

A Different Kind of Future

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A Different Kind of Future

by [BerriesOnTop](#)

Summary

Ilya Rozanov is an incredibly skilled and famous hockey player, maybe the best in the league. He's known for being captain of the team in Ottawa, for being constantly surrounded by adoring fans, and for being kind of an asshole.

Shane Hollander is the founder and director of a charity hockey school in Montreal. He loves his job and takes it very seriously, which leaves little time for socializing or just about anything else.

Ilya and Shane cross paths when Ilya's manager insists on boosting his public image with a little charity work. The two don't exactly click, yet they can't stop thinking about each other. Mutual attraction turns into a hook up, and then another, and then suddenly a positive pregnancy test.

Shane and Ilya have to figure out how to navigate this complicated situation, and in the process discover the feelings they have for each other are a lot deeper than they thought.

Notes

Hello, it's me, back with another mpreg fic 😊. I will try to update this story when I can. Thank you for checking it out and I hope you enjoy it!

Chapter 1

“Amazing job! You all did so great out there,” Shane Hollander said as he high-fived the class of seven-year-olds stumbling their way off the ice.

Now that his hockey school had grown into a big success, he spent a lot more time in meetings and at networking events than he'd like. His favorite thing had always been leading classes for the little kids, and he made sure to keep time in his schedule for it. When the last kid had waddled off the ice dressed in gear that was nearly twice their size, he took his skates off and made his way to the head office. There he found Hayden in a pile of paperwork.

“How was class?” he asked without looking up.

“Great, as always.” Shane plopped down on the couch with a heavy sigh. “A few of the kids actually managed to spend the whole class upright.”

Long time business partners and even longer friends, Shane and Hayden ran the hockey school together. Their office had two side-by-side desks and a futon couch on the opposite wall. When they were first starting out and working round the clock, Shane spent several nights sleeping on the couch, buried in paper work.

“I hope they managed to learn something,” Hayden said. “They’ll be too excited to learn anything next week.”

“What’s next week?”

Hayden looked up.

“Ilya Rozanov.”

“Fuck, I forgot.”

A few months earlier, the hockey school got a phone call from Ilya Rozanov’s manager. They were apparently trying to clean up Rozanov’s public image as an asshole by stirring up some publicity of him doing charity work before the upcoming hockey season. Shane nearly hung up the phone right there, but Hayden convinced him to hear them out.

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this,” Shane said, walking over to his desk.

“I know you hate the guy, but think about the press. Every parent from here to Ottawa is going to want to sign their kids up for lessons.”

“I think we’re doing just fine without the press.”

Hayden smiled while he pressed his laptop shut.

“I’m getting out of here for the day,” he said, packing up. “Don’t spend the whole night working, okay?”

“No promises,” Shane said. “Give Jackie and the kids my love.”

Hayden was right about one thing, press for the hockey school was the biggest they’d ever had. Shane pulled into the parking lot the day of Rozanov’s visit and couldn’t even find an empty spot. The lot was overflowing with cars from families desperate to participate in the workshop where Ilya Rozanov was paying a visit. Shane finally managed to find a place to leave his car around the back of the building by the dumpsters.

Inside was even more of a circus. The rink, locker rooms, and waiting area were packed with people. Shane found Hayden in the crowd.

“This is a nightmare.”

“This is great!”

Hayden took Shane by the arm and led him toward the rink, either not noticing or ignoring Shane’s negative energy. He had already been there for an hour helping parents sign their kids up for the school. Shane had drastically underestimated the power of Ilya Rozanov. He didn’t see it for himself until they pushed through the doors to the rink.

Rozanov and his team were already there. He was on the ice in his team uniform, shaking hands with parents and taking selfies with kids. Shane rolled his eyes. The fake show for the cameras made him sick. He hated the show of it all, the need to keep up appearances. It was one of the things that kept him from going pro, and Rozanov was especially skilled at it.

Despite his repulsive display for the cameras, Shane couldn’t help but feel drawn to Rozanov. There was something about him that shined bright. Shane could feel it from across the room.

“Ilya Rozanov, this is Shane Hollander,” Hayden said as he exited the rink. “He’s the reason this whole place exists.”

“Very nice hockey school,” Rozanov said, extending his hand. “Almost as big as my apartment in Ottawa.”

Jesus, this guy was an asshole.

“Thanks,” Shane said, reaching to shake his hand.

The moment they touched, there was something electric. Shane didn’t quite understand it, but it was there. He told himself it was the rush that comes with meeting a celebrity. Hate him or love him, Rozanov was one of the best hockey players in the world, and here he was standing in Shane’s hockey school. That was surely responsible for the lightning bolt he felt through his entire body as they locked eyes. It must have been.

“We will be working together all week, yes?” Rozanov said.

Shane took a quick glance at Hayden who was giving him a desperate grin.

"That's right," Shane forced out. "Looking forward to it."

The rest of the week with Rozanov was torture, not that Shane ever really got close to him. There was a constant stream of parents and kids wanting their five minutes with their favorite hockey player. Shane wasn't sure when his reputable hockey charity turned into celebrity press event. At least there was only one day to go before Rozanov returned to Ottawa and things went back to normal. Shane drove to the school early that morning, he still had his weekly class to teach before the chaos started, and Rozanov wasn't going to ruin it for him.

Shane sighed when he already heard voices down the hall as soon as he walked in. He guessed a few parents decided to beat the crowd even earlier than he did.

Shane stopped short when he reached the end of the hall and saw Rozanov down on one knee in front of a bench. There were two little kids sitting in front of him grinning happily and kicking their feet while he helped them into their skates.

"This pair will feel better," Rozanov said. "Parents always buy skates too big so their kids can grow into them, but much safer to wear skates that fit."

Shane tried to keep himself hidden around the corner while he watched Rozanov tie the laces on the little girl's skates.

"How does this feel?" he said. "Fit okay?"

He helped the girl onto her feet and watched as she stomped around, testing the skates.

"Ah, you are professional," he said. "You will be better than me soon."

The little girl stumbled in her unfamiliar footwear and Rozanov quickly reached out and grabbed both her hands, stopping her from falling down. She held onto his hands tightly as he helped her back over to the bench.

Shane couldn't quite process what he was seeing. This was not the Ilya Rozanov he knew from TV, or the stories on the internet, or even his own eyes the last few days. Away from all the cameras and reporters and managers, this Rozanov was completely different.

"Be careful out there," Rozanov said as the kids made their way toward the rink. "But have fun. That is most important."

Rozanov turned and was startled to see Shane standing there. He made a show of putting his hand over his chest.

"Shane Hollander, you are standing here in the shadows like serial killer," he said. "You are here to murder me?"

"Not today," Shane said. "What are you doing here so early?"

"Your business partner told me you teach beginner class Friday mornings."

"That's right. But, why..."

"I think these kids could use real teacher, yes? Maybe they will actually learn something today."

Rozanov gave him a rough slap on the arm before turning for the rink. He was out of sight before Shane could react. He already heard the kids on the ice cheering at the sight of him. Shane sighed and made his way toward the locker room.

Shane had expected the rest of Rozanov's team to be waiting for him out on the ice, but it turned out they wouldn't be arriving until later. The only people on the rink were Shane, Rozanov, the kids, and a few parents watching from the stands. Shane continued to be surprised by this version of Rozanov. There was no showboating for the cameras, only the occasional challenging of Shane to a race when it amused the kids. Rozanov was happy to work closely with the kids as they learned new skills in their wobbly skates and giant gear. He was quick to support the ones who needed a little extra help, holding a nervous hand through the obstacle course or offering words of encouragement. Shane could hardly believe what he was seeing. He even caught himself having fun.

Then the stands begin filling with parents and kids hoping to get their one last chance to see Ilya Rozanov and the calm start to the day quickly vanished. Reporters and photographers showed up in packs, and there was Rozanov, back to the arrogant persona Shane had always thought was the real Rozanov. Shane faded into the crowd and let the day go on as planned.

Finally, the last event of the day ended and people started leaving. Parents scrambled to get their last photos with Rozanov while kids gathered up their gear and raced to the parking lot. When just about everyone had left, Shane told Hayden he was going to hit the showers and asked him to thank Rozanov's team on their behalf.

Shane was standing beneath the hot water when he heard the door to the showers open. He thought it was strange that Hayden would be taking a shower when he hadn't even been on the ice that day. He nearly gasped when he looked up and saw Rozanov turning on the showerhead beside him.

"I am driving back to Ottawa from here," Rozanov said. "Wanted to shower before drive."

"Okay," Shane said and turned away.

Shane started rinsing the soap from his hair as quickly as possible. His eyes were closed under the running water when he suddenly got the feeling of being watched. He opened his eyes and felt his pulse quicken. Some part of him knew he was about to turn and see Rozanov looking at him. He didn't want to confirm it, yet he couldn't resist this strange strong impulse to look...

Shane turned and saw Rozanov looking at him. Not just looking at him, but looking down, at the space between his legs. Rozanov slowly moved his gaze upward, shamelessly following the contour of Shane's body until their eyes met.

Shane's heart pounded in his chest. He knew he should say something. *Anything*. Instead he quickly shut the water off and grabbed a towel before rushing for the door.

Shane dressed more quickly than he ever had in his life and rushed to his office. He sat down at his desk and dug into some paperwork, hair still wet from the shower. He tried to keep himself distracted until the sound of Rozanov leaving through the main entrance. He had been pretending to work for about ten minutes when Rozanov appeared in the office doorway.

"Thanks for, uh, for everything you did this week," Shane said without looking up. "You should probably leave now if you don't want to get stuck in traffic."

To Shane's horror, Rozanov stepped inside his office. He slowly closed the door behind him. Shane watched from behind his computer as Rozanov looked at the different awards and photographs covering the office wall.

"You are very good," Rozanov said, looking at a photo of Shane on the ice during a charity game. "Why didn't you go pro?"

"You're an asshole," Shane said, shaking his head.

"I am serious." Rozanov turned around. "You are good. Better than some guys I've played with in the league, maybe."

Shane looked at Rozanov and saw sincerity in his eyes.

"I almost did," Shane said. "Go pro, I mean."

"Why didn't you?"

"My parents really wanted me to. They got me the best coaches and the best trainers and starting talking deals with sponsors. It all started to feel very..."

"Like business?" Rozanov said.

"Yeah, something like that," Shane said. "So I just stopped everything and decided to do this instead." He gestured around the room.

Rozanov sat down on the couch.

"Your parents. They like hockey?"

"A little too much."

"Do they like me?"

"Of course. You're the best," Shane said. "My mom thinks you're an asshole, though."

Rozanov smiled. "She is not wrong."

Shane smiled despite himself. He looked up and saw that Rozanov had picked up a glass award for Shane's charity work from a nearby shelf.

"Uh, maybe don't pick that up."

Shane walked across the room and took the award from Rozanov's hand. When he did, their fingers grazed for a brief moment. There it was again, that unexplainable electricity. Shane set the award back down and made to walk away.

"Wait," Rozanov said.

Shane stopped. He was standing in front of Rozanov on the couch. Rozanov leaned slightly forward, his face square with Shane's hips. Shane felt his heart jump into his throat. His feelings about Ilya Rozanov had changed so many times in the last day, he didn't know what to think anymore. One thing he was definitely sure of was that he really, desperately, wanted Rozanov to touch him.

Somehow reading his mind, Rozanov reached out and put his hands on Shane's hips. The touch sent a pulse through Shane's entire body. His heart pounded and his breathing quickened. Rozanov let his fingers trail to the front of Shane's jeans and he undid the button. Shane couldn't take it any longer. He wanted Rozanov, and he wanted him now.

Shane suddenly dropped to his knees in front of Rozanov. He leaned forward and fumbled to unzip Rozanov's pants. Rozanov scooted forward on the couch and tugged his pants down, exposing himself to the air. Shane wasted no time taking all of him in his mouth. Ilya sighed and slid his hand under the collar of Shane's shirt, grabbing at his bare skin while his back muscles tensed.

"Fuck, Hollander," Rozanov said. "That's perfect."

Shane hummed as he sucked, taking Rozanov in. His pulse raced even faster, knowing he turned Rozanov on like this, that the very sight of him made him hard. He felt Rozanov's fingers slide over his scalp, grabbing a fistful of his hair and gently tugging. Shane leaned in, taking Rozanov even deeper. Rozanov moaned and bucked his hips up. He breathed in loud, strained spurts.

"I'm close," Rozanov choked out, tightening his grip on Shane's hair.

Shane swallowed as Rozanov came down his throat. He made sure to keep sucking while Rozanov rode out his orgasm, making it last as long as possible. When he finally felt Rozanov relax, Shane released him. Rozanov quickly grabbed his shoulders and tugged him upward, pulling him into a kiss.

Rozanov's kiss was rough and hungry. It seemed to go on forever, and Shane didn't want to end. Finally, they both came up for air and Shane collapsed on the couch beside him.

"Turns out you are good at more than one thing, Hollander," Rozanov said, catching his breath.

“Shut up.”

“I have better idea.”

Rozanov turned toward him and pushed Shane back onto the couch. He reached up and tugged down Shane’s pants, the button still undone from earlier.

“Oh, fuck,” Shane said, feeling himself suddenly exposed to the air.

He couldn’t stop the gasp that came out of him when he felt Rozanov’s mouth wrap around his cock. Shane gritted his teeth and hissed. He tilted his head back and moaned.

“Fuck, Rozanov, that’s...”

His voice trailed off as pleasure overtook him. Rozanov worked him expertly, his head bobbing up and down, sucking with impressive strength.

“Rozanov I’m... I’m...”

That was as far as Shane got before he came down Rozanov’s throat. His whole body shuddered as he climaxed, his fists tearing at the couch cushion beneath him. Rozanov slowly slid off of Shane, then placed a gentle kiss on his cock before sitting up on the couch. Shane took a second to zip up and then pushed himself up, heady and dazed from the afterglow.

They both sat silently on the couch for a moment, letting their breathing return to normal. They both smiled as they came back to reality.

“That was...”

“Yes,” Rozanov said.

Rozanov finally stood and straightened himself out. Shane was surprised to feel disappointed at the sight of Rozanov leaving.

“Thank you for this week, Hollander. You have wonderful hockey school here.” Rozanov leaned in and gave Shane a quick kiss on the lips. “I will see you next time we play Montreal.”

Ilya Rozanov opened the office door, and then he was gone, leaving Shane with his head still spinning.

Chapter 2

Things went back to normal at the hockey school after the whirlwind week with Ilya Rozanov. The only difference was now there was a waiting list for all their classes, which Hayden and Shane were thrilled about. Of course, there was something else about Rozanov's visit that Shane couldn't shake from his mind.

The moment they shared in the office was unexpected, and Shane wasn't quite sure what to make of it. He hadn't said anything to Hayden about it and the more time that passed, the more the whole thing started to feel like a dream. If it was a dream, Shane wasn't ready to wake up.

I will see you next time we play Montreal.

That was the last thing Rozanov had said to him. Shane kept playing it over and over in his mind. What exactly did that mean? Would Shane show up to work one day and find Rozanov there? Did Rozanov expect him to come to game? One afternoon in the office, Shane got his answer.

He had just walked into the office after a meeting as Hayden was hanging up the phone.

"You won't believe this," Hayden said. "That was Rozanov's manager. They're sending us tickets to the Ottawa/Montreal game next week."

Shane felt an unexpected flutter in his stomach at the sound of Rozanov's name.

"Really? For you and me?"

"For the whole staff."

"Wow. That was... thoughtful."

That flutter that Shane felt in the office stuck with him all the way up to the hockey game the next week. It grew it even stronger when he got to the venue, then exploded when he saw Rozanov on the ice.

This is ridiculous he thought to himself. Rozanov was focused on the game and Shane was just one of hundreds of fans in the crowd. It's not like Rozanov was even thinking about him. The whole free tickets thing was probably his manager's idea anyway.

At least that's what Shane thought until Rozanov looked up at him in the stands and winked as he skated by.

"Was that at you?" Hayden said, following Rozanov's eyeline to Shane.

"No way," Shane said. "He probably just does that to get a reaction from the fans. You know how he is."

And Shane almost believed that himself until one of the Ottawa team managers showed up to escort the hockey school staff to the locker room before the third period. They wanted to show their appreciation for the collaboration and introduce them to the team.

The staff were thrilled and Shane was glad to see them happy. They all worked so hard and it was nice to see them get such a special experience. The players came out and took photos and shook hands. Everyone was having a great time, and then Rozanov emerged from the lockers.

"Of course we couldn't let you go without seeing our team captain again," the team manager said.

"Nice to see all of you," Rozanov said. "Sorry it had to be while we beat your home team."

Shane felt himself smile. When did Rozanov's jokes suddenly become funny to him?

"You and the team have a big night out planned for Montreal?" Hayden asked.

"Ah, no. They have us in very nice Four Seasons hotel downtown. I will be going to bed early tonight."

Rozanov seemed to look right at Shane when he said it. Shane told himself he imagined it.

The team manager announced that the players had to be back on the ice in five minutes. Rozanov quickly shook a few hands as the staff thanked him again and started leaving for their seats. Shane felt his stomach suddenly go to knots when Rozanov extended his hand.

"Good to see you again, Shane Hollander. Enjoy rest of the game. Even when we beat Montreal." Rozanov suddenly tightened his grip and jerked Shane forward, giving him the opportunity to lean in close and whisper something in his ear. "Four-two-two."

A few hours later, Shane found himself in the elevator on his way up to the fourth floor of the Four Seasons hotel. The only explanation he could think of was that he had completely lost his mind.

He walked to room 422 and stood outside the door. He had come too far to turn back now. He reached up and knocked before he could change his mind.

"Shane Hollander, I thought you might not show up."

"Are you going to make me stand here outside your door even longer?"

Rozanov stepped aside and Shane walked into his hotel room. The door closed behind him and Shane turned to look at Rozanov. He was wearing sweatpants and a tight black t-shirt. Shane could see every curve of his body where the fabric clung to his skin. The bulge of every muscle, the swell between his legs.

"Fuck," Shane said before he could stop himself.

Rozanov smiled, pleased with himself. He was so smug it was maddening. Before Shane had the chance to hesitate, he pulled Rozanov into a rough kiss. They grabbed at each other hungrily, stumbling toward the hotel bed. Rozanov gripped Shane's hips and hoisted him up. Shane wrapped his legs around Rozanov's waist while he carried him over to the bed and dropped him onto it.

There was the quick tugging off of shirts, unbuttoning of pants. Articles of clothing got tossed in all directions. As Rozanov peeled off his last stitch of clothing, he stood before Shane at the end of the bed.

"Jesus Christ," Shane said, looking him up and down.

Rozanov showed his smug smile again. He loved seeing Shane react to him, desperate for him. Rozanov climbed on top of Shane and leaned into him, pressing their lips together. Shane reached up and grabbed a fistful of Rozanov's curly hair.

Rozanov slipped from his grip and started planting kisses down Shane's body, pressing his lips to the side of his neck, over his chest, down his abs. He explored Shane's body with his hands while he kissed every inch of him, craving more and more of him. He kissed the sensitive skin below his belly button and Rozanov heard Shane's breathing quicken.

"This okay?" Rozanov said, looking up.

"Mhm," Shane said, his eyes closed.

Rozanov stopped and sat up. He positioned himself between Shane's legs, gently stroking one of his thighs.

"You are scared," Rozanov said.

"I'm not scared," Shane said quickly.

"Is okay. We don't have to."

"No. I want to." Shane sat up on his elbows. "I'm just... surprised."

"Surprised?" Rozanov narrowed his eyes. "Surprised about what?"

"You," Shane said. "That you're not what I thought. That you... like me."

Rozanov smiled. Not a smirk, but a gentle, kind smile.

"I like you," he said. He bowed his head and kissed Shane's inner thigh. "You make me curious."

Rozanov continued to kiss along Shane's thigh. Shane laid back and let himself melt under Rozanov's touch, that tingling sensation returning to his stomach and radiating outward. Rozanov put his hands under Shane's legs and guided them back, bringing his knees to his chest. Shane felt Rozanov's soft lips going lower, lower, lower. Then he felt the wet hot pressure of Rozanov's tongue against his hole.

"Fuck, Rozanov," Shane said, curling his head to his knees. "Oh, fuck."

Shane felt Rozanov's tongue press inside him and he moaned, his whole body quaking. He wanted more of him, all of him. Rozanov read his mind and climbed forward. He put his hands on either side of Shane on the bed and leaned in to kiss him before positioning himself at his entrance.

"Still okay?" Rozanov asked, his cock gently grazing his skin.

"Yes, please," Shane begged. "Don't make me wait."

Rozanov smiled, his signature smirk back on full display. He pressed himself inside Shane and they both sighed. Rozanov rolled his hips into Shane, gently at first. He moved in and out of him slowly, letting Shane feel every inch. Shane tossed his head back and moaned, blood rushing to his cheeks. The image drove Rozanov wild, Shane folding under his touch. He increased his thrusts, moving faster, deeper.

"Roza-" the word got caught in his throat as Shane tried to speak, overwhelmed by the electricity pulsing through his body.

"Are you close?" Rozanov asked, breathing hard as he pumped into him, the bed shaking beneath them with every thrust.

Shane tried to respond but all he could do was nod. Rozanov pressed all his bodyweight into him, letting Shane feel his full strength. Rozanov felt the sweat drip down his back as he reached climax. He tried to hold out as long as he could, wanting this feeling to last forever.

"Oh, fuck, Hollander," Rozanov said as he came inside him. His whole body tensed, his muscles flexed and glistening with sweat.

Shane came with a loud moan. He arched his back and let the pleasure wash over him, his lip quivering as he came down from the rush. Rozanov pulled out and leaned in. He licked Shane's cum off his skin, Shane's chest slick with sweat and heaving up and down while he caught his breath. Rozanov finished by grabbing Shane's chin and kissing him roughly. Then he collapsed beside him on the bed.

"Holy shit," Shane said, his breathing finally steady again. "That was so hot."

"Yes," Rozanov said. "Worth the wait."

They laid there for a moment in the quiet hotel room, basking in the afterglow. Then Shane rolled over to face him.

"What do you mean worth the wait? You were waiting for this?"

"Yes. I have been thinking about this since charity visit." He grabbed Shane's face again and dragged his thumb down one side of his lips. "This perfect mouth."

Shane smiled and playfully shoved his hand away.

“Shut up.”

Rozanov laughed to himself and reached his arms up in a stretch, settling into relaxation after they came down from the high. Shane watched him closely, taken by this version of Rozanov, quiet and vulnerable.

“You’re not really an asshole,” Shane said.

Rozanov raised an eyebrow and looked up at him. “Is that compliment?”

“I mean you always act like an asshole, when you’re doing press or on the ice,” Shane said. “But you’re not really like that.”

Rozanov shrugged. “It is what people expect.”

“But you don’t have to be what people expect.”

Rozanov groaned dramatically and rolled on top of Shane.

“Why do you worry about these things, Hollander? Is not important.”

He leaned in and pressed a long kiss to Shane’s lips. Shane smiled and ran his fingers through Rozanov’s messy hair. He let himself enjoy the moment, feeling the weight and warmth of Ilya Rozanov tangled up in bed with him.

“I should go,” Shane said after a while. “I have to work tomorrow.”

“Yes. I have early flight.”

Shane thought he saw a brief pout flash across Rozanov’s face before he slipped out of bed. He leaned against the wall while Shane got dressed and walked towards the door.

“Okay. Well, I’ll see you around, I guess,” Shane said, reaching for the doorknob.

“Wait.” Rozanov crossed the room and held out his hand. “Phone.”

“What?”

“Give me your phone, Hollander.”

Shane pulled his phone from his pocket without a second thought and handed it over. Rozanov tapped across the screen and then put it back into Shane’s hand. Shane looked down and saw Rozanov had added his cell number and started a text thread.

“We play Montreal again in couple of months,” Rozanov said. “I will see you then.”

Chapter 3

Ilya Rozanov was no stranger to casual hook ups on the road. Having been in the league for several years, he had gotten accustomed to the lifestyle. Being in different cities every weekend, meeting people with the understanding that they'd never see each other again after that night. He was happy to do that for the rest of his career until he retired, or at least he thought he was.

He had not expected to feel so strongly about Shane Hollander, the owner of the charity he was just supposed to spend a week taking photos with and then move on. He wasn't exactly sure what these feelings were, but he knew he hadn't been able to get Shane out of his head since the day they met. His soft smile. His beautiful freckles.

Ilya was pleasantly surprised when Shane had decided to show up at his hotel room that first night in Montreal. Ilya had made sure to exchange numbers so they could plan to meet again in Montreal a few months later, but only a few days went by before he found he couldn't resist sending Shane a text.

Ilya: *You watch our game against New York on TV? All those goals I scored?*

Shane: *You mean all two of them?*

Ilya: *Ah so you did watch*

Ilya found himself reaching to text Shane more and more. At home in front of the TV, on the treadmill at the gym, in the locker room after a game. Every time he heard the chime of his text notifications, he hoped it was Shane, and then smiled when it was.

Finally after two months of texting, Ottawa played Montreal again and the two found themselves in the same city. Ilya sent Shane his hotel and room number and waited for the knock at the door.

The moment Ilya saw Shane standing in front of him, he felt his heart flutter. He made sure to quickly squash whatever feelings were bubbling up inside him by yanking Shane into the room and tearing his clothes off.

After thoroughly enjoying each other's bodies again and again, they laid together in bed. Ilya reached over to the bedside table and lit up a cigarette.

"I don't think you're supposed to smoke in here," Shane said.

"This is very expensive penthouse," Ilya said. "They don't care."

Shane watched him take a few puffs.

"It's not good for you."

“Oh my god Hollander you are so boring.”

Ilya let out a long exhale before putting out the cigarette in a glass of vodka beside him. He could feel Shane smiling beside him. He leaned back against the pillows and sighed.

“You play Montreal one more time before the season’s over, right?”

Ilya looked over at him and a smirk grew across his face.

“You have been looking at my schedule?”

“Of course. I’m a hockey fan. I look at who’s playing Montreal all the time.”

“Okay Hollander,” he said. “Yes. We will beat you one more time this season.”

“Will you go back home when the season’s over?”

“Home, Ottawa?”

“Russia.”

“Probably.” Ilya shrugged. “I go back every year.”

“Do you like it?” Shane asked. “You have family there?”

Ilya waved away the questions with his hand. “Hollander you ask too many questions.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

Ilya sighed and reached across the bed. He gave Shane’s thigh a gentle squeeze through the sheets.

“Is okay.”

Shane looked down at Ilya’s hand on his leg. He thought about this all the time when they were apart. Being touched by him. They barely knew each other and for some reason the idea of being an ocean apart tugged at his heartstrings.

After enjoying each other’s company a bit more, Shane got up and got dressed. Ilya walked him to the door of his hotel room and pulled him into a long kiss.

“Goodnight, Hollander,” he said.

“Goodnight.”

The rest of the season went by fast. Too fast. Shane and Ilya texted each other constantly. Sometimes flirting, sometimes joking. They mostly just wanted to know what the other one was doing, unable to stop thinking about each other with miles between them.

There was some relief in how busy they both were. Ilya with the team and Shane with the hockey school. They both had responsibilities that took up most of their time, though they were happy to spend any remaining time they had thinking about each other.

Ottawa played Montreal once more and they met up at Ilya's hotel room in the usual way. They loved exploring each other's bodies, making each other feel good. It felt different than any other casual hookup they'd ever had, even if they weren't ready to admit that out loud quite yet.

The season ended and Ilya went back to Russia for the break. Shane hadn't received any texts from him in a while, but he figured he was probably busy spending time with family. Shane told himself it was probably a good thing anyway. He had a ton of work to do and needed to focus. Then one afternoon he and Hayden were working in the office when his cellphone rang.

Shane pulled his phone from his pocket and was startled to see Ilya's name on the screen. He had never called unannounced before. He had never called before at all. Shane stood up so quickly that Hayden flinched.

"Sorry," Shane said, already moving toward the door. "I'm gonna..."

Shane quickly ran downstairs to the locker room. He shut the door behind him and quickly scanned the room to make sure he was alone.

"Hello?"

"I thought you weren't going to answer," Ilya said. He sounded different. More serious than usual.

"Sorry." Shane realized he was out of breath. "I had to find somewhere to be alone."

"Is okay. I should have texted first."

"No. I'm glad you called. It's good to hear your voice," Shane said. "Are you okay?"

There was a long pause before Ilya spoke again.

"My family," he said. "Things are...complicated. I don't know why I keep coming back here."

Shane sat down on a locker room bench and pressed the phone to his ear.

"You don't get along?"

"It's more than that. I do a lot for them, but it's never enough. It makes them terrible. And that makes me terrible."

"I don't think you're terrible."

Shane heard Ilya exhale through the phone. A long silence passed between them. It was a comfortable silence, knowing they had each other through the phone.

“I wish I was there with you,” Shane said, barely above a whisper.

There was another pause before Ilya spoke again.

“I wish you were here too.”

Shane and Ilya spoke on the phone a few more times while Ilya was away, and each time left Shane with a feeling of butterflies in his stomach. He found that Ilya was the first person he wanted to talk to when he had a bad day, or when something fun happened at work, or when he watched a particularly frustrating hockey game. He started to get the feeling that he was that person for Ilya too, but he wasn't about to ask.

After a few weeks, Shane noticed that the feeling of butterflies started morphing into something else. There was a tingling sensation in his belly that seemed to fluctuate throughout the day. Sometimes it was strong, other times barely noticeable. Then one day on top of that he started having waves of nausea. Sudden, gripping nausea that sent him rushing to the nearest toilet or trash can to throw up.

Shane was returning to the office one afternoon after one of these sprints to the bathroom. He sat down at his desk with a heavy exhale.

“You okay?” Hayden said from his desk. “You’ve been battling this stomach thing for days.”

“Yeah, I’m sure it’s fine,” Shane said. “I think I just need to rest.”

“That’s definitely true. You work way too hard.” Hayden started packing up his things. “You mind if I head out early today? Jackie’s planning a birthday party for Amber and I told her I’d pick up some things from the store.”

“Holy shit, Amber’s turning one already?” Shane said, leaning back in his chair. “Seems like just yesterday Jackie went into labor.”

“Tell me about it. Time flies.”

Shane suddenly had a thought that hit him like a punch to the gut. Talk of Jackie and the baby reminded him of when Jackie was pregnant. Hayden was constantly talking about how she was struggling with morning sickness and nausea and something as simple as the smell of burnt toast could make her vomit. He started to feel sick for a different reason.

“Shane? You cool with me leaving early?”

Hayden’s voice snapped him out of his haze.

“Oh, yeah. Sure thing, man. See you tomorrow.”

Shane waited until he saw Hayden drive out of the parking lot and then quickly locked up for the day.

His head was a million miles away while he raced home, making a quick stop at a drug store. When he got back to his place, he set the box down on the bathroom counter and stared at it. A pregnancy test.

He stared at the box for probably a good twenty minutes before finally taking the test. He set a timer on his phone for the results and paced outside the bathroom door while he waited.

Shane tried to think of other explanations for his symptoms over the last few weeks. Maybe it actually was a stomach bug. The kids at the hockey school were always passing around some illness or other. Maybe it was just stress. Or his diet. He tried his best to come up with a reasonable explanation, even though in his heart of hearts he knew the truth.

He jumped when he heard the timer go off. He took a deep breath and walked into the bathroom. On the bathroom counter was the pregnancy test, waiting for him. He picked it up and his stomach started doing somersaults at the sight of the results.

Positive.

Chapter 4

Ilya returned from Russia ahead of the new season. He would be training in Ottawa for a while before the games started up again. He had tried to call Shane a few times, but he always had an excuse for needing to get off the phone quickly. Finally Ilya's phone rang and he saw Shane's name on the screen.

"Hollander, I thought you were avoiding me."

"Sorry," Shane said through the phone. "I've been... dealing with some things."

"You want to talk about it?"

"When can I see you again?" Shane said, quickly pivoting.

"Ah, you are eager Hollander. I just got back to Canada a week ago."

Shane could hear Ilya smiling through the phone. It would have turned him on if he didn't have something else massively consuming his mind.

"I was thinking maybe this weekend," Shane said.

"We have training all month. I won't be back in Montreal until season starts."

"I know. I thought maybe I'd come to you."

There was a brief pause.

"You want to come to Ottawa?"

"Yeah. It's only a two hour drive," Shane said. "Is that... okay with you?"

"Okay. I will text you address," Ilya said. "You are full of surprises, Hollander."

Shane's stomach was in knots. Ilya had no idea the kind of surprise he was about to give him.

He did want to see Ilya, of course. But the main reason behind it was that he wanted to tell him about the pregnancy in person. He thought it would be a good idea to drive to Ilya's place and tell him. Shane was afraid he'd go crazy if he had to hold onto the secret for much longer. Also, giving Ilya the news in Ottawa meant that if he reacted poorly, Shane could just get in his car and leave. He made a plan to drive to Ottawa that weekend.

Ilya answered the door to his apartment in a t-shirt in jeans. He somehow looked even better than Shane remembered. How was that even possible?

“Hi Hollander,” Ilya said just before pulling him into a kiss. “Your freckles look extra beautiful today.”

Fuck, this was going to be even harder than he thought.

Ilya led Shane through his apartment. He was so taken by what he saw, he temporarily forgot the reason he came. He was captivated by the high ceilings, the giant kitchen, the roaring fireplace. He was brought back to reality by the feeling of Ilya’s hand on his lower back.

“I will give you rest of tour later,” Ilya said, sliding his hands over Shane’s hips. “Let’s go straight to bedroom.”

Ilya leaned in to kiss him, and Shane let him. The feeling of his strong hands on him felt so right, the taste of his lips so familiar. Shane felt Ilya’s hand slip beneath his shirt and slide over his stomach and he suddenly remembered why he was there.

Shane jumped back so quickly that Ilya startled.

“I do something wrong, Hollander?”

“No, you haven’t done anything.” Shane swallowed hard. “Can we, maybe, talk?”

Ilya took a step back and examined Shane’s expression.

“This is serious,” Ilya said.

“Can we sit?”

Ilya led Shane into the living room where they sat down at opposite ends of the couch. Shane leaned back against the cushions, then crossed his legs. Then he sat up and uncrossed them again.

“Hollander you are making me nervous.”

“Look, um, I’m not really sure how to say this, so I’m just going to say it. Okay?”

“Hollander.”

“I’m pregnant.”

The room fell completely silent as they stared at each other. Shane felt sweat forming on the back of his neck.

“Yes, I’m sure,” he continued. “And yes, it’s yours. If you were going to ask.”

Ilya opened and closed his mouth a few times like he was about to speak but words never found their way out. Shane decided to keep going.

“I’m not here to ask you for anything. I just thought you deserved to be told in person,” Shane said. “I know we haven’t known each other for very long, and you don’t know much

about me, but my whole life is my job. I wasn't sure I'd ever have the time to meet someone and start a family. So, if this is my chance to be a parent, I'm going to take it. I don't expect you to be involved. I'm not here to ask you for money or threaten to go to the press or anything. I just wanted to tell you."

A painfully long silence passed before Ilya finally spoke.

"You... you don't want me in baby's life?"

It was the first time Shane heard the word *baby* out loud. Everything suddenly felt very real.

"That's not what I mean," Shane said. "I just mean, I know we didn't plan this. I don't want to force you into anything. If you don't want to be involved, I understand."

Ilya looked away for a moment and took a long breath. He stood and walked over to Shane so he could sit back down beside him. Ilya reached over and took his hand.

"Hollander, it takes two people to make baby, yes?" He gently rubbed his thumb back and forth over Shane's hand. "Is your body, is your decision. But that's my baby too. I would like to be involved. As much as you'll let me."

Shane wasn't exactly sure why, but he felt tears coming to his eyes. He opened his mouth to speak and felt a lump in his throat.

"So you're... you're not upset?"

Ilya's face softened. He reached up and gently grazed his thumb over Shane's freckles.

"Why would I be upset? We did nothing wrong."

Ilya put his hand under Shane's chin and gently tilted his head up to look at him. He kissed him, slowly and gently.

"I was really worried about telling you," Shane said. "I didn't know how you'd feel about it."

Ilya gave him a gentle smile and ran a hand over Shane's hair.

"Stay here tonight."

Shane furrowed his brow. "You want me to spend the night?"

Ilya nodded. "Don't drive back to Montreal tonight. Stay with me. Drive back tomorrow."

"Don't you have morning practice?"

Ilya shrugged. "I will take sick day. This is more important."

Shane thought for a moment, then nodded. "Okay."

The two talked more and then Ilya made them dinner. Later they climbed into Ilya's bed and sought comfort in each other's warmth beneath the sheets.

Ilya reached his arm around Shane and guided him to rest his head on his chest. Shane let out an exhale he felt like he'd been holding in for a week. He closed his eyes and heard the sound of Ilya's heartbeat against his ear. Ilya leaned in and kissed the top of Shane's head.

"I am glad you're here," Ilya whispered just before Shane drifted off to sleep.

The next morning Shane woke up with the bed empty beside him. There was that brief feeling of confusion when waking up in an unfamiliar place before he remembered where he was. His memory was flooded with the conversation he had with Ilya the night before. Everything was still scary and overwhelming, but telling Ilya was a huge weight off his chest.

Shane walked into the kitchen and found Ilya at the stove. He was making eggs and brewing a pot of coffee.

"Good morning," Ilya said, looking up from the stove. "Sleep okay?"

"Great, actually." Shane sat down at the kitchen counter. "That smells amazing."

Ilya scooped some eggs onto a plate and put it front of Shane. He set down a mug and picked up the pot of coffee.

"I, uh, probably shouldn't," Shane said, nodding toward the coffee.

"Oh. Right."

Ilya made himself a plate and sat down beside Shane. The two ate together, the weight of everything present in the air around them.

"So, how do you feel about this?" Shane said after a while. "You were so great and supportive last night, but you haven't really told me what you're thinking."

Ilya put down his fork and took a sip from his coffee cup.

"Is terrifying, yes?"

Shane smiled for the first time since he woke up.

"Definitely."

"But, is also... nice," Ilya said. "A baby. To love. To take care of."

"You're really okay with this?"

"Yes, Shane. I am really okay." He reached up and touched the side of Shane's face. "Is scary, but we will figure it out. Raising our baby, with beautiful freckles."

Shane smiled again. The words *our baby* rang loudly in his ears. He was having a baby with Ilya Rozanov. Ilya *fucking* Rozanov.

“How did we get here?” Shane said.

“I think I can tell you how,” Ilya said, smirking as he picked up his fork.

“You’re being very understanding about all this.”

“You are doing much harder part.” Ilya glanced at Shane’s midsection. “I will take care of whatever you need. Both of you. Don’t be afraid to ask for anything.”

Shane felt his heart flutter. Somehow despite all that was happening, being in Ilya’s presence still gave him butterflies. He picked up his fork and finished his breakfast, believing for the first time in weeks that everything was going to be okay.

Chapter 5

Shane had gotten the conversation with Ilya out of the way, but he still had another conversation he was anxious about. The one where he told Hayden he was pregnant. And that Ilya Rozanov was the father.

Shane got to work early one morning and found Hayden already at his desk. Part of him hoped Hayden would be running late so he could put off talking to him, but he didn't have an excuse. He decided it was better to rip off the bandaid as quickly as possible. He set down his things and then lingered awkwardly beside Hayden's desk.

"Can I help you with something?" Hayden said, looking up from his computer.

"Uh, I need to talk to you about something. Or, tell you something, I mean."

"Okay." Hayden sat back in his chair, recognizing the look of anxiety in his friend's face.

"I'm not sure I'll be able to teach the Friday morning class much longer."

"Oh." Hayden looked at him, confused. "That's okay. We can easily get someone else on staff to take it over. Is that all?"

"Uh, no." Shane took a deep breath and blew it all out between his lips. "I'm pregnant."

Hayden's face changed expressions three times, not sure how to take this news.

"Oh. Um, wow. That's... congratulations?"

"Thanks," Shane said, cracking a smile. "It's unexpected but... good news."

"Then that's really awesome, man," Hayden said, deciding on a positive reaction. "Welcome to the club!"

"Thanks. I'm terrified."

Hayden laughed. "Yeah, it's definitely terrifying. I didn't know you were... never mind. It's not my business."

"You didn't know I was seeing anyone?"

"I guess I figured if you were seeing someone you would have told me."

"Well, I did want to tell you, but it's kind of complicated." Shane took another breath. "It's, um, Ilya Rozanov."

Hayden stared at him.

"You're fucking with me."

“I’m not.”

“Dude, no way. You hate the guy!”

“I don’t. I mean I did, or I thought I did. But I... I definitely don’t hate him.”

Hayden shook his head like he was trying to calculate an impossible math problem.

“How were you even seeing each other? He lives in Ottawa.”

“We mostly saw each other in hotels when they played Montreal. I went to his place once. To... tell him.”

“So he knows?”

Shane nodded. “He’s being really great about it, actually.”

“Well shit, man. This is crazy news, but I’m happy for you,” Hayden said. “Oh my god, Jackie’s gonna be so excited. She’ll want to throw a party.”

“Please don’t.”

“Shh, let us handle this.” Hayden picked up his phone and immediately started texting.

“Don’t buy anything. We’ve got cribs and strollers and everything else you need.”

Shane smiled, feeling grateful for his friend.

Shane woke up one morning about 12 weeks into his pregnancy and got in the shower. The nausea and morning sickness had mostly subsided, thank goodness. His body started changing in other ways.

When he got out of the shower he stopped to look at himself in the mirror. He gasped when he saw that his belly had finally popped. There was a soft little dome where his solid abs usually were. He brought a hand to it and imagined the little life growing on the other side.

“Hello in there,” he said. “It’s nice to finally see you.”

Shane looked at himself in the mirror and felt his heart flutter. Of course he knew the pregnancy was real, but *seeing* it was completely different. He was worried that he might feel insecure to see his body changing shape, but he had the complete opposite reaction. The love he felt when he looked in the mirror was indescribable. He wanted to do anything and everything he could to help his baby grow. After staring at the tiny bulge of his belly for a while, his next thought was that he couldn’t wait to tell Ilya.

Shane: *My belly finally popped! There’s really a baby in here...*

Ilya: *Send me pic!*

Shane: *It's really small. I don't think it'll even show up in a photo.*

Ilya: *I don't care. Send anyway.*

Shane: *You have to see it in person.*

Ilya: *Fine. We have home game on Thursday. I will come to Montreal Friday.*

Shane had been home from work for about an hour on Friday when Ilya arrived. He answered the door and felt those same butterflies that had become synonymous with seeing Ilya. Maybe it was the pregnancy hormones at work, but the sight of him did something to Shane's body. It took everything in him not to tear off his clothes right there in the doorway.

Ilya's feelings seemed to not be that different. The second the door shut behind him, he pulled Shane into a messy kiss.

"How are you and baby today?" Ilya asked, his lips less than an inch from Shane's.

"We're good," Shane said with a shy smile. "Look."

Ilya stepped back and Shane lifted the hem of his shirt to just below his chest, revealing the slight mound of his baby belly. Ilya's breath hitched and he lowered himself to his knees. He put his hands on Shane's hips and looked squarely at his belly. Ilya said something in Russian under his breath that Shane didn't recognize.

Ilya had a look on his face that Shane had never seen before. It was serious, but soft. Shane could swear he saw the slightest glint of tears forming in his eyes. After a moment, Ilya cleared his throat and got back to his feet. He kissed Shane again.

"You look good," was all he said.

Shane looked at him for a moment, unsure what to say.

"Um, let me show you around," Shane finally said.

He took Ilya by the hand and showed him around. It was a fraction of the size of Ilya's place in Ottawa, but it was home, and Shane was happy there.

"I know it's not what you're used to," Shane said, taking them through the normal sized kitchen.

"No, it is perfect," Ilya said. "It is very... you."

"So, boring?"

A big smile stretched across Ilya's face.

"Ah, so you are funny now?"

"Leave me alone," Shane said, smiling.

“No.”

Ilya stepped forward and kissed him. Shane put his hands on Ilya's chest while they kissed, feeling his toned body through the fabric of his shirt. Ilya pulled Shane along as he walked backwards, taking them all the way to the couch. Ilya fell onto his back on the couch and pulled Shane on top of him. Shane continued to kiss him while Ilya pawed at the space between Shane's legs.

“Is this okay?” Ilya said between kisses. “We won't hurt baby?”

“We won't,” Shane said, smiling at the question. “Just be gentle.”

“I can do that,” Ilya said before kissing him again.

Ilya slid his hand inside the front of Shane's pants. Shane hummed at the touch, excited to feel Ilya's hands on him again. He stood and quickly pulled off his pants while Ilya tugged his down. Shane climbed on top of Ilya and straddled him. He lowered himself onto Ilya and they both sighed.

“Fuck, Shane,” Ilya said, rubbing his hands up and down his thighs.

Shane started rocking his hips, riding Ilya as he shifted his weight back and forth. Ilya matched his rhythm, bucking his hips up and getting Shane to take him in deeper.

“Ilya,” Shane choked out, his breath coming out in quick gulps.

“Is okay?” Ilya asked, increasing his thrusts.

“Yes, fuck,” Shane said, squeezing his eyes shut as pleasure pulsed through him.

Ilya continued to thrust into Shane as he rolled his hips against him, both panting and groaning along with every movement. They increased their speed in unison, feeding off each other's pleasure.

“I'm close,” Shane managed to say as he felt Ilya thrusting deeper inside him.

Ilya's breath got caught in his throat as he got closer to orgasm. He slid his hand up and pressed his palm to Shane's little belly just in time for them both to come, moaning as they climaxed together.

Shane slid off Ilya and collapsed on the couch beside him. Ilya lifted Shane's chin toward him and kissed him. Shane then buried his face in Ilya's chest and inhaled his scent. Ilya kissed the top of his head.

“I like visiting you, Hollander,” Ilya said. “You are good host.”

“Shut up,” Shane said and smiled.

Chapter 6

The next couple of months went by much more quickly than Shane would have liked. Things were crazy at work after hockey season kicked off and he had a million things to do in preparation of the baby's arrival and before he knew it he was five months along.

He was showing too much to keep the pregnancy hidden any longer, but Shane didn't mind. With each passing day, he was more and more excited about the baby and was happy to tell people. The rest of his staff and everyone involved at the hockey school was happy for him.

Ilya made the drive to Montreal every chance he got, but it was difficult making it work in the middle of the season. He would play an away game, fly home to Ottawa, then drive to Montreal. Sometimes multiple times in one week. Shane noted to Ilya that he looked exhausted and it wasn't necessary to go back and forth so much, but Ilya insisted on being there. Shane offered to at least compromise by driving to Ottawa on his days off, but Ilya wouldn't have that either. *You need to rest on your days off* he had said. *Driving is not resting.*

Shane had made it far enough into his pregnancy where he could no longer teach classes on the ice, but that didn't stop him from coaching from the sidelines. He stood outside the rink during his usual Friday morning kid class, shouting words of encouragement to the kids and helping them with their skates and gear on the benches. He was leaning against the rink watching them when Hayden walked in with a clipboard.

"Hey, can you take a look at this? It's the contract with our new gear supplier. I just want to make sure everything looks alright before I send it back."

Shane took the clipboard and flipped through the pages. The words started going in and out of focus and he had to blink a few times to see straight again.

"Um, did they approve the budget you sent them?" Shane asked, pausing to rub his eye.

"Yeah. They just emailed it back to me."

Shane made it to the last page and suddenly felt lightheaded. He handed the clipboard back to Hayden and put a hand on the boards to steady himself.

"Everything looks good." Shane swallowed hard. "You can send it back to them."

"Are you alright?" Hayden asked. "You look a little pale."

"Um, I'm actually not feeling great all of a sudden."

Shane took a few steps and wobbled on shaky knees. Hayden dropped the clipboard and grabbed Shane by the arm to keep him from falling.

"Let's go to the office," Hayden said. "I'll have the medic come check you out."

“I don’t think that’s necessary,” Shane said, the room spinning. “I just need to...”

That was as far as Shane got before he passed out.

Shane had a foggy memory of the back of an ambulance, then being pushed down a hallway on a hospital gurney. When he finally came to full consciousness, he was lying in a hospital bed hooked up to an IV. He blinked his eyes open and saw Hayden sitting in a chair next to him looking at his phone.

“What happened?” Shane croaked, his throat painfully dry.

Hayden jumped to his feet. “You passed out. The doctors said you were dehydrated. They’re giving you electrolytes.” Hayden nodded toward the IV hooked up to Shane’s arm. “How are you feeling?”

“Just tired.”

“You scared the shit out of me, man.”

“I’m sorry.”

Hayden exhaled. “It’s okay. Just take it easy for a while, alright?”

“I have a feeling you’ll make sure I do.”

Before Hayden could respond, they heard a small commotion in the hallway followed by Ilya bursting through the door of the hospital room. He looked panicked and out of breath.

“Holy shit, what are you doing here?” Hayden said.

“Hospital called me,” Ilya said to Shane, looking right past Hayden. “They said you were unconscious.”

“How did they know to call you?” Hayden said.

“I added him to my emergency contacts after...” Shane brought both hands to his belly.

“Are you okay?” Ilya said, going to his bedside. “Is baby okay?”

“We’re both okay. I just got a little dehydrated.”

“He passed out at work,” Hayden said.

Shane shot daggers at Hayden.

“Work?” Ilya said. “I thought you stopped teaching on the ice.”

“He wasn’t on the ice,” Hayden said. “He was standing outside the rink.”

“He shouldn’t be on his feet at all,” Ilya said to Hayden. “He is pregnant.”

“He’s not on bed rest. He’s okay to work if he wants.”

“Yeah, so okay that he passed out.”

“Hey!” Shane waved his hands in the air. “Can you two not talk about me like I’m not in the room?”

Ilya and Hayden glared at each other. This was not how Shane imagined bringing them together over the baby. Fortunately for everyone, the doctor walked in.

“Hello Mr. Hollander,” he said. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” Shane said. “Just a little tired.”

“Do you remember how you felt before you fainted?”

“Uh, the room started spinning and I got sort of lightheaded,” Shane said, trying to remember. “It felt like my legs couldn’t hold me up all of a sudden.”

“Is this serious?” Ilya asked.

“It can be, but it’s under control now. This is classic exhaustion and dehydration,” the doctor said.

“Exhaustion?” Shane said. “I was barely doing anything.”

“Maybe for the activity level you were used to pre-pregnancy, but your body has different limits now,” the doctor explained. “The baby needs rest.”

“I told you,” Ilya said softly.

“Not helpful,” Shane said.

“You and baby are both doing well now, but I think you should take it easy for the next couple of weeks,” the doctor said. “Pay attention to your body. Rest as much as you can.”

“I can’t just rest all day. I still have to work before the baby gets here.”

“We can cover for you,” Hayden said. “Take care of yourself first.”

Shane sighed. He knew they were right but he didn’t like being treated like a helpless child.

“While you’re here, would you like to do an ultrasound to check on the baby?” the doctor asked. “Just for peace of mind.”

Shane lit up. “I’d love that, thank you.”

“Great. We’ll send an ultrasound tech in soon.”

The doctor left and the three of them were alone again.

“Well, I should probably get back to Jackie and the kids,” Hayden said. “I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Thanks, Hayden,” Shane said. “I’ll be back at work as soon as I can.”

“Don’t you dare,” Hayden said, heading for the door.

“Hey,” Ilya said. “Thank you. For getting him to hospital.”

Hayden smiled and gave him a nod before leaving.

“You didn’t have to come all the way down here,” Shane said, turning to Ilya.

“Hospital called me and told me you were here and that I couldn’t talk to you because you were unconscious,” Ilya said. “Of course I came here.”

“Don’t you have a game today?”

“They will survive one game.” Ilya smirked. “I can’t win every game for them.”

Shane smiled. He was glad to have Ilya there, even if the circumstances weren’t what he’d like. A moment later a technician came in with an ultrasound sound machine.

“Okay Mr. Hollander,” she said. “Ready to see your baby?”

“Yes please.”

Shane pushed down the thin bedsheet and pulled up his hospital gown, revealing his belly which was now a noticeable soft dome.

“Is this uncomfortable?” Ilya asked.

In all of Ilya’s visits to Montreal, he had never managed to make it to one of Shane’s doctor appointments. Shane had sent him ultrasound pictures, but this was the first time he’d be seeing it live.

“Not at all,” Shane said. “It just feels a little weird.”

“You’ll feel some cold pressure,” the tech said as she squirted clear gel onto the ultrasound wand and pressed it to Shane’s belly.

Ilya and Shane looked at the monitor as the tech moved the wand around Shane’s skin. The screen was a swirling blur of black and white, then the image centered on the unmistakable form of a tiny baby. They could immediately make out the baby’s head and body. Even the hands and feet were visible this far along. Shane had his eyes on the screen when he felt Ilya take his hand.

“Do you know the sex yet?” the tech asked.

“No,” Shane said. “I wasn’t far enough along for them to see at my last scan.”

“Well you’re far enough now. Would you like to know?”

Shane and Ilya looked at each other with wide eyes.

“Oh my god, yes,” Shane said, smiling ear to ear.

The tech moved the wand around Shane’s belly, distorting the picture. Shane found himself giving Ilya’s hand a little squeeze. The tech paused the screen and looked at the image.

“Congratulations,” she said. “You’re having a boy.”

“A boy?” Shane repeated, just wanting to hear her say it again.

The technician nodded. “A healthy baby boy.”

Ilya leaned in and kissed Shane on the cheek. Shane turned to look at him and saw Ilya had tears in his eyes. He said something quietly in Russian, watery eyes on the screen. For a second, Shane wasn’t quite sure what to make of it.

“You okay?” Shane said. “Are you happy?”

Ilya nodded, his voice caught in his throat. “The happiest.”

Shane was discharged from the hospital a few hours later. Since his ride to the hospital was in an ambulance, Ilya drove him home. He walked him inside and made sure Shane was comfortable on the couch with blankets and water and snacks all within reach.

“What are all those boxes in your home office?” Ilya said, returning from starting a load of laundry so Shane wouldn’t have to do it later. “They weren’t there last time I was here.”

“Oh, that’s a crib and some other furniture Hayden got out of storage for me,” Shane said. “I’m turning the office into the baby’s room.”

“I hope you don’t plan on building furniture while on bed rest.”

“The doctor never said bed rest. He said take it easy.”

“Building a crib is not taking it easy.”

Shane fought a smile. He didn’t like being micromanaged, but he liked seeing this side of Ilya. So doting and protective. He was already trying to take care of their baby and they hadn’t even been born yet.

“I’ll do it after resting for a few weeks,” Shane said. “There’s plenty of time before the baby gets here.”

Ilya stood in the living room with his hands on his hips and looked around the apartment. He plopped down on the couch beside Shane with a loud sigh.

“Okay,” Ilya said. “I will stay.”

Shane raised an eyebrow.

“What?”

“There is too much to do around here, Hollander. You need someone to take care of you.”

“I don’t need anything. I’m fine.”

“You are not fine. You passed out from working too hard. You have baby’s room that needs to be put together and whatever else you do around here.”

“What are you going to do? Just take a week off in the middle of the season to help me around the house?”

“Yes.”

The smile faded from Shane’s face.

“Ilya, no. You can’t do that. You’re the team captain, not some rookie. They need you.”

“You and baby need me more.”

Ilya put his hand on Shane’s belly. Shane looked down at his midsection that was getting rounder every day. Growing inside him was the little life he and Ilya made together. Their baby boy.

Shane was so used to doing everything on his own, it felt strange letting someone else take care of him. He needed to remember that Ilya was just as much the baby’s parent as he was and to accept help when it was offered.

“You sure they’ll let you take a week off?” Shane said. “They won’t, like, rip up your contract or fine you or anything?”

“Let them.” Ilya shrugged. “Hockey is not most important thing in the world. Not anymore.”

Shane smiled. Ilya laid down across the couch and rested his head in Shane’s lap. Shane tangled his fingers in Ilya’s hair while Ilya picked up the remote from the coffee table and turned on the TV. The two sat together in comfortable silence and watched TV well into the evening.

Chapter 7

The first thing Shane noticed when he woke up in the morning was the feeling of Ilya's arms wrapped around him. He felt Ilya press a kiss to the back of his neck and smiled.

"What do you and baby want for breakfast?" Ilya said in a raspy morning voice.

"There's eggs in the fridge."

"That is not what I asked."

Shane thought for a moment and let his lips curl into a grin.

"Pancakes."

"Better answer."

Ilya kissed Shane on the cheek and then got out of bed.

A few moments later after getting dressed, Shane made his way into the kitchen. He saw Ilya standing at the stove making him pancakes, in sweatpants and shirtless.

For a moment, Shane's mind drifted to an unexpected place. He imagined coming downstairs in the morning in a home that belonged to him and Ilya both. Ilya making breakfast while Shane got the kids ready for school. The house would be loud and messy, full of love and laughter.

Ilya turned to look at him and Shane snapped back to reality.

"Do you want orange juice?" Ilya asked.

"Ginger ale, please."

"Ginger ale? With breakfast?"

"The baby wants it."

Ilya smiled as he flipped a pancake onto a plate. "Okay. Ginger ale."

Shane walked around the kitchen and came up behind Ilya. He wrapped his arms around his waist and rested his chin on Ilya's shoulder.

"Thank you for being here," Shane said softly.

"Only place I want to be is with you and baby," Ilya said. "Even if it is in this boring apartment."

"Shut up."

Shane pretended to take a bite out of Ilya's shoulder. Ilya smiled.

The two had breakfast together and then Ilya insisted that Shane relax on the couch while he tidied up around the house. Ilya spent the morning opening the boxes in the baby's room and assembling the crib, occasionally popping into the living room to make sure that Shane was staying off his feet and had everything he needed.

In the afternoon Ilya made them both lunch and then put together the changing table. By the time Ilya was ready to join Shane on the couch, he was exhausted. He collapsed on the couch with a sigh and laid his head in Shane's lap. Shane tangled his fingers in Ilya's hair and gently grazed his fingernails back and forth across his scalp.

"Thanks for everything you did today," Shane said. "The baby's lucky to have you."

"No, baby is luckier to have you," Ilya said. "You take very good care of him."

Shane smiled. He ran a hand down Ilya's arm, feeling the warmth of his skin. He felt Ilya relax a little deeper into his lap.

Ilya was suddenly jolted by his phone vibrating in his pocket. He looked at the screen and then quickly silenced it before tossing it on the table.

"You can get that if you want," Shane said.

"No. I don't want to," Ilya said. "Is my brother. Probably just noticed I'm not in Ottawa game on TV and is freaking out."

Shane gently grazed his fingers up and down Ilya's arm.

"Does your family like that you play hockey?" Shane asked after a while.

"Too much. They only like it because it means I can pay for everything."

"That sounds tough."

Ilya kept his eyes on the TV in front of them. He laid still so Shane could continue rubbing the length of his arm.

"Does your family like what you do?" Ilya asked.

"I think they're disappointed that I never went pro," he said. "They've never said it, but I can tell."

"But you like what you do, yes? You are happy with hockey charity?"

"I love it," he said, smiling. "I can't imagine doing anything else."

Ilya stayed quiet for a moment, then he rolled onto his back so he could look up at Shane from his lap.

“What if our baby doesn’t want to play hockey?”

“Well that’s probably a good thing,” Shane said. “Babies shouldn’t really be playing hockey. I mean, they can’t even walk.”

“Oh, okay Mr. Funny Guy,” Ilya said to a smirk from Shane. “Then when he is older? If he wants to do something else? Are you okay with that?”

Shane ran his fingers through Ilya’s hair and looked down at him in his lap.

“Of course I’m okay with that. I want him to do what makes him happy.”

“Good.” Ilya exhaled. “Me too.”

“Even if it’s something boring? Like chess? Or knitting?”

Ilya sighed dramatically. “If it makes him happy, I will learn to be okay with it.”

Shane smiled and grazed his hand over Ilya’s cheek. Ilya rolled in just close enough to be able to plant a kiss on Shane’s belly. He said something in Russian to Shane’s midsection.

“What is that?” Shane said. “I’ve heard you say it a few times to the baby.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu,” Ilya repeated. “*I love you.*”

Shane felt a swell in his chest. This pregnancy was unexpected and came when they barely knew each other. Shane was ready to respect Ilya’s choice if he didn’t want to be involved, but instead he had plunged head first into love and care for their baby. The more time they spent together, the more Shane felt himself falling for Ilya.

“Will you teach me?” Shane said with a lump in his throat. “Our baby is half Russian. I should probably learn some.”

“Okay,” Ilya said. “I would like that.”

After spending a week with Shane and helping him get the apartment ready for the baby, Ilya finally had to go back to work. He would have stayed another week, but Shane convinced him that Ottawa needed their team captain back. Ilya returned to the ice and continued with the season, but all he could think about was Shane and the baby.

They were the first thing on his mind when he woke up in the morning and went to sleep at night. When he was at the gym, and driving home, and even in the locker room between periods in the middle of a game. If there wasn’t something that immediately required his full attention, his thoughts were in Montreal.

The whole thing had come as a shock. Not just the baby, but Shane too. Ilya couldn’t remember the last time he felt like this about anyone. Probably never.

If Ilya stopped to think about all the important things in his life, nothing else compared. He was ready at any moment to give up his hockey career to be there for Shane and the baby, but Shane always convinced him to stay. They were about to raise another human being together, and they needed to be smart about the future. They had plenty of time to make decisions about their jobs.

Ilya was in New York for an away game and FaceTimed Shane as soon as he got back to the hotel. The second Shane's face appeared on the screen, Ilya felt his heart flutter.

"You look pretty today," Ilya said as soon as the call connected.

"Shut up."

"I am serious. You're glowing."

"Stop."

Ilya could tell Shane was fighting a smile. He loved watching the expressions on Shane's face, so earnest and kind.

"Did you watch game?"

"Of course. You guys crushed it," Shane said. "You could've made that goal in the second period though."

"Oh so you are coach for Ottawa now?"

"I'm just saying, I would've made sure you scored."

"Okay I will tell management to get you on payroll."

They both smiled, wishing they were in the same place instead of a country apart.

"How is baby today?" Ilya asked.

"He's good. Kicking a lot."

Ilya felt a tug at his heartstrings. He wanted to be there with Shane so badly, to be able to put his hand on his belly and feel the kicks himself.

"Let me see."

"I can't show you the kicks on demand."

"I mean I want to see the baby. Let me see how you look."

Shane groaned and rolled his eyes. "Okay. Hold on."

He went out of focus for a second while the phone was set down on a surface. Shane came back into view a few feet away, fitting most of himself into frame. He turned to the side and pressed the fabric of his shirt to his body, highlighting his six-month belly.

Ilya felt a deep longing come from somewhere in his chest that spread through his body. His clenched his teeth to keep his lip from quivering. Shane stood in frame for just a few seconds before picking the phone back up.

“You look beautiful,” Ilya said.

Shane blushed, surprised by Ilya’s earnestness. He cleared his throat.

“When are you coming to see us again?”

“We have busy schedule for the next two weeks,” Ilya said. “It might be a while. Longer than I’d like.”

“It’s okay. We’ll see you next time you get a break.”

Ilya walked across his quiet hotel room and sat down in a chair.

“I should be there more. Baby will be here soon.”

“Not for another three months.”

“That is nothing. Is like tomorrow.”

Shane laughed. “Oh god don’t say that. I’m not mentally prepared to give birth.”

“You will be great. Like with everything else,” Ilya said. “And I will be there.”

Shane looked away from the screen for a moment.

“Ilya, you might not be there. The baby’s due before the season is over.”

“You think I would miss birth of our baby? I will be there.”

“You can’t say that for sure. You might be 100 miles away in another city when I go into-“

“Shane,” he said firmly. “I will be there. I don’t care if I have to walk off the ice in the middle of game and get straight onto plane. I won’t miss it.”

Shane put on a smile but he didn’t seem convinced. He yawned and rubbed one of his eyes.

“I’m pretty tired. I should get to bed.”

“Of course. You and baby sleep.”

“Congrats on the win. I’ll text you tomorrow.”

Ilya ended the call and wished more than anything that he was in Shane’s boring apartment in Montreal and not in an empty hotel room in New York.

He had been sitting quietly with his thoughts for less than a minute when his phone rang. Ilya quickly snatched it from the table, thinking Shane had forgotten something. He groaned when

he saw it was his brother Alexei.

Against his better judgment, he answered. He spoke in their usual Russian.

"What is it, Alexei?"

"Finally he answers. I thought you had gotten too famous to take my calls."

Ilya rolled his eyes, already regretting answering.

"What do you want?"

"Money. I'm out."

Alexei spoke so confidently and arrogantly, like he was entitled to everything that was Ilya's.

"Out! How? The last check I sent you was huge," Ilya said. He stood up and started pacing the room without realizing it.

"What do you care what I spend it on?" Alexei said through the phone. "You have enough to spare."

Ilya scoffed. "Not anymore. Find someone else to be your own personal bank account. I have more important things to spend money on."

"You mean that Canadian you knocked up?"

Ilya stopped pacing so suddenly he nearly tripped over the carpet. He felt the air get sucked out of his lungs.

"You think I wouldn't find out?" Ilya's brother said. "Your old coach still talks to players in the league. Everyone is talking about how Ilya Rozanov keeps missing games because of some whore having his baby."

"Don't call him that!" Ilya shouted so loudly he surprised himself.

There was an uncomfortable silence before Alexei spoke again.

"So it is true," he said. "I wasn't sure you would admit it. Now I know where my money has been going."

"It is not your-" Ilya interrupted himself to take a breath. He clenched his jaw and exhaled hard through his nose. "I am done with this conversation. And I am done sending you money. If my niece needs something, school fees or whatever, I will pay for it directly. If you need anything, call someone else."

Ilya ended the call and tossed the phone into his bag and out of sight.

Chapter 8

Ilya had been right about time going fast. The next two months flew by quickly. Ilya made it Montreal every chance he got, but it never felt like enough. Shane and Ilya looked forward to every second they got to spend together, and goodbyes got harder and harder. They never felt more at home than when they were together.

Shane and Hayden sat at their desks in the office at the hockey school ahead of a staff meeting. They went over a few last minute talking points that they wanted to bring to the staff. Shane gathered his things and said he was going to make a trip to the bathroom before the meeting, something he was doing more and more these days.

Shane pushed himself out of his chair with a groan. With only one month left in his pregnancy, his belly was swollen to the size of a basketball. The extra weight was taking a toll and his feet ached with every step, his muscles sore from working hard. He brought a hand to his lower back and took a deep breath.

“You okay?” Hayden said, looking up from his desk.

“Mhm,” Shane said. “I’m just...”

“Pregnant?”

“I can’t believe Jackie did this four times.”

“I’d tell you it gets easier, but...”

Shane sighed. “I’ll see you at the meeting. It might take me a minute to get there.”

Shane waddled his way to the bathroom and then the staff meeting. He was extremely uncomfortable for the rest of the day, more than usual. No matter what position he sat in, he couldn’t seem to get the pressure off his lower back. He was relieved to finally make it to the end of the day and was looking forward to FaceTiming Ilya while lying down on the couch.

Shane and Hayden walked through the parking lot together as they went toward their cars.

“I’ll make sure the registration forms are done by next week,” Shane said, waddling slightly side to side with each step. “We’re already getting calls from parents who want to sign their kids up for next season.”

“Great,” Hayden said. “Maybe we can do another fundraiser for the local high schools to generate some interest.”

“Good idea. Last time we-“

Shane suddenly gasped and doubled over in pain. His bag fell off his shoulder and hit the ground as he quickly grabbed onto a nearby car to keep from falling, his other hand on his

lower back. Hayden ran to his side.

“What’s wrong? What happened?” Hayden asked, putting a hand on his arm.

“My back,” Shane said through clenched teeth. “It feels like-“

Shane couldn’t get another word out before hissing in pain. Hayden scooped up his bag from the ground and took Shane by the arm.

“Let’s go to my car,” Hayden said. “I’m taking you to the hospital.”

Shane didn’t object.

“A pinched nerve? That’s all it was?” Shane said to the doctor from the hospital bed. “The pain was crazy. I thought I was going into labor.”

“That sounds about right, unfortunately,” the doctor said. “The pain from a pinched nerve can be very intense. How are you feeling since we gave you those painkillers?”

“Better.” Shane brought a hand to his belly. “You’re sure they’re safe for the baby?”

“In small amounts, yes.” The doctor turned over a tablet and tapped something into the screen. “We’ll send you home with some for next time.”

“Next time?”

“Unfortunately this may become more common as you enter the final weeks of your pregnancy.” The doctor tapped something on the tablet and flipped it around to show Shane a diagram of a spine. “The baby is putting a lot of extra weight on your pelvis and compressing the nerves in your lower back, which is causing the pain. As the baby gets bigger…”

“The pain will get worse,” Shane said.

“Not necessarily. This could be a one time thing.”

“But is it likely?”

The doctor showed a kind smile that told Shane everything he needed to know.

“We’ll send you home with some information on how to best treat the pain. Hot compresses, lower back stretches. You should make an appointment with your primary care provider to follow up.”

Shane thanked the doctor and Hayden helped him out of the hospital bed. He got to his feet carefully, cradling his heavy belly with one hand. He was about to follow Hayden out of the room when his phone rang.

“Shit, it’s Ilya.”

“Take it,” Hayden said. “I’ll bring the car around and meet you out front.”

One of the many benefits of Ilya’s frequent visits was the bridge being built between him and Hayden. Shane was glad they were finally warming up to each other, even if neither wanted to admit it out loud. Hayden stepped out of the room and Shane answered.

“Hi Hollander,” Ilya’s deep and comforting voice said through the phone. “You home or still working too hard?”

“Uh, neither, actually. I’m... at the hospital.”

“Hospital?” Shane heard the sound of a chair screech against the floor on Ilya’s side of the phone. “What’s wrong? You okay? Baby?”

“We’re okay. I got really terrible back pain and Hayden brought me here. It’s just a pinched nerve.”

“Pinched nerve? You are still in pain?”

“No, I feel fine now. I’m just gonna go home and lay down for the rest of the night.”

“I will come to Montreal tomorrow.”

“What? Aren’t you in Boston?”

“We fly home in the morning. I will change my flight.”

“Ilya, you don’t have to do that. I’m really okay.”

“Try and stop me, Hollander.”

Shane sighed. “Your English is getting better.”

“Go home and rest. I will see you in the morning,” Ilya said and hung up the phone.

Shane looked down and rubbed a hand over his belly.

“That’s your Papa,” he said to his round middle.

Shane was still in bed when he heard the front door open the next morning. One of the best things he did during this arrangement was give Ilya a key so they wouldn’t have to coordinate Shane being home to let him in every time he visited. Shane rubbed his eyes and lifted his head from the pillow to see Ilya drop his bag in the doorway.

“Sleeping Beauty,” Ilya said as he entered the room.

“You must have gotten on the flight before dawn,” Shane said, his voice hoarse.

“Not really. It is after 11AM.”

“What?” Shane rolled over and looked at his phone on the bedside table. “Oh my god, I can’t believe I slept so late.”

Ilya sat down at the edge of the bed and rubbed a hand over Shane’s belly, a large bump beneath the sheets.

“Sleep is good. You and baby need it.” He leaned in and kissed him. “Feel okay today? No pain?”

“No pain. Can you help me up?”

Ilya put an arm around him and helped Shane sit up at the edge of the bed. Ilya smiled at the sight of him. With just a few weeks to go, he looked like he was about to pop.

“You look good,” Ilya said in that strange earnest way he sometimes did.

“I’m glad you think so,” Shane said. “I feel like I swallowed a bowling ball.”

Ilya leaned in and gave him a long kiss.

“I like you like this. I like you.”

Ilya held his gaze for a beat and Shane blushed. How one look from Ilya managed to make him feel beautiful when he was waddling around like a turtle on its back was beyond Shane’s understanding.

“I like you too.”

Shane took a shower and got dressed while Ilya settled in. When Shane came out of the bedroom, he saw Ilya standing on the back deck on the phone. He was talking with his hands and was very frustrated with whoever was on the other end. As Shane walked through the kitchen, Ilya hung up the phone and came inside. He jumped when he saw Shane standing there.

“Hollander, I didn’t see you come out.”

“Who were you on the phone with?”

“My manager.” Ilya walked toward the fridge. “Are you hungry? I will make you something.”

Shane followed behind Ilya and sat at the counter, struggling with the weight of his belly as he climbed onto the kitchen stool.

“Is everything okay?” he said, slightly out of breath. “You looked upset.”

“It was nothing. He’s annoyed I didn’t go back to Ottawa with the team. You like tuna melt?”

“Uh, sure,” Shane said, watching him take containers from the fridge. Ilya had become so comfortable there, he no longer had to ask Shane where to find things. “Do you need to be

back in Ottawa?”

Ilya walked around the counter. He put a hand on Shane’s belly and kissed him.

“There is nowhere I need to be but here.”

Chapter 9

Shane had made an appointment with his primary care physician like the doctor at the hospital recommended. Ilya assured him he did not need to rush back to Ottawa, so he could go to the appointment with him.

Shane was lying back on the exam table with Ilya beside him while they waited for the doctor. Ilya reached out and took Shane's hand.

"I like coming to doctor appointments with you," Ilya said.

Shane gave his hand a gentle squeeze.

"I like having you here."

The door opened and Shane's doctor came in and greeted them. Shane told her about the pinched nerve that sent him to the hospital and she confirmed what the other doctor had said. The pain was likely to happen again, and he could manage it with rest and hot compresses.

"If the pain becomes unbearable in the next few weeks," the doctor said, "we can talk about inducing you."

Ilya narrowed his eyes. "What is this word? *Inducing*?"

"That means we would give Shane a medication that would make him go into labor," she explained. "If the baby is fully developed and the pain is too much, it might be a good option."

After talking more about how Shane was doing, the doctor examined him with the ultrasound. Shane and Ilya got to see their baby boy on the screen and listen to his heartbeat. This far along they could make out the features on his face, his tiny fingers and toes. They smiled ear to ear as they watched the monitor, eager to be able to hold their baby in their arms.

When the doctor was finishing up, Ilya's phone vibrated in his pocket a few times. Each time he quickly reached down and silenced it.

"You can get that if you need to," Shane said.

"Is not important," Ilya said.

They made their way out to reception and stopped at the window to check out. It was a slow morning with just a couple other patients in the waiting area. There was a small TV on the wall playing morning news.

"Sorry, our system is slow today," the receptionist said at the desk. "I'll just quickly print your exam paperwork in the back."

Shane glanced up at the TV as the news shifted to the sports segment. Ilya seemed to stiffen.

“What is taking so long?” he said, looking through the reception window.

“It’s been like 30 seconds,” Shane said. “She’ll be right back.”

Ilya cleared his throat and walked around to the other side of him, positioning himself between Shane and the TV. Shane raised an eyebrow and looked him up and down.

“What’s wrong with you? You’re being... fidgety.”

“I am not.” Ilya glanced into reception again. “Do we really need to wait for this paperwork? Can we leave?”

“Why do you- Holy shit.”

Shane looked past Ilya at the screen behind him. He read the news ticker at the bottom of the screen.

ILYA ROZANOV OTTAWA TEAM CAPTAIN SUSPENDED FOR REMAINDER OF SEASON

Ilya looked down and pressed his fingers to his forehead.

“Fuck,” he said quietly.

“Here’s your paperwork,” the receptionist said, extending her hand.

Ilya quickly grabbed it before making a swift exit with Shane. It wasn’t until they were both in the car that Shane finally opened his mouth.

“Ilya, what the fuck,” he said. “I mean, what the actual fuck. You’re *suspended*?”

“Is not like it sounds.”

“It sounds like you’re suspended.”

“I was going to tell you.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I knew you would panic like you are right now!”

Shane closed his eyes and took a breath.

“Okay. Let’s not have this conversation in a parking lot.”

Ilya started the car.

Shane was spinning out by the time they got to his apartment. He would have been pacing the floor had he not been hauling around the extra weight of a nearly full term baby.

Ilya sat down on the couch and looked up at him.

“I told coach I was coming to Montreal and he said I couldn’t miss any more games this season. I said that was going to happen no matter what. Baby would be coming soon,” Ilya explained. “He wouldn’t change his mind. I tried to take leave of absence and he said he would not approve it. We argued, he said if I left that he would suspend me for rest of season. I said okay.”

Shane stared at him. “You said *okay*?”

“Is not big deal.”

“Ilya! It’s a big fucking deal.”

“Shane. Hockey is not a big deal. *Baby* is big deal. Team will be just fine without me. I don’t want you to be having baby alone while I’m playing a game somewhere.”

Shane paced in front of the couch. It turned out his belly didn’t outweigh his anxiety.

“This could be the end of your career. Ottawa might not renew your contract next year.”

“Are you worried about money? Because I have more than enough for us in savings.”

Shane stopped pacing and looked at him.

“No. Of course that’s not what I’m worried about.”

“Then what?”

“I just...”

“You just what?”

“I don’t want to be the reason you have to let go of your dream.”

Ilya looked up at Shane, his expression soft. A long silence passed. Then he reached out to Shane.

Shane took his hand and let Ilya guide him onto the couch. Sitting beside him, Ilya turned so he was face to face with Shane.

“When did I ever tell you that hockey is my dream?”

“You’re the best in the league. One of the best *ever*. You’d just give all that up?”

“Hockey is not my dream. It is something I am very good at, yes. I always thought it would be my way to make a good life for myself. That I could be something like happy.”

Shane furrowed his brow.

“What do you mean something like happy?”

“Hockey doesn’t make me happy. Not like how you and baby make me happy.” Ilya reached up and touched the side of Shane’s face. “You are not taking away my dream. My dream is right here.”

Shane felt tears coming to his eyes, suddenly very overwhelmed.

“Don’t say that if you don’t mean it,” he managed to say, barely above a whisper.

Ilya leaned in and gave him a long kiss on the lips.

“I mean it.”

Shane looked at him, his lower lip quivering. He didn’t know what to say. All he knew was that he was really, really glad to have Ilya there with him. Wordlessly, he swung a leg across him and climbed into Ilya’s lap. Shane buried his face in Ilya’s neck, his belly pressed between them. Ilya wrapped his arms tightly around him, rubbing his hands up and down his back. Shane settled into his embrace, feeling Ilya’s unwavering support.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Shane said, nose still pressed to Ilya’s neck.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Ilya said.

The next week dragged by and despite his initial reaction, Shane was grateful to have Ilya there. Things were getting more difficult for him physically, and it was a huge relief to have someone else doing the laundry, getting groceries, and everything else he was used to doing on his own. And of course it was nice having Ilya around to look at, too.

Shane’s back pain hadn’t been much of a problem, until one evening when his pinched nerve came back with force.

The two had just finished dinner and were cleaning up. Ilya was standing at the sink stacking the dirty plates to wash. Shane had just brought over the last plate and turned for the bathroom.

“I’m going to take a shower,” he said.

“You want some company?”

Shane smiled. “I think I can-“

A loud gasp interrupted Shane’s sentence and he doubled over in pain, grabbing the kitchen counter to steady himself. Ilya dropped a plate in the sink and was at his side in an instant.

“What’s wrong? Is your back?” Ilya said, already rubbing his lower back.

“Fuck, fuck, fuck,” Shane hissed through his teeth.

“Come. Let me help you to the couch.”

In a half-bent position, Shane waddled to the couch with one arm around Ilya, wincing and yelping with every step. He finally made it to the couch and laid down. Ilya helped him get into a position the doctor had showed him to help relieve the pressure from his low back, on his side with one leg bent over the other. He took a few deep breaths in that position and felt the pain start to fade away.

“Better?” Ilya said, wiping away the beads of sweat that had formed on Shane’s forehead.

“Better,” Shane said. “Thank you.”

Ilya pressed a kiss to his forehead.

“Want me to get painkillers?”

Shane shook his head. “They’re not good for the baby.”

“Doctor said they’re okay in small doses.”

“Even better if I don’t take them at all.”

Ilya sighed. He sat beside Shane on the couch and massaged his lower back until he was feeling like he could move around again.

“Why don’t I make you a bath?” Ilya said after a while. “Heat will help your back.”

Shane thought for a moment, then nodded. “Okay. That sounds nice.”

Not long later, Ilya was helping Shane undress and lower himself carefully into the bathtub. The hot water felt good instantly, cocooning Shane’s sore muscles in warmth. The buoyancy helped with the pain too. Shane felt weightless as he closed his eyes and settled into the tub.

His big belly rose above the surface of the water. Ilya sat down on the bathroom floor beside the tub and reached over to Shane. Ilya traced small circles with his fingertip around Shane’s belly, making little trails of water droplets on his pulled-tight skin. Shane smiled, feeling Ilya’s touch.

“It’s nice having you here for more than a few days,” Shane said.

“I told you so.”

“Shut up.”

Ilya smiled. He trailed his fingers through the water as he looked at Shane, enamored by the sight of the man having his baby.

“I will not go to Russia this summer,” Ilya said after a while.

Shane opened his eyes. He turned his head to look at Ilya.

“You can go if you want,” Shane said. “The baby will be here by then. We’ll be okay on our own for a few weeks.”

Ilya shook his head. “I don’t want to. There’s nothing there for me anymore. Is not good for me.”

“You don’t want to see your family?”

Ilya looked Shane deeply in the eyes.

“My family is here.”

Shane tried not to let himself cry. His emotions felt very close to the surface lately and it was a lot to handle.

“Maybe when baby is older the three of us can go,” Ilya continued. “Show him where his papa is from.”

Shane smiled. “That sounds nice.”

Ilya reached over and brushed the pad of his thumb over Shane’s cheek.

“My parents want to meet you,” Shane said.

“They must hate me.” He put his hand on Shane’s belly. “I did this to their only son.”

Shane laughed. “They don’t hate you. They know you’ve been traveling back and forth all season to be here for me and the baby.”

“They still think I am asshole?”

“They think you’re less of an asshole.”

Shane’s expression suddenly changed to surprise and he grabbed Ilya’s hand. He pressed Ilya’s fingers firmly to a spot on the side of his belly. Ilya could feel a steady little *kick, kick, kick*. His heart swelled.

“He is strong,” Ilya said, eyes watery. “Like his dad.”

Ilya reached over with his other hand and ran his fingers through Shane’s hair, damp from the bath.

Shane looked up at him, and felt nothing but love.

Chapter 10

Over the course of the next week, Shane's back pain got worse and worse. It seemed like any little step or turn in the wrong direction pinched the nerve in his lower back.

Fortunately Ilya was there to provide an endless supply of heating pads and back massages and hot baths. He finally convinced Shane to stop working at the charity after joining forces with Hayden. Shane didn't appreciate the intervention, but he secretly loved that Ilya and Hayden were coming together. He agreed to stay home until after the baby was born, on the condition that he could respond to the occasional work email.

Shane woke up one morning and managed to sit himself up, a task that was getting more and more difficult. He sat at the edge of the bed for a minute, massaging his lower back and taking deep breaths. Ilya walked in and found him in that position.

"Your back hurting?" Ilya said.

Shane nodded. Ilya walked over to him and kissed him.

"Stay in bed," Ilya said, rubbing his back. "I will bring you and baby breakfast."

"I want to get up and move around a little," Shane said. "Help me up?"

Ilya bent down so Shane could reach an arm around him. Shane cradled his belly with his other hand while Ilya lifted him to his feet. Before he got to a full standing position, Shane winced in pain.

"Wait," he said through clenched teeth. "My back."

Ilya lowered him back onto the bed. Shane let out a long, slow breath, trying to let the pain pass. Ilya sat down next to him and rubbed his back.

"Shane, maybe we should talk to doctor about this."

Shane shook his head while grimacing, his eyes tearing up from the pain.

"I'm okay."

"You are not okay. Baby is not due for two more weeks. You can't keep going like this." Ilya rubbed his back while he spoke in a calming tone. "Remember what doctor said about having baby early if pain becomes too much."

"I don't want to be induced."

"But you can't--"

"No." Shane turned his head to look at him. "He's not done growing yet. I won't force him to come early just because I'm uncomfortable."

Ilya looked at Shane and felt somebody spin his heart through a blender. It was killing him to see Shane in so much pain.

“Is more than uncomfortable. You are in terrible pain. All the time.”

“No, Ilya.” Shane shook his head and a tear rolled down his cheek. “Please.”

Ilya sighed. He leaned in and gave Shane a gentle kiss on the lips.

“Okay,” he said softly.

“Maybe I will take that breakfast in bed though.”

Ilya managed a smile and kissed him again.

“Let’s get you back in bed and then I will make you something.”

Later that day, Shane was feeling well enough to get up and walk around the apartment. He found Ilya in the baby’s room folding and stacking baby onesies. Shane stood in the doorway for a while before Ilya turned and saw him.

“You are trying to give me heart attack,” Ilya said, tossing the last folded onesie onto the pile.

“I need your help too much to put you in the hospital.” Shane waddled into the room and looked at the baby clothes that smelled like fresh laundry. “Did you wash these?”

“I read that it’s good idea to wash clothes from store before baby wears them.”

“Most of these are from Hayden and Jackie.”

“Then definitely good idea.”

Shane turned around and looked at him, the corners of his lips turning up into a smile.

“You’ve been reading about baby stuff?”

“I don’t have games or practice anymore so I need to pass the time somehow.”

Shane reached up and wrapped his arms around Ilya’s neck. Ilya slid his hands around his waist and kissed him.

“This means a lot,” Shane said, tangling his fingers in Ilya’s hair at the nape of his neck. “Everything you’re doing for the baby. And for me.”

“You are doing a lot more than me.”

Ilya brought a hand to Shane’s belly. Shane leaned in and rested his head on Ilya’s shoulder. They stood like that for a moment, gently swaying side to side in the room that would soon be their baby’s.

“How do you feel?” Ilya said quietly. “No pain?”

“Not right now.”

“Good.”

Ilya kissed the side of Shane’s head. Shane nuzzled his nose against Ilya’s neck and kissed his skin there. He slid his arms down and ran his hands over Ilya’s chest, soaking him in. Ilya slipped a hand beneath the hem of Shane’s shirt and grazed his fingernails across the bare skin of his back. It sent a shiver down his spine. It had been a while since Ilya had touched him in a way that wasn’t to ease his pain, and it got his blood pumping immediately.

“Take me to the bedroom,” Shane whispered in his ear.

Ilya stepped back and looked at him.

“Why? Are you starting to feel pain?”

“No.” Shane shook his head. “I want you to fuck me.”

Ilya’s mouth formed a sly smile.

“I don’t think we should. I don’t want to cause you pain.”

“You won’t. It might even help.”

Ilya looked him up and down and bit his lip, fighting against his impulse.

“You are killing me, Hollander.”

Shane leaned in close and spoke softly so that his breath ghosted across Ilya’s neck.

“Please fuck me.”

A moment later, the two were tangled up in Shane’s bed. Ilya undressed them both, carefully pulling off every piece of Shane’s clothing, pausing to kiss him each time.

Shane rolled onto his side with one leg crossed over the other, the position that took the pressure off his back. Ilya pressed himself to his backside and kissed Shane’s neck while he explored every inch of him with his hands. Shane hummed, feeling Ilya’s touch.

“Please fuck me, Ilya,” he said, turning his head so they could kiss.

Ilya kept his lips pressed to him as he pushed himself into Shane from behind. They both moaned, high on each other already. Shane’s breathing quickened as he felt Ilya roll his hips into him. He dug his fingers into the bedsheets, electricity pulsing through him with every thrust.

Ilya kissed along Shane’s jawline and neck while he pumped in and out of him.

“You feel so good,” Ilya said softly into his ear, his voice gruff and intoxicating.

Shane writhed with pleasure, craving Ilya in every way. His heart pounded as he approached orgasm, clawing at the mattress beneath him.

“Come for me, Ilya,” Shane choked out. “I need you. All of you.”

Ilya was happy to oblige, increasing his tempo. He reached forward and cradled Shane’s belly as he got closer. Ilya pressed his forehead to Shane’s shoulder and moaned as he came inside him, erupting in pleasure all at once. Shane came right after, riding the wave along with him.

Ilya kissed along Shane’s spine as they both caught their breath, the sheets damp with sweat.

“That feel okay?” Ilya asked between kisses.

“Better than okay.” Shane struggled to roll over so he could face him. “Perfect.”

Ilya leaned in and pressed a long kiss to his lips. They laid face to face, taking in every detail of each other. They stayed that way for a long time, just enjoying each other’s presence.

“I don’t want Ottawa to renew my contract for next year,” Ilya said into the silence.

Shane furrowed his brow.

“What?”

“Going back and forth all the time was hard enough when it was just you and me. I will miss half of baby’s life if I go back to Ottawa.”

“So, you want to... retire?”

Ilya shrugged “Maybe. I don’t know.” He tucked one of his feet in between Shane’s. “Maybe I’ll go back when baby is older. If there is a team that will still have me.”

“What do you want to do in the meantime?”

Ilya smiled. “What do you think?” He put a hand on Shane’s belly. “I want to stay here with you and baby. You love working at the hockey school. You can go back to work when you’re ready, and I can stay home with baby.”

Shane looked at him. “You would live here, full time.”

“Yes, Hollander. I would. If you will have me.”

Events of the past year suddenly flooded Shane’s mind. Something that started out as an unexpected hookup with Ilya Rozanov had blossomed into something else completely. A year ago he was keeping his head down and working hard at a job he built from the ground up, and now he was lying in bed with Ilya talking about raising the baby they were having together. A year ago, this wouldn’t have been anywhere near his mind as something he wanted. Now, he couldn’t imagine anything he possibly wanted more.

“I would really like that,” Shane said.

Ilya kissed him. He touched the side of Shane's face, pausing to brush his thumb across his freckles.

"I can't wait to meet our baby," Ilya said quietly. "I love him so much already. Like I love you."

Shane already thought his heart was going to burst. Now he was sure of it. He swallowed the lump in his throat.

"I love you, too."

Shane and Ilya slept soundly that night, wrapped up in their love for each other and their baby. Shane woke up before dawn, something that was happening more and more with the baby getting as big as he was. He looked over his shoulder and saw Ilya sound asleep. Shane smiled, not wanting to disturb his rest.

He floundered his way out of bed as best he could and miraculously did not wake up Ilya. He waddled to the bathroom, holding in a groan with every step.

"Did you double in size overnight?" Shane said to his belly once he reached the bathroom. "You feel extra heavy this morning."

Shane slid his hand along the wall for the light switch and squinted his eyes as he adjusted to the bright light. He had only taken a few steps toward the sink when he suddenly felt a rush of liquid flow down between his legs.

In a mild panic, he rushed back into the bedroom as quickly as his belly allowed and shook Ilya awake. He awoke with a start and took a second to realize Shane was standing over him.

"Ilya, you have to get up," Shane said once he came into focus. "My water just broke."

Chapter 11

It took Ilya about half a second to get out of bed when Shane woke him up to tell him that his water broke. Ilya had already gotten dressed and put the hospital bag by the door before Shane had finished putting on a fresh pair of pants.

“Ilya, I haven’t even had a contraction yet,” Shane said when Ilya returned to the bedroom. “It could be hours before we have to leave for the hospital.”

“Better to be ready.” He walked over and put his hands on Shane’s hips. “You feel okay? No pain?”

“No pain. It does feel kind of strange though. Like pressure in my lower belly.”

“What can I do?”

Shane smiled, seeing Ilya in full new parent mode. It didn’t surprise him at all, but it felt good to watch. He was glad to have Ilya there with him.

“You’re already doing everything. You don’t have to- *Hooooollly shhhiiiiit*”

Shane hunched over and grabbed the edge of the bed as a cramp pulsed through his entire body. It was so intense it nearly took his breath away until it passed. Ilya rushed to his side and rubbed his back.

“Was that...?”

“A contraction,” Shane said through gritted teeth. “Yes.”

A few hours later, Shane and Ilya were pacing the floor of a hospital room. When the contractions had progressed to about ten minutes apart they called the doctor who told them to start heading to the hospital. Shane was walking back and forth in a hospital gown, hoping gravity would help move things along. Ilya did his best to get him whatever he needed.

“You want me to call your parents?” Ilya asked.

“No,” Shane said between deep breaths. “They’ll get right in their car and drive straight here. I don’t want to have to worry about them while I- *Oh, fffuuuck.*”

Shane doubled over and clutched his belly as a contraction took control. As they got closer together, they also got stronger and more intense. Ilya rubbed his back as it rippled through him.

“Breathe, remember to breathe,” Ilya said softly.

“Oh my god this sucks,” Shane said when he regained the ability to speak.

“You’re doing great,” Ilya said, trying his best to be encouraging.

Ilya was still rubbing his back when the doctor walked in.

“How are we doing in here, Mr. Hollander?” she asked.

“Just fantastic,” Shane said, still hunched over in pain.

The doctor smiled kindly.

“I know this part isn’t fun,” she said. “Why don’t we get you onto the bed and check you out?”

Ilya and a nurse helped Shane onto the hospital bed so the doctor could examine him. He let out a long exhale as he settled onto the bed. Ilya brushed Shane’s hair away from his face, already damp with sweat. Ilya leaned in and gave him a gentle kiss on the side of the head. The doctor checked Shane out at the end of the bed.

“Everything looks good down here, Mr. Hollander,” she said. “Things are moving right along. I’ll just take a quick feel around your belly.”

The doctor walked around the side of the bed and pressed her hands firmly against Shane’s belly. He groaned at the pressure, exhausted from his body being pushed to the limits.

The doctor furrowed her brow and continued feeling around Shane’s abdomen. Ilya noticed her expression.

“Is something wrong?”

“It looks like your baby is breech,” she said.

“Oh no.” Shane groaned and covered his face with both hands.

Ilya looked to the doctor, panicked. “What does this mean?”

“It means that your baby is in the wrong position for a natural birth,” she said. “His head should be facing down, but he’s turned the opposite way.”

“How do we- *uuuuhhhhhhh*.”

Shane groaned through another contraction. He reached for Ilya’s hand and squeezed hard through the pain.

“What do we do about baby’s position?” Ilya asked the doctor once Shane could focus on the answer.

“We can try something called an ECV, external cephalic version.”

Ilya’s eyes widened at the scary sounding words. The doctor read his expression.

“It sounds worse than it is,” she said. “It just means that we manipulate the baby’s position by pushing outside the belly.”

“Is painful?” Ilya asked, stroking Shane’s hair with one hand.

“I’ll be honest, it can be extremely uncomfortable, but it shouldn’t be painful.”

“Is there another option?” Shane asked, his cheeks flushed from the recent contraction.

“The only other option would be to perform a c-section. You can’t deliver your baby naturally in this position.”

Shane covered his face and moaned again, overwhelmed by everything happening in his body and everything the doctor was saying.

“Turning the baby,” Ilya said, “is safer option?”

“Less risk involved and no recovery needed.”

Ilya looked at Shane, sweaty and exhausted and overwhelmed. Ilya placed a gentle hand on the side of his face.

“What do you want to do?” Ilya asked.

“I don’t know,” Shane said, rubbing his eyes. “I’m so tired.”

“I know, but you’re doing great.” Ilya ran his fingers through Shane’s sweaty hair. “I think you should let them try and turn baby. It will be fast and you won’t need surgery.”

Shane took a deep breath and tried to think. He looked up at the doctor.

“Okay,” he said. “Let’s do the ECV.”

“Great,” she said. “Let me go grab another nurse and we’ll get started.”

Shane looked back to Ilya, his eyes soft and vulnerable. Ilya had never felt more in love in his entire life. He leaned in and kissed him.

“You doing okay?” Ilya asked, though the question felt kind of silly.

“Ready for this to be over,” Shane said as he leaned his head back against the pillow.

Ilya smiled and placed a hand on Shane’s belly.

“Almost,” he said.

Shane put his hand on top of Ilya’s and looked up at him.

“I’m so exhausted. What if I’m not strong enough to do this?”

“Of course you are strong enough.” Ilya gave his belly a comforting rub. “Baby wants to come out. He just needs a little help from you.”

Shane squeezed Ilya’s hand and took a deep breath. “I’m really glad you’re here.”

“Me too.”

The doctor returned with a nurse and they prepped Shane to turn the baby. They explained the procedure to him, how they would push down hard on either side of his belly and guide the baby into position. Shane took Ilya’s hand and told them he was ready.

Shane grimaced as they pressed down on his abdomen, pushing and forcing his body into a shape it didn’t want to go. Ilya stroked his hand and kept telling him it was almost over.

“*Fuckfuckfuckfuck*,” Shane said through clenched teeth.

Ilya resisted the urge to snap at the doctors and tell them to hurry it up already. He had to keep his attention on Shane who was squeezing his hand so hard he thought he might break a bone. He kissed the back of Shane’s hand.

“Here we go, Mr. Hollander,” the doctor said. “Baby’s turning.”

“They’re almost done,” Ilya said. “Breathe. Deep breaths.”

Finally, the baby moved into the right position. Shane exhaled immediately, feeling relief from the pressure.

“There we go,” the doctor said. “Your little boy’s ready for delivery.”

“Thank god,” Shane said, breathing hard. “How long-“

Shane barely got a second of rest before he was struck with another contraction. This one was the biggest yet, causing him to curl forward in mind numbing pain. The doctor got down at the end of the bed and examined him.

“That one was really bad,” Shane said, beads of sweat trailing down from his hairline.

“That’s because baby’s ready to come,” she said, reaching for the nurse to prepare. “You’re fully dilated. I want you to push on the next contraction.”

“Oh my god, really?”

“Really.”

Shane looked up at Ilya who wiped the sweat from his forehead ahead.

“You can do this,” Ilya said. “You’re strong.”

Shane didn’t have time to process a response because his next contraction came right away. He heard the doctor instructing him to push and he did what his body wanted him to do. He

squeezed Ilya's hand and pushed with all his strength until the contraction passed.

"Great job, Mr. Hollander!" the doctor said. "The baby's crowning."

"Jesus Christ," Shane panted, head collapsed back against the pillow.

"You're doing great," Ilya said even though Shane could barely hear him. "Baby is almost here."

Another contraction followed up fast and Shane pushed as hard as he could for as long as he could. He collapsed back against the pillow and took a big breath, a combination of tears and sweat streaming down his face.

"One more big push should do it," the doctor said.

"I can't," Shane cried, a sweaty mess.

"You can." Ilya pushed Shane's sweaty hair away from his eyes. "Just one more and baby's here."

"You do it then."

Ilya smiled. Even in the most pain he'd ever felt in his life, Shane found it in him to respond with sarcasm.

Another contraction gripped Shane and he pushed with all his strength, screaming his way through it. He finally made it to the other side of the contraction and a few seconds later the hospital room was filled with the shrill cries of a newborn.

"Congratulations," the doctor said, lifting the screaming newborn. "You have a baby boy."

Shane instinctively reached out and took his baby boy in his arms. He held the baby to his chest, unable to believe his eyes.

"Oh my god, you're so beautiful," Shane said, a massive smile suddenly replacing his strained expression.

"Hello little one," Ilya said tearfully. "Ya tebya lyublyu."

The two looked down at their beautiful newborn son and felt more love than they ever thought was possible.

A few hours later, Shane was sleeping soundly in his hospital bed. The medical team examined the baby and said he was in perfect health. After the baby had been checked out and Shane and Ilya spent as long as they possibly could with their eyes glued to him, exhaustion was starting to set in for everyone.

The baby had been put down in a bassinet near the hospital bed where Shane kept his eyes on his baby boy until he was too tired to keep them open.

When Shane opened his eyes again he saw Ilya standing across the room with the baby in his arms, gently swaying side to side.

“Is he awake?” Shane said, exhaustion in his voice.

Ilya turned to face him. “He started to fuss. I wanted you to rest.”

“Bring him here.”

Ilya walked over and sat in the hospital bed beside Shane. He settled back so Shane could rest his head on Ilya’s shoulder and look in on the baby.

They both looked down at their perfect baby boy. All his tiny features. His ten little fingers and ten little toes. Shane reached over and laid his hand on the blanket that was swaddled tightly around the little squirming baby.

“He has been in your belly for the last nine months,” Ilya said. “It must be very scary out here apart from you.”

Shane smiled as he watched their son, sleeping peacefully against Ilya’s chest.

“He feels safe in your arms,” Shane said. “He knows you.”

“I never want to stop looking at him.”

“Same.”

Ilya leaned over and pressed a long kiss to the side of Shane’s head.

“Thank you for our baby boy,” Ilya whispered. “He is perfect.”

“I couldn’t have done it without you,” Shane said, settling against his shoulder.

“I think you could have.”

They both stared at the baby they made together. Ilya kissed Shane again.

“I love you,” Ilya said.

Shane smiled, happier than he’d ever been. “I love you, too.”

After enjoying time together as their new little family for a while, a nurse came in to check on them.

“How’s everyone doing in here?” the nurse said as she walked in.

“Never better,” Shane said.

The nurse came in close and checked on the baby.

“Have you decided on a name for this little guy yet?” she asked.

Shane and Ilya looked at each other and exchanged a smile. Ilya looked back to the nurse.

“Isaak,” he said. “Isaak Hollander Rozanov.”

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

We've made it to the end! I've really enjoyed writing this little story and am sad to bring it to a close 😊. Thanks to all who have stuck with it and made it this far! I appreciate every comment, kudos, and bookmark! Let me know what you thought of this story. I don't have any plans for a new one at the moment, but never say never! 💕💕

Shane walked through the front door and dropped his bag in the kitchen. He and Ilya had moved into the place in Montreal together nearly six months ago, but there were still a few unpacked boxes here and there. Settling into a new home while taking care of an infant was no easy task.

Shane walked into the living room and saw Ilya and Isaak playing on the floor. Ilya was laying down on his stomach while Isaak sat across from him, a train set between them. Ilya made train engine noises while pushing it along the tracks, much to Isaak's delight.

"It sounds like fun in here," Shane said as he walked up to them.

Isaak immediately squealed and reached up when he saw his dad. Shane scooped him up quickly in his arms, kissing and tickling him all over. Isaak squirmed and giggled. Ilya climbed to his feet and kissed Shane.

"How was work?"

"It was good." Shane gave Isaak another quick kiss. "Home is better. How was he today?"

"He is getting too smart. He will be reading books all by himself soon."

Shane smiled down at their little boy. At just over a year old, he couldn't believe how fast he was growing.

"Maybe we start with speaking in full sentences."

Shane set Isaak back down to play with his toys and walked toward the kitchen. Ilya followed.

"Do you want me to get dinner started?" Ilya said. "I haven't had time to think about it."

Shane walked over to the fridge and took out a ginger ale. He popped open the tab and took a sip.

"That's alright, I need something to settle my stomach first."

Ilya furrowed his brow. “Your stomach? Are you getting sick?”

He pressed the back of his hand to Shane’s forehead to check for a fever. Shane swatted his hand away.

“I’m fine,” he said. “What did you do today?”

“You know, the usual. Lots of playing with toys, reading books, eating snacks. A few naps too. Very hard work, really.”

Shane smiled. Ilya was a natural when it came to taking care of Isaak. It was a hard decision for Shane to go back to work after he was born, but he felt good knowing their little boy was at home with his Papa, safe and sound.

“I, uh, got an interesting phone call today,” Ilya added, drumming his fingers on the kitchen counter.

Shane took another sip of ginger ale. “A phone call?”

“Someone from the Montreal Metros.”

Shane froze mid-sip. He took a second to make sure he heard correctly.

“The Metros? The hockey team?”

“Is there another Montreal Metros you know?”

“What did they want?”

“Their assistant coach is leaving at the end of this season,” Ilya said. “They wanted to know if I was looking for a job.”

After Ilya’s somewhat tense exit from Ottawa before Isaak was born, the team decided not to renew his contract. Ilya wasn’t that upset about it. He loved staying home with Isaak and with each passing day, the idea of ever going back to Ottawa seemed harder and harder. He and Shane decided to get a place together in Montreal and think about what Ilya wanted to do when Isaak was old enough for daycare.

“They... want you to be their assistant coach?”

“I told them I would meet with them next week to talk more.” Ilya shrugged. “It is good offer. Pay is good. Metros are good team. Isaak will be starting daycare soon, so I won’t need to stay home.”

Shane looked at the man he knew better than anyone and narrowed his eyes.

“This sounds like a perfect opportunity. Why aren’t you excited about it?”

Ilya closed the distance between them and put his hands on Shane’s hips.

“It is a good job, yes. I could tell them yes.”

“But...”

Ilya suddenly hoisted Shane up by the waist and set him down on the counter. Shane gasped and gripped Ilya’s shoulders. He smiled as Ilya stepped in close between his legs.

“But...” Ilya said, “maybe we could make another reason for me to stay home instead.”

Shane studied his face. “You want to have another baby?”

“Is just an idea.” Ilya slid his hands up and down Shane’s thighs. “It would be your decision, of course. But... it would be nice. Another one of those.”

Ilya nodded in the direction of the living room and they both looked at their beautiful little boy, playing happily with his train set. They watched him with full hearts, seeing little parts of themselves in him.

Shane turned back to Ilya and stared at him a moment. He covered his face and laughed. “I can’t believe this is happening,” he said, more to himself than to Ilya.

Ilya furrowed his brow, confused.

“If you don’t want to, we don’t-“

“It’s not that.” Shane looked up and took Ilya’s face in his hands. “I’m pregnant.”

Ilya stared at him, unable to comprehend.

“You... you’re...”

“Yes. I started having a feeling these last couple days. I took a test on my lunch break today.”

Ilya’s look of confusion morphed into a wide smile.

“We’re having another baby?”

“We’re having another baby.”

Ilya immediately pulled Shane into a long kiss. Their relationship had grown so much since they first met, it was hard to believe. One day Ilya was just swinging by the hockey school for a publicity stunt, and now they had a life and a family together.

A wonderful, beautiful family they loved with all their hearts.

“I won’t take Montreal job,” Ilya said quickly. “I will call them tomorrow and tell them.”

“Wait! No. Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Do you want to be assistant coach for the Metros?”

“Sure, but-“

“Then you should take the job. We can do both. It’s completely different than you going back and forth to Ottawa. You’d be right here in town, and I can adjust my hours to be home with the kids when you have away games.”

“I don’t know...”

“Ilya, you’ve done so much for me and Isaak for so long. If you want this job, you should take it.” Shane reached up and ran his fingers through Ilya’s hair. “Besides, I missed a lot of Isaak’s firsts when I went back to work. It’d be nice if I got to stay home a little longer with this next one.”

Ilya leaned in and kissed him again.

“Then I guess we’re having another baby and I’m starting a new job.”

“I love you,” Shane said before kissing him again.

“I love you, too.”

Shane stepped into the backyard with the baby on his hip. He opened his mouth to call Ilya and Isaak for dinner but stopped when he saw them playing in the grass together. Isaak was kicking a ball around, or at least as much as his short little legs allowed. Ilya made a big show of not being able to keep up, letting Isaak score an imaginary goal. Shane stood and watched them for a moment, his heart soaring.

Finally Ilya noticed him and turned Isaak toward the house. His little feet stampeded in the direction of Shane and baby Yuri. He stopped when he came crashing right into Shane’s legs.

“Whoa, easy there little love,” Shane said, reaching down to ruffle his son’s hair.

“Sorry,” Isaak said in his precocious little voice.

“It’s okay,” he said with a smile. “Go get ready for dinner. We’re having pasta.”

“Pasta!” Isaak shouted as he sprinted into the house.

“That’s turning into his favorite word,” Ilya said, leaning in to kiss Shane.

“What do you think her favorite word will be?” Shane said, turning Yuri toward Ilya.

“Hockey?”

“Probably.”

Ilya took Yuri from Shane’s arms and lifted her up in the air. She squealed and happily flailed her little arms and legs. Ilya brought her back down into his arms and kissed her cheek.

“My beautiful girl,” he said against her ear.

Shane smiled, his heart full of so much love he thought it might burst.

“I’m glad we get to have you to ourselves all week,” Shane said, reaching up and running his fingers through Ilya’s hair.

Ilya made it clear to the Metros when he started his job as assistant coach that his family would always be his first priority. He was glad to learn that they shared his same values and had no problem with him taking time off when Shane and the kids needed him.

The team had home games all week which meant that Ilya got to come home to his family every day after work just like a regular job.

“Me too. She is much cuter than all the players on the Metros.” Ilya gave Yuri another quick kiss. “Do you think Hayden and Jackie would babysit next weekend so we can go look at cottages?”

When Shane was pregnant with Yuri, Ilya had brought up the idea of buying a cottage on lake. Somewhere they could go as a family whenever they needed a break from work and the city. Now that Yuri was born and they had something resembling a routine, they had started looking at places.

“Yeah I already talked to Hayden. They’ll watch Isaak and Yuri this weekend and I told him we’ll watch their kids when they go to visit Jackie’s brother next month.”

Ilya frowned. “But they have so many of them.”

“Stop.”

Ilya stepped closer and kissed him.

“I will give her a bottle before we eat,” Ilya said, giving Yuri a little squeeze.

Shane watched Ilya walk into the house with their daughter on his hip. Isaak came bounding into the kitchen and Ilya reached down and ruffled their son’s hair. Shane watched and tried to memorize the image, adding it to his overflowing collection of moments with his wonderful little family.

Ilya sat on a lounge chair in the backyard of the cottage. He kept his eyes on Isaak and Yuri where they sat a few feet away on a blanket on the ground. Yuri squealed and clapped her hands as Isaak built up and knocked over a block tower again and again.

Shane walked outside having just gotten off the phone with his parents.

“How are Yuna and David?” Ilya asked.

“They’re good. They want to come visit next week while we’re still at the cottage.”

Ilya opened his arms and Shane crawled in beside him on the lounge chair. Ilya wrapped an arm around him and raked his fingers through Shane's hair.

"That will be nice," Ilya said. "They haven't seen the kids since Yuri's birthday."

They both looked out over their backyard at their kids playing happily together, the sun just starting to set over the lake.

"Can you believe we have a three-year-old and a one-year-old?" Shane said.

"No. Time is moving faster somehow."

Shane smiled and brought his hand to rest on Ilya's thigh. Ilya took his hand and interlaced their fingers.

"Do you think they're too close to the water's edge?" Shane said.

"Hollander, lake is like 30 feet away."

"Just making sure."

Ilya pulled him in a little closer and Shane laid his head against his chest. They watched their kids and tried to soak in the moment, savoring every blissful second.

"It's getting late," Shane said after a while. "We should bring them in and get them ready for bed."

"Not yet," Ilya said. "Let's just enjoy this for a few more minutes."

"Okay," Shane said, settling deeper into Ilya's embrace. "I love you."

Ilya pressed a long kiss to the top of Shane's head.

"I love you, too."

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