane sees his father staring at him with wide eyes. David Hollander has never been particularly demonstrative, but the emotion on his face is unmistakable.

"I'm scared, Mom," Shane's voice cracks.

"I know," Yuna murmurs into his hair. "I know, baby. But you're going to be okay. You're both going to be okay."

When she finally releases him, David steps forward and pulls Shane into his own hug. "I'm so proud of you," he says quietly. "Both of you."

Ilya hovers nearby, looking uncertain in that way he gets sometimes when Shane's parents are around, like he's not quite sure he deserves to be part of this family, even though he's been part of it for years now. Shane reaches out and snags his wrist, pulling him closer.

"Come here," Shane says. "You're part of this too."

And then they're all hugging, this weird tangle of limbs and emotion, and Shane feels safe. He feels safe.

Later, after they've settled in the living room with tea and more crackers for Shane, Ilya excuses himself to take a call. Shane watches him go, then turns to find both his parents looking at him with identical expressions of concern and love.

"How are you really doing?" his mother asks gently.

Shane takes a breath. "Terrified. Excited. Nauseous. All at the same time."

"That sounds about right," David says with a small smile. "When your mom was pregnant with you, she threw up every morning for sixteen weeks."

"*Sixteen?*" Shane's eyes widen. He's only at ten and he's already exhausted.

"It was worth it," Yuna says firmly, reaching over to squeeze his hand. "Every single second was worth it."

"What if something goes wrong?" The words tumble out before Shane can stop them. "What if my body can't do this? What if—"

"Shane." His mother's voice is gentle but firm. "You can't live in the what-ifs. Yes, there are risks. Yes, this is unprecedented in a lot of ways. But you have the best medical care, you have Ilya who clearly adores you, and you have us. We're all here to support you through this."

"Your mother's right," David adds. "And for what it's worth, you're one of the most determined people I've ever known. If anyone can do this, it's you."

Shane feels tears prick at his eyes. Damn hormones. "Thanks, Dad."

They sit in comfortable silence for a moment before Yuna speaks again. "Have you told anyone else yet? Hayden?"

Shane shakes his head. "Not yet. I wanted to tell you first. But we're planning to tell him and Jackie soon. And..." he hesitates. "Ilya wants to tell some of his Centaurs ex-teammates. The ones he's closest with."

"That's good," Yuna says. "You'll need a support system. This is going to be a lot to handle on your own."

"We're not on our own," Shane says, and he believes it. Even with all his fear, all his anxiety about what's to come, he knows he and Ilya aren't facing this alone.

When Ilya returns from his call, he slides onto the couch next to Shane, close enough that their thighs press together. Shane leans into him automatically, and Ilya's arm comes around his shoulders.

"Everything okay?" Shane asks quietly.

"Was Svetlana," Ilya says. "She wanted to check in. I may have told her."

Shane blinks. "You told Svetlana I'm pregnant?"

"Is that okay?" Ilya looks suddenly worried. "She is my oldest friend. I couldn't not tell her."

"No, it's fine," Shane assures him quickly. "I'm glad you told her. What did she say?"

A smile breaks across Ilya's face. "She screamed. Very loud. I had to hold phone away from ear. Then she cried. Then she demanded to know when she can visit."

Despite everything, Shane finds himself smiling too. "She can visit whenever she wants."

"I told her that," Ilya says. "But maybe after morning sickness stops, yes? Otherwise she will worry too much."

"Good plan."

They stay at the cottage with Shane's parents for the rest of the weekend, and by the time they leave on Sunday evening, Shane feels steadier. More grounded. The morning sickness is still terrible, and the fear hasn't gone away, but he doesn't feel quite so alone in it anymore.

In the car on the way home, Ilya reaches over and takes Shane's hand.

"We're going to be okay," he says quietly. "All three of us."

Shane squeezes his fingers. "Yeah. We are."

Week 16

The ultrasound appointment feels like crossing a finish line and starting a new race all at the same time.

They're past the highest-risk period now, though Dr. Reeves is careful to remind them that Alpha pregnancies carry elevated risks throughout all three trimesters. Still. Making it to sixteen weeks feels like something worth celebrating.

Shane lies back on the exam table, his shirt rucked up to expose his stomach. There's a small bump there now, barely noticeable unless you know what you're looking for, but it's there. Real. Undeniable.

Ilya stands beside him, gripping his hand so tightly that Shane's fingers are starting to go numb. Shane doesn't complain.

Dr. Reeves squirts the gel onto Shane's stomach. It's cold, and he flinches, then presses the transducer wand against his skin. For a long moment, there's nothing but static on the screen.

And then a shape. Small and bean-like, but unmistakably there. Moving.

"There's your baby," Dr. Reeves says, her voice warm. "Everything looks good. Strong heartbeat."

She turns up the volume, and suddenly the room fills with sound, a rapid whooshing thump-thump-thump that makes Shane's breath catch in his throat.

That's his baby's heartbeat.

His and Ilya's baby.

"Oh my god," Shane breathes. His free hand flies to his mouth.

Beside him, Ilya makes a choked sound. When Shane glances over, there are tears streaming down his face, and he's not even bothering to wipe them away. He's just staring at the screen like it's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen.

"Is real," Ilya whispers. "Shane, is... they're real."

"Yeah," Shane manages. His own eyes are burning. "Yeah, they are."

Dr. Reeves gives them a moment, continuing to move the wand around and take measurements. She points out the head, the little arms and legs, the curve of the spine. Shane tries to follow along, but he can barely process what he's seeing through the haze of emotion.

They made this. Together. Against all odds, against biology itself, they made a person.

"Do you want to know the sex?" Dr. Reeves asks after a few minutes.

Shane and Ilya exchange a glance. They'd talked about this, lying in bed late at night. Ilya had been adamant that he didn't care either way, boy, girl, it didn't matter as long as the baby was healthy. Shane had felt the same.

But now, with the reality of their baby right there on the screen...

"Not yet," Shane says. "I think... I think we want to be surprised."

Ilya squeezes his hand in agreement.

Dr. Reeves smiles. "That's fine. I'll make a note in your chart." She clicks a few buttons, and the printer whirs to life. "I'm printing you some pictures to take home."

When she hands them over, Shane stares down at the grainy black-and-white images. Their baby. So small still, but undeniably there.

"Thank you," he says hoarsely.

They don't make it out of the parking lot before Shane breaks down.

He's not even sure why it hits him so hard, just that one moment he's fine and the next he's sobbing into his hands, his whole body shaking with the force of it. Relief and terror and joy all tangled up together until he can't tell where one emotion ends and another begins.

Ilya pulls over immediately, throwing the car into park. "Shane? Sweetheart, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Shane gasps. "Nothing's wrong. I just..." He can't finish the sentence. Can't explain the overwhelming rush of feeling.

Ilya unbuckles and reaches across the console, pulling Shane as close as their awkward position will allow. "Is okay," he murmurs. "You can cry. Is a lot."

"I'm scared," Shane admits into Ilya's shoulder. "I'm so fucking scared, Ilya. What if something goes wrong? What if I can't do this? What if—"

"Stop." Ilya pulls back just enough to cup Shane's face in his hands. His thumbs brush away Shane's tears. "Listen to me. You heard what Dr. Reeves said. Everything looks good. Baby is healthy. You are healthy. We're doing this, Shane. You're doing this."

"But—"

"No buts." Ilya's expression is fierce. "I know you're scared. I'm scared too. But we're in this together, yes? You and me and our baby. We'll figure it out."

Shane takes a shaky breath. Then another. Slowly, the panic starts to recede, leaving him wrung out but calmer. "Together," he repeats.

"Always together," Ilya confirms. He presses a kiss to Shane's forehead, then his nose, then his mouth. "Now. Let's go home so I can put these pictures on the fridge."

Despite himself, Shane laughs. "You're such a sap."

"Only for you," Ilya says, grinning. "And now for our baby too."

That night, Shane wakes up at 2 AM to find Ilya's side of the bed empty.

He finds his husband standing in the room they've designated as the nursery, even though there's nothing in it yet except some boxes and a treadmill they've been meaning to move. Ilya is staring at the space like he's trying to imagine it fully formed.

"Can't sleep?" Shane asks softly from the doorway.

Ilya startles, then relaxes when he sees Shane. "Just thinking," he admits. "About everything we need to do. Crib, changing table, clothes..." He waves his hand vaguely. "There's so much, Shane. How do people do this?"

Shane crosses the room and wraps his arms around Ilya from behind, resting his chin on his shoulder. "One day at a time," he reminds him, echoing Ilya's own words back. "We have time. Twenty-four more weeks."

Ilya's hand comes up to cover Shane's where they rest on his chest. "I want everything to be perfect," he confesses. "Want our baby to have everything they need."

"They will," Shane promises. "Because they'll have us. That's what matters most."

Ilya turns in his arms, and in the dim light filtering through the window, Shane can see the vulnerability in his expression. The fear that mirrors his own.

"I'm going to be a father," Ilya says wonderingly.

"Yeah," Shane agrees. "We both are."

They stand there for a long moment, just holding each other in the empty room that will soon be full of life and love and probably a lot of crying at 3 AM.

"Come back to bed," Shane murmurs eventually. "We need to rest while we still can."

Ilya follows him back to their bedroom, and they curl up together under the covers. Shane's hand finds his small bump, and Ilya's hand covers his.

"Goodnight, little one," Ilya whispers to Shane's stomach. "Your papas love you very much."

Shane falls asleep smiling.

The next day, Shane calls Hayden.

They haven't seen each other in person since before Shane found out he was pregnant. Between Hayden's busy schedule with the kids and Shane's exhaustion and morning sickness, they'd mostly been keeping in touch via text. But now, Shane thinks it's time.

"Hey!" Hayden's voice is bright when he answers. *"Long time no talk. How are you?"*

"Good," Shane says. "Really good, actually. Are you busy? Can you and Jackie come over this weekend? I have something I want to tell you."

There's a pause. *"Is everything okay?"*

"Everything's fine," Shane assures him. "Better than fine. I just... it's better to tell you in person."

"Okay, now you're worrying me."

"Don't worry. It's good news. I promise."

"Alright," Hayden says, sounding unconvinced. *"We can come over Saturday afternoon. The kids have soccer in the morning, but we're free after that."*

"Perfect. See you then."

When Saturday arrives, Shane finds himself pacing the living room nervously. Ilya watches him with amusement.

"You know they're going to be happy for us, yes?" Ilya says.

"I know," Shane says. "I just... I've never told anyone before. Except our parents. And Svetlana, but that was you."

Ilya nodded. "It will be good, solnyshko. They are your friends."

The doorbell rings, and Shane nearly jumps out of his skin. Ilya laughs and goes to answer it.

Hayden and Jackie come in with their usual chaos, Jackie carrying the baby and Hayden herding the older kids. "Sorry we're late," Jackie says. "Arthur decided he needed to change his outfit three times."

"No problem," Shane says. His heart is pounding.

They settle in the living room, the kids immediately distracted by the toys Shane and Ilya keep for when they visit. Jackie sits with Amber on her lap, and Hayden sprawls on the couch next to her.

"So," Hayden says. "What's this big news?"

Shane looks at Ilya, who gives him an encouraging nod. They'd agreed Shane should be the one to tell them.

"I'm pregnant," Shane says.

For a moment, there's absolute silence. Hayden and Jackie both stare at him with identical expressions of shock.

Then Jackie squeals. "Oh my god! Shane! That's amazing!"

She's up and crossing the room before Shane can blink, pulling him into a careful hug. "Congratulations! When did you find out? How far along are you? Oh my god, I'm so happy for you!"

Hayden is still sitting on the couch, looking stunned. "You're pregnant," he repeats slowly. "Like, actually pregnant."

"Yes, actually pregnant," Shane confirms, laughing. "Sixteen weeks."

"Holy shit." Hayden finally stands and comes over, pulling Shane into a hug of his own. "That's incredible, man. I'm so happy for you. Both of you."

He extends the hug to include Ilya, who accepts it with surprising grace.

"This is why you've been so tired lately," Jackie says, the pieces clearly clicking into place for her. "And why you canceled on us last month."

"Morning sickness," Shane confirms. "It was pretty bad for a while."

"But it's better now?" Jackie asks, concern evident in her voice.

"Mostly," Shane says. "Still happens sometimes, but not as often."

They spend the next hour talking about the pregnancy, Shane's symptoms, what the doctors have said. Jackie offers advice and reassurance, having been through pregnancy three times herself. Hayden mostly listens, but Shane can see the genuine happiness in his best friend's eyes.

"Have you thought about names?" Jackie asks at one point.

"Not really," Shane admits. "We don't even know if it's a boy or a girl yet. We decided to wait."

"That's sweet," Jackie says. "The surprise will be nice."

As they're leaving, Hayden pulls Shane aside. "Hey," he says quietly. "I just want you to know... I'm really proud of you. I know this wasn't easy, and I know you must have been scared to tell us. But I'm honored you did. And I'm here for whatever you need, okay?"

Shane feels his throat tighten. "Thanks, Hayden. That means a lot."

"Also," Hayden adds, his voice taking on a teasing tone, "I can't *believe* you didn't tell me sooner. I've been your best friend for how long?"

"I was nervous!" Shane protests.

"About telling me you're pregnant? Shane, come on."

"I didn't know how you'd react!"

Hayden's expression softens. "Fair enough. But for the record, I'm always going to be happy for you. No matter what."

After they leave, Shane collapses on the couch next to Ilya. "That went well," he says.

"Told you," Ilya replies smugly.

"Don't be smug."

"Can't help it. Am always right."

Shane rolls his eyes but can't help smiling. "We should probably start thinking about telling more people. Your teammates, maybe some other friends..."

"And we should plan gender reveal party," Ilya says. "Jackie was saying is popular thing to do now."

"A gender reveal party?"

"Yes. We invite people, we find out if baby is boy or girl, everyone celebrates."

Shane considers this. On one hand, it feels like a lot of attention and fuss. On the other hand... it might be nice. To share this moment with the people they care about.

"Okay," he says. "Yeah. Let's do it."

Ilya's face lights up. "Really?"

"Really. But nothing too crazy. Just our close friends and family."

"Define crazy."

"No explosions."

"But Shane—"

"No. Explosions."

Ilya pouts, but he's smiling. "Fine. No explosions. But I get to plan everything else."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Shane mutters, but he's smiling too.

Week 24

"I look like I swallowed a basketball," Shane announces, staring at himself in the full-length mirror.

It's not quite true. At twenty-four weeks, his bump is more pronounced than it was but still relatively modest. He can hide it under baggy shirts, though he's given up on most of his regular clothes. Still, seeing the undeniable swell of his stomach is surreal every single time.

"You look beautiful," Ilya says from where he's sprawled on the bed, watching Shane with undisguised appreciation.

Shane snorts. "I look weird."

"Weird and beautiful," Ilya amends. He sits up and beckons Shane closer. "Come here."

Shane goes, because he can never resist when Ilya gets that particular look on his face, soft and heated all at once. Ilya's hands immediately go to Shane's stomach, cradling the bump with a reverence that makes Shane's throat tight.

"You're growing our baby," Ilya says seriously. "Is most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"You're so full of shit," Shane accuses, but his voice wavers.

Ilya looks up at him, and there's no teasing in his expression now. Just pure, unfiltered sincerity. "I'm not," he says quietly. "Shane, you're doing something incredible. Something impossible. Every day I look at you and I can't believe..." He breaks off, shaking his head. "Can't believe you're real. That this is real."

Shane's eyes are definitely not getting misty. That would be ridiculous. "Hormones are making you sappy," he mutters, even though they both know it's not the hormones at all.

Ilya grins and presses a kiss to Shane's bump. "Maybe. But I'm also right."

The first kick happens three days later.

Shane is sitting on the couch, reading one of the parenting books his mother had sent them (he's already finished two others and taken detailed notes), when he feels it.

A flutter. No, not a flutter. A definite movement. Like someone poking him from the inside.

He freezes, his hand flying to his stomach. "Ilya," he calls out, his voice tight.

Ilya appears in the doorway immediately, dish towel still in hand. "What? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," Shane says quickly. "I just... I think the baby moved."

Ilya drops the towel and crosses the room in three long strides. "Moved? Just now?"

"Yeah, I..." Shane presses his hand more firmly against his bump, waiting. Hoping. "Come on," he murmurs. "Do it again."

For a long moment, nothing happens. Shane is starting to think maybe he imagined it when—
There. Another flutter-kick, stronger this time.

"Oh my god," Shane breathes. "Did you see that?"

Ilya shakes his head, looking crushed. "No, I... can I...?" He reaches out tentatively.

"Yeah, of course." Shane guides Ilya's hand to the right spot, holding it there. "Just wait."

They stay like that, frozen, for what feels like an eternity. Shane is about to give up when the baby kicks again, and this time, Ilya's face goes slack with wonder.

"I felt it," he whispers. "Shane, I felt them."

"I know," Shane says, and he's definitely crying now, hormones be damned. "They're real, Ilya. They're actually real."

Ilya makes a choked sound and buries his face against Shane's stomach, his shoulders shaking. Shane cards his fingers through his hair, his own tears falling freely.

"Hi, baby," Ilya murmurs against Shane's bump. "Hi, little one. I'm your papa. And I love you so much already."

The baby kicks again, as if in response.

By week twenty-six, the kicks have become a regular occurrence.

The baby is most active at night, of course, because apparently even in utero, they're determined to mess with Shane's sleep schedule. He'll be lying in bed, trying to drift off, when suddenly his entire stomach will start moving like there's a tiny acrobat in there.

"They're doing it again," Shane says on a Wednesday night, resigned to another hour of lying awake while his baby practices their gymnastics routine.

Ilya, who had been half-asleep, immediately perks up. He scoots down the bed and presses his ear to Shane's bump. "Hi, troublemaker," he coos. "Why are you keeping your papa awake?"

As if in answer, there's a particularly strong kick right against Ilya's ear. He laughs delightedly.

"They like you," Shane says, even though he's exhausted and his back hurts and he has to pee for the fifteenth time that day. "They always kick more when you talk to them."

"Is because they know I'm cooler papa," Ilya says smugly. Then he presses a kiss to Shane's bump. "But don't tell Shane that. He's sensitive."

"I'm right here," Shane points out.

Ilya grins up at him. "I know." He shifts back up the bed and pulls Shane against his chest, one hand settling protectively over the bump. "Go to sleep, sweetheart. I'll keep watch."

"Keep watch for what?" Shane mumbles, already feeling his eyes drift closed despite the continued movement in his stomach.

"For everything," Ilya says simply. "I'll keep watch for everything."

Two weeks later, they tell their other friends.

Troy, Harris, Wyatt, Lisa, Bood, Cassie, and J.J. all come over for dinner, ostensibly just a casual get-together. But Shane can tell Ilya is nervous by the way he keeps checking on the food, adjusting place settings, generally fussing in a way that's very unlike him.

"They're going to be happy," Shane says quietly, catching Ilya's hand as he passes by for the third time. "Just like Hayden and Jackie were."

"I know," Ilya says. "But is different. These are my... My guys. My firends."

"Your guys who already adore you," Shane points out. "And who've been asking about why we've been so quiet lately."

That's true. Wyatt had texted just yesterday asking if everything was okay, if Shane and Ilya were having relationship problems, because they'd turned down the last three invitations to hang out.

When everyone arrives and settles around the dinner table, Shane can feel the nervous energy coming off Ilya in waves. He reaches under the table and squeezes his husband's hand.

"So," Wyatt says, after they've all served themselves and started eating. "Not that we're not happy to be here, but you guys have been weird lately. What's going on?"

Ilya glances at Shane, who nods encouragingly.

"We have news," Ilya says. "Good news."

"Oh god, are you guys getting divorced?" J.J. blurts out, then immediately looks mortified. "Sorry, that came out wrong. I meant... you're not getting divorced, right?"

"No, we're not getting divorced," Shane says, trying not to laugh. "The opposite, actually. We're... expanding our family."

There's a beat of silence as everyone processes this.

Then Lisa gasps. "You're adopting?"

"Not exactly," Shane says. He stands up, and his bump is immediately visible under his shirt. At almost twenty-eight weeks, there's no hiding it anymore.

"Holy shit," Troy breathes. "You're pregnant."

"Yes," Shane confirms, smiling. "Twenty-eight weeks."

The table erupts. Everyone is talking at once, getting up to hug them, asking questions. Harris looks like he might cry. Wyatt is definitely crying. J.J. is already pulling out his phone to look up "what to get for baby shower."

"This is amazing," Cassie says, pulling both Shane and Ilya into a hug. "We're so happy for you. Both of you."

"When did you find out?" Troy asks.

"About six months ago," Ilya says. "We wanted to wait until we were past the risky period before we told people."

"And you're both feeling okay?" Boob asks, looking at Shane. "Is everything going well?"

"So far, so good," Shane says. "The morning sickness was rough at first, but it's mostly gone now. And the baby is healthy and active."

"Very active," Ilya adds. "Shane barely sleeps because baby is doing gymnastics at night."

"That's normal," Lisa assures them. "All of ours did that."

They spend the rest of the evening talking about the pregnancy, about preparations, about the nervousness and excitement. By the time everyone leaves, Shane is exhausted but happy.

"See?" he says to Ilya as they clean up. "I told you they'd be supportive."

"You were right," Ilya admits. He wraps his arms around Shane from behind, hands settling on the bump. "I'm glad we told them."

"Me too."

The gender reveal party is scheduled for week thirty-two.

Shane had wanted something small and low-key, but Ilya had other ideas. Not explosions, as promised, but pretty much everything else.

The backyard is decorated with neutral-colored balloons and streamers. There's a table full of food, a dessert bar, and a large box in the center of the lawn filled with colored balloons that will reveal the sex of their baby.

Shane's parents are there, of course, along with Hayden and Jackie and their kids. Their ex-teammates and their families. A few other close friends. Even Svetlana, who flew in from Boston specifically for this.

"This is not small," Shane mutters to Ilya as they stand on the deck, surveying the gathering crowd.

"Is intimate," Ilya argues. "Only our closest people."

"There are at least thirty people here."

"Exactly. Intimate."

Shane shakes his head, but he's smiling. The truth is, seeing all these people here, people who care about them and are excited about their baby, it makes his chest feel warm.

Before they open the box, Hayden pulls Shane aside.

"Hey," Hayden says. "Remember when I told you we were having Arthur? And you asked if I wanted to get you pregnant too?"

Shane blinks, then starts laughing. "*Oh my god*, I'd forgotten about that."

"Well, I just want to say, for the record, I'm glad you found someone else to knock you up instead."

"Hayden!"

"What? I'm just saying, Rozanov can deal with your crazy pregnant mood swings. I've got my hands full with Jackie's."

Jackie appears from nowhere and swats her husband on the arm. "I heard that."

"I meant it lovingly," Hayden says, pulling her close and kissing her temple. She rolls her eyes but smiles.

Shane watches them, feeling a sudden surge of affection for his best friend and his family. "Thanks for being here," he says quietly. "It means a lot."

"Where else would I be?" Hayden says. "You're my best friend. And that baby is going to have the best uncles in the world."

"Uncles plural?"

"Me and every other man here, apparently," Hayden says. "I saw them earlier, arguing about who gets to babysit first."

Shane laughs. "Of course they were."

When it's time for the reveal, Shane and Ilya stand together in front of the box. Shane's heart is pounding. After all this time, after everything they've been through to get here, they're finally going to know.

"Ready?" Ilya asks quietly.

"Ready," Shane confirms.

They open the box together, and pink balloons float up into the sky.

A girl.

They're having a girl.

Shane's knees go weak, and Ilya has to catch him. Around them, everyone is cheering and clapping, but Shane can barely hear it over the roaring in his ears.

A daughter. They're having a daughter.

"Shane?" Ilya's voice is concerned. "Are you okay?"

"I'm perfect," Shane breathes. "We're having a girl, Ilya."

"Yes," Ilya says, and his voice is thick with emotion. "We're having a girl."

They stand there, holding each other while pink balloons float above them and their friends and family celebrate around them. Shane's hand finds his bump, and Ilya's hand covers it.

"Hi, baby girl," Shane whispers. "We can't wait to meet you."

That night, after everyone has left and they're cleaning up, Shane finds Ilya standing in the nursery again. But this time, there's furniture. A crib they assembled two weeks ago. A changing table. A bookshelf already filling with children's books.

"Thinking about names?" Shane asks from the doorway.

Ilya turns, and there's something vulnerable in his expression. "Actually, yes. I had a thought."

"Yeah?"

"What would you think..." Ilya pauses, then starts again. "My mother's... if you would want to... I know is Russian name, but—"

"Irina," Shane repeats, testing it out. "Irina Hollander-Rozanova."

"You don't have to," Ilya says quickly. "Is just an idea."

"I love it," Shane says, crossing the room to wrap his arms around Ilya. "It's perfect."

Ilya's shoulders sag with relief. "Really?"

"Really. Your mother would have loved her, and I want our daughter to carry her name. To know where she came from."

"Thank you," Ilya whispers, burying his face in Shane's neck. "Thank you."

They stand there for a long time, holding each other in the nursery that's no longer empty. The nursery that will soon hold their daughter.

Irina.

Week 30

The nesting instinct hits Shane like a goddamn avalanche.

One day he's fine, and the next he's reorganizing the entire nursery at 7 AM on a Sunday morning, sorting tiny onesies by color and then by size and then by color again because the first system wasn't quite right.

Ilya finds him three hours later, surrounded by piles of baby clothes, looking slightly manic.

"Sweetheart," Ilya says carefully. "What are you doing?"

"The green ones don't go with the yellow ones," Shane explains, which makes perfect sense to him but clearly doesn't translate, based on Ilya's expression. "And we need more blankets. We don't have enough blankets. What if the baby gets cold?"

"We have seventeen blankets," Ilya says patiently. "I counted."

"That's not enough," Shane insists. His hands are shaking slightly as he refolds a tiny pair of pajamas with cartoon ducks on them. "And the crib, did we set it up right? What if we didn't? What if it's not safe?"

Ilya crosses the room and gently takes the pajamas out of Shane's hands. "The crib is perfect," he says firmly. "We followed the instructions exactly. It's safe, I promise."

"But—"

"No buts." Ilya cups Shane's face in his hands, forcing him to make eye contact. "I know you're anxious. I know you want everything to be perfect. But Shane, it already is. This room is beautiful. Our baby is going to be so loved. That's what matters."

Shane takes a shaky breath. Ilya's right, he knows Ilya's right. But the urge to keep organizing, to keep preparing, to somehow control the uncontrollable, is overwhelming. "I just... I need everything to be ready."

"It will be," Ilya promises. He guides Shane to his feet, careful of his balance now that his center of gravity has shifted. "But you also need to rest. Doctor said not to overdo it, remember?"

Shane does remember. Dr. Reeves had been very clear at his last appointment. Alpha pregnancies are hard on the body, and at thirty weeks, Shane needs to be careful not to exhaust himself. He's supposed to be taking it easy.

Reorganizing the nursery for three hours straight probably doesn't count as taking it easy.

"Come on," Ilya says gently. "Let's go sit down. I'll make you lunch."

"I'm not hungry," Shane protests, even as his stomach growls.

Ilya raises an eyebrow. "Your body disagrees."

After lunch (which Shane devours despite his protests), Ilya insists they spend the afternoon on the couch. Shane tries to argue, but the truth is, he's exhausted. His back aches, his feet are swollen, and the baby has decided to use his bladder as a punching bag.

Pregnancy, he's decided, is deeply unsexy.

Except when Ilya looks at him like he's the most beautiful thing in the world, which he's doing right now.

"Stop staring," Shane mutters, trying to get comfortable against the mountain of pillows Ilya has constructed for him.

"Can't help it," Ilya says unapologetically. "You're very beautiful when you're pregnant."

"I'm huge," Shane counters.

"You're perfect," Ilya corrects. His hand settles on Shane's bump, and the baby immediately kicks against his palm. "See? Baby agrees with me."

Despite himself, Shane smiles. "You're impossible."

"Yes," Ilya agrees easily. He shifts closer, pressing a kiss to Shane's temple. "But you love me anyway."

"Unfortunately," Shane says, but there's no heat in it.

They sit like that for a while, Ilya's hand on Shane's stomach, the baby moving occasionally beneath his touch. It's peaceful in a way Shane desperately needs right now.

"I'm scared," Shane admits quietly. "About the birth."

Ilya's hand doesn't move, but Shane feels him tense. "What are you scared of?"

"Everything," Shane says honestly. "It's going to hurt. A lot. And there are so many things that could go wrong. My body... it's not designed for this, Ilya. What if I can't do it?"

"Then we do a C-section," Ilya says practically. "Dr. Reeves already said that's an option if we need it."

"I know, but..." Shane struggles to articulate the fear that's been gnawing at him for weeks now. "I want to do this. I want to... I don't know. Prove that I can. Does that make sense?"

Ilya is quiet for a moment. Then he says, "You don't have anything to prove. Not to me, not to anyone. But I understand."

"Do you?"

"Yes." Ilya presses another kiss to Shane's head. "You've wanted this for so long. You fought so hard for it. Of course you want to see it through." He pauses. "But Shane, if something goes wrong, if you need surgery... that doesn't make you a failure. That just makes you smart for doing what's safest for you and the baby."

Shane knows Ilya's right. Logically, he knows. But there's still that part of him that feels like he needs to do this the "right" way, whatever that means.

"I'll try to remember that," he says softly.

"Good." Ilya's fingers trace idle patterns on Shane's bump. "Now stop worrying and take a nap. You're exhausted."

"I'm not—" Shane starts to protest, but a yawn interrupts him.

Ilya smirks. "What was that?"

"Fine," Shane grumbles. "But I'm only napping because you're very comfortable."

"I'll take it," Ilya says, grinning.

Shane wakes up to Ilya carefully maneuvering out from under him, trying not to disturb him. It doesn't work. Shane has been a light sleeper since the second trimester started.

"Sorry," Ilya whispers. "Didn't mean to wake you."

"It's fine." Shane yawns and stretches as much as his pregnant body will allow. "What time is it?"

"Almost five. I was going to start dinner." Ilya hesitates. "But first... I have something for you. Stay here."

He disappears before Shane can ask questions, returning a few minutes later with a large, flat box. He sits down on the edge of the couch and hands it to Shane.

"What is this?" Shane asks, already starting to tear at the wrapping paper.

"Open it and see," Ilya says, and there's something soft in his voice that makes Shane's heart squeeze.

Inside the box is a photo album. No, not just any photo album. Shane opens it and sees the first ultrasound picture, carefully mounted on the first page. The next page has the sixteen-week ultrasound. Then the twenty-week one.

But that's not all. Interspersed between the ultrasound photos are pictures Shane didn't even know Ilya had taken. Shane asleep on the couch, one hand resting on his tiny first-trimester bump. Shane standing in front of the mirror at twenty weeks, looking uncertain. Shane laughing at something in the kitchen, his growing belly visible under his shirt.

"Ilya," Shane breathes. His vision is blurring. Damn hormones.

"I've been documenting everything," Ilya explains. "So we can remember. So our baby can see." He reaches over and flips to one of the last pages. There's a photo from last week, Shane and Ilya both with their hands on his bump. "Is important, I think. To remember this time. Even the hard parts."

Shane can't speak past the lump in his throat. He just pulls Ilya into a kiss, hoping it conveys everything he can't put into words.

When they finally break apart, Ilya is smiling. "So you like it?"

"I love it," Shane manages. "I love you."

"I love you too," Ilya says. Then he leans down and addresses Shane's bump: "And we both love you, little one. So much."

The baby kicks in response, and Shane laughs through his tears.

A week later, they have the baby shower.

Jackie had insisted on throwing it, and Shane had eventually given in. It's at Hayden and Jackie's house, and when Shane and Ilya arrive, the backyard is transformed.

Pink decorations everywhere. A table full of gifts. A cake shaped like a baby onesie. And all their friends and family, gathered to celebrate.

Shane's mother pulls him aside as soon as they arrive. "How are you feeling?" she asks, her hand going automatically to his bump.

"Tired," Shane admits. "But good. Ready for her to be here."

"Not long now," Yuna says with a smile. "Just a few more weeks."

The shower is overwhelming in the best way. Everyone has brought something: clothes, toys, books, blankets. Troy and Harris went in together on a state-of-the-art baby monitor. Wyatt and Lisa brought a massive teddy bear that's nearly as tall as Shane. J.J. gives them a onesie that says "Future Hockey Star" on it.

Hayden's contribution makes everyone laugh: a onesie that says "My Dads Are Cooler Than Yours."

"I couldn't decide between 'Papas' and 'Dads,'" Hayden explains. "But I figured you guys could work that out."

"We're going with Papas," Ilya says. "Is better."

"Noted," Hayden says with a grin.

When it's time for cake, everyone gathers around. Shane stands with Ilya beside him, one hand on his bump, and looks around at all these people who love them. Who are here to celebrate their daughter.

"Thank you," Shane says, his voice thick. "All of you. This means more than you know."

"Speech!" someone calls out, and Shane shakes his head.

"No speech," he says. "Just... thank you. For being here. For supporting us. We couldn't do this without you."

"Yes you could," Jackie says. "But we're glad you don't have to."

Later, after most people have left and Shane is sitting on the couch surrounded by gifts, Hayden sits down next to him.

"You doing okay?" Hayden asks.

"Yeah," Shane says. "Just processing. This is really happening."

"It really is," Hayden agrees. He's quiet for a moment, then says, "You're going to be a great dad, you know."

Shane looks at him, surprised. "You think so?"

"I know so," Hayden says firmly. "I've watched you with my kids. You're patient and kind and you actually listen to them. That's more than most people manage."

"Thanks, Hayden."

"Plus, you've got Rozanov," Hayden adds. "And say what you will about the guy, but he clearly adores you. And he's going to adore that baby."

Shane smiles. "Yeah. He really is."

Week 36

Sex has been off the table for weeks now, because Shane is exhausted and uncomfortable and also because they're both terrified something will go wrong if they try.

But at thirty-six weeks, Shane is so frustrated he could scream.

"We could try," Ilya offers one night after Shane has been tossing and turning for an hour, unable to get comfortable. "Dr. Reeves said it was safe, remember?"

"I don't even know if I can," Shane admits. "Everything feels weird. My body doesn't feel like mine anymore."

Ilya props himself up on one elbow, looking down at Shane in the darkness. "Then we don't," he says simply. "Is okay. We can wait."

But Shane doesn't want to wait. He wants...

He wants to feel connected to Ilya in that particular way again. Wants to remember what it's like when it's just the two of them, before everything changes. Wants to feel desired instead of just... pregnant.

"I want to try," Shane says quietly. "But... I don't know how."

Ilya's expression softens. "We'll figure it out," he promises. "But only if you're sure."

"I'm sure," Shane says. And he is.

It takes some maneuvering.

Shane on his back doesn't work; the weight of the baby makes it hard to breathe. On his hands and knees is too much pressure on his wrists. They finally settle on Shane on his side, Ilya pressed up behind him, moving slowly and carefully.

"Okay?" Ilya breathes against Shane's neck.

"Yeah," Shane gasps. "Yeah, I'm... oh."

Ilya's hands are careful on his hips, supporting him. His movements are gentle, almost reverent, like he's afraid Shane will break. And maybe Shane feels a bit breakable right now, but this... this is exactly what he needed.

"I love you," Ilya murmurs between kisses pressed to Shane's shoulder, his neck. "Love you so much. You're so beautiful, Shane. So perfect."

Shane can't do more than moan in response, overwhelmed by sensation. It's different now. Everything feels more intense, more sensitive. The angle is different too, and Ilya is hitting spots that make Shane's breath catch.

"Ilya," he gasps. "I can't... I don't think I can..."

"Let me," Ilya says, and one of his hands slides around to wrap around Shane's neglected cock. It only takes a few strokes before Shane is coming, harder than he has in weeks, his whole body shaking with the force of it.

Ilya follows soon after, pressing deep and holding there, his face buried in Shane's neck. They stay like that for a long moment, just breathing together.

"We should have done that sooner," Shane says eventually, once his brain has come back online.

Ilya laughs quietly. "Probably," he agrees. He carefully pulls out and helps Shane roll onto his back. His hand immediately finds Shane's bump, checking in with both of them. "You okay?"

"I'm perfect," Shane says, and means it. He's exhausted and sore and he'll probably need to pee in about thirty seconds, but right now, in this moment, everything feels right.

Ilya presses a kiss to his forehead, then his bump. "Both of you are perfect," he corrects.

At week thirty-seven, Shane starts having Braxton Hicks contractions.

The first one hits while he's making breakfast, and he gasps, his hand flying to his stomach. The tightening sensation is intense but not quite painful, and it only lasts about thirty seconds before it releases.

"Shane?" Ilya appears in the kitchen doorway immediately. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Shane says, breathing carefully. "Just Braxton Hicks, I think. Dr. Reeves said they'd start around now."

Ilya doesn't look convinced, but he nods. "Should I start timing them?"

"Not yet," Shane says. "They're not real contractions. They're just..." Another one hits, and he has to pause and breathe through it. "Practice."

Except they keep happening all day. Not regularly, but enough that Shane is hyper-aware of every twinge, every tightening. By evening, he's exhausted and irritable and maybe a little bit terrified.

"We should call Dr. Reeves," Ilya suggests for the fifth time.

"It's not time yet," Shane argues, even though part of him wants to call her too. "These are normal. She said they're normal."

"But—"

"Ilya." Shane reaches out and takes his hand. "I'm okay. The baby's okay. I can feel her moving. It's just my body getting ready."

Ilya doesn't look happy about it, but he nods. "Okay," he says. "But if they get worse..."

"We'll call," Shane promises. "I promise."

That night, Shane can't sleep.

The contractions have mostly stopped, but he's too keyed up to relax. He lies in bed, one hand on his bump, feeling the baby move beneath his palm.

We're almost there, he thinks. A few more weeks, and everything will change.

He's terrified. He's excited. He's so many things at once that he can't separate one emotion from another.

"Can't sleep?" Ilya's voice is soft in the darkness.

"No," Shane admits. "Just thinking."

Ilya shifts closer, wrapping around Shane from behind. His hand covers Shane's on his bump. "Thinking about what?"

"About meeting her," Shane says. "About... everything. What if I'm a terrible parent? What if I don't know what to do?"

"Then we figure it out together," Ilya says simply. "Same as everything else."

"You make it sound so easy."

"Is not easy," Ilya corrects gently. "But we don't have to be perfect. We just have to love her. And we already do."

Shane's throat goes tight. "Yeah," he whispers. "We really do."

They lie there in comfortable silence, the baby occasionally shifting beneath their joined hands. Shane feels himself finally starting to relax, exhaustion pulling at him.

"Ilya?" he murmurs, already half-asleep.

"Mm?"

"Thank you. For doing this with me. For... everything."

Ilya presses a kiss to the back of Shane's neck. "Nowhere else I would rather be," he says softly. "You and me and our baby. Is everything I ever wanted."

Shane falls asleep with those words wrapped around him like a blanket.

Week 39

Shane's nesting instinct reaches critical mass at thirty-nine weeks.

He reorganizes the nursery again. He washes all the baby clothes a second time, even though they're already clean. He makes Ilya go through the hospital bag with him six times to make sure they have everything. He cleans the entire house from top to bottom, scrubbing baseboards at 10 PM on a Thursday night while Ilya watches in concerned fascination.

"*Shane*," Ilya says carefully, when he finds Shane reorganizing the kitchen cabinets at 2 AM. "Sweetheart. You need to sleep."

"I can't," Shane says, his hands shaking slightly as he moves canned goods around. "There's too much to do. What if we forgot something? What if—"

"We haven't forgotten anything," Ilya interrupts firmly. He takes the can of tomatoes out of Shane's hand and sets it on the counter, then turns Shane to face him. "Everything is ready. The nursery is perfect. The house is clean. We have everything we need."

"But—"

"The only thing left to do is wait for our baby to be ready," Ilya continues. His hands cup Shane's face, thumbs brushing over his cheekbones. "And you can't control when that happens. No matter how many times you reorganize the cabinets."

Shane's eyes are burning. He's so tired, but his brain won't shut off. "I'm scared," he admits in a whisper.

"I know," Ilya says gently. "I'm scared too."

That admission breaks something in Shane. Ilya never admits he's scared. He's always the strong one, the one who holds everything together while Shane falls apart.

"You are?"

"Of course," Ilya says, like it's obvious. "Shane, you're about to give birth. My husband, *lyubov moya*, is about to do something hard and scary and I can't do anything to help. Of course I'm terrified."

Shane hadn't thought about it from Ilya's perspective. Hadn't considered that Ilya might be just as scared as he is, maybe for different reasons.

"I'm sorry," Shane says. "I've been so focused on my own anxiety, I didn't—"

"Don't apologize," Ilya interrupts. "You're allowed to be anxious. You're about to push a human being out of your body. Is a lot." He pauses. "But you can't control everything, sweetheart. Sometimes you just have to trust that it will be okay."

Shane takes a shaky breath. Then another. "Okay," he says softly. "Okay."

"Good." Ilya presses a kiss to his forehead. "Now come to bed. Both of you need rest."

This time, Shane doesn't argue.

The contractions start for real two days later, at 5:43 AM on a Sunday morning.

Shane wakes up to a sharp, cramping pain low in his abdomen, different from the Braxton Hicks he's been having. This one is intense, radiating from his belly around to his back, and it takes his breath away.

"Ilya," he gasps, gripping the sheets. "Ilya, I think..."

Ilya is awake instantly, sitting up and reaching for Shane. "What? What's happening?"

"Contraction," Shane manages through gritted teeth. "Real one."

The pain crests and then slowly subsides, leaving Shane panting. He glances at the clock on the nightstand. 5:44 AM. The whole thing lasted just over a minute.

"Okay," Ilya says, and Shane can hear him trying to stay calm even though his hands are shaking slightly where they grip Shane's shoulder. "Is okay. We have time. Dr. Reeves said early labor can last for hours. We don't need to go to the hospital yet."

Shane nods, trying to remember everything from the birthing class they'd taken. Stay home as long as possible. Time the contractions. Don't go to the hospital until they're five minutes apart, lasting a minute, for at least an hour.

"We should time them," Shane says. His voice sounds surprisingly steady.

"Yes." Ilya scrambles for his phone. "I'll start timing. You just... breathe. Focus on breathing."

The next contraction comes twelve minutes later. Then fifteen minutes after that. Then ten. They're irregular and manageable, and Shane feels almost calm. He can do this. He's been preparing for this for months. His body knows what to do.

By 8 AM, the contractions are seven minutes apart. By 10 AM, they're five minutes apart and lasting over a minute each. Shane has to stop and breathe through them now, leaning heavily on Ilya or the counter or whatever surface is nearest when they hit.

"Time to go?" Ilya asks during a brief reprieve between contractions, and Shane can hear the tension in his voice.

Shane nods. "Yeah," he says. "Time to go."

The drive to the hospital feels simultaneously endless and far too short.

Shane grips the door handle through two contractions, breathing carefully through the pain. Ilya's knuckles are white on the steering wheel, and he keeps glancing over at Shane with barely concealed panic.

"Eyes on the road," Shane reminds him, trying to sound calm even though another contraction is building. "I'm fine. Just drive."

"You're in labor," Ilya says, like Shane might have forgotten. "You're having our baby and I... I can't do anything."

"You're driving me to the hospital," Shane points out. "That's doing something."

The contraction hits hard, and Shane has to close his eyes and breathe through it. One hand finds his belly, cradling the swell of it. Soon, very soon, this belly will be empty, and they'll have a baby in their arms instead.

The thought is both exhilarating and terrifying.

When they pull up to the hospital entrance, Ilya insists on getting a wheelchair even though Shane protests he can walk. "I'm not risking anything," Ilya says firmly, helping Shane into the chair. "Not now."

They're taken up to labor and delivery, where Dr. Reeves is already waiting. She examines Shane, checking his cervix, and pronounces him five centimeters dilated.

"You're doing great," she says with an encouraging smile. "Everything looks good. We'll get you settled in a room, and then it's just a matter of waiting."

"How long?" Shane asks, his voice tight as another contraction builds.

"Hard to say," Dr. Reeves admits. "First labors can take a while. But you're progressing well. I'd estimate you'll meet your baby sometime in the next twelve to twenty-four hours."

Twelve to twenty-four hours. Shane tries not to let that number overwhelm him.

Labor is brutal. That's the only word for it.

Shane has been through a lot in his hockey career. He's been hit, checked, slammed into boards. He's had stitches and concussions and that one time his shoulder got dislocated. He thought he knew pain.

This is different.

This pain has a purpose, but that doesn't make it any easier. Each contraction feels like his body is trying to tear itself in half, waves of agony that crest and crash and leave him gasping in their wake.

By hour six, he's begging for an epidural.

"I can't do this," he gasps between contractions, gripping Ilya's hand so hard he's probably leaving bruises. "I can't, Ilya, I need..."

"Epidural," Ilya tells the nurse immediately. "He needs epidural. Now."

The anesthesiologist arrives within twenty minutes, and Shane has never been more grateful for modern medicine in his life. The relief is almost instantaneous. The contractions are still there, he can still feel the pressure, but the searing pain is gone.

"Better?" Ilya asks, smoothing Shane's sweat-damp hair back from his forehead.

"So much better," Shane breathes. He can finally think clearly again. "I'm sorry I..."

"Don't apologize," Ilya interrupts. "You have nothing to apologize for. You're doing amazing, sweetheart. So amazing."

Shane's not sure he believes that, but he appreciates Ilya saying it anyway.

By hour ten, Shane is seven centimeters dilated and exhausted beyond belief.

"I'm so tired," he mumbles, his eyes drifting closed. "Can't keep them open."

"Then sleep," Ilya says gently. He's been by Shane's side the entire time, holding his hand, wiping his face with a cool cloth, murmuring encouragement in Russian and English both. "Rest while you can. I'll wake you if anything changes."

Shane wants to argue, wants to stay awake, but his body has other ideas. He drifts off between contractions, surfacing briefly when the pressure intensifies, then slipping back under.

When he wakes more fully, Dr. Reeves is back in the room, checking him again.

"Nine centimeters," she announces. "Almost there. Another hour or two, maybe, and you'll be ready to push."

Another hour or two. Shane can do this. He has to do this.

The urge to push hits at hour thirteen, sudden and overwhelming and impossible to resist.

"I need to push," Shane gasps, his whole body tensing with the force of it. "Dr. Reeves, I need..."

"Let me check first," she says calmly, and after a quick examination, she smiles. "You're complete. Ten centimeters. Okay, Shane, on the next contraction, I want you to push."

Ilya is at his side immediately, one arm around Shane's shoulders, supporting him. "I'm right here," he says. "You can do this. I know you can."

The next contraction builds, and Shane pushes with everything he has. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Good!" Dr. Reeves encourages. "That's perfect. Rest now, and we'll push again with the next one."

It goes on like that. Contraction, push, rest, repeat. Shane loses track of time, focused entirely on his body and what it needs to do. Ilya never leaves his side, talking him through each push, telling him how strong he is, how brave.

"I can see the head," Dr. Reeves announces after what feels like forever. "One or two more pushes, Shane. Your baby is almost here."

Almost here. Shane can barely process it. He's so tired, so wrung out, but he gathers every last bit of strength he has for one final push.

The pressure intensifies beyond anything he's felt, a burning stretch that makes him cry out, and then, suddenly, release.

"It's a girl!" Dr. Reeves exclaims, and Shane hears the most beautiful sound in the world: his daughter's first cry.

"Shane," Ilya breathes beside him, his voice thick with emotion. "Shane, we have..."

But Shane can't focus on Ilya right now, can't focus on anything except the tiny, wailing bundle that Dr. Reeves is placing on his chest. His hands come up automatically to cradle her, this impossibly small person who somehow came from him.

She's perfect. Red-faced and screaming and covered in vernix, and absolutely perfect.

"Hi," Shane whispers through his tears. "Hi, sweet girl. We've been waiting for you."

Ilya leans in close, his hand covering Shane's where they support their daughter. He's crying too, tears streaming down his face unchecked. "She's beautiful," he says hoarsely. "Shane, she's so beautiful."

Their daughter's cries start to quiet as she nuzzles against Shane's chest, already seeking comfort from her papa. Shane stares down at her in wonder, unable to believe this is real. That she's real. That they did this.

"We need to finish up here," Dr. Reeves says gently after a few minutes. "But take your time. There's no rush."

Eventually, they have to let the nurses take their daughter to clean her up and do all the necessary checks. Ilya goes with her, refusing to let her out of his sight, while Shane delivers the placenta and gets stitched up. He's too exhausted and overwhelmed to care much about what's happening to his body. All he can think about is his daughter.

Their daughter.

When the nurses finally bring her back, swaddled in a hospital blanket with a tiny knit cap on her head, Ilya places her carefully back in Shane's arms.

"Two-point-nine kilo," Ilya reports, his voice full of pride. "

Perfectly healthy. All her fingers and toes. She even has my nose, I think."

Shane studies his daughter's tiny face, committing every detail to memory. "She has your nose," he agrees softly. "And my freckles, maybe. It's hard to tell yet."

"We did it," Ilya whispers, perching carefully on the edge of Shane's bed. "We really did it."

"Yeah," Shane breathes. He can't stop staring at their daughter, at the impossible miracle in his arms. "We really did."

Later, after they've been moved to a recovery room, after Ilya has taken approximately three hundred photos, after they've both held their daughter and cried several more times, Shane finally speaks what they've both been thinking.

"Irina," he says softly. "Hi, Irina."

Ilya's eyes are shining. "Irina Hollander-Rozanova," he says, and his voice breaks on the last syllable.

"Your grandmother would have loved you," Shane tells their daughter. "And we love you so much."

That night, or maybe it's morning (Shane has lost all track of time), Ilya helps Shane shuffle to the bathroom and then back to bed. Everything hurts in new and exciting ways, and Shane is pretty sure he'll never be able to sit comfortably again, but he doesn't care.

He has his daughter. He has Ilya. He has everything.

Once he's settled back in bed, Ilya carefully lifts Irina from her bassinet and places her in Shane's arms. She's awake but quiet, her dark eyes (Ilya's eyes) staring up at Shane with an intensity that seems impossible for someone so new to the world.

"Hi, sweet girl," Shane murmurs, his finger stroking her impossibly soft cheek. "Welcome to the world. We're your papas, and we love you so much."

Irina makes a small sound, her tiny fist waving in the air until it connects with Shane's finger. She grips it with surprising strength, and Shane feels his heart expand so much he's surprised it doesn't burst.

"I can't believe we made her," he whispers.

Ilya settles onto the bed beside them, wrapping an arm around Shane's shoulders so they're all cocooned together. "We did," he says. "Against all the odds. Against biology itself. We made her."

"She's going to do amazing things," Shane says with sudden certainty. "She's going to change the world."

"Of course she is," Ilya agrees, pressing a kiss to Irina's forehead. "She's already changed ours."

They sit like that for a long time, the three of them together for the first time as a family. Shane's exhausted, his body aches, he has no idea what he's doing, and he's pretty sure he's going to be terrified every single day for the rest of his life.

But as he looks at his daughter, at his husband, at the impossible family they've created, he's never been happier.

Epilogue

Six weeks later, Shane is sitting in the nursery at 3 AM, feeding Irina while Ilya snores softly down the hall. The house is quiet except for the small sounds of his daughter nursing, her tiny hand gripping his finger.

Parenthood is nothing like Shane imagined. It's harder, so much harder. The sleepless nights, the constant worry, the fear that he's doing everything wrong. There are days when he's so tired he can barely think straight, when he breaks down crying because Irina won't stop crying and he doesn't know how to fix it.

But it's also better than he ever dreamed. The way Irina smiles at him now when she sees his face. The small sounds she makes when she's content. The weight of her in his arms, the trust she has that he'll take care of her. The look on Ilya's face when he holds their daughter, like she's the most precious thing in the universe.

"You're so loved, little one," Shane whispers to Irina as she finishes eating and starts to drift off to sleep. "By me and by your papa. We're going to do everything we can to give you a good life. To teach you to be kind and brave and true to yourself."

He thinks about the impossibility of her existence. How they were told it would probably never happen. How they tried anyway, because sometimes you have to reach for the impossible. How their daughter, their perfect, beautiful, impossible daughter, is living proof that miracles do exist.

Ilya appears in the doorway, still half-asleep, his hair sticking up in all directions. "Everyone okay?" he mumbles.

"We're perfect," Shane says softly. "Just having a moment."

Ilya shuffles over and presses a kiss to Shane's head, then to Irina's. "I love you both so much," he murmurs.

"We love you too," Shane replies. "More than anything."

And as he sits there in the quiet darkness, his daughter asleep in his arms and his husband by his side, Shane knows with absolute certainty:

Everything they went through to get here, every moment of fear, every setback, every impossible odd they overcame, it was all worth it.

Every single second.

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Kudos and comments loved and appreciated ♡ also I have zero clue how late in pregnancy you can actually have sex but if 36 weeks is too late... pretend that omegaverse makes up for it.

Let me know if y'all would like a follow up to this for the series !!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!