

play-by-play

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by [hollanov_1410](#)

Summary

Shane had memorized every version of Ilya's face over the years.

He remembered the way his face broke open when he saw him on TV winning his first Stanley Cup. He remembered the way he turned away and face contorted as he tried not to cry in front of Shane for the first time at that All Stars weekend all these years ago now. He remembered the soft vulnerability in Ilya's eyes the first time they'd managed to choke out I love you.

But seeing Ilya hold their son for the first time was a look Shane didn't have a name for yet.

Or,

Shane and Ilya are about to become dads for the first time. They navigate the pregnancy, Ilya's final season, and Shane's first away game after their son is born.

Notes

general disclaimer: this follows the same Hollanov dads universe from my other fics in [Our House](#), but they're all standalones so you definitely don't need to read any of them to read this one!!

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

July 2022 — Ottawa

"Oh God, what are we doing."

Shane was pacing their bedroom. Back and forth. His hand kept going to his hair, fingers raking through it roughly until it stuck up at odd angles.

Just twenty minutes ago, they had both watched the two faint lines appear on the pregnancy test, held their breath as the color deepened and became undeniable. Both of them had been crying, unable to stop hugging and kissing and staring at those two lines.

And now, Shane was wearing a path in the carpet.

"Shane," Ilya said carefully from where he was sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Maybe this was a mistake."

Ilya's lips twitched, fighting a smile that absolutely was not appropriate for this moment. "Did not seem like mistake when we were practicing every day for the past month."

Shane stopped mid-pace and shot him a look. "That's not the same thing."

"Is exactly same thing," Ilya said, leaning back on his hands. "We wanted to make a baby. We made a baby. The birds and bees."

He wasn't wrong. They had decided, months ago now, that they would start trying for a baby once the season ended. And when it did and they won the Cup in June, they had spent that entire month at the cottage. Unable to keep their hands off each other.

Shane had thought the novelty would wear off after a week or two. That actively trying for a baby would fade into something more routine. Maybe even start to feel like a chore.

That had not been the case.

If anything, it had made both of them completely insatiable. Ilya grabbing Shane while he was chopping vegetables for dinner and bending him over the kitchen counter. Getting pulled onto the deck in broad daylight, splinters be damned. In the home gym between sets.

And now here they were. Pregnant.

"That was different," Shane said weakly, resuming his pacing. "That was...theoretical. Hypothetical. This is real."

Ilya stood up from the bed and crossed the room in a few long strides, catching Shane mid-pace and pulling him in by the hips. "Shane," he said firmly, his hands warm and steady. "Breathe."

"I am breathing."

"Then breathe slower," Ilya said, his thumbs rubbing small circles against Shane's hip bones. "You are going to pass out."

To his credit, Shane did try. His chest rose and fell in deliberate, measured breaths.

But his hands were shaking when they came up to grip Ilya's forearms, fingers digging into the muscle hard enough that Ilya could feel each individual fingertip. "We don't know how to be parents," he said, the words tumbling out. "What if we're terrible at it?"

Ilya pulled Shane closer, eliminating the last few inches of space between them. "Shane," he said. "Nobody is born knowing how to be parent. Everyone figures it out as they go."

"I don't even know how to change a diaper—"

"Well, you have nine months to learn," Ilya mused.

"You don't know how to either."

"I will also learn." He said it like this was completely fine, which it probably was, and Shane knew it was probably fine, and his brain was still running at a frequency that made everything feel like it wasn't fine at all.

Shane didn't smile yet. Nine months felt impossibly fast, in the grand scheme of things.

But before he could get any further into it, Ilya dropped to his knees in front of him.

Shane's breath caught. "Ilya—"

Ilya's hands settled on Shane's hips, warm and sure through the fabric of his joggers. Then he leaned forward and pressed a soft kiss to Shane's lower stomach. Then another kiss, just beside his navel.

He pulled back slightly and looked up at Shane, his chin resting against Shane's stomach. His eyes were bright, a little wet at the corners.

"We are having baby, Shane," Ilya said softly.

Shane felt something crack open in his chest. His hands came down to cup Ilya's face, thumbs brushing across his cheekbones.

"We're having a baby," Shane repeated, the words sounding different now. A little less terrifying.

"Our own little poppy seed," Ilya said, his lips curving into a smile against Shane's stomach.

Shane blinked down at him. "What?"

"I looked it up on app this morning," Ilya said. "Baby is size of poppy seed right now. First month."

Shane stared at him. "You already downloaded a baby tracking app?"

"Of course. Had it for months now." Ilya said. "Is very informative. Next month, baby will be size of kidney bean." Ilya kissed him again. "Even paid monthly subscription to get recipes for each week. I will make you lemon poppy seed muffins this week."

"You—" Shane's voice caught between a laugh and something that might have been a sob. "You have a paid subscription?"

Ilya smiled. "Premium features for our premium baby. It includes shopping lists, meal plans, symptom tracker—"

"Ilya." Shane's voice broke on it. He was crying properly now, which on any other day he might have felt a little embarrassed about. Right now he couldn't find the part of himself that cared. He looked down at Ilya, still on his knees in front of him, phone apparently full of months of preparation that he'd said nothing about, and didn't have words for any of it.

So instead, he pulled Ilya up by the shoulders and kissed him. Hard and desperate and probably too salty from the tears still falling, but Ilya just made a soft, pleased sound and kissed him back, his hands coming up to frame Shane's face.

When they finally broke apart, Ilya kept his hands on Shane's face, holding him there, their foreheads pressed together.

"I cannot wait to see you be a dad," Ilya whispered against his lips.

Shane's breath hitched. "I hope I don't fuck this up."

"You will," Ilya said simply, and Shane's eyes flew open. Ilya was smiling at him, small and tender. "I will too. We will both fuck up many times. And then we will fix it. Together. Like always."

August 2022 - Ottawa

Over the next few weeks, Shane felt like absolute shit.

Whatever mythical pregnancy glow everyone supposedly got was definitely not happening for him. He had a low-grade queasiness that never quite went away and more than occasionally spiked into full-blown vomit territory. He was exhausted in a way that felt bone-deep, like he could sleep for sixteen hours and still wake up tired.

And everything—*everything*—was pissing him off.

The smell of coffee. The sound of Ilya chewing. Sometimes just the sound of Ilya breathing, which was completely irrational and Shane knew it was irrational and it didn't help. The way the sunlight came through the kitchen window at a specific angle in the morning. The way his jeans felt against his constant bloat.

And then there was Ilya, who had somehow, inexplicably, developed what could only be described as sympathetic pregnancy cravings. Except instead of craving pickles and ice cream like a normal person, he was eating like a fucking toddler let loose in a candy shop.

Shane couldn't think of any other way to describe it.

It was early on a Saturday. Shane was at the kitchen table working through a smoothie—ginger, spinach, wheat grass, something Ilya's app had described as gentle on the stomach and packed with nutrients. Shane had his doubts about both of those claims. He was trying anyway.

Ilya was standing at the kitchen island, methodically working through an entire bag of sour gummy worms.

At eight in the morning.

Shane took another reluctant sip of the smoothie, forcing it down, and watched with mounting horror as Ilya pulled out a handful of the gummy worms, shoved them in his mouth, and then proceeded to lick the sugar residue off his fingers before immediately digging back into the bag for more.

The slurping sounds alone were enough to make Shane's already-precarious stomach situation too much.

"Ilya."

Ilya looked up, mid-chew, his cheeks slightly bulging. He swallowed with some effort—Shane could actually *see* his throat work—then held the bag out in Shane's direction.

"Do you want one?"

Shane wanted to reach across the table and punch him.

"No," he said stiffly. "Why are you eating like *you're* the one growing limbs?"

Ilya looked at the bag, genuinely puzzled. "I wanted something sweet."

"You've gone through three bags of candy in two days," Shane said, his voice climbing slightly despite his best efforts. "I've seen them in the trash. The trash can *I* had to throw up in."

Ilya flinched. He set the bag down on the counter carefully. "Sorry—"

The sight of Ilya like that made Shane's irritation deflate almost immediately. He pressed both hands over his face and exhaled slowly. "No. I'm sorry. You can eat whatever you want. I'm being an ass."

Ilya crossed the kitchen without a word and sat down beside him, arm going around his shoulders, lips pressing to the side of his head. "Nausea bad this morning?"

Shane nodded.

Ilya rubbed his back. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I can throw away the rest of my candy."

"It's fine," Shane said. He leaned more heavily into Ilya's side. "You could be eating a salad and I'd probably find something wrong with it."

Ilya made a sound that was almost a laugh. They sat like that for a minute, Shane's smoothie going untouched, Ilya's hand still moving on his back.

"It has been happening since I stopped smoking," Ilya said eventually. "The sugar cravings."

Shane went still. He pulled back just enough to look at him. "You stopped smoking?"

Ilya nodded, like he'd genuinely forgotten he hadn't mentioned it.

"Since when?"

Ilya pulled out his phone, tapped at the screen a few times, then held it up. Some kind of quit-smoking app. A date at the top. A streak counter.

Shane read the date displayed there.

"July 23rd," Ilya said. "When the test came back positive."

Shane stared at the screen for a long moment. "Ilya."

"Look," Ilya said, swiping to a different screen, his enthusiasm genuine and a little dorky. "I get to open my first achievement badge at thirty days. Is like...little trophy." He showed Shane the locked badge. "Only eight more days."

Shane felt his eyes burning again. *God*, he was crying all the time now. "You quit smoking the day we found out."

"Of course," Ilya said, like it wasn't even a question. "Could not keep smoking around you while you are pregnant. And definitely not when baby comes." He set his phone down and picked up another gummy worm. "So now our baby will only have to worry about having father with no teeth from all the cavities. But very big, healthy lungs. Is good trade-off, yes?"

Shane let out a wet laugh, the sound catching in his throat. He reached up and swiped at his eyes with the back of his hand. "We're going to be paying half our mortgage in dental bills at this rate."

"Is possible," Ilya agreed cheerfully, popping the gummy worm in his mouth. His lips were already stained slightly blue.

Shane leaned in and kissed him anyway.

"It looks like you two are having a beautiful baby boy."

Shane looked at the screen. The squirming blob that was, apparently, a son. His face broke open before he'd fully processed it, the smile happening on its own, and he turned to look at Ilya.

Ilya was grinning at the screen with wet eyes, his whole face lit up, and Shane felt something crack open in his chest at the sight of him.

"We're going to have a son," Ilya said.

Shane turned back to the screen, watched their baby move, listened to the sound of the heart beating steady and strong. He let out a laugh that came out a little waterlogged. "Oh my God."

Ilya lifted Shane's hand from where it was resting on the exam table and kissed it. Once, then again, then again, like he couldn't stop himself. Then he turned and kissed Shane properly, still smiling too wide to do it right, and Shane laughed against his mouth.

"A little Shane," Ilya murmured.

"Or a little you."

Ilya looked back at the ultrasound. He reached out and traced the profile on the screen—the tiny nose, the curve of the forehead—without quite touching it. "That's all you, *moy lyubovnik*."

Shane watched the screen for another moment, then glanced down at his stomach. "I haven't felt him move yet," he said, trying to keep his voice casual but not quite managing it.

"Completely normal at eighteen weeks," the technician said easily, adjusting something on the machine. "First pregnancies especially. Some people don't feel anything until twenty, twenty-two weeks."

She said it matter-of-factly, the way someone said something they'd repeated a hundred times before. Shane nodded, his expression carefully neutral.

Ilya knew that nod. Shane had been turning this particular worry over for weeks now, quietly, in the way he did with things he'd decided weren't worth mentioning. Ilya had caught him more than once standing in the kitchen or lying in bed with his hand pressed flat against his stomach, completely still.

Ilya reached over and squeezed Shane's knee. "He is moving in there, Shane. We can see it right now on screen. Soon you will be complaining he kicks too much and won't let you sleep."

Shane gave a small laugh, his eyes back on the monitor. "Yeah. Maybe."

"Not maybe. Definitely." Ilya kissed him. "He is just waiting for right moment to say hello. He is already dramatic."

The technician printed off a strip of ultrasound pictures and handed them over with a smile, and neither of them stopped looking at them for the entire walk back to the car. Shane held the strip carefully with both hands, tilting it slightly in the sunlight streaming through the clinic windows to see the grainy images better. Ilya kept leaning over every few steps to look at it again—over Shane's shoulder, then from the side, then craning his neck to see it from a different angle—even though he'd already memorized every pixel of their son's tiny profile.

They were almost to the car, Shane still staring at the images with that soft expression that made Ilya's chest ache, when Ilya's phone buzzed in his pocket. Then again immediately after. He pulled it out, glanced at the screen, and started tapping quickly.

"Who are you texting?" Shane asked absently, still looking at the pictures.

"Venmo-ing," Ilya corrected without thinking.

Shane's head snapped up. "What?"

Ilya realized his mistake immediately. He turned his phone screen away and winced. "I'm, uh, Venmo-ing Hayden."

Shane stopped walking. Right there in the middle of the parking lot, a car had to slow down and go around them. "Why?"

Ilya looked at the ground. Then at the sky. Then at a bird that was conveniently flying past. Anywhere but at Shane's face. "We placed small bet. On the gender."

The silence that followed was deafening.

Shane's voice, when it came, was very controlled. "You bet on the gender of our baby."

"In my defense," Ilya started, which he knew—even as the words were leaving his mouth—was never a good opening. "I was very confident. You were showing all the signs for girl. Bad morning sickness, carrying high, the app said—"

"You used your app," Shane said slowly, "to place a bet against your own child."

"Not against! I bet *on* our child. I just bet wrong gender." Ilya paused, recognizing the dangerous look forming on Shane's face. "Which, looking back—"

"Ilya."

Ilya's mouth snapped shut.

Shane looked at him for a long moment, the ultrasound pictures still gripped carefully in both hands. His jaw was tight. His expression was doing that thing where Ilya genuinely couldn't tell if he was about to yell at him or laugh.

Then he turned on his heel and walked to the car.

Ilya sped up and got there first. Just barely. He pulled the passenger door open and stood beside it, and Shane gave him a look as he got in that communicated several things at once, none of them particularly warm.

Ilya got in the driver's seat and didn't say anything for a moment. Just sat with it.

"Shane." Ilya reached over and took Shane's hand, lacing their fingers together. "I am so happy I could burst. Boy, girl, does not matter. This is our baby. Our son." He brought Shane's hand up to his lips, kissed his knuckles.

Shane's thumb brushed across Ilya's knuckles. "I had literally just texted Hayden and Jackie the news."

"Yes, well," Ilya said. "Hayden is a greedy man. He sent me Venmo request right away. Paychecks must not be coming in reliably for world's most mediocre hockey player. Think of this as charity, yes?"

Shane was fighting a smile and losing. "You're a fucking idiot."

"Possibly."

Shane looked back at the ultrasound pictures propped against the base of the windshield. His expression went soft again, that overwhelming tenderness that had been appearing more and more over the past few weeks.

Ilya watched him look at the pictures for a moment. Then:

"You will not be happy to hear that I placed bet with Rose on how much baby weighs when he's born."

Shane glared at him.

"Ten pounds," Ilya said.

"You want me to give birth to a ten pound fucking baby?"

"Is a joke!" Ilya said, already laughing. "Joking. I promise." He leaned over and kissed the side of Shane's face, then his cheek, then the corner of his mouth while Shane sat rigid and unimpressed. "No more bets."

"Good."

"Although," Ilya started, "your mother did mention you were a big baby—"

"Drive us home," Shane said. "Now. Not another word."

Ilya did. One hand on the wheel, one hand resting on Shane's stomach. Shane's hand over his, warm and steady, the ultrasound pictures propped against the windshield the whole way.

January 2023 — Montreal

Shane was bouncing his leg, hands stuffed in the pockets of his fleece-lined jacket, his rounded stomach cradled absently underneath. Yuna on his left, David on his right, the three of them up in the box watching the second period wind down.

Montreal's new center had just slammed into Luca. Way late, long after the whistle, the kind of hit that was solely just to send a message. The arena pulled in a breath. Luca went into the boards hard and stayed there a beat too long.

Shane winced, his hand instinctively moving to press against his stomach where the baby had just delivered a particularly sharp kick.

Then Ilya was there. Gloves already off before Shane had fully processed what was happening, closing the distance with that particular economy of motion that meant the decision had already been made. The first punch landed clean. The second one too. By the time the linesmen got between them, the point had been made several times over.

The camera cut to a close-up. Ilya being pulled back by Bood and Hayes, blood running freely down his chin, dripping onto the ice. He spit more of it out without breaking stride, still yelling something at the Montreal bench, and he was grinning big as he did it.

Shane exhaled slowly through his nose.

"Shane," Yuna said beside him, her voice gentle but concerned.

Shane felt her hand land on his bouncing leg, warm and grounding. He nodded without really hearing what she'd said, his eyes still locked on Ilya in the penalty box. Ilya was wiping blood from his mouth with the back of his glove, still looking entirely too pleased with himself.

Shane's jaw was set so tight it was starting to ache.

The locker room after the game was as loud as it always was following a win. Especially after a decisive win against Montreal, 5-1.

Ilya found Shane the second he walked through the door. Still in his gear, still not showered, crossing the room like Shane was the only fixed point in it and pulling him in without preamble.

Shane let him. Arms coming up around Ilya's back, chin dropping to his shoulder.

This was one of the many things pregnancy had quietly rearranged in Shane. Normally he had a firm policy about proximity to Ilya immediately post-game—the sweat, the *smell*, it was a sensory nightmare for Shane until Ilya showered or at least put on clean clothes. But somewhere around the second trimester something had shifted, and he was now, against all reason, a little too fond of the way Ilya smelled after a game.

He had not told Ilya this. But Ilya absolutely knew.

When they pulled back, Shane got a proper look at him. Busted lip, swollen and still bleeding slightly at the corner. The beginning of a black eye darkening under his left socket. Some dried blood along his jaw he hadn't bothered to clean off.

"Jesus Christ," Shane hissed.

"We need you back, Shane," Bood said from where he was sitting on the bench. "Maybe you could've stopped Cap from going fucking ape shit—" He stopped. Looked at Shane's stomach. Looked back up. "Sorry. The baby."

"The baby has heard worse."

"Still." Bood pointed at Ilya. "You see what we're dealing with?"

"We really have missed you," Luca said earnestly, still in half his gear. "It's not the same without you."

"You all saw what they did to Luca out there," Ilya said immediately, with the energy of someone who had prepared this defense in advance. "What was I supposed to do?"

"Not get your face bashed in," Troy suggested.

"I was protecting—"

"You were enjoying yourself," Troy said. "We all saw your face."

Ilya said nothing. Which was its own kind of answer.

Shane looked Ilya over again. The worry he'd felt watching it from the stands, the specific cold spike of it, came back all at once. And underneath it, sitting right alongside it, was something that had been building since the fight and was only getting sharper now. He was mad at him.

The drive back to Ottawa was quiet.

Shane knew Ilya could fight. It was one of the first things he had known about Ilya Rozanov as a player. He knew *exactly* how to get under an opponent's skin, knew how to chirp until tempers flared. And when it came down to it, he could back up every word with his fists.

But it hadn't been a regular occurrence. Not in the last few years of his career, at least. Ilya had mellowed, or at least gotten better at picking his battles. The fights had become rare enough that Shane had almost stopped bracing for them. Almost.

Because now, sitting in the passenger seat with his hands clasped too tightly in his lap, all Shane could think about was one wrong move. One trip, one fall toward a blade. One punch landing wrong—to the temple, to the jaw, snapping Ilya's head back hard enough to—

"Do you want to pick up ramen?" Ilya asked, cutting through his thoughts. "There is that place you liked last time, with the tonkotsu—"

"I already told you that pork's been making me gag," Shane said. The sharpness in his own voice caught him off guard, but he couldn't pull it back. He was bristling, and he knew it, and he couldn't help it.

Ilya's hands stilled slightly on the wheel. He glanced over, brief and careful. "Oh," Ilya said quietly. "Sorry. I must have forgotten."

Had he actually told Ilya that? He couldn't remember anymore. Everything was bleeding together between the games and appointments and long drives.

Shane turned his head to look out the window, watching the highway lights blur past in the darkness. His jaw was tight. His stomach was tight too—not helped by the baby doing what felt like slow somersaults against his ribs. At six months, the movements were getting stronger, more insistent. Which normally Shane loved. Normally those kicks made everything feel more real. He'd started keeping a mental count throughout the day, reassured by each flutter and jab.

But right now, with his heart still racing and his mind stuck on replay of Ilya's bloodied face, even that familiar comfort felt off-kilter. He rested his hand on his stomach anyway.

The silence that followed wasn't comfortable. Ilya didn't try to fill it.

When they got home, Ilya hauled his gear bag in from the car while Shane went straight upstairs.

By the time Ilya made it up after putting his equipment in the mudroom to deal with tomorrow, Shane was already in the bathroom. The overhead light was on, harsh and unforgiving.

Shane's eyes tracked over Ilya's face, cataloging the damage in the unforgiving bathroom light. The busted lip, already swollen and crusted at the corner with dried blood. The eye that was going to be spectacular shades of purple and black by morning.

"Shane, I was already checked by medical," Ilya said, patient but with an edge of exasperation creeping in. "You do not need to—"

"Is this how you want to end your final season? Final season as *captain*, at that?"

Ilya's brows furrowed, confusion and something like hurt flickering across his features.

"Shane, it was *Montreal*. And didn't you see what they did to Luca? That rookie went after him with his elbow up, could have broken his—"

"So you're willing to risk a concussion? Or, God forbid, something worse?" Shane's voice was loud now. "For what? Revenge?"

"It was not revenge, Shane," Ilya interrupted, jerking his head back from where Shane's fingers had been hovering near his blackening eye. His jaw was set, defensive. "It is sticking up for the team. That is what a captain does. I am fine."

"Well, yeah, what if you weren't?" Shane snapped back. The words came out harsher than he'd intended. "What if next time it's worse?"

"Shane."

"Next game is someone going to spit in Luca's direction, and are you going to defend his honor again and get your neck snapped? Or your head slammed into the boards? Or—"

Shane's hands were shaking. He pressed them flat against the bathroom counter to hide it.

Ilya's eyes flickered with surprise. Or maybe the beginning of understanding. "That's not fair," he said, his voice dropping lower. "You're acting like I'm reckless."

"Well," Shane said, gesturing at Ilya's face, and the bruising blooming along his cheekbone. "Look at yourself right fucking now, Ilya. It speaks for itself."

The words hung in the air between them. Ilya went very still. His expression shuttered in that way it sometimes did when he was hurt but trying not to show it.

God, what was he even saying? What was he *thinking*? They were hockey players. This was part of the game. He should know this by now, with over a decade playing professionally. He had seen worse fights than this. He'd been knocked unconscious on the ice before.

And he'd never spiraled like this about it.

Ilya was watching him carefully now, head tilted slightly in the way it always did when he was trying to read Shane. "Was not really thinking," he said after a moment, his voice softer. "When I went after him. I just...I have been thinking more about..." He paused, searching for words. "What if it was our son? Out there. Getting hit like that."

Ilya continued, his hand coming up to gesture vaguely toward the door. "Luca is only twenty-two. Has always looked like little cherub," he said with a small smile. "But now? He just looks *so* young to me now. And I see him get hit like that, see his head snap back, and I think —"

He stopped, swallowing hard. "What if someone goes after our son one day like that and no one protects him?"

Shane's throat felt too tight. He looked down at where his hands were gripping the edge of the bathroom counter. "You won't be able to protect him from everything, Ilya," he managed, his voice coming out rough and unsteady.

"I know," Ilya said softly. He reached out slowly, carefully, and rested his hand on Shane's stomach. "You are right. I know."

"I just need you to be okay," Shane said quietly. "I need you to be safe."

"I will," Ilya promised, his thumb moving in a slow circle over Shane's soft skin. "I am okay. See? Still here. Still whole. Just a little purple."

Shane smiled a little. "You look terrible."

"Yes, well." Ilya grinned, then immediately winced when it pulled at his split lip. "You should see other guy."

"I *did* see the other guy. He looked way better than you do right now."

"Give it twelve hours," Ilya said confidently. "He will have matching set. Maybe worse. I got him good in second hit."

Shane wanted to be annoyed at the pride in his voice. But he couldn't quite manage it. Not when Ilya was looking at him like that, hand still resting protectively on their son, battered and bruised.

"You're an idiot," Shane said, but there was no heat in it anymore.

"You are right again," Ilya says, stepping in closer and closing the distance between them. "I'm sorry I scared you. I will not get into any more fights. Clean record for rest of season." He paused. "Maybe I will delegate that task to someone else. Like a good captain."

Shane huffed out a laugh, the tension finally starting to ease from his shoulders. "Please don't."

"No?" Ilya's hand slid from Shane's stomach up to cup his face, thumb brushing carefully across his cheekbone. Softened by the past few months of pregnancy. "Then I will be very good boy. No fighting. Just skating and scoring goals and being extremely handsome on camera."

"You can't be handsome on camera looking like that," Shane pointed out, but he was leaning into Ilya's touch now, his own hand coming up to rest over Ilya's.

"Come on," Ilya said finally, pulling back just enough to look at Shane's face. "Let's go to bed. You need to sleep, and baby needs to sleep, and I need to put more ice on my face to please my very beautiful, very scary husband."

Shane shoved him lightly, careful not to hit anywhere that might be bruised. "Shut up."

"See? Scary," Ilya said, but he was grinning—then wincing again. "Stop making me smile. My face hurts."

"Then stop saying things that make me want to smile," Shane muttered, but he was already heading toward the bedroom, Ilya's hand warm and steady at the small of his back.

March 2023 — Ottawa

By 36 weeks, Shane could no longer fly to away games with Ilya.

Not that he had much for the past month or two anyway. Sitting for extended periods of time on a plane had already become uncomfortable. The last flight had been miserable enough that

he'd spent most of it standing in the aisle, much to the flight attendants' concern.

But there was something about being *medically prohibited* from flying that hit differently.

He was on the couch now, watching Ilya's game against San Francisco on the TV. The house was quiet in that particular way it got when Ilya was away. Not empty exactly, but *quieter* than usual.

He should probably be soaking in these last few weeks of quiet. Soon there'd be a screaming infant and no sleep and chaos he couldn't even fully imagine yet.

But right now, he hated it.

Shane shifted on the couch for what felt like the hundredth time, trying to find a position that didn't put pressure on his lower back or his hips or make the baby decide to use his bladder as a trampoline. Nothing worked.

During the first intermission, he forced himself up off the couch and went for a walk around the block. He had been diligent about his approved exercise routine for months, determined to stay in shape as much as possible so the transition back to training for next season wouldn't be completely brutal once the baby was here. But the past few weeks had thrown him completely off course. His center of gravity had shifted too much. His stamina had cratered in a way that felt wrong after a lifetime of elite conditioning.

Still, Shane knew sitting still for three hours straight would just make the back pain worse. Movement helped, even if the movement was just a walk.

He had to stop twice just to catch his breath during his walk—once at the corner, leaning against a street sign with both hands while he waited for the sharp stitch in his side to ease. Once more halfway down the next block, breathing through his mouth because his ribs felt compressed and his lungs didn't seem to have enough room anymore.

This was the part of pregnancy Shane had struggled with the most. More than the nausea that had plagued the first trimester. More than the constant exhaustion. It was this—the limitations. The way his body had stopped being something he could just push through, something he could force to comply through sheer willpower, and had started being something he had to *negotiate* with.

He'd spent his whole life knowing his body better than almost anything. Knew which muscles would protest first when he pushed too hard in practice. Knew exactly how his legs would feel the morning after a particularly brutal game, that specific deep ache in his quads, the tightness in his hip flexors. Knew after countless training camps and seasons precisely how far he could push before his body would push back, knew the exact edge of his limits and how to dance along it without crossing over.

And now he couldn't even walk a quarter of a mile without taking breaks.

He made it back home just as the second period was starting, breathing hard. He fell asleep at some point during the end of the period, but woke up towards the end just in time to see the

Centaurs win.

He must have dozed off at some point during the third period, because the next thing he knew, the arena noise was getting louder and he was blinking awake to see the final seconds ticking down. Centaurs won, 3-2.

Ilya FaceTimed not even ten minutes later, just as Shane was making his way upstairs to bed. Shane lowered himself onto the edge of the mattress with a grunt and answered the call.

Ilya's face filled the screen immediately, still flushed from the game, hair damp and curling at the ends in the way Shane always adored. He was grinning, that post-win energy still buzzing through him.

"Did Nikolai celebrate when his papa scored the winning goal?" Ilya asked.

Shane smiled. He panned the phone down to where his hand was resting on his stomach. "He didn't get the memo to only kick during your goals, so he settled for spending the entire third period doing it instead."

Ilya's grin softened into something more private. "He was cheering," he said. "Just in his own way."

"His own way is going to break my ribs," Shane said, but there was no real complaint in it. He moved the camera back up to his face and resettled against the pillows.

"How are you feeling?" Ilya asked, the grin dialing back now, eyes moving over Shane's face. Taking inventory.

"Fine," Shane said.

Ilya looked at him.

"Tired," Shane amended. "Back hurts. Went on a walk and it took longer than it should have."

"There is no 'should have,' Shane," Ilya said. "You are 8 months pregnant. The only thing you *should* be doing is resting and watching your very talented husband destroy San Francisco."

Shane smiled.

"Have you tried your yoga ball exercises instead of walking?" Ilya asked, and Shane could hear the smile creeping into his voice even before he saw the grin spreading across Ilya's face on the screen. "Might help with the back pain, yes?"

Shane scoffed, shifting against the pillows. "I know exactly why you're asking about that."

Because every single time Shane did his exercises on that damn yoga ball, it ended with Ilya fucking him over it. And Shane had also developed a habit—not entirely coincidentally—of doing those exercises specifically when Ilya was home, in full view, while wearing shorts that were maybe a size too small.

Ilya's mouth twitched on the screen, fighting a grin. "I am asking for entirely legitimate medical reasons. The hip mobility alone—"

"Uh huh."

"The pelvic floor strengthening—"

"Right."

"Maybe you should get on it right now," Ilya suggested, leaning back against his hotel headboard with an expression of complete innocence that fooled absolutely no one. "For your back. I will supervise. Make sure your form is correct."

"I'm already horizontal," he said flatly. "And I physically cannot get up anymore without a team of people and possibly a crane. So that's not happening."

"Pity," Ilya said.

"Devastating," Shane agreed.

Ilya smiled at him through the screen. Shane smiled back. Neither of them said anything for a while, just stayed on the line, the hotel room quiet on one end and their bedroom quiet on the other.

"Tell me about the game," Shane said eventually, his eyes already heavy. "I fell asleep during part of it."

Ilya started talking, his voice low and soothing, recounting plays. Shane listened, or tried to, but Ilya's voice had that quality it always did late at night. Warm and rhythmic, like a lullaby.

His eyes drifted closed.

"Shane?" Ilya said softly, maybe five minutes later.

"Mm," Shane managed, not quite able to open his eyes again.

"Go to sleep, sweetheart."

"You too," Shane mumbled.

But neither of them hung up.

They fell asleep like that, the phone propped between them across five hundred miles, the call still running when Shane's breathing evened out and deepened.

April 2023 — Ottawa

Shane had memorized every version of Ilya's face over the years.

He remembered the way his face broke open when he saw him on TV winning his first Stanley Cup. He remembered the way he turned away and face contorted as he tried not to cry in front of Shane for the first time at that All Stars weekend all these years ago now. He remembered the soft vulnerability in Ilya's eyes the first time they'd managed to choke out I love you.

But seeing Ilya hold their son for the first time was a look Shane didn't have a name for yet.

Shane was delirious at this point. Two days of labor, no sleep, his body wrung out in a way that went past tired. Past anything he'd ever felt even during the most brutal playoff runs or back-to-back overtime games.

The room was still loud, still bright, still full of people moving around him. Nurses checking vitals, someone adjusting his IV, voices murmuring instructions he couldn't quite track. The overhead lights were too harsh, making him squint. Everything was too much.

But when Ilya looked up from their son's face and found Shane's eyes, all the noise went away.

"Shane," Ilya said. His voice came out wrecked, barely above a whisper, like he didn't trust it at full volume. He looked up from their son's face just long enough to find Shane's eyes. "He's perfect."

Shane was smiling. Ilya crossed to the bed and lowered their son into Shane's arms slowly, carefully, both hands staying until he was sure Shane had him. Shane pulled him in against his chest and felt something in him go completely still for the first time in two days.

He looked down at him. Dark hair, still damp. Tiny fists. The unfamiliar weight of him, solid and warm and real in a way that the ultrasounds and the kicks and the nine months of waiting hadn't fully prepared Shane for.

His face crumpled. He let it.

"Hi," he whispered, his voice breaking completely. "Hi, baby boy. We've been waiting for you."

He looked up at Ilya, who was standing at the edge of the bed watching them both. His expression was still soft and open and completely unguarded, the same look that had appeared the moment the nurses first placed Niko in Ilya's arms. Shane was still trying to name it.

He still couldn't.

He wasn't sure there was a word for it.

Maybe Shane had just been bracing himself for the worst-case scenarios. Colic, endless screaming, no sleep for months. He'd read all the books, absorbed all the horror stories from

Hayden and his mom and all the other parents in his life, prepared himself mentally for complete chaos.

But those first few weeks home were...perfect. Absolutely perfect.

Even exhausted—and Shane *was* exhausted, bone-deep and constant in a way he'd never experienced even during the most brutal stretches of the season—he didn't seem to care. The exhaustion felt inconsequential compared to the overwhelming fact of Niko's existence. Compared to the weight of him in Shane's arms, the way his tiny hand would curl around Shane's finger with surprising strength.

And any lingering fatigue was greatly diminished every time Shane watched Ilya with their son. Watched the way Ilya would talk to Niko in soft, lilting Russian while changing his diaper at 3:00am, narrating every step like Niko could understand him. Watched how naturally Ilya cradled Niko's tiny head, how he'd learned to swaddle him in those first few days with a competence that had surprised them both. Watched him get up for every single night feeding without complaint, just padding barefoot into the nursery and scooping Niko up before he could fully start crying.

It helped that, by all objective measures, Niko was an incredibly easy baby.

It hadn't taken long to learn his hunger cues. He settled quickly when they rocked him, going calm and heavy in their arms within minutes. He could be handed off to Yuna or David or even strangers at the pediatrician's office without much fuss, content as long as someone was holding him and speaking softly.

Shane had been terrified he wouldn't know what to do. That his particular brain, with all its rigidity and need for specific routines, wouldn't be able to adapt to the chaos of a newborn.

But Niko made it easy. Niko made everything make sense in a way Shane hadn't expected.

And watching Ilya be a father made Shane fall in love with him all over again in a way that felt entirely new.

"Look at his little toes," Ilya would whisper, holding up Niko's foot to examine it in the lamplight. "So small. How can toes be this small?"

"Because he's 3 weeks old," Shane would point out, but he'd be smiling.

"Such tiny, perfect toes," Ilya would insist, completely serious. "We are very lucky to have such a perfect baby with such perfect toes."

And Shane, exhausted and sore and happier than he'd ever been in his entire life, would just watch them and think: *Yes. We really are.*

October 2023 — New York

It was Shane's first away game since Niko was born. And as much as he had been trying to mentally prepare himself for this day, he still wasn't fully prepared.

Shane had gotten up early that morning. Or rather, he hadn't slept much, so "getting up" was generous. He'd mostly just given up on the pretense of sleep around four-thirty and quietly slipped out of bed, careful not to wake Ilya.

He pulled the glider from the corner over to the side of Niko's crib and sat down in the early morning dark, watching his son sleep. The room was still dim, just the faint glow of the nightlight casting soft shadows across Niko's face. His little chest rose and fell with each breath, steady and even, completely peaceful.

He watched as Niko snuffled in his sleep, little fists curled up near his chubby cheeks, his dark hair sticking up in every direction the way it always did. When Niko eventually started stirring awake—a small stretch, a yawn, eyes blinking open slowly—Shane immediately reached down and scooped him up.

"Good morning, baby," Shane whispered.

His voice came out thick in a way he hadn't prepared for. He pulled Niko flush against him and rocked on his feet slowly. Less so that Niko needed it right now, and more because Shane did. He pressed his face down into the crown of dark hair and just breathed him in.

He closed his eyes and tried to memorize it well enough that it would last him through six days away.

Shane had already packed the night before. Had double-checked his bag twice, made sure he had everything, laid out his travel clothes. Ilya had made breakfast while Shane gave Niko his morning bottle, the two of them moving around each other in the kitchen with the easy choreography they'd developed over the past six months.

But now it was time to leave, and Shane was standing in the entryway with his bag by the door, holding Niko one more time. Trying very hard not to cry.

He kissed Niko's soft hair, over and over, pressing his lips to the top of his head like he could somehow imprint the feeling into his memory. Niko barely stirred, content and warm in Shane's arms, completely oblivious to the fact that his dad was about to leave for almost a week.

"Be good for Papa, okay?" Shane murmured, his voice wavering.

Ilya stepped closer, his hand coming up to cradle the back of Niko's head, his fingers overlapping with Shane's. "He always is," Ilya said quietly, his thumb brushing over the soft baby hair. "We will send you so many pictures you will be sick of us."

Shane let out a laugh that was short and a little unsteady, more air than sound. He brushed his thumb along the soft skin of Niko's cheek. "Don't grow too much while I'm gone," he whispered.

It hurt Ilya, seeing Shane look this sad. Seeing the way he was holding Niko like he might never see him again, like six days was six years. But Ilya knew it was temporary—knew that this was just like when Shane had been hesitant to go back to training camp, anxious and

overthinking it, and then it had become routine within a week. Just like Shane had been worried about his first game back in Ottawa, terrified he wouldn't be ready, and then he'd played beautifully.

This would become routine too. It would hurt less each time.

But right now, for this first time, Ilya let Shane take as long as he needed.

Shane pressed another kiss to Niko's forehead, then his nose, then his cheek. Then he carefully, reluctantly, handed him back to Ilya.

Ilya took Niko and settled him against his chest, supporting his head the way he always did, and Niko immediately curled into him with that boneless baby trust.

"I'll text you when I'm at the airport," Shane said, his voice still wobbly. He was blinking rapidly.

Ilya stepped forward and kissed him, his free hand coming up to cup Shane's face. "We are so proud of you," he said against Shane's lips.

Shane smiled, a little tremulous, and nodded. He grabbed his bag, gave a few more kisses to Niko, then Ilya, and forced himself to walk out the door.

After Shane left, Ilya stayed there for a long moment, just looking at the closed door, bouncing Niko gently in his arms.

Ilya decided in approximately ten minutes that he was going to be at this game.

He'd been mulling the thought over for weeks. Had even brought it up to Shane, who had said no—too much of a hassle, too complicated, and besides, they both needed to get used to Shane being away. Ilya had let it go. He'd thought about it every day since.

He called Yuna when he'd made up his mind, intending to ask if she could drive him and Niko to the airport in an hour to catch the 11am flight. He just wanted to update her, he said. It would be straightforward, he said.

But Yuna had already packed her own bag. Had already bought her own ticket. She was the one who spent the entire pre-flight stretch bouncing Niko around the terminal, walking him up and down the length of the gate until he'd burned through enough energy to sleep on the plane. It worked. He was out like a light before takeoff and didn't stir until they landed.

Now they were in the stands at the New York stadium. Niko was awake now, wide-eyed and taking everything in with that intense baby focus he'd developed lately. The noise, the lights, the movement; it was a lot, but he seemed more curious than overwhelmed.

"Do you think Shane will be mad?" Ilya asked suddenly, adjusting the noise-canceling headphones over Niko's little beanie-covered head for the third time. They kept sliding. "That I took Niko on his first flight without him?"

Yuna smiled, reaching over to help straighten the headphones for him. "Ilya, he's going to see you two and he's not going to care about anything else."

Ilya looked down at Niko, who was looking back up at him with his baby blue eyes, pacifier working steadily.

"You are very handsome," Ilya told him. "Just like your daddy." He kissed his chubby cheek, which earned him a little smile from behind the pacifier. "We are going to surprise him, yes? He is going to be very happy to see you."

Niko made a small noise that Ilya chose to interpret as agreement.

Ilya had decided not to tell Shane they were coming. It might distract him during the game, he thought. And besides, they'd have plenty of time after to celebrate. The plan was simple: watch Shane play, let him have his moment, and then be there waiting when he came out of the locker room.

The game started. Shane looked good. Sharp and focused, moving with that particular precision that never looked like effort from the outside, which Ilya knew from a decade of watching him meant he was completely locked in. For all the fear Shane had carried into this comeback—not being ready, not being strong enough, his body not being what it was—Ilya had never once doubted him. Had never been able to. Shane Hollander at sixty percent was still better than most players at their best, and this was not sixty percent.

Ilya had never thought he looked stronger.

Around the first intermission, the crowd started getting loud. Really loud. The kind of sustained noise that meant something was happening, but Ilya couldn't figure out what. Nobody had scored. There wasn't a fight.

The Jumbotron.

Him and Niko, enormous above the ice, displayed in front of everyone in the building. Niko staring up at the screen with his mouth slightly open around his pacifier, completely transfixed by this giant version of himself. He was wiggling in Ilya's arms now, one chubby fist raised like he was trying to reach up and grab his own face forty feet above him.

"Looks like Shane Hollander has some very special visitors in the building tonight!" the announcer's voice boomed over the speakers, cutting through the noise of the crowd, which had gone from loud to *deafening*.

Ilya's eyes went wide.

Down on the ice, through the glass, Ilya watched Shane on the bench. Watched him look up at the board along with the rest of his line. Watched the exact moment it registered—the slight hitch in his posture, the way his entire body went still for half a second before his head whipped around, scanning the stands with sudden desperate focus.

Until he found them.

Until his eyes locked onto Ilya and Niko in their seats.

Even from this distance, even across the ice and the noise and the thousands of people between them, Shane's face did something that Ilya felt like a physical blow to his chest.

His expression just cracked wide open. Went soft and bright and so full of joy it was almost painful to witness from this far away.

All the other Centaurs on the bench were losing their minds around him. Hayes and Troy were on either side of Shane, arms thrown around his shoulders, hollering and shaking him. Shane's hand came up immediately—one gloved hand pressed flat against his chest, right over his heart. Then he raised his stick in acknowledgment, pointing it directly at their section.

The crowd roared.

Ilya lifted Niko's little hand and waved it back, his throat suddenly too tight to speak.

"Well," Yuna said, laughing as she wiped at her eyes. "I don't think you have to worry about him being mad."

"No," Ilya managed, still watching Shane on the bench, watching him swipe quickly at his face. "I think he is happy."

After the game, they waited in the family area outside the locker room.

Niko was dozing off on Ilya's shoulder, completely unbothered by the noise and chaos of the post-game crowd milling around them. His little hand was curled in Ilya's shirt, pacifier working slowly even in sleep.

Shane immediately reached for them. Ilya grinned and handed Niko over.

"Oh my God," Shane breathed, his voice already breaking. Niko stirred slightly at the transfer, made a small sound of protest, then settled immediately when he recognized Shane. His little fist found a handful of Shane's damp hair and grabbed it. Shane didn't even flinch. Just pulled Niko closer, tucking his face against the top of his head and breathing. "Hi, sweet boy. Daddy missed you so much."

Niko made a sound and grabbed harder at Shane's hair.

Shane looked up at Ilya then, his eyes bright and wet.

"I hope we didn't distract you," Ilya started, stepping closer. "I didn't know they would put us on the Jumbotron—"

Shane kissed him. Hard and grateful and still holding Niko carefully with one arm, his other hand coming up to cup the side of Ilya's face and pull him in.

When he pulled back, his eyes were still shining with unshed tears. "I can't believe you came," he said, his voice rough and thick. "I can't believe you're both here."

Ilya shrugged, his eyes glassy. "Papa and Nikolai's first spontaneous adventure," he mused. "First of many, I bet."

Shane laughed and looked back down at Niko, who had transferred his death grip from Shane's hair to the collar of his jersey.

"No eating your dad's shirt," Shane murmured, gently extracting the collar from Niko's fist. Niko immediately grabbed for it again.

"He is very strong-willed," Ilya observed. "Wonder where he gets that."

Shane chuckled. "Maybe from his father who books a last-minute six-hour flight with a baby just to surprise someone."

Ilya smiled. "Maybe."

End Notes

thank you for reading!! <3

i've got about 5,000 ideas in my mind about ilya and shane as new dads, shane's pregnancy, postpartum, etc. with all the kids. but figured i'd start here :) i did nooot expect this to be so long lmfao

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