bad case of lovin' you

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bad case of lovin' you

by imbihesgay

Summary

“Okay, give me five minutes. This patient will not take long.”

Luca nods in thanks and scurries off to busy himself in the meantime. Ilya huffs another sigh, shaking his head as he finally pulls up the digital chart.

Shane Hollander
Age: 27
Height: 177.8cm
Weight: 88.5Kg
Temp: 36.6
BP: 118/75

-Patient presented with syncope, nausea and vertigo.

-shane hollander comes into ilya rozanov's ER, two months after they had a wild one-night stand)

Notes

hello ! DEAR GOD PLEASE READ THESE NOTES BEFORE U READ

-this is VERY au, ilya is an ER doctor and shane is a hockey player.
- i am NOT A DOCTOR. the medical stuff is most certainly NOT ACCURATE. i do not get paid for this, i do this for fun and whimsy, please do not leave detailed comments correcting my silly medical stuff. it will not compute, and i am not a doctor so i dont need it <3
-EVERYTHING IS MADE UP. THE SCIENCE, THE MEDICENE, THE SETTING- ITS ALL IMAGINATION- THATS THE FUN OF THIS!! ITS NOT REALISTIC PLEASE DO NOT EXPECT THAT.
- theyre probably a bit ooc, if thats not ur thing , run free!
- this was written as a oneshot because i really wanted to write some of the scenes in this +Ilya as a doctor, but i have started writing a second part...not sure if it will ever get finished/posted, so sharing this as it is, a short snapshot into this universe!

that being said, i hope you enjoy! please be kind if you choose to comment, thanks for reading!

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

“Dr. Rozanov, we got one for you in room five.”

Ilya glances up at the familiar face of his most trusted charge nurse, Svetlana Vetrova. She’s got a mischievous grin on her face, something he recognizes easily from their several years of working together. They’ve bonded over their shared Russian heritage, their love of pickles, and the occasional stress-relief fucking when the on-call room is a ghost town. That’s strictly off the record, though. And not in a while, since it’s ethically dicey and she’s got a girlfriend these days. Some actress from a superhero movie franchise. Very fancy. Long distance, but exclusive.

“I just got in,” he deflects, holding up his paper cup of hot piss coffee from the mini machine behind the nurse’s station. He waves it in example, taking a sip of the burning black liquid. Working nightshift is hell on Earth, but coffee gets him through it. Gets them all through it, really.

“Oh, I’m sorry, shall we let all of your patients die until you finish your coffee?” she asks, arching her eyebrow inquisitively.

Ilya takes another sip, accepting the tablet from her extended hand. She has the chart pulled up for room five, but Ilya barely spares it a glance, tucking the device under his arm and taking another hefty sip of his coffee.

“I assume this is not urgent?” he asks, looking at her with his eyes narrowed.

“He’ll live if you finish your coffee first, but I think you should get in there.” Her lips tilt up in a smirk. “He’s hot as fuck.”

“Oh my god, Sveta.” Ilya shakes his head, finishing the coffee and chucking the empty cup in the nearest bin. “Has he been triaged?”

“You’d know if you looked at the chart.”

“Mhm, but I am asking you.”

“He passed out at work, he’s been throwing up. Definitely dehydrated. I think you should order blood tests and an IV. But-” She waves her hand dismissively. “I’m just a nurse.”

Ilya rolls his eyes. Everyone knows that *just nurses* run this place. *This place* being Ottawa General, the hospital where Ilya has furthered his career as an attending physician since moving on from Boston three years ago.

“Another drama queen with the flu running to the ER,” says a passerby, and Ilya turns sideways to see their admissions clerk breeze by, making her way back toward the doors for the lobby. “He *is* hot though!”

Svetlana watches her go with her expression neutral, then turns to Ilya once the doors close behind her. “She should not be allowed to use the bathroom back here. She is an idiot.”

“You do not think he has the flu?” Ilya teases.

“I think you should get to room five, Rozanov, or I’ll tell him to complain about you to Dr. Wiebe. You would like to have the chief of medicine involved because you wanted to annoy me extra long today?”

Ilya snorts, whirling on his heel and heading down the hall toward room five. He dodges a bustling intern and two residents arguing over shift switches for next week, before finding himself in front of the door. Just as he’s about to lift the tablet to skim the chart, he’s interrupted by a first-year resident, Luca Haas.

“Dr. Rozanov?”

Ilya sighs, turning to face him. Luca always manages to find him, even if he’s only been in the hospital for a grand total of twenty seconds.

“Dr. Haas, you must have my scent on a pair of scrubs somewhere.”

Luca hesitates, arching an eyebrow. “Um, what sir?”

“I am easy for you to find, even in this very big hospital.”

“Oh. I just had a quick-”

“Yes, yes, what is question? I am needed with a patient.”

“Oh, well I have a patient presenting with fatigue and irregular heart rhythm. I was just wondering if you could help with the diagnosis.”

Ilya purses his lips. “What tests have been run? Who is the attending?”

“It was Dr. Kent, he just left for shift change though, before we got the test back. Her EKG looks normal to me, but-”

“He left? Didn’t I see he was scheduled to supervise an intubation on bed 6 in the ICU?” Ilya frowns.

“Um, he said for me to do it and to tell you to supervise.”

Ilya curses under his breath in Russian, distaste filling his mouth at the thought of his fellow attending, Dallas Kent. The man is a bigger asshole than he is a physician, but the higher-ups love him because of his impeccable ability to ass-kiss corporate.

“Okay, give me five minutes. This patient will not take long.”

Luca nods in thanks and scurries off to busy himself in the meantime. Ilya huffs another sigh, shaking his head as he finally pulls up the digital chart.

Shane Hollander

Age: 27

Height: 177.8cm

Weight: 88.5Kg

Temp: 36.6

BP: 118/75

- *Patient presented with syncope, nausea and vertigo.*

No fever, which is a slight surprise considering Ilya was sure this would be a case of the flu. Though, maybe Sveta is right and he just needs some fluids.

He knocks gently on the door, waiting for a quietly murmured, *"come in,"* before he enters. He's got his usual, swift, easygoing smile on, ready to reassure this patient and get them turned out, when he recognizes the man curled up on the exam cot.

Short, sleek black hair. Suntanned skin with a spray of dark freckles across his rosy cheeks. A pinstraight, sharp nose, a curved upper lip, thick, muscular arms. Arms that Ilya has touched, arms he's felt wrap around his waist…

The man on the bed spots him as well, and their eyes meet, both going wide.

"Ilya?" he says, at the same time as Ilya asks, *"Hayden?"*

There's a pause -a thick, confusing tension in the air. Ilya glances at his chart again. No, not Hayden, *Shane.*

"You lied about your name?" Ilya finds himself asking, professionalism all but obliterated at his surprise.

"Oh my god," Hayden, or Shane, moans, dropping his head into his hands. "This is not happening to me."

"I am a bit confused," Ilya admits, "it *is* Shane, Shane Hollander? Or am I in the wrong room?"

"No, it's- yeah, that's it. It's Shane. Hayden works with me." The man huffs out a breath, wincing. "I did lie."

"Why-" Ilya falters, trying to find his professional decorum somewhere deep inside.

“I’m a professional athlete,” Shane mutters, “it’s better if clandestine hookups don’t know my real name. I was lucky you didn’t recognize me.”

Ilya hesitates, fixating for a moment on potentially the least important detail here. “Hayden is your colleague? How would it benefit you to lie about your identity but use your *teammate’s* name? What if I knew of *him?”*

“You wouldn't have, not over me,” Shane replies, briskly. Then, his cheeks flush bright red, like he’s embarrassed he said something so cocky. “I didn’t- I’m not the best at lying, okay? It just came out. It was the only name I could think of.”

“What sport do you play?”

“Does that matter?”

“Actually, yes.” Ilya holds up the digital chart. “Relevant to your care, if you could have taken blunt trauma.”

“It’s- hockey, I’m a hockey player.” Shane groans again, keeping his hands pressed over his face. “We had a game tonight, but I passed out in the locker room afterward. I play for the Metros. I don’t know why I’m adding that. You don’t need that.”

“Alright,” Ilya says gently, sensing Shane’s tension. “Given that we have previously…” *Fucked nasty on my leather couch.* “Been acquainted-”

Shane scoffs.

“-it might be better if I have a colleague handle your case.”

“Wait, please.” Shane turns to him with pleading brown eyes. They’re sparkly and warm, the way Ilya remembers from that long night so many weeks ago. It was after too many drinks, too long of a shift, but he remembers each detail of Shane’s face with clarity. “I just want to get out of here. I only came because my coach made me. Can’t we just get this over with?”

“If you are comfortable with it, then I guess it is okay.”

“Yeah it's fine.” Shane shrugs. “We don’t even know each other.”

Ilya swallows thickly. He knows Shane’s body intimately. He’d touched every inch of skin, kissed, sucked, elicited sounds from him that were straight out of a pornographic film.

But, the other man is correct. Hell, Ilya didn’t even know his *name* until two seconds ago.

“Okay, so you passed out after the game.” Ilya pulls up a stool beside the cot to sit down and take his notes. “Did you take any rough hits? Any possible injuries to your head?”

Shane is quick to shake his head. “No, no. It was an easy win. Ottawa sucks.”

Ilya arches an eyebrow.

“Sorry, I mean- it was a clean game. They couldn’t get their hands on me. No injuries at all.”

“And did you feel fine before the game?”

At that, Shane falters. He wrings his hands together, eyes darting up toward the brilliantly beaming fluorescent bulb. He shifts uncomfortably.

“Would you be more comfortable with the lights dimmed?” Ilya asks, noting his visible anxiety.

“It’s fine,” Shane mutters. “I just hate hospitals.”

Ilya smiles briefly. “Most people do when they are the patient.”

“I was dizzy all day, I guess,” Shane confesses, dragging his lower lip between his teeth furtively. “I threw up a couple times.”

“Just today?” Ilya inquires.

“Um, no, the past few days I have been feeling pretty queasy.” Shane catches Ilya staring at him, and frowns. “What?”

“You still played game? Throwing up?”

Shane smirks. “You’ve never come to work when you weren’t at 100%?”

Ilya wants to argue that if *he* misses work people die, and if Shane misses work then maybe a team scores one less point, but that doesn’t seem fair. He elects to ignore that intrusive thought.

“Okay, so you have been feeling dizzy and nauseous. No, temperature? No fever at all, da?”

“Da?”

“Yes?”

“Huh?”

“Any fever, Mr. Hollander?”

“Oh- Shane is fine. No, no fevers.”

“Okay.” Ilya nods thoughtfully. “I want to get a full blood panel and rule out any issues with your blood sugar. I’d also like to push some fluids and get you rehydrated, you have markers of dehydration and if you have been throwing up, that can make it worse.”

“Okay.” Shane clears his throat. “When do you think I can get out of here?”

“Let’s get your results back first and see what will best help you.” Ilya gets to his feet. “In the meantime, is there anyone you want us to call for you? A partner or friend maybe?”

Shane arches an eyebrow. “You know I’m single.”

“Well, I also thought your name was Hayden.”

He scowls. “No. I’m fine on my own.”

“Alright, Mr. Hollander. A nurse will be in shortly to get your IV administered and draw some blood. Call for us with this button if you have questions.” Ilya heads for the door, hesitating with his hand on the knob.

“Ilya?” Shane stops him with a quietly uttered word.

“Yes?” He turns to look at the other man, who’s hunched over and tense.

“For the record I-” Shane clears his throat again. “I’m sorry. It wasn’t right. To lie to you.”

“Oh.” Ilya considers this for a moment, then shrugs. “Like you said. We do not know each other. Is harmless.”

“Right. Harmless.” Shane swallows thickly. “I- do you think I could get a puke bag or something? I’m feeling sick again.”

“Of course. Here.” Ilya grabs one of the little blue bags from the cabinet beside the monitor, passing it to Shane. His hands are shaking. “Is there anything else you need right now, Shane?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Okay. Call for us if you need anything, da?”

Shane nods again. “*Da.* Okay. Thanks.”

“Of course, Shane. I’ll be back soon.”

The door closes behind Ilya, and he releases a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. With a huff of air, he manages to mutter one quiet word.

“Fuck.”

After helping Luca with his diagnosis and intubation, checking on his elderly ICU patient with pneumonia, doing a solid forty-five minutes of documentation, and two more cups of shitty coffee, Ilya gets the results of Shane’s blood work back.

Svetlana delivers him the news that the results are ready, smirking as she says, “Dr. Rozanov, your boyfriend’s test results are back. Hopefully not an STD, hm?”

“You are hilarious, Sveta,” he mutters dryly.

She laughs as she turns her attention back to the computer on the desk, focused on the task at hand. Ilya pulls up Shane's chart on the tablet, scanning the page for his results.

Hemoglobin: normal, lipids: normal, glucose: a little low but nothing alarming. Proteins: good…

Ilya pauses, eyes going wide as he sees the next results.

HCG: 32,000

"You look like you saw a ghost," Svetlana says, studying Ilya from behind the desk. "Is something wrong? Oh no, does your boyfriend have something serious?"

"Yes," Ilya manages, "pretty serious."

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry." Her expression softens.

Ilya turns to her. "He is not dying. It is the opposite."

Her brow furrows, until realization seems to strike. "Oh. The fainting. The puking."

Ilya nods.

Svetlana smiles sympathetically. "So much for getting his number."

"I wasn't going to do that, Sveta."

"Why not? He's exactly your type!"

Ilya huffs out another breath, ignoring her and shaking his head as he tries to get his emotions into the proper space to deliver this news. It is obvious Ilya was not Shane's only *clandestine hookup*, as he'd so eloquently put it. He's ashamed at the sting of jealousy that burns in his chest at the idea.

But, his job is to be objective. He has no claim to stake on Shane. They are two single people who hooked up one night a few months ago after a long night of drinking at some dingy bar. Does it matter that it was the best sex of his life? No. None of that matters.

Ilya is a doctor. What matters right now, is his patient. His patient who is alone, probably very scared, and about to get life-changing news.

With a hand that he forces to stop trembling, Ilya knocks on the door.

"Come in," Shane calls again, quieter this time.

When Ilya enters, he's reclined on the cot with an IV in his arm, pushing clear fluids. He's holding another vomit back to his chest like his life depends on it. He looks haggard, a little less guarded than he had earlier.

"How is the nausea?" Ilya asks gently.

“Shitty,” Shane grunts. “Can you guys give me anything?”

“Yes, we definitely can,” Ilya replies, “now that we have a diagnosis for you, we can get you feeling better.”

“A diagnosis?” He sits up straighter at that, though his knuckles are white around the vomit bag. “Something *is* wrong with me, then?”

“No, not exactly.” Ilya sits down again, meeting Shane’s eyes seriously. “Shane, your blood work came back all standard except for one thing, HCG. Are you familiar with what that means?”

Shane shakes his head. “Not even a little.”

“It’s *human growth hormone,* the body produces it in excess during a pregnancy. Your levels came back high, aligning with a pregnancy between six to nine weeks gestation.”

It takes Shane a moment to process this, his forehead wrinkling in thought. His voice comes out slow, confused. “I’m…I’m *pregnant?”*

“Yes.” Ilya nods. “This would explain your dizziness and nausea, these are very common side effects in the first trimester. Everything looks healthy from your blood panel, but you will need an ultrasound to-”

“Ilya,” Shane interjects, sitting up completely. The IV in his arm tugs, and Ilya almost tells him to sit still so as not to disturb it, but he refrains. “Ilya. I’m *pregnant?”*

“Yes, Shane.” Ilya’s heart flutters a little at the panicked expression on his face, worry tightening in his chest. “Are you alright? I know this is big news.”

“How far along, did you say?”

“Well, an ultrasound would give more confirmation, but based on your levels, probably eight weeks.” Ilya tilts his head. “Are you okay, Shane?”

“Why aren’t you freaking out?” Shane asks him, voice flat, eyes wide.

At that, Ilya is a little perplexed. “Excuse me?”

“Why aren't *you* freaking out?” Shane demands, gesturing to himself. “It’s not like this was a fucking immaculate conception, Ilya.”

“I don’t follow,” he admits, frowning.

“Are you fucking kidding me?”

Ilya shakes his head. “Shane, we were together long before-” He pauses, hesitating. *How* long ago was it again? He was so drunk…

“Two months ago, you asshole.” Shane’s voice is venomous.

Ilya swallows thickly. “But, we used-”

“Oh my god. You’re a *doctor*. You aren’t aware that condoms aren’t 100% effective?”

Ilya stands up abruptly. “Are you saying-”

“I haven’t been with anyone else!”

“Oh my god,” Ilya manages, rooted to the spot, eyes widening.

“That’s more the reaction I expected,” Shane mutters, his head hitting the cot as he falls back against it.

Ilya freezes, unsure of how to proceed here. This is uncharted territory. This can’t be *happening*.

“My career is so fucking over,” Shane says to no one in particular. Then he gags, and lurches forward, holding the vomit bag to his mouth.

Ilya moves on instinct, a nurturing desire inside of him, yearning to *help.* He braces a hand against Shane’s back, fingers splaying out between his trembling shoulder blades.

“Easy,” he murmurs, “try to breathe through it, slow deep breaths. It will help.”

Shane finishes puking, a small whine in the back of his throat. “This fucking sucks.”

“I will get you a prescription for Zofran, to help with the nausea,” Ilya says, taking the vomit bag. “Just- erm- give me five minutes. I will- be back- right back, Shane.”

Shane watches him go, panting from the efforts of puking. He doesn’t speak.

The door closes behind Ilya and he breathes again, ragged and uneven. His heart is racing in his chest, sweat beading at his temples and the back of his neck. Svetlana spots him from the nurse’s station, her expression immediately worried.

“Doctor?” she asks, heading in his direction.

Ilya thrusts the chart at her and disposes of the vomit bag in the hazard bin beside him. “4mg of Ondansetron, intravenous. I’m ordering it for room five. Get it to him fast, please. I need- I have to go to the bathroom.”

With that, he turns on his heel and rushes through the hall. God help Luca Haas if he stops him to ask how much Tylenol to give bed seven or if he should remove five sutures per the chart if he *sees* six in the patient. Ilya might actually lose his mind.

He finds himself in the on-call room, mercifully empty right now. The lights are off, and he keeps it that way, breaths rattling in his chest as he blinks at rumpled bunk beds.

“Oh fuck,” he whines to himself, heart beating rapidly in his chest, “oh fuck, fucking hell. *Fuck.”*

What the fuck is he going to do? He knocked up a professional hockey player. He knocked up a *one night stand*, whose name he just learned. Whose name he *never* would have even known if he hadn't shown up in Ilya's fucking ER on the off-chance he had an away game tonight!

"Fuuuuck," he groans into his hands.

Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

There is not really another word he can locate in his English lexicon to describe this feeling. He does not even know what the hospital protocol is for something like this. Moreover, his oath. Fuck, is he going to lose his job?

Stop it, he says to himself, trying to calm down, *you did not get a patient pregnant. You got a random guy in a bar pregnant.*

Okay, okay. Is still bad, but not *career ruining* bad. He did not break any laws or violate any oaths. He did not impregnate an existing patient. He impregnated…well, a stranger.

Which isn't *much* better, but at least it doesn't get his license to practice medicine revoked.

Okay, he's fine. Everything is fine. He just has to go back out there, and *definitely* has to get another physician assigned to Shane's case. Hopefully, somehow, without letting them know *he* is responsible for Shane's current predicament.

Holy shit. Ilya got someone pregnant. He's going to be a *father.*

The idea is, confusingly, both terrifying and elating at once. Working in emergency medicine, he hasn't exactly had a lot of free time to explore romance. At his age, at this point, he'd pretty much accepted it was going to be random hookups and the occasional online date. He's past the point of feeling like he needs love in his life.

But…the idea of a small little person, chubby hands and a cute little belly and a big, toothy smile looking up at him? Trusting him implicitly, the way he never could with his own father? *Loving* him?

The thought makes a smile threaten to spread across his face. It's difficult to tamp it down.

He is getting *way* ahead of himself here. He does not even know if Shane wants to keep the baby. As exciting as the prospect of becoming a father is, this is a complicated situation. They are strangers. Shane obviously cares about his career. Maybe he'd like to be married and settled before doing this. And it is his body, his life on the line. Ilya would never ask him to reconsider if he doesn't want this.

But if he does…well, Ilya is going to be there. As much as Shane will let him.

First, he needs to go back in there and face him. He'd run out like a chicken, shamefully. He owes the other man an honest conversation, and to know he has options and support.

He smooths over the front of his scrubs, takes a deep breath, and exits the on-call room. A brief glance at his watch makes him pale as he realizes he'd been in there a half hour trying to calm down. Time he could have been spending with patients. He will stay late tonight, to make up for it. Much longer than an extra half hour.

He makes a beeline for room five, hoping the Zofran has kicked in enough to give Shane some relief. He stops abruptly when he sees the door is wide open, and the bed is empty, save for some crumpled sheets.

He turns immediately for the nurse's station. Sveta isn't there, but he recognizes Kate, an ICU nurse.

"Nurse Martinez," he says, "where is the patient from room five? Is he in the restroom?"

She frowns. "No one told you?"

"Told me what?"

"He just left AMA."

"He *what?"*

She shrugs. "I wasn't the one helping him, I just know he practically ripped his own IV out and rushed out of here. Sveta had him sign AMA paperwork and he shot out of here like a bullet. It should be all documented, Dr. Rozanov."

"But-" Ilya shakes his head in disbelief. "I did not discharge him."

"I know, that's why it was AMA, Dr. Rozanov. No one could find you."

Fuck.

"Thank you," he says dejectedly.

"No problem."

Ilya is about to head for the front admissions desk, when a voice behind him gets his attention. He turns to see Luca Haas, wide-eyed and panicked with a smear of dark red liquid on his scrubs.

"Dr. Rozanov, I need-"

"Yes, let's go, right now." Ilya urges him forward and follows the young man down the hall toward whatever emergency is happening.

Shane will have to wait, as badly as that thought kills him.

Ilya does not leave the hospital for another twenty hours.

It is against the rules completely, but he leaves with Shane's phone number and address scrawled down on a sticky note. He certainly hopes Shane will understand his need to do this, completely breaking protocol, considering there are things they need to discuss.

He tries to call Shane twice during his shift, but there is no answer. That worries him. Shane wasn't able to get his Zofran dose before leaving, and he hadn't finished his fluids, and he was certainly in no condition to drive the two-hours back to Montreal.

Ilya has exactly thirty hours before he has to return to the hospital. He should go home and change, shower off the long shift, try to get some sleep and decent food before he comes back here.

What he does instead, is get in his car.

He stops on the way for a few grocery-bags worth of supplies. Ginger ale, Gatorade, over-the-counter nausea meds and constipation meds safe for pregnancy. He gets saltines and a few tubs of soup from the deli near the hospital. Their chicken-noodle is delicious, and not too hard on the stomach. He also picks up some Tylenol, a heating pad, and some chocolate. Better safe than sorry.

He has no way of knowing if Shane is even home. It's likely he traveled with his team to their next game. It is also likely he has no interest in seeing Ilya ever again. It's *also* likely he is no longer even pregnant.

But he has to be sure. If he's still pregnant, or freshly coming down from a medication abortion, he needs someone to take care of him.

If he allows it, Ilya will be that person.

The drive to Montreal is lengthy, and Ilya downs two more cups of drive-thru coffee to get him through it with his eyes open. The address on file is for a large, secluded piece of land, probably to protect him from paparazzi or crazed hockey fans.

Ilya had done some Googling on Shane Hollander. He is a very, *very* good hockey player. He has led his team to three Stanley Cups. Ilya learned what those are after a separate series of Googling. He's always been a good student.

There's a security gate when he pulls the car up, and he presses a button, which makes a buzzer sound.

For a moment, there's only quiet. Then, Shane's voice comes through the speaker, crackly and tired-sounding. "Who are you?"

"Shane, it is me. Ilya. Rozanov. Doctor Rozanov. Um, from the bar. And the hospital."

"What the fuck?" comes the voice through the speaker.

"You left."

"No shit! Why are you here?"

“I wanted to make sure-”

“Is this even legal? You fucking stole my address?”

“I know. Is bad. I will leave if you want, but-”

“Just, come up. Fuck.” Another buzzer sounds and the gates swing open.

Alright then.

Ilya pulls his car up the long winding driveway, parking in front of a grandiose…well, it’s a mansion. There’s no ifs or buts about it. The place is huge, with big glass panels and dark burnished wood siding. It’s sleek and modern, but has elements of a cozy cabin feeling to it.

Arms weighed down by grocery bags, he trudges up to the front door, startled slightly when it opens.

Shane is standing there under the archway, wearing a pair of gray sweatpants and a black pullover with the Montreal Metros logo. There are dark circles under his eyes, his black hair is mussed atop his head, and he’s swaying on his feet. From his complexion, and the dull in his gaze, Ilya would guess he’s sleep deprived, hungry, and probably veering back toward dehydration again.

“You’re here,” Shane says in disbelief.

“You left,” Ilya replies.

“Well, you had a fucking freakout and ditched me,” he mutters, dropping his eyes to the grocery bags. “What’s that?”

“Oh, er-” Ilya holds the bags up unsurely. “I didn’t know if you were still feeling unwell. You did not get your nausea meds. So, just in case. Got some things.”

Shane’s expression darkens. “And you thought you could just show up at my door and- what? I’d tell you I’m keeping the baby and I want us to coparent or something?”

Ilya arches his eyebrow. “No, Shane.”

“Then what?” Shane demands.

“I thought we could talk,” he says softly, “and I could check on how you are feeling. And you would not have to make any decisions alone, if you did not want to.”

At that, Shane’s posture eases a bit, some of the tension rolling off his shoulders. He regards the grocery bags with an inquisitive eye.

“Is there any ginger ale in there?”

Ilya smiles. “There is. Two kinds.”

“Come inside.”

Ilya resists the urge to say, *“isn’t that how we got into this mess?”* and instead just follows him into the massive foyer.

Shane leads him down the hall to a grand kitchen, with sleek modern appliances and stainless steel everywhere. It smells freshly cleaned, tidy and organized, unlike Ilya’s scattered bachelor pad high-rise.

Ilya sets the bags on the marble island, watching from the corner of his eye as Shane pulls a chair up and sits down heavily, chin resting on his fists.

“How are you feeling?” Ilya asks, keeping his tone neutral, despite the concern he feels.

Shane snorts. “I feel as good as I probably look.”

Ilya’s lips tilt. “So you’re feeling extremely handsome?”

“Boooo.”

“Worth a shot.” He chuckles. “The nausea is normal, if that helps. Morning sickness.”

“Morning? Try all fucking day and sometimes in the middle of the night.” Shane presses a hand over his stomach with a slight grimace.

“Ah, the name is deceptive. Here.” Ilya passes him a can of ginger ale and one of the tubs of soup, still warm in the container. “Have you eaten anything?”

“Kinda hard to, when it comes right back up,” Shane admits. He takes a microsip of the ginger ale and sighs softly.

“You should have stayed for monitoring, you could have HG,” Ilya tells him with a frown.

“HG what?”

“Hyperemesis Gravidarum, basically severe morning sickness. We can help medicate you to make it more bearable.” Ilya hesitates. “That is, if you’re continuing the pregnancy.”

Shane’s shoulders deflate. “Right.”
Ilya glances around the room, observing the lack of personal effects or photos. His jaw sets tightly.

“Have you given it any thought?” he asks, not wanting to push, but needing to know where Shane’s head is at.

“I’ve given it so much thought I’m surprised my head hasn’t exploded,” Shane mutters.

“Mm.” Ilya smiles briefly. He likes the way Shane turns a phrase, it seems unintentional, just the eccentric way he describes his feelings. “And where do the thoughts land?”

Shane's head snaps up and he meets Ilya's eyes. "Where are *your* thoughts landing?"

"It does not matter what I think. It is your body."

"That's a cop-out," he says flatly. "You didn't drive two hours for a fucking cop-out, Ilya."

"I drove two hours to make sure you were okay," Ilya replies. And it isn't a lie.

"Fucking, fuck." Shane drops his head into his hands again, covering his eyes. "This is so fucked up."

"I know," Ilya agrees quietly. "I am sorry I left the room so abruptly the other night. I am sorry I made it harder on you. I was…reacting, I guess."

"It's fine." Shane exhales shakily. "I didn't handle it that well either. I um…I already told my coach I was going to be out for the rest of the season."

Ilya tilts his head curiously.

"I guess I already decided without, um, officially deciding." He shakes his head. "I'm not making sense. Anyway, I'm staying pregnant."

"You are?" Ilya asks, brows lifting in surprise.

"Uh-huh." Shane laces his fingers together in his lap, shoulders set, brow stern. "I don't need anything from you, obviously."

Ilya studies him for a quiet moment. Here, even in his own kitchen, Shane seems uncomfortable. His shoulders are hunched, he's hesitant to make eye-contact, he keeps fiddling with his fingers like he needs to move them at all times to stay focused. Ilya wonders, vaguely, if Shane's ever been tested for any anxiety disorders, or maybe to see if he's anywhere on the autism spectrum. Nothing like that had been in his chart, but that's not really surprising, given he's a twenty-something male athlete in a contact sport.

Not that it matters anyway, but he hopes his presence here isn't making Shane feel worse.

"I know you do not *need* anything," Ilya answers carefully, "but if you are okay with it I… would like to be involved. However you are comfortable with."

"Involved how, exactly?" Shane asks, reluctance audible in his clipped voice. His face doesn't give much away, but the subtle shift of his body, angled slightly away from Ilya, does.

"However you will let me," Ilya assures him. "I know you are going through a lot of things. Changes. In your body and your mind and thinking of the future, life. I do not want to be another thing you feel like you have to…navigate. I just want to support."

Shane swallows loudly, breath shaking. "I feel so sick."

“Here.” Ilya pushes the pills toward him. “I took some tablet Zofran for you. Take two, let them dissolve on your tongue. And you should really try to eat something.”

Shane takes the capsules, studying the little clear packaging for a beat, before he washes them down with some ginger ale. He shakes his head when Ilya gestures to the soup.

“I have some crackers,” Ilya offers.

Shane grimaces.

“Chocolate?”

At that, he perks up a bit. “You brought chocolate?”

“I did.”

“Why?”

“For you to eat.”

Shane lips twitch. “That’s probably not good for the baby. I’m on a performance diet. I don’t usually…eat stuff like that.”

“If you are *only* eating chocolate, it is a problem. If you are *adding* chocolate, no reason to worry.” Ilya passes him the pack of chocolates. “Today is exception. If you want chocolate, eat chocolate.”

Shane’s fingers hover over the chocolate for a beat, and then he plucks one up and drops it in his mouth. His eyes close, lashes drawing down over his freckly cheeks. He truly is a beautiful man- sharp, exacting features, with soft brown eyes that give way to the warmth he holds inside. Deep, *deep* inside.

“You look pretty tired,” Shane observes through a mouthful of chocolate. “You can sit down.”

“Thank you.” Ilya crosses around and takes a seat beside Shane. “Long shift.”

“Can I ask about your accent?”

“What about it?”

“What is it?”

“Oh. I am from Russia.”

“Oh.” Shane swallows another chocolate and holds the box out to Ilya in offering.

He shakes his head. “No, is for you.”

“Have one so I don’t feel as bad about it.”

“There is no need to feel bad, Shane-”

“Ilya, Jesus, eat a fucking chocolate please.”

He fights off a laugh and accepts one, popping it in his mouth. It is very good.

“When was the last time *you* ate?” Shane demands.

Ilya wracks his brain. He’d wolfed down a few candy bars at the vending machine about halfway through his shift, and then a few cups of coffee, some mints Sveta gave him when she said his breath smelled like a dead-

“Okay if you’re thinking this hard it’s been too long.” Shane gestures to the kitchen. “Help yourself.”

“I am not going to cook in your-”

“I’ll eat something if you cook something,” Shane says.

That is all the encouragement he needs.

Ilya finds a carton of organic eggs in Shane’s fridge, and some low-fat, lactose free milk. He finds a bag of chopped spinach and some ripe tomatoes. He sets about making a few omelets. It will be easy on Shane’s stomach, and hopefully get some vitamins in him.

Meanwhile, Shane leans on his fist and sips ginger ale, absentmindedly munching on chocolates. Ilya notices he keeps one hand pressed over his belly, almost reflexively, as if he doesn't even clock it himself.

“You cook much?” Shane asks in that confusing, flat voice that doesn’t give Ilya much indication of why he’s asking. Is it curiosity, suspicion, polite small talk? It’s hard to tell.

“When I have time,” Ilya says. “I cooked a lot growing up. In med school I mostly ate Ramen and Spam. But I do enjoy it, when I have the luxury of time.”

“Ramen has so much sodium,” Shane notes.

“Yes but it is cheap,” Ilya flashes his teeth in a smile.

“Aren’t doctors like, super rich?”

Ilya laughs at that. “You think *I* am rich? My apartment is the size of your kitchen.”

Shane’s face flushes red. “I didn’t say I *wasn’t* rich. Asshole.”

“Mm, well, at least our baby will always get whatever they want.” Ilya whisks the eggs and milk together before pouring them into the slightly warmed pan on Shane’s gas stove.

“Within reason,” Shane adds. “Oh, god. I can’t think that far ahead.”

“Well, what about you?” Ilya stirs the eggs lightly. “Do you ever cook? Such a big kitchen not to.”

Shane shrugs, voice mild. “Sometimes. Same as you. When I’m home and have time. It’s the same thing over and over again, though. I don’t experiment.”

“Only with random guys at the bar?” Ilya teases with a wiggle of his eyebrows.

It works. Shane can’t hide his abrupt, short bark of a laugh. He covers his mouth quickly, scowling like he hadn’t meant to let that slip.

“You aren’t funny,” he says, even though he’s clearly still smiling.

“No, just very fertile, apparently.”

“Oh my god. Ilya. Please.”

“I am just saying. Did not even notice I broke the condom. I’m impressed with us.”

“Yeah, well, we were fucking drunk.” Shane takes another small sip of ginger ale, exhaling.

“Is the medicine helping?” Ilya asks softly.

Shane nods. “I think so, yeah. I actually feel kind of hungry.”

“Good.” Ilya plates the omelets and passes one to Shane, sitting down beside him with his own. “It is funny coincidence though, is it not?”

“What is?” Shane asks, taking a tentative bite of his omelet.

“That you end up in my ER, eight weeks after we met at a bar.” Ilya waves his fork. “Like fate.”

“Fate isn’t real.”

“And yet here we are.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “It’s called I had two games against Ottawa in two months. It’s pretty standard for our schedule.”

“And both times we were at the same bar, then the same hospital.” Ilya spears some egg with his fork and takes a large bite. He pats the gold crucifix around his neck, smirking. “Sometimes big man upstairs has big plans.”

“Oh you’re one of *those.”* Shane snorts, but the sound is somewhat fond. At least, Ilya *thinks* it’s fond.

“I am one of those,” he affirms.

“I’m surprised, working in the ER, you could believe in all that stuff. You must see awful shit.” Shane takes another bite of his food, then glances hesitantly at Ilya. “Sorry. That

probably was insensitive."

"No, is okay. It's true." Ilya shrugs, expression thoughtful. "I do see bad stuff. All the time. I think, maybe, believing in all this stuff helps me make sense of it. That probably sounds stupid."

"It doesn't sound stupid," Shane is quick to assure him. "I…I *wish* I could go there, when things feel overwhelming. It sounds better than just floundering."

"Ah, floundering can be good." Ilya grins. "You floundered into my ER. I am glad you did."

"You're glad I ended up in the ER?"

Ilya guffaws. "Are you like this with everyone?"

"Like what?" Shane looks genuinely confused.

Adorable, Ilya wants to say.

"Sharp and exacting," he says.

"Your English is so good," Shane tells him, ignoring the question, "how long have you lived here?"

"Here, just a few years. Was in Boston since college. I got a scholarship."

"Oh."

"And you?"

"Me what?"

"How long have you lived here?"

"In Montreal? Or Canada?"

"Take your pick, I guess."

"Canada my whole life." Shane takes another bite of omelet. "I actually grew up in Ottawa, but I got drafted to Montreal out of high school." He smirks. "First pick."

"So it was always hockey," Ilya deduces.

"What do you mean?"

"You always knew you would…do hockey? Forever?"

"Oh." Shane considers this, his curved upper lip pursed. It's quite kissable, but Ilya isn't going near *that* thought. "Yeah, I guess I did. It was like, the only thing I've ever been really good at since I was a kid. It just always makes sense to me even when other things don't."

Ilya smiles fondly. “That is nice, having that.”

“It is.” Shane nods. “What about you? Did you always want to be a doctor?”

“I…did not.” He shakes his head. “I like helping people, though. So I guess same for me. It made sense.”

“I’m surprised, usually when people are doctors they have this big dramatic story.” Shane cleans his plate, glancing down at it with surprise. “Whoa, I ate all of that.”

“First meal in a while?” Ilya asks with obvious concern.

“In a few days.” Shane wipes his mouth with a napkin. “Thank you.”

“Of course. How do you feel?”

“Better than earlier.” Shane sets his napkin down. “So, no dramatic story for you?”

Ilya scrapes his fork across his plate, wincing apologetically when the sound makes Shane recoil. “Sorry. Um, I do not know if this is a *dramatic story.* My mom died. The ambulance came for her but they were too late. No one could help her. I guess…it would have been nice if I could have helped her.”

“How did she die?” Shane’s brows are pulled together now, expression soft. He’s surprisingly warm like this, like he feels sympathy and concern for Ilya.

“Oh she overdosed.” Ilya clears his throat. “It was a long time ago and I have been to therapy about it for a thousand years.” He waves his hand dismissively. “And you? Are you close with your parents?”

“My parents.” Shane says the words like he’s tasting them on his tongue for the first time. “My parents. *Fuck.* How am I going to tell them about this?” He touches a hand to his belly again, face going ashen.

“Breathe.” Ilya reaches out and rests his hand over Shane’s knee, hoping it’s a comforting gesture. “You do not have to tell anyone right away. There is time to make plans.”

“Plans,” Shane echoes quietly, “plans, yeah. Plans are good.”

“We make a plan,” Ilya encourages, “there is time, Shane.”

Shane exhales raggedly, the sound almost painful. He blinks a few times, like he’s trying to ground himself. “Sorry.”

“No need to say sorry. This is big. I know.”

“Are you worried? About telling…” Shane hesitates. “Do you have someone to tell?”

Ilya grimaces. “I have no parents, if that is what you are asking. I do have a brother, back in Russia. I will probably tell him at some point.”

“Right.” Shane drums his fingers on the countertop. “I should probably make sure everything is okay before I tell anyone else. Like, make sure the baby is fine. I need an ultrasound, don’t I?”

“Yes.” Ilya nods. He glances down at his hand on Shane’s knee, noticing the other man hadn’t pulled away from the contact. “I got some prenatal vitamins, ones without iron, easier on your stomach. It would be good for you to start taking those daily. And we should find you an OB here, I can reach out to some contacts and get a good referral, if you would like?”

Shane stares at him for a beat.

“What?” Ilya asks.

“Nothing. Sorry. I just…” Shane shakes his head. “I usually do all of this kind of stuff myself. I’m not used to…yeah, Ilya that would be great, if you could help me set that up.”

“Of course.” Ilya squeezes his leg, before pulling away.

“I’ll take the vitamins.” Shane grabs the bottle from the grocery bag and studies it for a moment before popping open the lid and taking two. “This helps the baby grow?”

“It helps prevent birth defects and promotes overall health,” Ilya explains, grabbing their dirty dishes and heading for the sink.

“I can wash those, you cooked,” Shane insists.

“I think you should rest, right now,” Ilya tells him gently. “It has been a big few days. You look exhausted. I know we have a lot to talk about, and figure out, but we do not have to do that right this second.”

Shane’s expression twitches slightly. “I hate not having things figured out.”

“I am sensing that,” Ilya replies with a dry smile. “But you are also growing a human being right now from scratch, and that takes some energy. You have to rest.”

“Okay,” Shane agrees reluctantly. “Will you…” He glances behind him at the adjacent living room with a large, L-shaped couch. “Do you want to stay for a little while? I mean, do you have some time?”

Ilya feels warmth spread through his chest at the question. “Yes, of course, Shane. I will do these dishes and join you on the couch.”

“Just let the machine get them,” Shane says. He scoops up another ginger ale, and the box of chocolates, and begins a slow shuffle to the living room. He looks a bit more lively than when Ilya had first shown up.

Once he’s alone in the kitchen, Ilya opens the incredibly fancy dishwasher, and begins putting the dishes in.

It’s so odd. He’s in a strange place, with a stranger, and the imminent beginning of a complete change to his life on the horizon, but he doesn’t feel afraid. He feels…more comfortable with Shane than he has with anyone in a long time.

He even told him about his mother. Where the hell did *that* come from?

It’s too complicated to try and answer that question right now. He tries to take his own advice, and focus on one thing at a time. The rest can wait.

Right now, he needs to do the dishes, and go keep the father of his baby company so he can get some rest.

The father of his baby.

God, that's going to take some getting used to.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

ok well...somehow i got another chapter out of this and have plans for a third. .....

PLEASE HEED THE WARNINGS FROM CH1!!!!! I DONT WANT MEAN COMMENTS!! IM SENSITIVE AUBREY!!!

i hope yall enjoy, shit!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Wait, wait, wait. Slow down for a second.” Svetlana shakes her head, setting her coffee down on the desk before leaning over as if she thinks she’s heard Ilya incorrectly. “You and that patient from the other day-”

“Sveta, it was before he was a patient.” Ilya doesn’t even bother to look up from the computer where he’s dutifully documenting his last few visits. This is the most time-consuming, frustrating aspect of his job. Well, *one* of the most frustrating. Losing time with patients to make sure all of the documentation is in order.

“Just- walk me through it again,” she insists.

Ilya leans back in his chair, rubbing the blur from his eyes. On the tail end of another long shift, he doesn’t want to spend his only *sort of* downtime giving her the explanation of what happened between Shane and him.

“He was in town for a game, I went out to blow off some steam. We hooked up. He-”

“Gave you a fake name?”

“Yes, because he is a famous hockey player.”

“I didn’t recognize him.”

“Well, you have been too busy to watch hockey, considering we are understaffed.” Ilya gestures to the bustling nurses’ station.

Svetlana nods. “Fair enough. Okay, so you hooked up and he…well…”

“He is pregnant. He is keeping the baby. We have an ultrasound appointment booked for Thursday. I got a referral for an OB in Hawkesbury who was highly recommended, and it’s halfway between us. An hour for him, an hour for me.”

“And…” Svetlana hesitates. “What is the plan?”

“I just said plan. Thursday, ultrasound. I traded with Dr. Kent for day off. I owe him three night shifts now.” Ilya rolls his eyes in annoyance.

“No, the *plan* Ilya. You and Shane. Are you together?”

He looks at her with disbelief. “Are you joking? We have met only two times. We are…” He hesitates, hearing Shane’s voice in his head from that day last week at his home.

“Let’s just take things slowly, yeah? Get to know each other. I don’t want anyone to feel any pressure here. There’s a baby to think about now.”

“We are taking it slow,” he tells her, “just becoming friends, first. We hardly know each other at all.”

Svetlana arches an eyebrow. “So, where is the baby going to live? Who is going to-”

“Sveta, please.” Ilya turns to face her completely, and he’s sure the desperation must be written across his face. “I cannot do all of this right now. We have eight months to figure all of that out, okay? Let us get through the ultrasound first, please.”

“Alright, alright.” She holds her hands up in a placating manner. “So…you’re becoming friends. Do you like him?”

“Of course, we had amazing sex first time we met.”

“That’s not what I mean. I know you’re *attracted* to him. I meant, do you like him?”

“I have only met him-”

“Ilya. For fuck’s sake. Do you like him *so far?”*

Ilya pauses for a beat, thinking about her question. Most of his interactions with Shane have been either sexual in nature under the haze of alcohol, or terse and tense, conversations about their frightening future. What he has gleaned in their brief interactions and subsequent text conversations, is this:

Shane is funny. He’s dry, sarcastic, too literal and quick-witted.

Shane is passionate. He loves hockey more than anything in the world. He spent two hours on his couch explaining to Ilya all the different positions while they watched an old game on his giant television.

Shane is smart. He can tell you how quickly a puck will move into the net based on the angle it’s shot from. He really is that smart.

Shane is closed off. He struggles to access emotions, he doesn’t like talking about how things *feel*, and he seems to have this peculiar compulsion to maintain perfection in everything he does. Even something as simple as punctuation in his texts.

All of this to say, well, Ilya is undoubtedly charmed by him.

“He is kind of…exact opposite of me,” Ilya says. “He is very *careful* about everything. Like, walking on glass all the time, too afraid to push down and break it. Something about him is… *tight*, if that makes sense. He does not breathe without calculating how far the air will go first.”

“You probably need some of that structure in your life,” Svetlana muses. “Chaotic career, chaotic homelife, chaotic personality. You need some stability.”

“Chaotic? Me?” he demands.

“Um, yeah? Emergency medicine, shift work? Family trauma? Your messy ass apartment? Did you *bring him there?”*

“Yes, but I had Julian come clean that day,” he admits.

“You need a housekeeper for a one bedroom apartment. So embarrassing. Such chaos.”

“Are you done bothering me?” he asks, turning back to his charts.

“I’m done,” she says, shaking her head, “but you need to keep me posted, Ilyushka. I can’t believe I’m about to be a godmother!”

He scoffs. “Who said you-”

“Shh, let me have this.” She ruffles her hand through his curls and heads for her station. Ilya watches her go with amusement, rolling his eyes.

She is right about one thing. His life is definitely chaos.

“Dr. Rozanov?”

Ilya glances up to see his most favorite lapdog, Luca Haas shuffling toward the desk. On his heels, is third-year resident Troy Barrett. He’s a bit less of a bother-er than Haas, prefers to handle things on his own. Confident, but not cocky. Quiet, but loud in defense of his ideas when he needs to be. Ilya respects that.

“Hello Dr. Haas, hello Dr. Barrett.” Ilya clicks *save* on his updates to the chart and looks at them. “It is a quiet day today. What can I do for you that you cannot do yourselves?”

“We *can* do it,” Troy interjects immediately. “I know what to do.”

“We should check with an attending first!” Luca argues.

“Well, you are here. What are you checking with me?” Ilya arches an eyebrow, leaning on his fist patiently.

“The patient in bed eight,” Luca begins, “Richard Johns. He came in with the STEMI. I know he wasn’t your patient, but, are you familiar with the case?”

Ilya shakes his head. “No, is he Dr. Kent’s?”

“Mhm.”

“Then why are you not asking Dr. Kent?” Ilya demands.

“Well, he-”

“Because he’s a dick,” Troy mutters, unable to stop himself.

Ilya exhales. Dallas Kent, another attending physician who Ilya also does not care for, is not well-liked by most of his subordinates. Ilya puts up with him because they are colleagues and he has to, but he would not want to be at the bottom of Kent’s totem pole.

“You want to be a doctor but you cannot put your differences aside to save a patient’s life?” Ilya asks, crossing his arms over his chest.

Luca exhales. “Please, Dr. Rozanov. Can you just help us on this one?”

Ilya clicks his teeth. “What do you need? Kent will not want me stepping on his toes.”

“Our STEMI patient isn’t responding to thrombolytics,” Troy says, “it’s been hours. I think we are going to need to do a rescue PCI. He’s ischemic.”

“It seems aggressive!” Luca argues. “What if we push another round of thrombolytics? He could respond.”

Ilya is already shaking his head. “No, he needs a PCI. Second round is too high risk.”

“I told you!” Troy says, vindicated. “I was right!”

“So, what do we do next?” Luca asks, wide-eyed.

Ilya gets to his feet. “I suggest you page the attending assigned to this case, and fast, so he can perform the angioplasty or supervise. And, Dr. Barrett?”

“Yes?”

“Medicine is not about *being right*, it is about saving lives. Which means you have to get along with people you think are dicks. Run along now.” Ilya waves them off, pleased when they immediately turn and hustle.

Kent *is* a dick though.

He’s about to head for the floor when his phone buzzes in his pocket. He pulls it out, a smile dawning on his face as he sees the name emblazoned on his screen.

SHANE HOLLANDER: *Is there something in my DNA that predisposes me to being this sick? I just walked by a plant at the grocery store and had to run to the bathroom because I could smell the dirt.*

ILYA ROZANOV: *There has been research lately that shows it is actually due to quality of the sperm that morning sickness occurs. You can blame me, not you.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *Don't worry, I definitely blame you.*

Ilya snorts out a laugh, and is halfway into his reply when he hears the alarm for a code, and rushes down the hall.

He'll have to remember to send that text later.

It's nearly midnight that evening when Ilya finally lays out flat across his leather couch -the same one he'd fucked Shane face first into- and opens his phone again to see he's missed a few text messages.

SHANE HOLLANDER: *Hey, you know I was kidding right? This was kind of a two-man job.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *You're probably just busy at work. Sorry if that came off wrong. Sometimes I'm offensive and I don't mean to be.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *I like dirt, really I do. It's good for your skin.*

Ilya laughs, the sound soft and tender in his throat. He runs his fingertips across the messages, over Shane's words, somehow hearing the anxious cadence of his voice through the screen.

ILYA ROZANOV: *I was busy at work, but it is a little fun to watch you flounder, as you put it. Hope you are sleeping.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *You are such an asshole.*

ILYA ROZANOV: *Why are you awake? It is past the baby's bedtime.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *You told me the baby is the size of a grape. It doesn't have a bedtime.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *I can't sleep.*

ILYA ROZANOV: *Can I call you?*

Ilya doesn't have to, as it turns out, because the next moment his phone is buzzing with an incoming call from Shane. He smiles again and puts the phone to his ear.

"Is there something wrong with your bed?" Ilya asks teasingly. He wisely doesn't add what he's thinking, which is: *it has a lack of Rozanov in it?*

"My bed is fine. It's temperpedic."

"Ah, fancy. Very good investment, good for your back."

“Did you just get home from work?”

“I did.”

“Wow, that was a long shift. How was it?”

“Ah, it was good. Nothing too exciting, which for the ER, means nobody died. A very good shift.”

There’s a brief pause, before Shane says, “I can’t believe you save lives. My baby’s dad saves lives. That’s kind of insane.”

Ilya hums thoughtfully. “My baby’s dad wins Stanley cups. That is pretty insane too.”

Shane chuckles, brief and clipped, like he isn’t used to doing it. “I won’t be winning any of those for a while. Unless…you’re *sure* contact sports are not a good idea with a fetus in tow?”

Ilya snorts. “I am very sure. I am sorry you have to give it up for now though. You plan to go back after the baby is born?”

“Yeah, of course. I have to.”

“Have to?” Ilya leans back against the cushions, hearing the leather squeak under his back. “I saw that big house, Shane, don’t tell me you have no investments?”

“Shut up. I didn’t mean for the money.”

“Mm. Then why *have to?”*

There’s a longer pause this time, hesitant, uncertain. Shane clears his throat. “Who would you be if you weren’t a doctor? What would you be doing?”

“Like, what other job would I do?”

“No, like if you suddenly won the lottery and never had to work again. Who would you be?”

Ilya purses his lips thoughtfully. “I… I would not stop working. I love what I do. It…it *is* who I am, I guess.”

“Right,” Shane says.

“I get it,” Ilya replies. “Hockey is who you are. It’s all you know.”

“Pretty much.” There’s another pause. “Do you think…do you think that’s maybe not good? Like, should we have something else?”

“Probably,” he agrees. “I think we will, soon.”

“You mean the baby.”

“I mean the baby.”

Shane huffs out a quiet breath. “I have been holding a hockey stick since I was old enough to walk. Without it… well, honestly I’m a little afraid to see what happens. I haven’t been off the ice this long since I broke my collarbone.”

“Ouch! During a game?”

“Uh-huh. Concussion, fractured collarbone and some big ass bruises. I missed the playoffs.”

“How many concussions have you had?”

Shane grumbles something under his breath, then says, “a handful.”

“Mm. Does not sound sustainable.”

“Well, my body’s gonna give out someday. Probably sooner after I go through this.”

A jolt of guilt injects itself into Ilya’s veins at that. Even though he knows Shane was right when he said this whole thing was a *two man job,* it isn’t Ilya who is going through the physical changes of growing their baby. Shane’s entire life has been upended because of one foolish evening.

“I have no doubt you will be back and better than ever once this is over,” Ilya tells him.

Shane laughs, a little looser this time. “How could you possibly know that?”

“I spent a few hours Googling you. Very good stats. You are best player in the league.”

“Googled me, huh? That’s pretty creepy, Ilya.” There’s a sound over the line like shuffling against blankets. “Maybe I should watch my back.”

“I will watch it for you,” Ilya replies with his lips spreading into a smile.

“Oh yeah?” Shane asks, and the tail end of the words are cut off by a yawn. “I can trust you to watch my back?”

Ilya swallows thickly. “Of course you can. And also, you should go to sleep, Shane.”

“Mm, not like I have work in the morning.”

“You are hilarious. You are also growing bones and eyeballs from scratch. Your body needs sleep.”

“You’re the doctor. I should probably listen.”

“Probably.” Ilya hesitates, before he speaks again. “So, Thursday? Still all set for our appointment? 9:30?”

“I’ve got nothing else going on. I’ll be there.”

“Are you sure you are okay to make the drive? Is an hour and I know you feel sick in the mornings.”

“Ilya, I feel sick all day.”

“That is not convincing, Shane.”

“I promise it’ll be fine. I’ll see you on Thursday, okay?”

“Okay. Get some rest, Shane.”

“You too. Night Ilya.”

The line disconnects, and Ilya is left staring at his phone lock screen. It’s a photo of himself with his niece Yulia, three Christmases ago when his brother and his family had come to visit for the first time since Ilya moved from home. The first Christmas after they lost Dad.

It was a horrible time. But Yulia is a little angel. Ilya mourns the idea that she might never get to meet her little cousin. She would love having a little baby to tote around and smooch.

Ilya owes his brother a call, anyway. But…Alexei is…a complicated man. He always took more after dad, while Ilya tended to align with their mom. Ilya thinks on some level, his brother blames him for their father’s death. He is a doctor after all, how had he not realized sooner that dad was sick?

He wasn’t home enough. He couldn’t have. And that was his choice. So, maybe he is a little bit responsible. He lives with it.

Ilya wonders idly what Shane’s parents are like. He’d seemed utterly terrified at the prospect of telling them about this when he brought it up at Shane’s house. Is it not a good situation for them? The thought makes him a bit anxious. He doesn’t want Shane or the baby in any trouble. Is Shane’s dad like Ilya's? Short-tempered? Unhappy? Violent?

Maybe he should be there when Shane tells them, just to be safe. He can’t imagine that would look too good, though.

Hello mom and dad. I, your famous hockey player son, am pregnant by a strange man I hardly know. Here he is, meet the giant, intimidating Russian man who spends his entire life in a germ-filled hospital pit. Who wants champagne?

Yeah, not ideal.

But, there is nothing he can do about it tonight. And as he’d told Shane, it’s important to get rest.

So, instead of being a hypocrite like most doctors are -like he *usually* is- he huffs his way off the couch and into the bedroom, mentally preparing for a long night of restless sleep.

As usual.

Thursday morning is crisp and cold, overcast. The gray clouds in the sky make everything look sort of muted and murky, and Ilya wonders if the weather is similar for Shane over in Montreal. He checks his weather app to confirm it is, then sends a quick text, working his teeth over his lower lip.

ILYA ROZANOV: *Please be safe on the highway. Looks like it is going to rain.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *I'll do my best. See you at the doctor.*

With that, Ilya sighs, and gets behind the wheel.

It's an hour drive up to Hawkesbury, and Ilya finds himself admiring the waterfront properties and quaint little shops as he pulls his car in through the small streets. He'd been referred to this OB by a colleague who almost exclusively handles VIP patients. Discreet, competent, and easy to work with. That is exactly what they need.

He spots Shane waiting outside the front of the office already, when he parks his car. He looks a little better today- more color on his freckled cheeks, a flush of pink over his nose. Ilya isn't sure if it's from the cold weather, or just that he isn't as sick this morning. He's wearing a pair of jeans, and a black Nike pullover, alongside a beanie pulled down over his ears. Tufts of black hair stick out the bottom. He looks very cute, bundled up for warmth and smiling lightly at Ilya.

"Whoa," Shane says as Ilya approaches, "nice kicks."

Ilya glances down at his sneakers, a chuckle landing in his throat. It's the most expensive pair of shoes he owns, and he doesn't get to wear them often. He doesn't like wearing his *too* expensive shoes in the hospital. It's a great way to ruin them.

"Oh, thank you." He lifts his shoe a bit so Shane can see the trim on the blue sneaker. "They're Cactus Jack Jordan 4s. I just got them, actually. A treat."

"They're sick." Shane lifts his own foot, smirking. "I have a deal with Reebok, so I'm not supposed to be seen in anything but them. *But* since I'm not really supposed to be seen here *at all* anyway…" Shane is wearing a pair of orange and gray Vince Staple Nike Dunks. Very expensive, with a *very* significant price tag. Ilya has definitely lusted over these exact shoes before.

Ilya grins at him. "Ah, so you are a bit of a risk taker?"

Shane snorts and gestures to his abdomen. "You couldn't tell that already?"

They both share a quiet laugh, and then a somberness settles between them. Shane stuffs his hands into his hoodie pockets, shifting on his feet unsurely. His eyes dart to the front doors, jaw tensing.

"Hey," Ilya says softly. "Are you alright?"

"Fine," Shane assures him, shaking his head like he's trying to empty it of any thoughts. "Just… I dunno. This is a big deal, isn't it?"

“First ultrasound,” Ilya agrees, nodding.

“Are you nervous?” Shane asks.

He quickly debates his answer, but settles for being honest. Shane doesn’t strike him as the type of man who appreciates *being handled*. “A little, yes. But, you seem to be in good health. There is no reason to go in thinking negatively.”

Shane blows out a lofty breath. “I took those Zofran things you left me but I still feel sick.”

“It could be nerves,” Ilya replies, “it is okay to be nervous, Shane. A lot is going on in your body that you have no control over. I would be a mess.”

At that, Shane’s lips twitch. “Really?”

“Oh, da. You are handling this like a fucking champion.”

The other man laughs, a shaky sound. “Not really.”

“Trust me.” Ilya nods firmly at him. “And if you need to fall apart, you are allowed to do that too. It is okay not to be okay.”

“Your bedside manner is killer,” Shane mutters, voice dry.

Don’t handle him, Ilya tells himself, *he likes it blunt. He’s not a patient, he is the father of your baby.*

“Alright, if you prefer it this way. Suck it up, Shane,” Ilya says. “We are going to go in there, and look at our baby. You are going to do it, because you have no other choice. Now, how do they say in sports? *Nut up or shut up.”*

It’s quiet for a beat, and Ilya is afraid he woefully misread this entire scenario. The apology is just about to roll off his lips, when Shane folds over and bursts out laughing.

It’s an unrestrained, easy sound. His laugh is actually quite nice when it’s not that clipped, sharp bark of a noise. This is more earnest, from deep in his belly, pealing bells of laughter that fills the crisp air between them and settles Ilya’s shoulders.

“Was that your idea of a pep talk?” Shane asks, still holding his stomach as the laughter gradually begins to die out.

“It would not win us any cups, would it?” Ilya muses, unable to pull his eyes off of Shane’s face. The way his lips curve when he laughs, the crinkles around his warm brown eyes, the little scrunch of his nose. It is hypnotizing, to tell the truth.

“No no, it wasn’t half bad.” Shane grins at him, cheeks flushed. “I mean, it was mostly nonsense. But I’ll take it right now. It’s kinda my language.”

“I will keep that in mind.” Ilya steps forward and opens the front door for him. “Let’s do this.”

“Let’s do this.” Shane nods, like he’s hyping himself up to score a goal, and steps across the threshold into the lobby.

They’re immediately assaulted with the warm blast from the heater above, and the smell of lavender-scented hand sanitizer. The floor is shiny linoleum, but the walls are less clinical, adorned with photos of pregnant bumps and dandelions and scrunchy-faced little babies. Ilya thinks it’s sort of precious, a *much* different type of environment than the one he practices medicine in, but he can feel Shane’s tension build up again beside him.

“Shane?” he prompts worriedly.

“This is so weird,” Shane replies under his breath, as they begin their slow walk toward the front desk.

“I know, but you can do this. Come on.”

They make it to the front desk, where a kind woman with a nametag that reads *Candy*, greets them. “Hello! Do you two have an appointment today?”

Ilya waits for Shane to respond, but after a solid five seconds of him just staring at her like she’s stolen his tongue, he intervenes. “Hi, yes. We should be in for a visit to establish care, and an ultrasound with Dr. Laveen. Shane Hollander.”

“Oh! Right. Of course. I thought I recognized your face.” Candy nods at Shane, smiling. “We are going to get you taken back to a room right away. We have some paperwork for you to fill out, but we know there is a certain sense of delicacy here, and want to keep you as comfortable as possible. Let’s head back, get you two some privacy.”

“Thank you,” Ilya says, taking Shane’s elbow and gently guiding him toward the swinging door that Candy opens for their entry. Shane, apparently, is still at a loss for words. He seems overwhelmed by the environment, definitely not comfortable. Ilya’s noticed that he gets quiet when he’s nervous.

“We’re going to take your vitals here, Mr. Hollander,” Candy says, gesturing to the scale and small triage area in the back of house. “Can I get you to step up on the scale for me?”

Shane nods, the motion somewhat robotic, and steps up on the scale. His hands are shaking, and his eyes are glued to the floor.

“85kg,” Candy muses as she notes his weight, “how tall are you, Mr. Hollander?”

“Um, I’m five-ten,” he manages, glancing down at the scale. “I- that’s- I lost some weight.”

“Have you been eating like normal?” Candy inquires as Shane steps off the scale and plops into the small chair beside it. Ilya keeps his mouth shut, biting the inside of his cheek and resisting the urge to involve himself in the medical aspects of this visit. He isn’t here as a provider, he is here as support.

“I’ve been pretty sick,” Shane mutters, “having trouble eating.”

“Oh no, I’m sorry to hear that. Are you taking anything?”

At that, Shane looks hopefully at Ilya.

“He takes 8mg Zofran tablets,” Ilya tells her. “How many was it yesterday, Shane?”

“Just two.”

Candy nods again, still charting in her notes. “Okay, got it. If that’s helping we can keep the dosage up for you until the morning sickness subsides, but you need to make sure you’re getting as many calories as possible, and staying hydrated. Have you tried Pedialyte?”

Shane’s skin turns a pale shade of green at the mention.

Ilya shakes his head. “Makes him worse. He has been drinking water and Gatorade. Sometimes Ginger Ale.”

“Gotcha.” She smiles sympathetically. “Let me get some vitals here, and we’re going to take some blood and get a urine sample from you, okay?”

Shane nods again, stone faced.

“Everything looks good,” Candy says after the vitals have been taken. “Your BP is a *tad* high though. Is that normal for you?”

“Mm.” Ilya frowns at the number. “Was lower before, Shane. This is not normal, right? At the hospital it was 118/75.”

“I’m nervous,” Shane bites back through his teeth.

Ilya and Candy exchange a glance, but don’t argue the point.

After the blood is drawn and Shane’s given his sample, he and Ilya are left alone in an ultrasound room. The lights are dimmed, and Shane’s reclined on the cot, breathing very pointedly through his nose while he twists a loose thread on his jeans between two fingers.

Ilya is the one to break the silence. “Do you need anything, Shane? Is there anything I can do?”

“I’m fine,” he replies immediately. Ilya is starting to realize this is his baseline response when he is demonstrably *not* fine. “You remembered my blood pressure?”

“What?”

“You said, at the hospital it was 118/75. Did you just like, remember that?”

“Oh.” Ilya glances away, hoping the warmth isn’t visible on his cheeks. “I did not memorize it on purpose. After you left, I was worried, so I went back over your chart a few times, trying to make sure nothing stood out that could put you or the…the baby at risk before I could come see you.”

When he looks back at Shane's face, the other man is studying him thoughtfully. His warm, brown eyes are fixated on Ilya's expression, brows slightly furrowed, like Ilya is some sort of puzzle he can't piece together.

Ilya understands the sentiment.

"What?" he asks, voice somewhat defensive.

"Nothing," Shane says. "You didn't like…see anything, right? Anything bad?"

Ilya's expression softens a bit, and his chest pulls a bit at the worry tinging each of Shane's words. Clearly he's been stressing about this.

"Everything looked fine to me, Shane. What is worrying you so much?"

Shane swallows audibly. "I'm a hockey player. I've been out on the ice this whole time. I win a lot of games yeah but I still get checked. I get hurt. Last month I took a really hard hit into the boards and I had a bruise on my thigh for like two weeks, and-"

"Shane, Shane," Ilya shushes his frantic stream of words quietly, with a hand on his arm. His skin is warm under the hoodie, flushed. "This may sound blunt, but trust me, if you were going to lose the baby from getting hit, it would have happened then, okay? You probably got very lucky, and your padding did its job. You have had no heavy bleeding or painful cramps, right?"

"Right," Shane replies, nodding hopefully.

"Is a very good sign. You are nine weeks pregnant now, you've made it quite far into the first trimester. That is also very good."

"Okay." Shane huffs a soft breath out. "I just want…want this to be okay."

When he says *this,* his hand drifts down to cover the expanse of his abdomen, hidden beneath his Nike hoodie. Ilya wishes he could take Shane's face in his hands, stroke his thumbs over those beautiful freckles, and tell him everything is going to be fine.

But before he can come up with a socially acceptable way to do that, there's a gentle knock, and the door opens.

Dr. Laveen is a tall woman, with muscular arms underneath her coat. Her dark hair is pulled back in a tight bun, and she wears glasses over her brown eyes. She smiles warmly at them upon entry, and it makes her white teeth glimmer in the dimmed room.

"Well hello! My name is Dr. Laveen, are you Mr. Hollander?"

"Hi," Shane says to her in a clipped tone, "um, Shane. Shane, please."

"Hello Shane, it's nice to meet you. And I presume this is baby's other dad?" Dr. Laveen extends her hand to Ilya, who shakes it politely.

“Hello, Ilya Rozanov.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both.” Dr. Laveen sets her laptop down on the counter. “Now Shane, typically we’d have our ultrasound technician do this for you, but since you’re a new patient I’m going to go ahead and perform the ultrasound. Afterward we can have a sit-down discussion and I can answer any questions you may have. How does that sound?”

“Yeah, okay.” Shane nods, looking slightly relieved at the kind, easy nature of her words. As if he’d been expecting something harsher.

Obstetrics is a specialty Ilya has a ridiculous amount of respect for. People think it’s all squishy babies and happiness, but he knows the reality that the task of safely bringing life into the world every day truly entails. It is not always healthy babies and happiness.

Sometimes, exactly what Shane is afraid of right now, is the truth.

He watches with baited breath while she instructs Shane to roll up his shirt and unbutton his jeans to give her good access to his pelvic area. Shane’s torso had been touched, licked, kissed, and greedily admired by Ilya on their shared evening together two months ago, but it had been dark and they had been a bit drunk.

Here, under the warm dimmed lights of the exam room, he’s reminded of how beautiful Shane’s body is. There is no definite bump there, just a little slope of his lower abdomen, most likely bloating. It’s softer than he remembers, he’d *definitely* felt defined abs before.

Dr. Laveen is reaching for her wand and gel, when Ilya asks, against his better judgement, “Doctor, would you warm it up first, please? So it is more comfortable for him.”

Shane glances sideways at him curiously. Ilya winces bashfully. He was intending to stay quiet and be a steady support, not intervene. But he can feel Shane’s anxiety, and Shane really had seemed uncomfortable in the cold sterility of the hospital. Blasting his warm skin with frigid gel will certainly startle him.

“Good thinking, Mr. Rozanov,” she says with a smile, seeming unbothered as she prepares the gel more thoroughly.

“It’s *Doctor* Rozanov, actually,” Shane tells her. He glances at Ilya, shyness on his expression, though his lips are quirked up slightly. Cute. Very cute.

“Oh.” Dr. Laveen glances over her shoulder, arching an eyebrow. “What kind of medicine do you practice, Doctor?”

“Ilya is fine, please. I’m internal medicine. I work at Ottawa General. I actually got your referral through Chief Wiebe.”

“Oh, yes!” The warmer beeps, alerting them that the gel is done. Dr. Laveen removes it and squirts a bit on Shane’s tummy. “Dr. Wiebe is amazing. We were in residency together.”

“He is,” Ilya agrees with a smile.

“Well, I’m pleased he sent you two my way. Now, Shane, I’m going to press down on your belly with this wand, that’s how we get the picture here of the baby.”

Shane nods, and Ilya watches the screen, while Shane turns his head away, eyes closed, like he can’t bear to see if something is wrong.

Ilya, on the other hand, is zeroed in.

He is not an obstetrician, or an ultrasound technician, so he of course would always defer to the professionals on what he sees. But he can’t help it. That’s his *baby.* His child, growing steadily inside of Shane. And if something is wrong, well, he can’t say he isn’t just as apprehensive to know about it.

From what he knows, it looks…

“Perfect,” Dr. Laveen says it out loud so he doesn't have to, “development looks good. I see the little heart beating. Let’s give it a listen.”

Shane makes a small sound in the back of his throat, something that’s half sigh, half whimper. On instinct, Ilya reaches out and touches his hand. Shane’s fingers curl around his so tightly it hurts, but he doesn’t open his eyes.

Then, the heartbeat fills the room. It sounds perfect. Really fast, but strong and steady.

“Oh Shane,” he whispers, overcome as his eyes water, “the baby is perfect.”

“Very healthy,” Dr. Laveen echoes quietly. “Everyone looks right on track. I’m going to take some measurements now.”

“Shane?” Ilya prompts, voice gentle when Shane still doesn’t open his eyes. “You want to look?”

Shane pops an eye open, face-to-face with Ilya, who is crouched beside his head. “Is it…does it look okay? Really?”

“It looks perfect,” he says, smiling as he gives Shane’s hand another squeeze. “If you look now, you can start to see their little head.”

Hesitantly, Shane cranes his neck to the other side, eyes falling on the gray screen and widening. “Oh. That’s it?”

“That’s it,” Ilya replies gently. “That’s our baby.”

“Shit,” he breathes. “That’s inside me? It’s…it’s alive.”

“Yes,” Dr. Laveen says, “and development looks right on track. You’re doing great, Shane.”

It seems like all at once, the air in Shane’s body evacuates. He lets out a harsh exhale, shoulders falling flat against the cot, body going limp. His lashes flutter, and Ilya sees liquid pooling at the corners, but he blinks it away before it can fall.

“Hey,” Ilya murmurs, rubbing his thumb over Shane’s knuckles, “you hear that? Everyone is okay. Baby is all good. You are all good. Very *good* news.”

Shane nods, sniffing. “Y-yeah. I’m so relieved.”

“Let’s get you cleaned up, and we can talk through some things.” Dr. Laveen passes Shane a small paper to wipe the gel off his belly, and Ilya helps him clean off and sit up on the cot.

The rest of the appointment is swift. Shane has a few questions, mostly a pretty intense list of *do’s* and *don’ts* that he got online and wants her to verify. Ilya has his own questions, but it doesn't take too much longer before they’re back outside the clinic, both of them stocked up with ultrasound photos.

“This is so crazy,” Shane says, one hand on his belly, the other holding his strip of photos. “Like, the baby is *in here.* Just, in me.”

“It is crazy,” Ilya agrees, glancing around the parking lot. There’s a light patter of water that’s started overhead. “Hey, Shane, please drive carefully. Is going to rain.”

“I took an Uber,” he says.

“What?” Ilya turns to look at him with surprise.

“I was throwing up this morning, didn’t think I should drive.” Shane shrugs.

“Why- why didn’t you say something?”

Shane arches an eyebrow. “What difference does it make?”

Ilya’s skin feels weird and crawly. He can’t explain why, because Shane is a grown man and perfectly capable of handling himself, but the thought of him alone in the car with a stranger on a rainy highway for an hour is almost too much to bear.

“I will drive you home,” he offers.

“No, no, that would make today like a four hour round trip for you.”

“I do not mind. I will drive safer than an Uber.”

Shane snorts. “In that *Porsche?* Sure.”

“Precious cargo,” Ilya insists. “Please, let me. I want to. We can spend the hour talking about baby names. What do you think of Thor?”

At that, Shane bursts out laughing. “You’ve lost your fucking mind if you think that’s happening.”

“Da, well, we have much to discuss then. Come on.” He gestures for Shane to follow, and heads toward the lot.

Reluctantly, Shane tags behind. Ilya opens the passenger door for him, laughing when Shane rolls his eyes, but the other man climbs in anyway.

“You really don’t have to do this,” Shane insists.

“I know, I want to. We are supposed to be getting to know each other anyway, da? Tell me how you are feeling right now, after the appointment.”

Shane glances out the window, running his lower lip through his teeth furtively. “A little better, I guess. You?”

Ilya’s fingers tighten on the wheel marginally. “I am feeling very happy. Is that okay to say?”

Shane looks at him, eyes warming a bit. “You really are excited about this, aren't you?”

“Should I not be?”

“No it’s just…it’s nice, that’s all.” Shane reaches down and places his hand over his stomach, a protective, soothing movement. “It’s not exactly a perfect situation. Your…willingness to be involved is really great.”

“Of course I am involved,” Ilya says easily. “It is my baby, too, yes?”

“Yeah of course.”

Ilya hesitates, eyes focused on the road before he speaks again. “Like I told you, I do not have any parents left. My brother and I…we have a complicated relationship. This baby, to me, it is family already. I have always wanted this. So, I am very excited. Sorry you are feeling sick though. It will pass soon, I promise.”

Shane’s lips are curved into a smile when Ilya glances sideways at him. His brown eyes are gleaming, nose all scrunched up. He looks so cute like this, Ilya wants to park the car and devour him whole.

“What?” Ilya demands.

“I kind of didn’t realize it until it happened,” Shane says softly, “but I think I’ve always wanted this too.”

“Then we will be excited together,” Ilya tells him, hesitating briefly before he adds, “as friends.”

“Right.” Shane nods once, firmly. “Friends. And co-parents, I guess.”

“Our baby will get to ride in very cool cars.”

“The baby is *never* getting in this thing!”

“Shane, do you not see me driving speed limit? So safe!”

“And what if it crashes? This thing will crumble like a can of soda!” Shane shakes his head, rolling his eyes. “There’s not even a backseat, Ilya. Where would the baby go?”

“My other car has a backseat!”

“And what’s that?”

Ilya glances at him with a playful grimace. “It is a Mustang fastback. But-”

“Nope.” Shane holds a hand up with a shake of his head. “It’s lame ass SUV or no dice.”

“Oh, absolutely fucking not!”

Shane’s lips twitch again. “Dr. Rozanov is too cool to drive around in a minivan, is he?”

“He is, Shane. He has to draw the line somewhere. My cool shoes are not enough to make up for *that.”*

Shane laughs again, shaking his head as he leans back against the seat. “Fine, they can ride in the Mustang if there are two or three layers of bubble wrap around the carseat. Final offer.”

Ilya deliberates. “Is fair. Maybe they can borrow your hockey gear.”

Shane snorts. “I doubt it would fit for a while, but sure, why not.”

Ilya smiles at him, unable to help the lingering way he watches the light expression on Shane’s face. He’s most pretty when he’s relaxed like this, joking around, allowing Ilya *in* a little bit. It is sometimes hard for him to do, it seems.

The rest of the drive is uneventful. They argue over music, and crack jokes about the other’s taste, and stop in a drive-thru for gross smoothies Shane insists are nutritious. And for the first time since that night in the ER it feels…

Kind of normal. It is nice, like this, to pretend for a short time that all of this is normal and planned. They’re just two people, having a baby together, who just got to hear the little heartbeat for the first time. It’s exciting, happy, and content.

And then, Ilya pulls the car up to the front gates of Shane’s Montreal mansion, and Shane goes pale.

“What is wrong?” Ilya asks, following his gaze to the black SUV currently parked outside the front, inside the gates.

Shane looks at Ilya with panic in his eyes, breaths coming quickly.

“Whose car is that?” he demands, shoulders back, defensive in an instant.

“My parents,” Shane manages to get the words out, though they’re tense and stiff. “They’re here.”

“Oh.” Ilya looks back at the car, then to Shane’s petrified expression. “Well…I guess now is as good a time as any to tell them, da?”

“I-I guess,” he stammers. He looks between Ilya and the front door, clearly caught off guard.

“Hey,” Ilya says softly, “I can leave you in privacy, if you prefer. We do not have to drop so much on them at once. The baby *and* the strange guy. I get it, Shane.”

“No, no.” Shane reaches across the center console and grips Ilya’s wrist like a vice. “Will you come with me? Please? I don’t want to do this alone.”

While surprised by this request, Ilya is quick to cover Shane’s hand with his own, soothing. “Of *course.*”

“Okay.” Shane nods again, exhaling and inhaling shakily, like he’s hyping himself up. “Fuck. Okay. Let’s go tell my parents.”

With that, he opens the passenger door and steps outside. It takes all of five seconds before he’s leaning over, gripping the door in his pale fist, vomiting on the pavement.

“Oh, Shane.” Ilya rushes to his side, one hand braced on his back. He rubs small circles while Shane retches, shoulders heaving.

“Shane?!” An alarmed voice gets their attention, and Ilya looks over to see a woman rushing toward them from the front porch. She must have seen them from the window.

She looks a lot like Shane- similar skin tone, dark, sleek hair, a statuesque nose. She races toward them, stopping short just at the car door, and sizing up Ilya with speculative eyes.

“Hi,” he greets her weakly, still rubbing Shane’s back. “You must be Mrs. Hollander?”

“Shane, baby?” She ignores Ilya, worriedly reaching out to cup the back of Shane’s neck.

“M’fine,” he assures her, shaking his head as he tries to catch his breath. “M’okay, Mom.”

“What the hell is going on?” she demands, glancing between Shane and Ilya with disbelief.

“Can we just go inside?” Shane asks, shuddering. “I want to sit down.”

“Are you sick?”

“No, Mom, I’m-” Shane curses quietly, his arm shooting forward to grab something. Ilya is confused for half a second, until he realizes the ultrasound photos had slipped out of Shane’s hoodie pocket. He clutches them in his palm.

The woman’s eyes go wide, locking in on the strip of ultrasound photos, and then her son’s miserable expression.

“Shane-” she says haltingly, her voice almost a gasp.

Shane lifts his head to look at her, tears forming in the corners of his eyes, though he still does not allow them to fall.

“Mom,” he says, “we need to talk.”

Chapter End Notes

REGARDING THE MEDICAL TERMS AND TREATMENTS

- not a doctor
- this is def not medically accurate, just treat it like an episode of greys anatomy and LEAVE ME ALONE!!! JUST HAVE SOME FUN WIT IT!! IF YOU ARE A DOCTOR PLEASE JUST IGNORE THAT STUFF LMAOOO

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

sigh there I go ...updating the chapter count because.... i unfortunately see this going on far longer than i intended ....

regardless, i hope you enjoy!!

BE NICE AND READ THE WARNINGS! <3 (tags have been updated with this new chapter, and i PROMISE A HAPPY ENDING! I WRITE NOTHING ELSE.)

Shane's kitchen is a little more noisy today.

His father, David Hollander, is at the counter, making everyone sandwiches, while his mother Yuna paces back and forth beside the round mahogany table. She's pinching the bridge of her nose, eyes closed like she's trying to ward off a tension headache.

"You like tomatoes, Ilya?" David asks from the counter, holding up a slice of the juicy, red fruit.

"Oh, yes I do. Thank you. Are you sure you do not need help?"

"I've got it, thanks."

Ilya would really like to head over there and help him. If nothing more, than to give himself something to do and perhaps loosen the target he feels on his chest from Yuna's occasional sharp glare.

"Are you sure about this?" Yuna asks, speaking suddenly after her solid five minutes of mostly silent pacing.

Shane lifts his head from his hands, where he's been seated beside Ilya at the table. He looks rough. Aside from the sickness, the anxiety and tension are visible all over his face. His mother isn't taking the news *well.*

"I'm sure, Mom," he says, voice flat and stiff. "I've thought about it a lot."

"What about the season?" she asks, leaning against the back of one of the chairs. She's mostly only looking at Shane, like she's trying to pretend Ilya isn't there. "We have that shoot in February with Speedo. Oh my god you'll be seven months pregnant by then!"

“Yuna,” David says gently, his tone not unkind, but something akin to a warning.

“Not right now, David,” she says back, tone equally as admonishing. She turns back to Shane, hands on her hips. “I mean, seriously Shane, have you *really* thought this through? I remember how it feels at first, I know you’re getting this rush of hormones and feelings that are probably very confusing, but this is a *baby.* A child, your child. That’s for life. And with-” She pauses, turning to look at Ilya. “I’m sorry, Ilya, I’m sure you’re a very nice man. But you two are *strangers.* Complete strangers!”

“Mom, please.” Shane presses his fingers into his forehead. “I’m twenty-seven years old, I can make these kinds of decisions myself. You don't have to manage every single thing I do.”

“Well obviously I do, Shane! How could you be so irresponsible? And you?” Yuna looks at Ilya again. “How old are *you*, to be a doctor? Older than my son, I know that.”

“I am thirty-six,” Ilya replies easily. He figures it’s best to let whatever feelings she needs to have happen, happen.

“He’s barely older than me,” Shane deadpans, “and stop acting like this. I’m a grown man. I already talked to my coach and I’m on IR for the rest of the season. I’ll go back after the baby is born, it’s not like I’m retiring or something.”

Before Yuna can reply, David comes over to the table and sets down two plates, one in front of Ilya and one in front of Shane. It’s two turkey sandwiches, with sliced fresh tomatoes, provolone cheese, avocado, mayonnaise, and toasted brioche bread. He’s kindly diced up some fruit on the side.

“Thank you,” Ilya says to him, trying to keep the disbelief out of his voice. His own father had never prepared him a meal, even one as easy as a sandwich. Is this something Shane’s father does often, or is he just feeling out of sorts because of the news?

“Shane, gotta try to eat something bud,” David says to him, with a perfunctory pat on the shoulder.

“Didn’t the doctor say deli meat and cheese were, like, a thing?” Shane asks Ilya, looking hesitantly at the sandwich.

“She said it was up to you,” Ilya replies, “this cheese is pasteurized, so it is fine. There is risk of listeria with deli meat, so they say to use caution, but I know a lot of people who ate it anyway.”

Shane looks at his sandwich for a moment, like he’s debating. Then, after a beat, he removes the top slice of bread and takes off the turkey, dropping it onto Ilya’s plate, before reassembling his sandwich, sans deli meat.

“Don’t want to risk it,” he says simply.

Ilya smiles at him, warmth filling his chest.

Yuna clears her throat, startling them both, and Ilya remembers that he and Shane are not in fact the only two people in the room.

“You’re serious about this?” she asks Shane, voice a little softer this time.

“Yeah,” he says back. It’s somewhat curt, but Ilya thinks that’s earned after the way she’s reacted.

“Well, that’s great,” David says, circling his arm around Yuna’s tense shoulders, “we’re gonna be grandparents, babe.”

“Oh, Shane.” Her eyes well with tears, and she’s moving toward him. Shane stands quickly, bracing himself on the tabletop with a palm planted there, and allows his mom to pull him in for a hug. It takes a half second before he’s wrapping his arms around her too, burying his face in the crook of her neck.

Safety.

Ilya recognizes it immediately. That cozy, soft feeling of knowing you have somewhere to run to when things get too scary. The sturdy, tender embrace of a mother- a soft place to land when the going gets rough.

Something Ilya has not had himself since he was twelve years old.

“I love you,” Yuna says to Shane, fierce and passionate. “I want everything good for you, Shane. I love you so much.”

“I know, Mom. I know. I love you too. I’ve got this, okay? I got it.”

“I know you do. You’ve never seen a challenge and not taken it.”

Shane laughs, but it’s a wet sound, more vulnerable than Ilya has heard him yet.

“Okay, so how was the appointment? Everyone is healthy?” Yuna pulls back and wipes her thumbs across Shane’s cheeks.

Shane nods, sniffling. “Yeah, yeah everything looks good. Ilya got me some prenatal vitamins and stuff, and uh- the morning sickness has been pretty terrible but I have some meds for that too.”

“I was the same way,” she commiserates. Then, she glances at Ilya, and sighs. “I haven’t made the best first impression.”

“It is a lot to take in, I know,” he says, getting to his feet to face her.

“The sandwiches will get soggy,” David says, bringing over two more plates, “let’s all sit down, Shane is eating for two.”

The four of them arrange themselves around the table, sandwiches in front of them. David and Yuna share a glass of wine, while Ilya and Shane each nurse a ginger ale.

“I was coming over to tell you that Reebok is interested in extending your contract,” Yuna says after swallowing a bite of sandwich. “Though I noticed you were wearing Nikes today. In public.”

“Mom.”

“Sorry, sorry. Are you interested? Just because you’re off the ice doesn’t mean the endorsements need to stop. Plenty of pregnant people still do commercials.”

Shane adjusts in his chair.

“You do commercials?” Ilya inquires, arching an eyebrow at Shane.

“Sometimes,” Shane replies, taking a nibble of the corner of his sandwich. “Small ones.”

“He’s an ambassador for Speedo, Reebok, Rolex, and Armani,” Yuna says.

“Wow.” *That explains the giant house.* “You are busy man.”

“Work hard, play hard,” Shane mutters with a shrug.

“You oughtta take it easy for a little while, Shane,” David suggests. “You’re always go go go. You’re gonna need some rest.”

“I could not agree more,” Ilya says with a nod.

Shane and Yuna fix him with a simultaneous, frighteningly similar stare.

“What did I say?” he demands.

“Just because I’m pregnant doesn’t mean I’m going to just sit around all day,” Shane says, “you have to work to keep what you’ve earned.”

“And I hope you don’t think you can just waltz in and try to impress him because you’re a doctor,” Yuna adds, “Shane is independently wealthy. He doesn’t need help.”

“Yuna,” David chides gently.

Ilya blinks. *Okay,* intense.

“Sorry,” Shane amends, looking contrite. “Mom and I can be intense.”

“I see that,” he muses. “I imagine it’s why you are so successful. I would never assume Shane *needs* my help, but I am committed to being here and giving it to him, whenever he wants it.”

David nods approvingly in his direction.

“I appreciate it, Ilya.” Shane offers him a fractional smile. He looks back at his parents, sighing. “I know this isn’t what you envisioned for me, and I know it’s kind of…well, it’s really weird and sudden. But can you please just be supportive? I’m happy about this. Ilya is a good guy, he’ll be a great dad. And hopefully I will too.”

“You will,” Ilya says immediately, touched down to his core at Shane’s effortlessly kind words.

Shane meets his eyes, gratitude shining there.

“Of course we’re supportive,” David says, “families come in all shapes and sizes, right?”

“Very true,” Yuna agrees mildly. “If you’re happy, we’re happy honey.”

“Thank you.” Shane exhales, glancing down at his sandwich with a grimace. “I’m sorry Dad, I can’t eat this.”

“Are you feeling sick again?” Ilya asks, hovering.

He nods. “I don’t know why, usually I love avocados, I just…” He presses a hand to his mouth and inhales sharply. “M’sorry, one sec.”

Shane is up like a shot, darting down the hall toward the bathroom. Yuna and Ilya both stand at the same time, moving in his direction.

Yuna stops herself in the doorway, and Ilya meets her eyes, uncertain- afraid to overstep.

“You go,” she says, with what is surely a considerable amount of restraint. “He seems…very comfortable with you.”

“Thank you.” Ilya nods and heads for the bathroom door, knocking gently with the tips of his knuckles. “Shane? It’s me. Can I come in?”

“It’s gross in here,” Shane replies.

Ilya smiles. “I am used to gross, Shane. I have performed bowel disimpactions.”

“What the *fuck* does that mean Ilya?!”

“It means you are not gross, I promise. Can I get you anything?”

“I think I could take some more of the Zofran,” Shane croaks, “and maybe some water.”

“I will get it now.”

Ilya makes a quick scuffle for the water and meds, and returns, carefully opening the bathroom door. Shane is sprawled out in front of the toilet, panting, a gleam of sweat on his forehead. It’s sort of ridiculous, that he could manage to look ethereally beautiful here, and now, but he does.

“Pills and water.” Ilya holds them out to him, lowering himself to the floor beside Shane and leaning against the sink.

“I’m sorry for bombarding you with all of that,” Shane huffs, sipping the water as he lets the Zofran tablets dissolve. “You handled it well. She can be a lot.”

“She is protective of you,” Ilya says, “you are her baby.”

“Yeah.” Shane smiles faintly, placing his hand over his belly with a longing sigh. “I hope this doesn’t last too long.”

“I hope so too.”

Shane looks down at his shaking hands, sighing again.

“Shane?” Ilya prompts gently.

“Yeah?” He looks over at the other man, arching an eyebrow.

Ilya smiles. “Whatever happens, we handle it together, da?”

“Right.” Shane’s lips quirk up. “Together.”

There isn’t much time to reply, before Shane is leaning over the toilet again, retching. Ilya rubs his back worriedly, and tries to keep his mind focused on the positives.

They are doing this together.

Shane is diagnosed with hyperemesis gravidarum at twelve weeks pregnant.

It’s not an adjustment, not really, because Shane has been sick the entire time. There’s nothing that can be done for him outside of symptom management. They get him on a B6 supplement, keep the Zofran prescription, and encourage him to replenish his electrolytes religiously. Ilya orders liquid IVs to his house, and sends Gatorade from his Instacart account, standing in the on-call room at work.

He feels helpless.

On his days off, he makes the drive to Montreal and makes Shane lunch, whenever he’ll eat. He watches the hollows of Shane’s cheeks, the slant in his jaw, the dark circles under his eyes.

He worries.

Shane texts him regularly. As the weeks progress, so does his pregnancy. One morning, the week before their 20 week checkup, Ilya awakens to his phone buzzing.

He turns it over, rubbing sleep from his eyes, propped up on his elbow. He smiles almost instinctively at the sight of Shane’s name, lashes fluttering as he scans the screen to read the message.

SHANE HOLLANDER: *Hey, I think someone is finally trying to make themselves known.*

Curious, Ilya clicks on the attachment, eyes going wide as a photo pops up. It’s an image of Shane, standing in front of the mirror in his bathroom, one hand lifting the hem of his t-shirt.

His belly, once a taut, firm band of muscle and hard lines, is rounded out. There are some small, faded white stretch marks on the underside of his tummy, nothing too noticeable yet, but the bump is visible. Shane's smiling in the picture, despite the tiredness in his eyes.

Ilya immediately presses the call button.

"Well, good morning." Shane's voice comes through the speaker, sounding amused.

"You popped," Ilya says breathlessly.

"I *what?"*

"Your belly, you popped. The baby. I can see it."

"Oh, yeah! Took them long enough, I'm halfway there. Definitely no hiding it now."

Ilya blinks rapidly, trying to keep his eyes dry. For some reason, the sight of Shane's bump has brought a swell of emotion to his chest.

"How do you feel?" he asks.

"I feel kinda nauseous," he replies with a dry chuckle. "But I'm used to that."

Ilya swallows, tension stiffening his jaw. "Have you taken your Zofran today? Were you able to eat any breakfast?"

"Yes and yes. Some plain toast. That was an hour ago, so far safe."

"Very nice, Shane. What can I do for you, mm? Want me to send something? Do you have enough-"

"Ilya, you've sent me enough Gatorade and liquid IV to survive an apocalypse. I'm alright. Thank you, though." Shane's voice softens a bit. "You're taking such good care of us. And you really don't have to do all of that, you know."

A strange, muted pride builds in Ilya's stomach at those words. *You're taking such good care of us.* Yes, that is what he wants to do. Take care of Shane. Take care of their baby. For as long as he's able to.

"Da, I know," he replies quietly, "I am just trying to see how quickly I can take up all the space in that big house. How many cases of Gatorade will it take to make your living room unusable?"

Shane laughs. "You're gonna have to get a *few* more to accomplish that."

"I am a determined man, Shane Hollander, I get things done."

"Yeah, I can tell." Shane chuckles again. "So, are you heading into work?"

"In an hour or so."

“Ah, I should probably let you go so you can get ready.”

“Mm, no, tell me about *your* plans for the day.” Ilya puts the phone on speaker and climbs out of bed, trying to pretend he isn’t suspiciously interested in the comings and goings of Shane’s life.

It’s normal. They’re friends, right? Friends care like this. Friends get butterflies at the sight of their friend’s pregnant bellies. Friends want to spend every waking moment in contact with each other.

He’s pretty sure.

Ilya prepares for work while Shane tells him about his plans to do a light workout and have a zoom meeting with some brand execs about securing a deal for a maternity workout gear line. One thing Ilya has come to learn about Shane, he’s not very good at relaxing. *Idle hands* are bad for his mental health, it would seem. And his mom is an encouraging force in that workhorse ethic. They are close, but she and his father live here in Ottawa, so she mostly hounds him by phone about his obligations outside of hockey. She is a good mother, that much Ilya knows from meeting her a few times, but Shane definitely grew up under intense pressure.

It’s difficult to end the call, to say goodbye as Ilya pulls into the hospital parking lot. But, Shane promises to let him know if the baby does anything *interesting* (ie, finally moving enough that Shane can feel it from the outside).

“Take care of yourself,” Ilya says, trying not to let the worry infect his words.

“I will,” Shane replies, “you too. Have a safe shift.”

“Mm. I will.”

The line disconnects, and Ilya is left staring at the photo of Shane’s bump. He swallows the lump in his throat, running his fingertip over the contours of Shane’s body, his tired smile, his thick dark hair.

He is so beautiful and funny. It almost does not seem real, that he’s agreed to do this with Ilya- bring life into the world together.

Ilya often wondered as a boy, why on earth his mother had ended up with his father. His dad was a crude, violent, angry man, with little to no patience for anyone other than himself. He was cold, uncaring and unkind- he made life pretty miserable for Ilya growing up.

But his Mama? She was wonderful. She was beautiful and funny, and so, so *sad.* As a physician with many years of practicing under his belt, and someone who has been to therapy consistently since graduating residency, Ilya knows now that the term for what she had was *clinical depression.* Being in an abusive relationship and raising two kids with no support, well, that didn’t *help* her clinical situation. But she also didn’t get the care and treatment she needed.

Her death, a suicide, was the final symptom of her ailment. It wasn't something Ilya could have prevented at twelve years old, but he spent a lot of years feeling the opposite.

If she had had anyone around who could've helped- a doctor, a loved one, fuck even a neighbor who noticed…

Maybe she would still be here.

Ilya shakes his head, trying to clear it of these thoughts. He takes a long, deep inhale, and lets the breath out, trying to regulate himself. He has to leave these things outside the hospital- compartmentalize, however he can. He cannot drag these things into the exam room.

He gets out of the car, and heads for the front doors.

It's Svetlana's birthday today. Ilya and a few of the nurses had arranged for a cake and flower delivery to come to her at noon. It sits on the staffroom table now, the words *"HAPPY 30TH SVETA!"* already half eaten, so it now reads *"HA 3 SVE"*.

It's German chocolate, her favorite.

Luckily, she and Ilya finish their shifts at the same time, so he sits with her at the table, paper plates weighed down by big slices of cake. She's wearing the earrings he got her, small diamond studs that glimmer underneath the ringlets of curls falling from her bun.

"You spoil me, Ilyusha," she says to him in Russian.

"Sveta, it is cake and earrings, relax," he replies back. It's always nice getting to speak his native language with her when it's just the two of them. "I hope that girlfriend of yours does some actual spoiling."

Sveta grins, wagging her eyebrows. "She is taking me out to a fancy restaurant in New York this weekend."

"Ah, so it is getting serious." He smiles at her, taking a bite of cake.

"Well, it's not like I'm having a baby with her," she replies pointedly.

Ilya's expression sours. "Shane and I-"

"Are having a baby together."

"Yes, but that does not mean-"

"That you are in love?" She arches an eyebrow, smiling wickedly. "Please. I have never heard you talk about one person so much before. You are so obsessed."

"Stop," he warns her. "We are taking it slowly. We are friends. It is cleaner that way. Safer."

"Why?" she demands, leaning on her fist as she takes a bite of her own cake.

“Because-” *Because he wanted to do it this way.* “Because we are being smart. For the baby. You know how many parents break up and it is traumatic for the baby?”

“Divorced parents, so yes.” She rolls her eyes. “Still, that does not mean you and Shane-”

“Shane and I have known each other for all of five months,” he reminds her.

“But you-”

Her words are interrupted by the sound of Ilya’s phone ringing. He swiftly puts it to his ear, expecting it to be an urgent call about a patient that might help him escape this conversation.

“Hello, Dr. Rozanov,” he says into the receiver.

“Doctor *who?”* comes the voice on the line.

Ilya frowns, pulling the phone back to look at the caller ID. His confusion is amplified when he reads Shane’s name on the screen.

He puts the phone back to his ear, perplexed, “Shane?”

“No. Shit, is this Ilya? You’re a *doctor?”*

“Who is this?” Ilya demands. The voice on the other line is most certainly not Shane’s. “Where is Shane?”

“What’s going on?” Sveta whispers, looking concerned.

“My name is Hayden Pike. I’m Shane’s best friend. I am in the ER with him in Montreal right now-”

“The ER?” Ilya gets to his feet immediately. “What-”

“He’s okay! He’s fine. They just finished giving him some fluids. He got a little dehydrated from all the throwing up. They’re about to discharge him. He asked me to call you. Um, you *did* know he was pregnant, right?”

In the background, Ilya can hear a muffled voice say, “of *course* he fucking knows!”

“Well *I* didn't know!” This man, Hayden, hits back.

Ilya’s heart is thundering in his chest. “Is he okay? The baby, is the baby okay?”

“Everyone’s fine,” Hayden says, “I swung by Shane’s house to check on him, he’s been flakey lately. And now, obviously, I know why. Anyway, he answered the door looking pretty rough, and more *pregnant* than I was expecting. After we talked he got up to get some water and he sort of took a dip.”

“What does this mean?” Ilya demands as he grabs his coat from the staffroom cubby. “Took a dip?”

“He blacked out a little bit,” Hayden says.

“Oh my god,” Ilya mutters. “Put him on.”

“Hey, listen, he asked *me* to talk to you, he’s not feeling up to it. You should respect his wishes.”

“Hayden!” Shane’s voice in the background. “If he wants to talk, give me the phone.”

“You heard him,” Ilya snaps back, irritated. There’s a shuffling, and he presses the phone to his chest to quickly tell Sveta, “Shane’s in the ER. I have to go. Will update you. Happy birthday.”

She nods in understanding and watches as he puts the phone to his ear and exits.

“Ilya?” Shane’s voice comes through the receiver, weak and haggard. He sounds exhausted, poor thing.

“Shane,” he breathes, relief creeping into his words at the fact that he’s at least able to speak, “*Solnyshko,* are you okay? I am on my way. Leaving the hospital now.”

“Ilya- wait, was that Russian?”

“Shane.”

“What does that word mean?”

“It means tell me if you are okay! What is happening?”

“I’m okay,” Shane assures him, voice gentle. “They gave me an IV with fluids and more Zofran. I’m just dehydrated. I guess I haven’t been drinking enough Gatorade. I’m sorry, I’m really trying.”

“Why are you *apologizing* to him?” Hayden demands from the background.

“Because I could’ve hurt the baby!” Shane snaps back.

“Shane,” Ilya interjects softly, “is not your fault, please do not say this. You are going through hell with the HG, I know. You are doing your best. I’m driving up now, getting in the car, okay? What hospital?”

“Ilya, I’ll be home in twenty minutes, they’re about to discharge me. It’s not worth the-”

“I’m coming, Shane. I’ll be there as soon as I can.” Ilya’s tone is deadly serious.

“Okay,” Shane replies, “meet me at the house.”

They disconnect, and Ilya gets behind the wheel, teeth gritted.

Two hours is insufferable tonight.

Ilya is exhausted from his long shift, and panicking about Shane's health, and worried for their baby. Shane is so far away. He's *too* far away. This isn't working. He's alone up there in Montreal. God, what if his stupid friend had not shown up? He would have been *alone* when he passed out this time.

He drives with his knuckles white around the steering wheel. When Shane's place finally comes into view, he smashes the passcode for the gate buzzer, and parks hastily.

He knocks harshly on the front door.

The man who answers is utterly unimpressive. Sort of tall, lean muscle, light brown hair and elfish features. He looks Ilya up and down, like he's judging a painting at an art fair.

And he knows it shouldn't, but it fucking *kills* that this guy is answering Shane's door while Ilya is knocking like some delivery driver.

"Where is Shane?" he asks urgently.

"You're Russian?" This man, presumably Hayden, asks.

"No I'm Jamaican," he deadpans, eyes narrowed.

Hayden wrinkles his nose. "You think that's funny? After the day we've had-"

"Let me in," Ilya growls, interrupting him.

"Hayd," a tired voice calls from inside. "Stop it. Please."

With visible reluctance, Hayden steps aside, allowing Ilya's entry. Ilya brushes in, heading straight for where he'd heard Shane's voice.

He finds him in the living room. He's curled up on the sofa, a quilt wrapped around his body and pulled up over his dark hair. His face is pale, sort of gaunt, freckles stark against hollow cheeks. He's a little haunting, his normally cherubic face thin and frail.

Still, he's the most beautiful person Ilya has ever laid eyes on.

"Shane," he breathes, rushing toward him, "*dorogoy*, I am here, are you okay?"

"I'm okay," Shane assures him, offering Ilya a weak smile as the other man comes to sit beside him on the sofa. "I'm so embarrassed. Two trips to the ER in a few months. What a mess."

Unable to help himself, Ilya reaches out and brushes the back of his hand across Shane's cheek. "You are cold, Shane. What did they give you? This is not okay."

"Fluids and Zofran," he says, leaning back against the pillows.

“Did they weigh you?” he pries.

Shane grimaces. “Yeah, I lost a pound since our last OB visit, but they said it could just be water weight shed.”

Ilya looks at him worriedly.

“I’m okay,” Shane repeats, extending his arm from the quilt to squeeze Ilya’s wrist, “the baby is okay, they even did an ultrasound just to be sure. She’s fine, growing right on track and everything.”

Ilya pauses. “She?”

Shane’s eyes go wide, jaw falling slack. “Oh. Ilya. I’m so sorry. They thought I knew and they told me- I know we were going to keep it a surprise- I wasn’t gonna tell you! Oh, I’m so sorry!”

Ilya stops his freakout with a gentle squeeze. “Hey, is okay. Shane, we are having a daughter?”

Shane nods, blinking rapidly, exhaling. “Y-yeah. A girl. She’s a girl.”

“Oh my god.” Ilya presses a hand to his mouth, trying to contain his rapidly shifting feelings. He’s a little overwhelmed between concern and pure unfettered joy at this revelation.

“I’m sorry,” Shane repeats, voice thick with emotion.

“Hey, no sorry. This is wonderful news.” Ilya smiles at him, needing Shane to stop looking so fucking *guilty.* “She is okay, and you are okay, da?”

“He’s really not.”

They both turn to look at Hayden, who has come to stand in the doorway with his hands on his hips.

“Hayden,” Shane warns.

“No, Shane, he should know. You wouldn’t let me call your parents.” Hayden turns to Ilya. “The doctor at the ER was very concerned that Shane is living alone right now. If I hadn’t been here, and he’d passed out…he could have gotten really hurt. She thought it best if he stays with someone else for the duration of the pregnancy.”

“I agree,” Ilya says immediately.

“Ilya!” Shane exclaims, looking betrayed.

“I offered to let him stay with me and my family,” Hayden says.

“And I refused,” Shane reminds him.

“He needs to go stay with his parents in Ottawa,” Hayden continues. “It’s not safe for him and the baby to be here alone like this. Not with his condition.”

“I am in agreement,” Ilya says again, turning to Shane with his expression softening. “You need to have support, Shane. What if you had been alone tonight? What if you had hit your head, or worse?”

The *or worse* hangs in the air between them, painful and tense.

“I-I’m not living with my parents,” Shane insists, shaking his head. “They have their own lives, they travel, they work, I won't burden them with this.”

“Shane, your parents wouldn’t mind-” Hayden starts to argue, but Shane shoots him a withering look.

“I won’t,” he repeats, shaking his head stubbornly. “Lots of pregnant people live alone! This is not an anomaly.”

“Shane,” Ilya says tentatively, reaching his hand back out to rub his thumb along Shane’s wrist. “It is not that you are not independent, but you have a serious medical condition. I am getting worried. You are thin, and tired, and passing out from not getting enough fluids and food. HG is real and it’s very hard on your body. You need to be looked after. Anyone would, in your position.”

“That’s what I tried to tell him,” Hayden mumbles.

“Well, you obviously did not do a good job,” Ilya bites back.

Hayden scowls at him.

“I can’t burden my parents with this,” Shane repeats, “I don’t want them having to babysit me. I’m almost thirty years old.”

Ilya hesitates, glancing at Hayden before he looks back to Shane. “Well, *I* also live in Ottawa, Shane. You could stay with me.”

Hayden scoffs from behind him.

Shane’s eyes soften, brows furrowing. “What?”

“Better than living with your parents, da? We could be roommates. Just until you are feeling well enough to be on your own again,” he suggests.

“Shane is not *moving in with you,”* Hayden says, “he barely knows you.”

“He is having my baby,” Ilya snarls.

“Only because somehow an almost forty-year old *doctor* doesn’t know how condoms work!” Hayden argues.

Ilya's jaw clenches.

"Okay, enough," Shane says, wiping at his face with the back of his hand. "Ilya, are you serious about this?"

"Of course," Ilya rests a hand on his knee over the quilt, squeezing once. "You'd be close to your family, and you'd have someone there with you in case you need anything."

"I couldn't ask you to-"

"Shane, stop. You are not asking." Ilya hesitates, then smiles softly. "You can water my plants for me while I work. Will make it a very good deal for me, actually. Be a big help."

Shane's lips twitch. "Really?"

"Oh yes, they need watering. Very badly."

"Shane you can't be serious," Hayden says in disbelief.

"This is none of your business," Ilya snaps at him.

"Okay, Ilya," Shane answers, redirecting his attention. He smiles weakly, the dark circles under his eyes look deep and heavy. "I'm paying rent, though. I'm not a freeloader."

"Shane, you are growing us a human being inside your body. Is not freeloading. You are already doing everything."

"Oh gimme a break," Hayden mutters.

Just as Ilya is about to tell him *exactly* what he'd like to break of Hayden's, Shane intervenes again. "Hayd, thank you for everything today. I know I scared the shit out of you, I'm sorry."

At that, the other man's expression gets gentler. "It's alright, man. I just wish you'd told me about this earlier. You know you don't always have to handle everything on your own, right?"

"Not anymore," Ilya adds.

"I maintain that *this* is a bad idea." Hayden waves his hand between them. "Shane, when you get tired of living with this guy, just call me, okay? Offer stands. Jackie and the kids would love to have you."

"You are married?" Ilya asks disdainfully. What kind of woman could have such low self esteem?

Hayden rolls his eyes. "Yeah, someone actually chose to commit to *me."*

Okay, that one hurt a little.

"You two got off really on the wrong foot," Shane says with a frown. Ilya feels contrite immediately. He looks so exhausted, and here Ilya is making things more stressful for him.

“Did you eat dinner?” he asks quietly, reaching back out to rest his hand on Shane’s knee through the quilt.

Shane shakes his head. “I really don’t think I can stomach it.”

“What about something easy and light? Some soup? You liked the one I made for you last month, didn’t you?”

He hesitates. “That was a lot of work for you, and it’s late, and you just drove-”

“Mm. Sit. I will make soup.” Ilya pats his leg and gets to his feet, ignoring the crack in his joints. Shane smiles up at him, that sleepy, gentle little smile he gives when he’s afraid he’s asking for too much, just by allowing someone else to care about him.

“Thank you,” he says solemnly.

“Is just soup, Shane.” Ilya winks and heads for the kitchen. He hears Hayden sit down beside Shane, and their low voices commence. He does not eavesdrop.

By the time he re-enters, soup warming his hands, he finds Shane asleep on the couch. He’s sprawled over the armrest, cheek smushed up into his bicep, lashes drawn down on his freckled cheeks. His other arm is circled around the swollen bump underneath his hoodie, a protective gesture he moves to even in his sleep. Ilya’s heart feels a little static-y at the sight of his belly in person. That’s their *daughter* in there, growing.

“Don’t wake him,” Hayden whispers from his spot on the loveseat.

“I wouldn’t,” Ilya says. He sits down and sets the soup on the coffee table between them, wringing his hands together before he looks back at Shane’s friend. “How was he today, really?”

Hayden exhales, shaking his head a little. “Scared me shitless. The dust had just settled on me realizing he’s fucking halfway through a pregnancy none of us knew about and then he just- he just hit the deck, man.”

“That must have been scary,” Ilya murmurs, a surprising note of sympathy in his voice for this man he isn’t very fond of.

“No shit, I just said that.”

Sympathy retracted.

“Why hadn’t he told you about it?” Ilya inquires, brows furrowed. “You said you are his best friend?”

Hayden sighs. “That’s just Shane. He’s a stubborn, hyper-independent motherfucker, always has been.”

“Mm, I have noticed,” Ilya agrees quietly. “So he has always been this way?”

“Since I’ve known him,” Hayden says, “probably since forever. He hasn’t exactly had it easy.”

Ilya arches an eyebrow curiously.

“Not surprised he hasn’t talked about it much,” Hayden admits, “he *hates* being reminded that he’s…*different.”*

“Different?” Ilya’s voice is utterly perplexed. Shane is a young, wealthy, handsome professional athlete. Ilya isn’t sure how *othered* he really could be feeling.

“Not sure how much you know about the NHL,” Hayden says, “but it’s kind of…*straight-white-guy*-centered.”

Oh.

“Oh,” Ilya repeats aloud, “because he is Asian? And…”

“Gay,” Hayden fills in for him.

“So, he is out?”

Hayden grimaces. “Not on purpose.”

Oh.

“He was outed a few years ago,” Hayden continues, “it wasn’t pretty at first. But the team came around. Most of the fans, too. The thing is he kind of…he kind of just tried to pretend it wasn’t happening, you know? He wanted everything to stay the same. But he’s always worked twice as much, fought twice as hard, given the most of himself out of any of us. Like he’s got something to prove.” The other man turns to look at Shane’s sleeping form, his eyes sad, a bit mournful. “Like, if he can be the *best*, if he can do it all on his own, if he can leave no room for doubt, no one can ever say he hasn’t earned his place. Do you get what I mean?”

Ilya swallows thickly, eyes following Hayden’s gaze over to Shane. “I understand.”

And Ilya does. Now, hearing this from Hayden’s mouth, thinking back on all of the things he’s noticed about Shane, it all does make sense. His insistence on being independent, not getting romantically involved with Ilya, lying about his name during their first hookup, putting up these walls and distances to protect himself behind an iron curtain.

You have nothing to prove, Ilya yearns to tell him, *not to me, Shane.*

“He definitely doesn’t want anyone else on the team finding out about the pregnancy,” Hayden says, “he already has a hard enough time keeping their respect. I’m sure he would think this just makes him look weak.”

Ilya’s expression softens sympathetically. “Is ridiculous. He is the strongest person I know.”

“Me too,” Hayden agrees, “but, you know, brains can be tricky.”

“Very true,” Ilya says.

“Well.” Hayden gets to his feet with a huff of air, patting his thighs as he stands. “I’ll get out of his hair. I assume you’re staying here tonight?”

Ilya glances at Shane’s sleeping form, then back to Hayden, and nods. “Until he orders me away.”

Hayden eyes him for a moment, the scrutiny a little intense. “Don’t fuck this up, alright? Shane’s a good person. He’s my best friend. He’s- he doesn’t deserve that, okay?”

Ilya runs through a rolodex of snarky replies in his brain, beginning with the fact that he could knock Hayden on his ass with one swift uppercut, and ending with all the ways Hayden probably doesn’t satisfy that poor wife of his.

In the end, he just nods, and quietly replies, “I won’t.”

Hayden seems placated. “Alright. See you around, I guess.”

“Likewise, I guess.”

The door shuts behind him, and Ilya is left standing in Shane’s gigantic foyer. He looks up at the high vaulted ceilings and wonders if maybe, this cavernous house isn’t some sort of status symbol to Shane.

Maybe it’s just the only place he doesn’t have to hide.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

HIII!!

i updated the tags but general mature content warnings here for a rough night at ilya's job (mostly just mentions, not very in detail) there is a patient who dies and he thinks about his mother and father

I HOPE YOU ENJOY PLEASE BE NICE TO ME IM NOT A PROFESSIONAL IM JUST HAVING SO MUCH FUN WRITING THIS AND I HOPE YOU ARE ENJOYING READING IT TOO THANK YOU !!!!

The first thing Ilya does is buy five houseplants.

He orders them from a local nursery for expedited delivery, needing them to beat Shane there. He helps Shane pack up a few suitcases. Clothing, hygiene products, books and electronics, and oddly enough his skates.

“I don’t think you will be needing those, Shane,” Ilya says with uncertainty in his eyes.

Shane eyes the skates with a longing gleam in his gaze, brows furrowed. Ilya frowns, noting how melancholy he appears at the thought of not needing his skates.

“We will pack them,” Ilya decides, “maybe when you are feeling better you can teach me how to skate, da?”

“You don’t know how to skate?” Shane looks surprised by this.

“I used to go with my mom, on the lake outside as a kid,” Ilya says, absentmindedly zipping up Shane’s toiletries bag, “but not since I was little.”

“Oh, your mom liked to skate?” Shane’s voice is politely interested, soft around the edges, like he knows he’s toeing around delicate water.

“Mhm,” Ilya replies briefly.

Shane doesn’t seem to pick up on Ilya’s hesitance. “It must have been hard, losing her?”

Ilya clears his throat. “Of course. She was my mom.”

“Right.” Shane’s brow furrows, and he looks down at his belly, seeming embarrassed. “Sorry. Stupid question.”

At that, Ilya softens a bit. He sets the toiletries bag down and crosses the room, picking up the suitcase Shane is currently trying to stuff the skates into.

“Let me help,” he says gently, removing Shane’s hands from the skates and carefully rearranging some things in the suitcase to better slide them in.

It’s quiet, briefly, while he works, but he can feel Shane’s eyes on him.

“What is it, hm?” Ilya asks, glancing up to look at Shane through his eyelashes. “You are asking questions with your face but not your mouth.”

“No I’m not,” he says immediately.

“You are a bad liar, *Hayden.”*

Shane’s cheeks flush red, brightening under his freckles. He scoffs, crossing his arms over the round swell of his belly. Standing there in gray joggers and a big *Metros* pullover, his stance slightly bowlegged from the added weight, he really does look utterly adorable.

“I guess I was just wondering,” he says, sort of haltingly, “will…the people in your life…you know, *your* Haydens…be okay with this? Me moving into your space? I mean- have you told anyone about all of this?”

“I told Svetlana,” Ilya replies easily, “she is my best friend, and we work together.”

“Svetlana,” Shane says the name like he’s feeling out the way it sounds on his tongue. “Your best friend?”

“Yes.” Ilya nods, setting the suitcase by the door and leaning against the frame with his arms crossed. “I er- well, full transparency, we also used to hook up sometimes.”

Shane blinks, surprised. “Oh.”

“Not for a while, she has had a girlfriend for almost a year now.”

“She- oh.” Shane’s jaw stiffens, brown eyes burning with an emotion Ilya can’t quite read. “So, you used to *hook up* and you are best friends and you work together? You see her like, all the time.”

“Da, yes.” Ilya nods. “She is fun, she likes hockey, you’d probably have lots to talk about with her. Her girlfriend is Rose Landry, an actress.”

“Heard of her,” Shane says briskly. He walks past Ilya through the door, reaching down to pick up his suitcase.

“Hey, I’ve got that.” Ilya moves to take it from him, but Shane recoils.

“I can carry it,” he insists. “It isn’t heavy.”

With that, he heads for the stairs.

Ilya watches him go, confused by the way the air had suddenly been sucked out of the room between them.

He grabs the other bags and follows Shane, who is already making his way out to the car. He’d insisted on driving himself so his car would be in Ottawa, which Ilya supposes makes sense. He doesn’t *love* the idea of Shane making the two-hour schlep when he’s in such rough shape, but he’ll be following him the whole way in case anything goes wrong.

Shane is trying to shove his bag into the hatchback of his modern SUV, but there’s a veritable locker room full of hockey equipment back there. Ilya had taken his Porsche, so he doesn’t really have the room.

“Hockey needs a lot of stuff,” Ilya notes.

“Yeah,” Shane agrees, shoving hard on the bag to wedge it in. “Surprised your best friend didn’t tell you that.”

Okay. Something’s amiss here.

“Shane?” Ilya asks softly, catching the other man’s attention. Their eyes meet, Ilya’s questioning, Shane’s annoyed. “Did I say something to upset you?”

“No.” Shane frowns, removing his hands from the trunk with an exhale. “I-I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m feeling…” He falters, struggling with the word.

If Ilya didn’t know any better, he’d say the word was *jealous*.

“Svetlana is a friend,” he says carefully, “nothing more.”

Shane’s eyes dart up to meet his again, and he runs his teeth over his lower lip. “You can date whoever you want, I mean, we’re not *together.”*

Ilya inhales. “I know.”

It’s quiet, for a beat.

“I’m sorry,” Shane says, “I think I’m feeling, like weird and hormonal or something. Ignore me today.”

“You are allowed to feel weird and hormonal,” Ilya says. “You are growing a baby.”

“Let’s forget about this conversation,” Shane says with a smile.

Ilya gets the sense that Shane does this often- pretends things are of no consequence when they bother him. Still, he doesn’t see the value in stressing Shane out by pushing the issue.

“Are you ready?” He asks, patting the roof of Shane’s car.

Shane nods, and they both head to their respective cars. Ilya can’t help but watch Shane in his rearview mirror, the slight waddle in his walk, but the determination on his face.

He hopes, maybe, in spending more time together, he can unpack a little bit more than just Shane’s luggage.

It’s a successful commute back to Ottawa. They have to pull over twice so Shane can throw up on the side of the road, citing the motion of the car as his trigger. Ilya rubs his back, shushes his worries about being *gross*, makes sure he’s had water and some crackers before he’s back behind the wheel. He tries three times to just drive Shane and offers to send someone back for the car, but Shane refuses.

Ilya’s apartment complex is a luxury spread of units, his being on the second floor. He’s apologetic about this as Shane eyes the staircase, looking exhausted from their long drive. He’s sure for the olympic athlete, a flight of stairs would normally pose no issue, but he’s feeling sick and haggard from travel.

“Let me bring the bags up, and I’ll come give you a hand on the stairs,” Ilya says, grabbing the luggage under both arms.

“I don’t need-”

“They are steep,” Ilya interjects, and for good measure adds, “please.”

Shane acquiesces.

The five large houseplants are outside his front door when he gets upstairs, and he curses. He haphazardly arranges them around the living room, then tosses Shane’s luggage inside before heading back down the stairs to find Shane waiting like he was about to fold and just walk up himself.

“May I?” Ilya asks, extending an arm for Shane to take.

Shane rolls his eyes good-naturedly, and takes hold of Ilya’s forearm. They make it up the stairs slowly, and his face is a pale shade of green by the time they reach Ilya’s door. It’s been a lot on his body today- he needs to lie down.

He can feel Shane’s eyes zeroing in on every single inch of the apartment when they enter. The pile of laundry on the recliner beside the leather sofa, the dishes stacked high in the sink, the fingerprint smudges on the stainless steel fridge handles.

Ilya suddenly feels *very* aware of how little time he’s had to straighten up lately.

“Did you have this many plants before?” Shane asks, craning his neck to get a birds-eye-view of all of the large houseplants lining the perimeter of the room.

“Of course,” Ilya replies, too quickly.

Shane purses his lips, hands pressing into his lower back. Unimpressed.

“I know it is a little messy, I did not have time to prepare for company,” Ilya says bashfully.

“I’m sure work keeps you very busy,” Shane says, his words kind and understanding.

“I will straighten up, why don’t you take a seat? You look a little green.”

Shane huffs a heavy breath, following Ilya to the couch. He runs his fingertips over the armrest, eyes flashing for a moment, and Ilya wonders if he’s thinking back on that night they first met. The night their baby was conceived, right here on this very couch.

“Have you washed it?” Shane asks, voice a little stiff.

“What?” Ilya grabs up the pile of laundry on the chair and heads across the apartment for the small washer/dryer attachment.

“The sofa? Since we…”

Oh.

He knows the honest answer, and he knows the answer that will make Shane feel better, so he opts for safety. It’s been a long day, Shane seems a bit hormonal and uncomfortable, and Ilya doesn’t think telling him that the couch might still have their sex germs on it would help.

“Yes, I washed it.”

He *did* give the thing a cursory wipedown with a towel.

Shane scooches back against the headrest of the couch, eyes trailing into the kitchen, where they land on the dishes.

“I’m on it,” Ilya assures him, heading that way.

“I can help.” Shane starts to stand, but Ilya cuts him a scolding look.

“You rest. If you want to take a shower or a bath, feel free. Bathroom is in that doorway. I promise, is clean.”

Shane smirks a little. “Is it clean for *you* or clean for *me?”*

Ilya snorts, opening the dishwasher. “So clean you could eat off of it.”

Shane looks like he wants to gag.

“Or not,” Ilya adds impishly.

“Do you mind if I…look around?” Shane asks hesitantly. He seems very uneasy, like being in a new place has him out of sorts.

“Yes, Shane, anything you want. Go anywhere you like. This is yours now too.” Ilya finishes loading the dishwasher and dries his hands with a towel from beside the sink.

Shane pushes himself upright off the sofa and begins perusing the room. He walks around the living room, looking at the books on Ilya’s shelves, the video games on his entertainment center, the vinyls propped up beside the record player Sveta got him for Christmas. He presses his fingertip against a Led Zeppelin album, tilting his head like a curious little kitten.

“You like them?” Ilya asks from the kitchen, leaning against the countertop to admire Shane’s warm brown eyes.

“Like who?”

“Led Zeppelin. That album.”

“I don’t think I know any of their songs,” Shane admits. “Kind of an old guy band, aren’t they?”

Ilya gasps with mock-offense and touches his chest. “Excuse me?!”

A smirk pulls at the corner of Shane's mouth, excited satisfaction at having goaded Ilya into the teasing banter. “I just, you know, my *dad* likes them.”

“Well your dad has great taste then,” Ilya replies, arching an eyebrow.

“He has old guy taste,” Shane says nonchalantly.

Ilya rolls his eyes. “You are about to be, how is it called, Shane? *Classed.”*

“Schooled,” Shane corrects him with a syrupy warmth in his voice.

He breezes by and grabs the vinyl, loading it into the record player. After a few clicks and some fiddling, the beginning notes of *Goin’ to California* begins to play. The room is serene then, filled with the soft melodic sounds of the song. Ilya nods his head along, singing quietly under his breath and turning to face Shane, who’s smiling at him.

The expression is a bit of a surprise, actually. Shane’s mouth is pulled up in this…almost dopey little grin, brown eyes glimmering like they’ve been injected with sparkles. His eyes are wrinkled and his body language is relaxed.

“What?” Ilya asks, unable to keep the fondness out of his voice.

“You look happy,” Shane says matter-of-factly.

“Mm. Well, I do not have to worry about you from far away now,” Ilya says, “that is good.”

“You were worried about me?” Shane’s expression softens, a little less amused and more earnest.

“Of course,” Ilya says. He clears his throat, worried he might be coming on too strong for Shane. “There’s the baby, and everything.”

“Right.” Shane nods, cupping a hand underneath his belly. “The baby.”

There’s a brief pause between them.

“I’ll make some dinner,” Ilya suggests, “do you think you could handle some real food?”

“Probably,” Shane says, “I am actually feeling pretty hungry.”

“I have some rice, and chicken, does that sound okay?”

“Yeah, sounds great.”

“Okay Shane. Make yourself comfortable, please.” Ilya smiles as he passes by, heading back for the kitchen. He pretends he doesn’t see Shane reach for the record player and turn the volume up, just a few clicks.

It’s a battle, convincing Shane to take the bed while Ilya sleeps on the couch.

Eventually though, citing the baby’s comfort and Shane’s back and his persisting nausea, Ilya convinces him to sleep in the kingsized bed that takes up most of Ilya’s bedroom. He changes the sheets, relieved when the threadcount seems to be acceptable to Shane, and straightens up the room to get it nice for him. Sharing one bathroom is going to be a bit unnerving considering Shane’s condition, but Ilya is going to do his best to stay out of the way and let Shane’s needs take precedence.

“And if you need anything,” Ilya says as he stands in the doorway of the bedroom, watching Shane carefully lower himself down onto the sheets, “I am right out here.”

Shane wipes a hand across his jaw and lets out a small, mewling yawn. He’s wearing a pair of checkered pajama pants and a big black Nike t-shirt, legs butterflied underneath the small swell of his belly. He’s got a pair of black glasses sitting high up on his perfect nose, shielding his freckled cheeks. He’s so fucking adorable that it almost makes Ilya feel breathless.

It is the first time Ilya has ever had someone in his bed and wanted to do so much more than just fuck them.

Shane smiles at him, cheeks dimpling, lips curving. His eyes are warm and sleepy behind the glasses. “Thanks, Ilya. Listen, are you *sure* you don’t want to sleep in your own-”

“Shane,” Ilya interjects firmly, holding up a hand as if pausing him, “if you ask me again to sleep on my couch while you are pregnant with my baby, I am going to have to fight you. And I will win. I am very strong.”

Shane snorts, leaning back against the headboard with one arm cupped underneath his belly. “I’m a professional athlete, Ilya. I’d whoop your ass.”

“Ah- professional athlete with small passenger in the way.” Ilya waves a hand dismissively at his midsection. “You are disqualified.”

“But you’ll beat me up?” Shane asks with an amused laugh.

“My threat is falling apart here. Just get some sleep, okay? Wake me if you need anything. My shift starts at seven tomorrow morning, so if you are up before then, I will make you some breakfast, okay?”

“You don’t have to-”

“Goodnight, Shane.”

Shane smiles again, shoulders relaxing a bit. “Goodnight, Ilya.”

Ilya makes his way into the living room after shutting the door behind him. He exhales, glancing down at the haphazard mess of sheets and quilts he’d thrown over the leather couch as his makeshift bed.

Not ideal for a six-foot-four man with a twelve hour shift awaiting him tomorrow.

Still, he plops down on the sheets, curling around his pillow and feeling the cool leather bleed through underneath the thin fabric. His fingertips splay out over the armrest, and he can’t help but remember the way Shane’s body had looked pressed against it.

It was warm that night, air sticky with humidity, a surprising heat for Ottawa, even in late August. The bar was crowded, sweaty bodies pressed together on the adjacent dance floor, some shitty country song playing over the crackly speakers.

He had sat down beside Ilya, all thick thighs and firm muscles. Smiling under the dim lights, cheeks decorated with little constellations that traveled over the bridge of his nose, begging Ilya to trace them with the soft edge of his fingertip. A face that demanded you take it in, that you respect it in awe, that you yearn to be closer to it, and press your lips to each beautiful contour.

Hayden, he’d said his name was, after Ilya bought his first two drinks.

Later, he was there with his face pressed into the leather armrest, his back arched beautifully, the column of his spine curved with the fluid beauty of a wave at high tide. When Ilya moaned his name, he’d begged, “please don’t- please just…*call me baby.”*

Baby.

So, Ilya did.

Does this feel good, baby?

Yeah, you like that, malysh.

Fuck, baby, you’re so tight. God, you feel so fucking good.

You're beautiful, malysh. Most beautiful. So fucking beautiful.

Shane's body was a livewire, so sensitive, so tight and coiled, much like his personality. He needed to be taken apart bit by bit, and it was fucking ecstacy to get to be the one to do it. To open him up slowly, feel each nerve pulse and tense with pleasure, to hear his moans devolve from soft and controlled, to downright animal, pleading.

And this never happened to Ilya on one-night-stands, but after it was all over, when they were laying there in the filth and the sweat and the fluid- he wanted his *baby* to stay.

It's of that night, that Ilya finds himself dreaming. He dreams of the way Shane's skin felt- warm to the touch. He dreams of the tight bundle of muscles in his biceps and thighs, the tense abs on his stomach, the dark lashes sweeping across his freckles as his eyes shut from overstimulation.

Ilya's awoken, not by the sound of his alarm clock as he'd expected, but by the quiet and surprising noise of delicate feet pattering against hardwood.

He jolts upright, breathing heavily, sweat dampening the back of his aching neck. His feet are hanging off the edge of the bed, shoulder angled uncomfortably, entire body feeling sore and stiff from the awkward positioning.

To find Shane, with his glasses and his round belly, standing between the living room and the kitchen, eyes wide like he's just been caught committing a crime.

"Shane," Ilya scrambles off the couch, ungainly and clumsy, voice still thick with sleep, "are you okay?"

"I'm so sorry," Shane replies, hushed and near whispering, "I was trying so hard not to wake you."

"I am light sleeper," Ilya admits, rubbing his eyes as he takes in Shane's form. "Is everything alright? What time is it?"

"Just after two," Shane says, shifting on his feet nervously.

Ilya frowns. "Are you sick? Do you need anything?"

"No, no it's…" Shane manages a small, slightly embarrassed laugh. "Oh my god. I'm really sorry about this."

"Shane, no sorries," Ilya insists. He crosses his arms over his chest, only to realize with a flush that he's shirtless, wearing only a pair of gray sweatpants. "What is going on?"

"I just…erm…" Shane exhales, shoulders sagging. "I'm *starving."*

Oh.

"Shane," Ilya says with a small smile blossoming on his face. "You are hungry? Now? At two AM?"

“Oh my god this is so dumb, I’m really sorry.” Shane’s cheeks hue a bright pink, and he turns like he’s going to go hide in Ilya’s bedroom.

“No, no Shane.” Ilya stops him with a gentle hand to the arm. “I was not making fun, I promise. I am just so happy, and relieved. This is very normal, you are pregnant. I have been so worried about you not eating.”

“I haven’t been this hungry in months,” Shane admits, “but today was the first time I’ve kept dinner down in a while. I dunno. I just… feel like if I don’t get some food my teeth are going to explode or something.”

“I will make you something,” Ilya says, already moving for the kitchen and ignoring Shane’s obvious instinct to protest. “What are you hungry for?”

“Um.” Shane follows him, leaning unsurely against the counter. “Whatever you have, whatever is easy is-”

“Mm, no, Shane. You did not wake up in the middle of the night, twenty weeks pregnant, and want *whatever.”* Ilya looks at him expectantly. “You are having craving, for what?”

Shane deflates. “Grilled cheese, with something sweet. Like… chocolate-y, maybe?”

Ilya turns toward the pantry door and pulls out a loaf of bread, and a tub of Nutella. “Like this?”

“Oh my god, yeah.” He nods quickly, brown eyes zeroing in on the jar. “Fuck me, yeah.”

Smirking, Ilya sets the ingredients down on the counter and moves for the fridge to hunt down some cheese. “Nutella is my favorite.”

Shane runs a hand over his belly, sighing. “I guess the baby takes after you. That looks so good. I- I feel like I’ll probably die if I don’t eat that.”

“Here, to hold you over.” Ilya scoops a generous spoonful of the stuff out and hands it to Shane, who takes it delicately between two fingertips.

“I never eat this stuff,” he says, though he looks like he’s not even sure why he’s bothering to say it.

“Baby wants it,” Ilya reminds him. “And I think you have some weight to gain back, Shane. You have been very sick.”

“I’m probably gonna regret this when it comes back up,” he says, heaving a sigh. Regardless, he slides the spoon between his lips, and his eyes fall shut, body going languid. “Oh my *god.* Oh, fuck.”

Ilya swallows thickly, pretending the sound of Shane’s happiness doesn’t make his boxers feel extra tight. “Is good?”

“So *fucking* good. Fuck, Ilya.”

Jesus Christ, he is going to kill Ilya.

"So, grilled cheese, hm?" Ilya asks, watching butter melt in the pan before he begins placing bread, "is that your favorite sandwich?"

Shane shakes his head, glancing down at the empty spoon in his hand. "I haven't had one in years, actually."

Ilya takes the spoon from him and dips it back into the Nutella before passing it back. Shane glances at it, then the jar, wincing.

"What?" Ilya demands.

"You just put my dirty spoon in a communal jar, Ilya."

"Communal…" Ilya looks at the jar, then Shane's face. "Shane, *we* are the commune here, us and the baby. I am not afraid of your germs."

Shane sighs, and stuffs the spoon back in his mouth, looking happy again as he licks the Nutella off of it.

"Why have you not had a grilled cheese sandwich in years?" Ilya inquires, flipping the sandwich and watching cheese bubble.

Shane licks Nutella off the edge of his cute little upper lip. "Before the baby, I was not supposed to eat carbs, sugar, dairy, or anything too processed. It's a special diet."

Ilya glances at him with an arched eyebrow. "Special diet?"

Shane nods, setting the spoon down on a paper towel. "Mhm. Like a performance diet. For hockey."

"Oh. Is this something all of you do?"

Shane hesitates at that. "Um, some of us."

"So, what did you eat?"

"Lean meat, chicken and fish you know, and veggies mostly."

Ilya nods thoughtfully. "I have heard of this, yes. You know carbs are good for your brain, right?"

Shane chuckles. "Yeah, I know. But I also do endorsements and stuff, and they expect you to look a certain way. *Speedo* doesn't want you out there with a gut promoting their underwear."

"Mm." Ilya nods again, flipping the sandwich to make sure both sides are golden. Some hot Nutella drips out of the sides, mingling with the cheese.

"Are you judging me?" Shane asks.

“No, I understand exactly why you’d feel you need to eat such an extreme diet,” Ilya assures him. “I just hope… you give yourself some grace. Especially with a baby. It’s a lot on your body. An intense diet would not be helpful.”

“I’m eating,” Shane assures him, gesturing to the sandwich like it’s evidence.

“I trust you,” Ilya says back, earnest and genuine.

“There’s…a lot of pressure, in what I do,” Shane says carefully, pursing his lips as he watches Ilya remove the sandwich and plate it for him.

“It seems that way,” Ilya says. He hesitates briefly, watching Shane take the first bite. “Is it okay?”

Shane nods, too busy stuffing his face to reply. It makes Ilya smile.

“Do you like the pressure?” Ilya finds himself asking.

Shane looks up from the sandwich, wiping Nutella from his lips with a napkin. “Huh?”

“The pressure. The extreme body expectations, the endorsements, winning the cups, all of that.” Ilya waves a hand. “Do you enjoy it?”

The other man swallows. “Um. Yeah I guess so.”

“My job has pressure,” Ilya tells him, “I like it. I work best under pressure. Some of us do.”

Shane nods, taking another bite. He doesn’t reply, just looks up at Ilya with curiosity in his gaze.

“Does it ever get to be too much?” Ilya asks. “Sometimes, for me, it can be.”

He swallows his bite of sandwich, eyes burning a hole in Ilya’s face. “What do you mean by that? *Too much?”*

“Like, does it ever feel, *not* enjoyable?” Ilya is starting to learn that sometimes, Shane needs things very, *very* clearly stated to be able to process them. He is happy to further elaborate, if it’s what Shane needs.

“Yes,” Shane replies, wiping his mouth again. “It’s not *fun* eating the way I do, or worrying about letting a brand down, or letting my parents down, or letting my team down, or letting the fans down, or-” He stops himself, brows furrowed behind his glasses. “Well, I have a great career. More money than I’d ever need. My parents are taken care of for life. My child is taken care of for life. I can’t complain about that, can I?”

He takes another bite of his sandwich, looking like he’s really trying to savor it.

“I find it hard to picture,” Ilya muses, “*you* letting anyone down.”

Shane gives him a short, humorless bark of a laugh. “You’d be wrong.”

It goes quiet for a breath.

“Shane,” Ilya says, glancing up to meet his eyes. “Have you told anyone besides Hayden that you are having a baby?”

Shane shakes his head, and takes another bite, like he’s trying to avoid answering more questions.

Ilya can’t help but think about what Hayden had told him. Shane getting outed, Shane struggling to earn the respect of his teammates and fans because of who he is, Shane pushing harder and fighting the most just to get the same level of treatment. Always watching his back, always making nice and not rubbing anyone the wrong way. Always with something to prove.

“So, what will you do?” he wonders. “When she is born, will you hide her?”

Shane has cleaned his plate. He looks at Ilya with hurt in his expression. “Why are you asking me this?”

“I think I am just wondering where she and I fit,” Ilya explains gently. “Your life, your career, is very intense. You have an image, and obviously you care about that image. Where do the baby and I…*belong,* in that image?”

“You’re the baby’s dad,” Shane says matter-of-factly. “I don’t think we need to like, announce it to the world.”

“Of course not,” Ilya agrees. “But is it…a secret?”

“Everyone knows I’m gay, if that’s what you’re asking,” Shane replies, each word flat and unemotional, like it’s been practiced.

“That’s not what I am asking.”

Shane squirms. “I sort of thought I just wouldn’t mention it to anyone. It’s not really their business. They think I’m on IR for an old injury acting up.”

“Oh.” Ilya purses his lips thoughtfully. “So you will keep it separate? Your life and your work? What is the word in English, I’m forgetting?”

“Compartmentalize,” Shane says.

“Yes,” Ilya nods. “I sort of have to do this too, for my job.”

Their eyes meet in the dim light of the kitchen. Shane wipes his mouth again with a napkin, even though it’s clean already.

“It’s better this way,” Shane responds softly. “Hockey is hockey, and the baby is home. They don’t need to intersect.”

“Okay,” Ilya says, “if that is what you want.”

“That’s what I want,” Shane affirms. He hesitates, jaw tensing. “I’m not sure what you saw when you were Googling me and stuff but, I…I don’t like to have my personal life out there. If any of the guys saw me like *this?”* He looks down at his protruding belly almost accusatorily. “I would never live it down.”

“Why not?” Ily finds himself asking.

“What do you mean?”

“Why would you not live it down? It is incredible, Shane, you are giving life to a new human being. Is the most amazing thing I’ve seen.”

Shane’s expression goes a little gentler at that, softer around the edges. “Ilya, you really are so sweet. I…*love* that you see it that way. But to my teammates, it would make me look…” He falters, unsure of his next word.

Incredible? Life-affirming? Monumentally strong? These are the words that come to mind for Ilya.

“-different,” Shane decides, “and I’m already different enough.”

“You are different in that you are so much better than them,” Ilya tells him without really thinking. “I have seen your scores. You score the most goals per NHL season, more than any other player. And have the second most assists.”

Shane’s cheeks flush. “That’s not what I meant by different, but thank you Ilya.”

“Can I ask what you *did* mean by different?” Ilya inquires. He wants so badly to talk this out with Shane, to let him know that he doesn’t have anything to prove, that he’s allowed to *enjoy* this stage of his life and be proud of what his body is doing. It’s a miracle.

But, he gets the sense that if he pushes too hard, Shane will only retreat.

“I would rather you didn’t,” Shane replies, proving his theory immediately. He clears his throat, smiling tightly. “I’m actually really exhausted now.”

“Of course.” Ilya smiles at him. “You head back to bed, I will clean up.”

“Oh, absolutely not.” Shane shakes his head, coming around the counter and gently nudging Ilya’s hip with his own. “You got up at two AM to make me a disgusting sandwich. I’m cleaning. You have work in the morning.”

“Shane, you are pregnant, you need sleep.”

“I’m not sleeping until the dishes are done to my liking.” Shane grins at him, and reaches for the dish soap.

Ilya sighs, realizing there is no fighting Shane when he’s like this. “You wash, I’ll dry, da?”

“Da,” Shane replies. “Does that mean yes?”

Ilya laughs. “Yes.”

Together, they get the dishes done and put away. By the time it’s over, they’re both laughing and bantering back and forth, tension from the heavy conversation all but forgotten. These little moments with Shane tend to be so easy and light, it makes the big ones that are harder to crack seem worth the effort.

When they’re finished, Ilya walks Shane back to the bedroom doorway, and notices the shorter man eyeballing the mess of pillows and sheets on the couch.

“You’re too tall to be sleeping on that,” Shane tells him.

Ilya shrugs. “It is better than being too pregnant to sleep on it.”

With a soft exhale, Shane jerks his chin toward the bedroom. “Come on. Just sleep in here. It makes no practical sense for you to hurt yourself crammed on a couch every night.”

Shane shuffles into the bedroom and carefully lowers himself back down on the right side, one hand braced on his middle to help him adjust.

Ilya stares, uncertain if he’d heard correctly.

“Don’t make it weird,” Shane says with a yawn, “you save lives. You gotta sleep.”

With that, he scoots down and curls up around one of the pillows.

Hesitantly, Ilya enters the room and makes his way around to the other side of the bed. He gingerly sits beside Shane, watching him like a hawk to see if any of the movements make him uncomfortable. When he shows no resistance, Ilya scooches down until he’s lying beside him. They make no contact, bodies parallel in the darkness.

“Thank you for making me a sandwich,” Shane says into the quiet. “You’re so nice to me. Sometimes I wonder if it’s real.”

“You are easy to be nice to,” Ilya tells him.

He can hear the smile in Shane’s voice when he responds, “I’m glad you think that. You are too.”

If Ilya’s heart wasn’t beating so loudly in his ears, pulse throbbing from their proximity, he might be able to come up with a clever reply to that.

He can’t, though. So he just nods, despite the fact that Shane can’t see it, and says, “thank you.”

It doesn’t take much longer for the both of them to fall asleep.

They fall into a steady rhythm, over the next few weeks.

In the mornings, Shane is up before Ilya's alarm clock. He cooks them breakfast, surprisingly feeling up to it now. He says it's better to move around, making the nausea a little more bearable. He keeps down his meals when Ilya is there.

His face, previously thin and gaunt, fills out a bit- cheeks softening and rounding as the pregnancy progresses. His color returns- russet skin with flushed cheeks, bright gleaming chestnut eyes, full dark hair. His freckles are more prominent, and his smile is a little easier, less like he's holding something back.

When Ilya gets home late, the apartment is spotless. He argues with Shane that he doesn't need to do that, but Shane waves him off. The plants are watered on a regular schedule, and they flourish. The fridge is suddenly stocked with nutrient-dense meals, fruits, veggies, lean protein.

Shane makes them green juice that Ilya pretends to gag at. Shane laughs and drinks his anyway.

Their 25-week ultrasound goes perfectly. The baby is growing and developing at just the right pace, her little limbs kicking out all ways. Shane says he can feel it, but not from the outside yet. He's a little worried about being behind on that marker, but Ilya and Dr. Laveen assure him that everything is fine.

Ilya works a long shift that night. He'd been hoping the ultrasound would be a good omen for the evening, but he was woefully mistaken.

It's busy. A busy night in the ER means a lot of patients, a lot of distress, not enough staff. They have two codes, and they bring them both back before admitting them to the ICU. He's on his feet all night, racing between residents and patients and nurses and disgusting coffee that's long since gone cold. It must be a fucking full moon out.

His last patient of the night is an OD.

He doesn't remember her name, after he calls it. He remembers each measure taken to bring her back. He remembers Sveta beside him, helping him run the code. He remembers her limp wrist against the bedsheets.

"Time of death: eleven-thirty-two," he says raggedly, once they've finally given up on her.

"Ilya," Svetlana says quietly, touching his arm.

He shakes her off. The woman's sister, the one who brought her in, is outside the room, wailing.

Everything has gone blurry around the edges. These types of cases never get easier.

He wonders, just briefly in the perimeters of his mind, if his own mother would have had doctors fighting this hard for her, had they gotten to her in time. If the ambulance had been quicker. If *he* had found her sooner.

You were only a child, he hears his therapist Galina's voice in his brain, *there was nothing you could have done. You called the ambulance. You did everything you could.*

Except for saving his mother, of course.

"Ilya." Svetlana is following him out, worry creasing her forehead. She knows about his mama, knows why these cases are so hard for him. Losing someone is *always* fucking hard, but to the same thing that killed his mom? These are tougher to shake loose.

"I have things to take care of," he tells her briskly, and heads out to get them done. A death is always heavily documented and procedures need to be followed for an overdose. He's going to be here a while dealing with this, even though he is technically off.

He drives home with his knuckles clenched around the steering wheel, so tightly his palms are red when he pulls them off. He'd taken a scalding hot shower and changed into some sweats and a hoodie, but he feels like the smell of death is lingering. This is far from the first person he couldn't save, of course, and he's had plenty of ODs and suicides before. It is part of his job.

That doesn't mean it ever gets easier.

Parked in the lot outside his apartment, he sighs and glances at his phone.

SVETLANA VETROVA: *Let me know if you need anything, Ilya. I know that was a rough one tonight.*

SHANE HOLLANDER: *Does this ficus plant really only need to be watered every five to ten days? That seems like not enough. I don't want to overthink the art of pouring water, but I'm afraid of killing this thing.*

Ilya can't help the small smile and tender laugh as he reads Shane's text. He can almost hear the tense, tight sound of his voice.

He kills the engine and chuffs it up the stairs to the apartment, unlocking the door and trying his best to be quiet. Shane should be sleeping soundly already.

The living room is illuminated by soft orange lamplight when he enters, toeing his shoes off by the key rack. He shrugs out of his coat, startling when he sees a shape appear in the doorway of the bedroom.

Shane is standing there in his pajama pants and a t-shirt that says *McGill Hockey.* The gray fabric stretches over his round middle, and he's pushing his glasses up high on his nose. He doesn't look sleep-ruffled, the way he should be after one AM. He looks wide awake.

"You smell like cigarettes," is the first thing he says, brows arched with what appears to be surprise.

Ilya chuckles dryly. "Why are you awake, Shane?"

“Are you okay?” Shane asks, instead of answering the question. He moves closer, forehead wrinkling as he takes in Ilya’s haggard appearance.

“I am fine,” Ilya assures him. “I am just surprised you’re still awake. It is late.”

“I was making sure you made it home first,” Shane says without a second thought. “Did you have a rough shift?”

“I had one cigarette,” Ilya says with a small smile. He heads for the kitchen, grabbing a bottle of vodka from the cabinet above the fridge. Shane watches him from the kitchen doorway, face tight.

“You smoke?” he asks quietly.

“Not as much as I used to,” Ilya replies, filling a glass halfway.

“But you’re a doctor,” Shane says.

Ilya turns to him, arching an eyebrow. “Yes?”

“Never mind.” Shane clears his throat, shifting on his feet. “Are you sure you’re okay? You seem…not great.”

Ilya takes a long swig from the vodka. “I am fine. A patient died on me. She is doing worse than me.”

“Oh.” The sound leaves Shane’s mouth like it’s been punched out of him. “I’m so sorry, Ilya.”

“Is part of my job,” he replies dismissively. He takes another swig and finishes off the vodka, replacing it quickly with another pour.

“Do you want to…talk about it?” Shane ventures, taking a hesitant step closer. His arm comes down to cup his belly, an almost protective motion.

Ilya frowns, looking down into his glass, then back at Shane’s unsure expression. Is that concern…about *him?* Is Shane worried about how Ilya might be reacting? Does he feel unsafe? Is *Ilya* making him feel that way?

Swallowing hard, he dumps the vodka down the drain and sets the glass in the sink. He exhales harshly, trying to hear Galina’s calming voice in his head.

It is okay to have setbacks. Just own it, and try to find a path forward.

“I quit smoking a few years ago, when my father died,” he says, still looking into the drain. “Sometimes when I have a rough night, I will smoke one cigarette. Just one. I threw the rest of the pack away.” He glances at Shane, lips tilting up. “I promise. Would not bring secondhand smoke around our baby.”

“I trust you,” Shane says, voice soft and sweet. “I can’t even imagine what your night was like.”

“It was a bad night,” he agrees. “But I do not want you to think I am…having a spiral, or something. It was just a bad night.”

“I didn’t think that,” Shane says simply.

“My dad used to have bad nights.” His tone is a little more hollow when he says these words. He isn’t even sure why he’s bringing it up. Something about the way Shane had seemed nervous makes his chest ache. He doesn’t want to ever, *ever* inflict the things his father did to him and his mother, on anyone else.

Shane hesitates, before asking, “what were his bad nights like?”

Ilya huffs. “He would drink and smoke. Yell a lot and sometimes hit us.”

There’s a thick silence between them for a count of five.

Then, Shane walks over and very gently presses his hand against Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya looks down at his big brown eyes, seeing the warmth and sadness in his gaze.

“You did not deserve that,” Shane says. There’s no ambiguity in his words. Firm, sure, completely confident.

“I know,” Ilya says, reaching his hand out to press his own hand over Shane’s. He squeezes the other man’s fingers tightly, like he’s holding on to a lifeboat. “I have been to therapy and talked it all out. I know, erm, I know- was not my fault. I just don’t want…I don’t want you to think my bad nights will *ever* be like that, for our baby.”

“I don’t think that, Ilya, hey.” Shane slowly glides his hand over so it’s rubbing the space between Ilya’s shoulder blades. Gentle, sort of methodical, rhythmic. It’s soothing, and Ilya tries to relax his breathing in time with the motions of Shane’s palm.

“I think you’re an amazing person,” Shane says, “a selfless, kind, big hearted human being. There is one thing I’ve been sure about this entire pregnancy, and it’s that my baby is *so* lucky to have you as her dad. I mean it, Ilya.”

Ilya drops his head down, his breath coming a little shakily. “Shane, you don’t have to-”

“I’m not, like, kissing your ass because you’re having a bad night,” Shane murmurs, “I’m just telling you the truth. You *know* I can’t lie for shit.”

Ilya manages a small, wet laugh.

“I’m sure you did everything you could for that patient, just like you do everything you can for me, and the baby. There’s no doubt in my mind that you were her best chance at making it through tonight. I’m sorry it didn’t go that way. But you are a caring, competent doctor, and an amazing person. I know you’ll be a great dad too.”

Ilya turns to face him, looking at Shane through his lashes. He's so beautiful, standing there, being so fucking kind to Ilya. It feels undeserved and unreal, how *right* this feels- how he somehow knows exactly what Ilya needs to hear.

"And you know what else?" Shane says, lips curving up a little.

"What?" Ilya whispers, transfixed by Shane's beautiful face.

"I noticed that some of the plants still have price tags on them," Shane says, giggling a little. "Did you buy them just so you could say I was helping you out, Ilya?"

Ilya's face feels hot. "I-uh-"

"You are *wonderful."* Shane tells him, eyes wrinkling with his smile.

Ilya feels like he might black out.

Shane's smile dissipates abruptly, eyes going wide as his palm flies to the swell of his belly. He presses against it for a moment, running his hand across the stretched side. His expression is thoughtful.

"Shane?" Ilya asks urgently.

"Oh," he murmurs, looking up at Ilya from behind his glasses, "Ilya, feel this."

He takes Ilya's wrist and presses his hand against his stomach. The skin is warm underneath his t-shirt, a tight drum of stretched flesh. Ilya waits, wondering what-

Oh.

Her little foot bumps against his hand, and his eyes go wide. He looks down at Shane's belly with disbelief, bringing his other hand around to cup both sides of his tummy. The baby kicks again, her tiny feet nudging and pushing against him.

"Do you feel her?" Shane asks in awe. "She's here, with us."

Ilya's eyes feel wet, his heart beating erratically in his chest, his stomach tightening. He almost can't believe what he's feeling right now- their daughter, moving and kicking inside of Shane. Here, the three of them, it's so breathtaking he really does think he might faint.

"Shane," he chokes out, overcome with emotion.

"I know," Shane sniffs, beaming at him, "it's amazing, we *made* her."

We made her.

The sentiment is…too much for Ilya to handle. Shane's big happy grin is too much, his pretty brown eyes and his long eyelashes, those goddamn fucking freckles- his warmth and kindness and selflessness.

It’s all too fucking much.

Without really thinking about what he’s doing, Ilya’s hands move from Shane’s belly, up to cup his cheeks. He strokes his thumb over the spray of freckles, eyes meeting Shane’s. The other man doesn’t speak, looking shocked, maybe a bit confused.

“Shane,” he says again, trembling.

“Ilya,” Shane whispers.

He does the only thing that could possibly express how he’s feeling in this moment.

He leans in and presses his lips against Shane’s.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

hfjksdhfjks SMUT WARNING!!!!

thanks for reading and commenting i am overwhelmed and awed and so appreciative !!!!!!! i love you so much thank you for your kind words and positivity on the previous chapters !! i am so enjoying writing this and sharing it with you <3

(i am starting a new job tomorrow, so uploads may slow a bit until i get my bearings. LIFE. UGH. tysm in advance for ur patience)

THANK U FOR READING PLS BE NICE !!

There are a few moments where time feels truly suspended.

Ilya is not aware of anything other than the feeling of Shane's mouth against his. He's warm, skin flushed, lips soft and pliant beneath Ilya's.

His senses are alight with the feeling of Shane's body pressed against his. The swell of his stomach, nudging into Ilya's abdomen, the feeling of his hands coming up to tangle in Ilya's curls, the butterfly quick beat of his breaths between their kisses.

"Shane," Ilya gasps as their lips part, chests heaving, "are you- do you want me to stop?"

"No," Shane practically whines, "don't fucking stop."

Somehow, they make their way across the living room, back to the couch. The same couch they'd conceived their baby on, that fateful night so many months ago.

Ilya can't pull himself away, can't force his mouth to stop seeking Shane's skin, his lips, whatever inch of flesh he can reach. He smells like his seaweed shampoo and crisp body wash, clean and fragrant.

Ilya wrestles with his own shirt, peeling it off his torso, skin flushed and hot as he continues to kiss and suck at the skin of Shane's neck. Beneath him, Shane lets out small, panted breaths of pleasure.

"More," he begs, hands grappling at Ilya's chest aimlessly, "more, Ilya. Want you."

Fuck.

Ilya bites at the small patch of skin underneath Shane's ear, pleased when he shudders and whines. His hands travel down Shane's chest, sliding under the fabric of his t-shirt to palm his belly, then glide up to cup his thickened chest.

He squeezes, and Shane yelps. Ilya pulls back, afraid he's hurt him.

"Sensitive," Shane huffs, "don't fucking stop!"

"So bossy, *Hayden,"* Ilya teases with a smirk, toying with the waistband of Shane's pajama pants.

"Don't you fucking dare, Ilya."

"Mm, sorry, *malysh.* I would never. You like this more anyway, da, when I call you baby?"

Shane whines, deep in his throat.

"Call me by my name," Shane says, "want to hear you moan my name."

Fuuuuck.

"Shane," Ilya whispers, teeth grazing his ear. Shane's hips buck underneath him, and Ilya presses down on his thigh with one firm palm. "Shh, is okay, do not move, baby. Easy, I will take care of you."

Shane looks up at him with those big brown eyes, warm and swimming with desire. He's a fucking vision like this- cheeks flushed, lashes fluttering, lips parted and swollen from Ilya's manipulation.

Holy fuck, is this really happening?

"Is what you want?" Ilya checks again, as he brings his hand inward, glossing it gently over the hard bulge in Shane's sweatpants.

"So much," Shane whimpers, blinking up at Ilya with tears in the corners of his eyes, "please Ilya, m'so sensitive, need it so *so* bad."

Ilya knows enough, medically, to be aware that in the second trimester these hormones really start to kick in. Shane's body is probably extra sensitive right now, extra charged, and perhaps extra confusing.

"Are you sure?" he asks again, breath heavy. He needs to make sure.

Their eyes meet, and Shane leans in, pressing their lips together once more.

Ilya loses himself in the feeling.

His hands move as if independent from his body- touching, caressing, feeling everything. Shane's pants are down the next moment, and when Ilya goes to slide his shirt off, Shane grips his wrist like a vice.

"Is okay?" Ilya asks.

Shane swallows. "Um, I don't look how I did the night we met. My belly is really getting big, and I've got so many stretch marks, and my nipples are getting kind of…puffy, I guess. I just don't want you to be turned off."

"Oh, *solnyschko."* Ilya strips the shirt off of him, leaving Shane bare-chested underneath the orange lamplight.

He is utterly breathtaking. His swollen stomach is lined with pale white stretch marks, dancing up the curves of his stomach inward. His nipples are hard, perky, the same pretty brown color Ilya remembers from before.

"Fucking gorgeous," Ilya practically spits the words out, chest heaving with arousal. He brings his face back down, lips moving back over Shane's flushed skin.

He kisses and licks, sucking on the patch of skin at Shane's hip, which makes the other man squeal and buck up. He presses down again, keeping his back flush with the sofa.

"I can taste?" he asks, husky with desire.

"Please!" Shane whines.

Needing no further encouragement, he envelops the head of Shane's cock with his lips, damp with his own spit. Shane cries out at the sudden contact, fists gripping the material of the sofa, and Ilya's curls respectively.

"Oh god, oh god," he pants, *"Ilya, fuck!"*

Ilya hums against the hard shaft of his cock, sending vibrations through Shane's nerves. He tastes so sweet, warm and clean and somehow like *home.* The heavy breathing and illustrious moans are enough to make Ilya so hard he feels dizzy with loss of blood.

Just when Shane is about to crescendo, he pops his lips off, pleased with the wail Shane lets out at the loss of contact. Carefully, he grips his hips, scooting his bottom off the couch, though holding him steady by the thighs.

He parts his legs, fingers gripping the ample flesh, and buries his face between Shane's round ass cheeks.

"Oh!" he cries out, head tipped back as a series of moans collapse out of his chest. *"Oh god, ah, Ilya, ah, ah, shit."*

Ilya eats him out like his life depends on it, savoring the taste and the feeling of being so close. He jackknifes his tongue into Shane's hole, wet and dripping for him. After a few

moments, he brings his finger in, alternating the pressure of his tongue with the gentle stretch of his fingers.

“Is okay?” he manages to get the words out through a heavy series of labored breaths.

“More,” Shane whines, “more, more!”

Ilya is happy to deliver.

It doesn’t take long for him to be completely ready, on the edge of coming once more. Carefully, Ilya removes his fingers, hands immediately going to grope at any warm flesh he can reach.

“Do you want me?” he asks gruffly.

“Yes,” Shane whines, “need you inside. Please, Ilya, it hurts, need you.”

“Oh, I’ll make it better, *malysh.* Just let me go get a condom.”

“Fuck that, I’m already pregnant with your baby,” Shane insists. “I want to feel you inside of me.”

Ilya blinks, brain short-circuiting at this request. Shane cannot be real. “Are you sure?”

“Are you fucking clean?”

“Of course.”

“Me too. Just *do it, please!”*

Fuck.

“Okay, easy, I am here.”

He gently grips on to Shane’s hips, planting one foot on the sofa cushion beside Shane, standing with the other. Gradually, he glides forward, pushing the plump head of his cock against Shane’s slicked up opening.

“Oh god,” Shane whines again, nudging his hips forward so the flesh makes contact.

Ilya suppresses his own moan. “Fuck, Shane. So pretty for me, begging and desperate for this cock. Jesus.”

“Fucking do it, please,” Shane pleads.

Ilya does it, grinding his hips toward Shane, and entering him with indescribable bliss.

They are connected now, in this moment. Ilya sheathed inside Shane, bottoming out to the hilt of his hard cock, Shane’s warm thighs circling around him. It’s like that first night together, but so much better. Sober, so much closer, and so intimate.

"Fuck," he gasps, unable to help himself.

"Ilya, please," Shane begs, "need you, please." His hips writhe desperately.

"Sorry, *solnyschko.* I am here, I have you."

It's a transcendent feeling, making Shane feel good. Ilya listens to his sounds, the light, airy whine in his breaths, the rattle in his chest as his moans grow deeper, more animal. His fingers dig into Ilya's back, his teeth graze Ilya's wrist, his lashes flutter as his eyes roll back in his head.

"Gonna- c- oh god, *Ilya!"* Shane cries out as his hips jerk and he abruptly spurts cum all over both of them.

"Oh fuck, Christ." Ilya is right behind him, emptying himself into Shane with a sustained grunt.

For a few beats, they both lie there, breathing heavily, noses brushing, inhaling the scent of each other. Ilya clings to Shane's warmth, his skin sticky with sweat.

The night's events have completely vacated his mind. Now, there is only *Shane.*

"Shit," Shane exhales, laughing quietly.

"Mm, shit." Ilya reaches down to nibble at his earlobe, pleased when Shane moans.

They get cleaned up slowly. Ilya wipes down each inch of Shane's skin with a warm rag, and helps him redress in his pajamas. They drift into the bedroom, both exhausted and worn out.

"So," Shane says into the darkness, voice more uncertain now, "that was fine, right? I mean, we can just be…casual about doing that?"

Ilya blinks wetness from his eyes. He had no illusions that a quick fuck would suddenly change their entire dynamic, or Shane's mind about what he wants, but it still sort of fucking hurts to hear it said aloud.

"Yeah of course." His tone is clipped.

"Okay," Shane replies quietly. "Goodnight, Ilya."

He tries not to let on how wrecked he is when he murmurs, "goodnight, Shane."

The next few weeks fly by in a blink.

Shane and the baby are growing every day, getting fuller and more healthy. It is a miracle to watch, and fills Ilya with a pride he cannot fully explain.

The sex is…confusing, in some ways. Simple, in others.

It's a cure for a bad day, for either of them. Ilya has a long shift? He distracts himself from it all by sucking on every part of Shane's exposed body, then fucking him until he's babbling nonsense. Shane feels isolated and swollen and useless without hockey? He rides Ilya until the headboard leaves a dent in the wall that will cost Ilya his hefty security deposit someday.

But it's nothing more. Afterward, they go back to their routines. It is simple, but confounding all at once.

Ilya tries not to think about what any of it *means,* and just feel grateful he gets to be close to Shane this way. Because not only is the sex confusing and simple, it is also *incredible.* They are so compatible- he has never had this with someone before. Do not get him wrong, he is great in bed, and Sveta was a wonderful partner, but he and Shane just…have something. He does not know how to describe it.

Ilya can manage casual hookups. He has done it with everyone else before. It is no big deal.

Everyone else was not having his baby, or making him breakfast in the morning, or inviting him to dinner with their parents, though. That makes things feel a little muddy.

The Hollander's home is beautiful as Ilya and Shane stand on the porch one crisp evening.

Much like Shane's mansion, it's quite large, but not in an imposing sort of way. It's grand, with a beautiful brick walkway, high-arched porch columns, and intricate windows displaying soft orange light from inside. It's classic, but elegant. Not a surprise considering the owner is Yuna Hollander.

Ilya has met her a few times now, mostly by chance when he visited Shane in Montreal at the same time as her, or when she's come by his apartment lately to pick Shane up. The interactions have been brief, but pleasant. Despite her tendency to fall into *momager* mode more often than not, he can tell she really truly loves her son.

"Do we have everything?" Shane asks, glancing down at the casserole dish in his hands like it's somehow vanished.

"Da." Ilya holds up the bottle of wine, smiling.

Shane opens the front door and calls, "Mom, Dad! We're here!"

It's surprisingly informal. Ilya's father always liked for the kids to ask permission before entering a room he was in- and they *lived* there. Shane just waltzes into his parent's house with no qualms.

"In the kitchen!" David calls back, completely unbothered.

Shane and Ilya head for the large kitchen, complete with double ovens, stainless steel appliances and marble countertops. David is at the fridge putting something away, while Yuna sets out an array of brightly colored veggies on the island.

"Sweetheart, you didn't have to bring anything!" she says, gesturing to the dish as she moves toward Shane. She takes it from his hands, looking down with interest.

“Ilya made it,” Shane says sheepishly, “it’s um, a Russian dessert, right? What was it called? Shar-Sharli-”

Ilya smiles warmly at his attempt to pronounce it. “Is called *sharlotka.* It is just a light cake, and I added apples.”

“Sharlotka,” Shane repeats, looking pleased.

“Oh, wow that’s so thoughtful, thank you Ilya!” Yuna sets the dish on the island and turns back to them, eyes warm. “Shane, how are you feeling?”

“Great,” he assures her, lips curving. “I haven’t puked in weeks.”

“Thank god,” Yuna says, reaching out to squeeze his hand.

“Thank Ilya,” Shane replies. “He’s been taking such good care of us.”

Yuna glances at him, and his face feels hot under the scrutiny. He shrugs. “Is my job.”

“That it is,” David agrees as he approaches, wiping his hands down with a kitchen towel. “Can I get you a drink, Ilya? We’ve got some beer, and some vodka, though I see you brought wine. Thank you.”

Ilya passes him the bottle with a nod. “I am fine with water, thank you.”

“We have cokes,” Yuna offers.

“Oh. I will have that, please.”

There’s a gentle laugh amongst them, and they all sort of…easily drift into position. David cracks a can of coke for Ilya and a ginger ale for Shane, and refills Yuna’s wine glass with the bottle they brought.

“Do you need help?” Ilya asks Yuna, gesturing to the vegetables on the island.

“That would be great, thank you so much.” She smiles at him. “David’s good in the kitchen, but I’ve got him on grill duty tonight.”

“I can help too,” Shane offers.

Ilya and Yuna both whip their heads around to look at him. He arches an eyebrow, standing before them with his hands on his hips defiantly. It isn’t an intimidating image, with his round belly stretching the front of his sweater, or the small sheen of sweat on his forehead from being on his feet in the warm kitchen.

“You should rest,” Ilya says gently.

Shane throws his hands up with a huff of air. “Nobody lets me do anything anymore!”

“Honey-” Yuna starts.

“Don’t *you’re-growing-a-human-being-that’s-doing-something-* me!” he warns her with a scowl.

“I wasn’t going to say that,” she insists, “I was going to say you’re too slow to help and you’ll just be in the way. Sit down!”

Ilya presses a hand over his mouth to suppress the laughter.

Shane’s scowl deepens, and he plops into a kitchen chair, knees spread reflexively to give his belly some space. He crosses his arms over it, wrinkling his nose at them like a very angry little bunny.

“You’re both on my list,” he mutters.

Ilya does laugh at that, expression softening with affection at Shane’s visible annoyance. “I will be at the top of your list, since I did this to you.”

“We did it together,” he says dismissively, malice completely drained from his voice. He sips his ginger ale and sits back in the chair. “At *least* julienne the carrots, please. I like them that way.”

Ilya smirks. “Who is Julienne?”

“Rozanov.”

“Hollander.”

“Okay boys,” Yuna interjects, chuckling at their teasing stalemate. “Ilya, you’re on carrots. I’ve got the onions.”

“Yes ma’am.” He nods and accepts the large knife handed to him. He glances back at Shane, brandishing the blade with an arched eyebrow. “Do not worry, *dorogoy*, Julienne and I know each other very well.”

As he begins slicing, Yuna asks, “what is that word? Was that Russian?”

Ilya hums softly, attention focused on his task.

“He told me it means doofus,” Shane replies with a snort.

Ilya bites his lip to hide the smile. He pretends he doesn’t see Yuna’s eyes drilling holes in the side of his face, her sharp expression saying something along the lines of: *“my son may be a doofus, but you’re not fooling me.”*

They continue on, chopping and slicing vegetables while Yuna and Shane fill the silence with talk of brand deals and post-paternity leave plans.

“So are you going to be hiring a nanny?” she asks conversationally, gliding her blade through another onion. Ilya isn’t sure what they're making here, but from the looks of it, some sort of soup.

“I hadn’t thought about it,” Shane admits, pursing his lips and furrowing his eyebrows, “I travel so much for hockey. I guess I’d need to hire someone to come with us? At least when she’s small. I wouldn’t want to leave her.”

Ilya clears his throat, slightly uncomfortable. This is the side of the whole *“having a baby together”* thing they have sort of been skirting around. The awkward, painful concept of the fact that they’re inevitably going to be living two hours away from each other again, attempting to share their child in a way that’s fair.

It’s a subject of conversation they’ve masterfully avoided bringing up, both of them. They’d both rather pretend this intrusion doesn’t exist, than face it head on.

Yuna glances at Ilya, lips pursed. “Well, Shane, you *can’t* just take her on the road. What about her other dad?”

“Right.” Shane blinks, like he hadn’t thought of that. “But, Ilya you work too. A lot.”

“Yes,” Ilya replies, wincing.

“Have you two even talked about custody?” Yuna asks, arching an eyebrow as she looks between them, still dicing onions. Her tone is casual, but the words are heavy, thick in the air.

Shane and Ilya look at each other, both a little helpless.

“Shit!”

Their heads turn at the sound of Yuna’s quiet curse, and Ilya sees a streak of red painted across the cutting board. She’s curling her arm against her chest, cradling her hand, though the blood seeping through is visible.

“Mom!” Shane gets to his feet, *way* too quickly for someone in his condition, and moves toward her.

“What’s going on?” David enters the kitchen from the patio, a grill brush in his hand, eyes going wide at the sight of the blood. “Honey!”

“Yuna,” Ilya gets to her first, one hand braced on her elbow, “let me look at it, please.”

She looks like she’s about to pull away, brows furrowed.

“He’s a doctor, mom!” Shane reminds her, expression frantic.

“Oh, right.” Yuna hesitantly unfolds her shaking, bloodied, hand, laying it in Ilya’s palm.

“Oh fuck it’s huge,” Shane says, bracing himself against the countertop.

“I’ll call for an ambulance,” David exclaims, scrambling at his pockets. “Christ, where’s my phone?!”

Yuna's palm is sliced clearly across from the crease of her thumb to the middle of her hand. The cut is bleeding a lot, but doesn't look deep, mostly superficial.

"She does not need an ambulance," he assures David before looking back at her face, "Yuna, wrap your hand around this and squeeze, the pressure is going to stop this bleeding, okay?"

He wraps a towel around her hand and gently presses her fingers into the right position. She seems to come back to earth, nodding her understanding, and gripping the towel.

"Does it need stitches?" she asks him, voice even-keeled and steady.

He shakes his head. "I think we need to clean it and close it. It is not deep enough for stitches."

"Are you kidding?" Shane demands, pupils blown wide. "She's covered in blood! Oh my god."

"Do you have superglue?" Ilya says to David, who looks alarmed but significantly more calm than his hormonal son.

"Superglue?" He seems surprised. "Um, yeah, yeah we have that. Why-"

"For her wound," Ilya gestures to her hand.

"You want to *superglue* her fucking hand together?" Shane gasps.

"Is exactly what we would do in the hospital, Shane," Ilya says. "This is a very superficial cut, it is bleeding so much because of the way she moved her hand."

Yuna nods at him. "I really don't want to waste time in the ER. David, the superglue is in the cabinet."

"And, first aid kit?" Ilya inquires hopefully.

"On it." David turns and heads out of the room.

"How is the pain, 1-10?" Ilya asks her, walking her over to the kitchen table and helping lower her into a chair while Shane watches with obvious disbelief.

"It's a two," she says.

"Do not be brave," he replies with a small smile.

"Honey, I gave birth with no epidural. This is a walk in the park."

"We should go to the hospital," Shane insists, pacing nervously beside the table.

"Shane, will you relax? You're going to raise your blood pressure." Yuna waves her good hand at him. "Sit down!"

"You fucking split your hand in half!" Shane squeaks.

“You’ve seen worse injuries on the ice!” she argues. “You’ve *had* worse injuries, Shane! Relax.”

“Got the stuff.” David returns and sets a bottle of superglue and a first aid kit down beside Ilya at the table.

“Thank you,” he says to David with a smile. He looks at Yuna. “I am going to unwrap your hand now and disinfect it very well. It might sting.”

“I’m prepared,” she says easily.

“Shane, sit down,” David tells him much more gently than Yuna did, “you’re making me nervous.”

Shane grunts with annoyance and pulls a chair out across from them. David sits beside him.

Ilya doesn’t normally love to work with an audience like this, but he’s absolutely no stranger to having patient’s loved ones in the room while he treats them. And her wound truly is entirely superficial.

Carefully, he unfolds her fingers from the towel, pleased to see the bleeding has already slowed. He unpackages the antiseptic from the first aid kit, and thoroughly clears the wound of blood and debris.

“Your hands are very steady,” she muses while he works.

Ilya smiles at her. “Glad to hear it, that is important for my job.”

“I can imagine. That will be good for swaddling.”

“I need to practice,” he admits, “I have only ever swaddled my niece.”

“You have a niece?” Yuna raises her eyebrows, glancing at Shane. “But you told me-”

“Mom,” Shane says stiffly, “I told you his parents had passed, not his *entire family.”*

“Oh, right. Sorry.” She grimaces in Ilya’s direction.

He chuckles. “It is okay. My mother was long ago, and my father was…eh, a bit of a relief. My niece is going to be ten this year.”

“Is she back in Russia?” David asks, reaching over to pat Shane’s arm, like he can tell the other man is still anxious.

“Yes, she and my brother are,” Ilya answers, eyes focusing in as he uncaps the superglue to delicately coat the edges of her wound.

“Are they excited about the baby?” Yuna inquires.

Ilya clears his throat again, pulling her skin together to seal it. “They do not know, yet. We are not as close as I wish.”

“Oh.” Her voice is apologetic. “Family can be complicated.”

“Yes.” Ilya nods, finishing his careful work. “There you go, Yuna. This should heal in a day or two. If you have any pain or trouble with motion, you should follow up with a hand surgeon.”

She flexes her hand, a smile spreading across her face. “Wow. Thanks, Ilya, you just saved me a visit to the ER.”

“Mm, I can be useful sometimes.” He winks, and she giggles.

The quiet after that moment doesn’t last long, because a loud, wet sniffle gets everyone’s attention. Shane has dropped his head into his hands, shoulders trembling, and it sounds like he’s *crying.*

“Shane,” David says in disbelief.

Ilya is on his feet, crossing the distance around the table to press a hand to his back. “*Solnyschko,* what is wrong? Are you okay?”

“Y-yeah,” Shane wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand, “I’m sorry, fuck, this is dumb. I don’t know why that just-” He shakes his head, still wiping fresh tears from his eyes. “Fucking hormones.”

“Honey,” Yuna says with a sympathetic pout, “I’m alright! Ilya fixed me right up.”

“I know, I know.” Shane sniffs again, ducking his face like he’s embarrassed. “It’s just- you were bleeding so much and then Ilya was so-” He stops himself, blinking rapidly, wiping his face with an urgency that no one else really understands.

“I am sorry if I upset you,” Ilya says unsurely, *hating* the whimper in Shane’s voice. He wants to make it stop, make him smile.

“No!” Shane says immediately, exhaling and finally drying his red eyes. “Fuck. I’m hormonal and starving and- just ignore me. Everyone, please, just ignore me. Can we move past this?”

“I say we get some takeout and make it a dinner on the couch night,” David suggests. Shane looks relieved.

“That sounds perfect,” Yuna agrees, “let’s get our hormonal son and grandbaby fed. Ilya, as the doctor who saved my life, what would you like to order?”

Ilya shakes his head, laughing. “Absolutely not. Is my first Hollander dinner and we already have an injury on my record. Shane can pick, he is eating for two.”

“That wasn’t your fault, I wasn’t watching what I was doing,” Yuna says. Everyone is kind enough not to bring up the subject she’d been discussing when it happened.

The *custody* elephant.

“Lets get pad thai,” Shane says, wiping his eyes once more before he rests a hand on his belly, “the baby wants peanut sauce.”

“Smart baby,” Ilya says to him with a grin. Shane smiles back, cheeks flushed an adorable shade of pink.

“I’ll place the order,” David says, getting up from the table to find his phone.

“I’ll clean up the kitchen.” Shane moves to stand, but Ilya shakes his head, pressing a hand to his knee.

“Shane, please relax. I will clean.” His eyes are pleading, which he knows is a dirty trick, but it works.

“Okay,” Shane says softly.

“Nonsense, Ilya, it’s my mess.” Yuna stands, but Ilya shoots her a warning look.

“You are a patient,” he says, “you do not clean up. Sit here with Shane, tell him about how fun natural childbirth is. I will take care of the kitchen.”

With that, he glides past them to begin cleaning up the blood and food scraps from the island.

“Please don’t tell me about natural childbirth,” Shane says behind him, “I want the biggest epidural they have.”

He’s answered with a laugh. Ilya can’t help but smile, still enamored with how easy it seems to be for these people to be a family.

Growing up in the Rozanov household, if something like this had gone wrong, it would have soured the entire night. Maybe even the whole week, depending on how angry his father got about the incident.

The Hollanders are different. David gets Yuna some ice for her hand, they order their food for delivery, and the four of them all spread out in the living room in front of the TV with plates piled high. Ilya ends up smushed on the couch between Shane and David, who bicker over him about what to watch.

“We’ve seen it fifty times!” David argues.

“It’s my favorite movie!” Shane hits back, wiping peanut sauce off the corner of his lips.

The banter is playful, light and easy. There's no true malice in anyone's words or tone, it's all easy and simple. David doesn't even waste time yelling at Yuna about the mess as he and Ilya tag team cleaning it up.

They end up watching some old romcom Ilya's never seen, and he's surprised at how much he enjoys it. By the time it's over, Shane is slumped over on Ilya's lap, cheek smushed into his thighs. Their empty dessert plates are littered across the coffee table, sharlotka crumbs on each one. Half the dish is empty in the kitchen, Shane having had three helpings, much to his chagrin. Ilya had just been grateful he enjoyed it so much.

Now, the movie is over and the evening is winding down. Shane is dead asleep against him, arm curled underneath his belly protectively, snoring like a weedwhacker. If it wasn't so completely adorable, Ilya might suggest he have his sinuses checked.

"So," Yuna says quietly, her warm gaze focused on her sleeping son, though she speaks to Ilya, "how is he, really? I know he's not getting sick anymore, that's great. But is he okay? You see him more than I do."

Ilya's hand twitches slightly from where it's resting on Shane's back. After the talk he had with Hayden a few months ago while Shane was asleep beside him, he feels sort of bad about all of these clandestine discussions happening just out of his consciousness. Still, he's almost thirty weeks pregnant, and sleeping like a rock.

"I think he is okay?" Ilya offers. "He smiles and laughs a lot. He is excited about the baby, that I know for sure."

"He won't let us throw him a shower," Yuna says, and Ilya is surprised to hear the tinge of heavy sadness in her voice.

"Yuna, that kind of thing just isn't for everyone," David reminds her quietly.

"He wants one," she insists, "but he doesn't want to tell anyone he's pregnant. I seriously am starting to wonder if he's lost his mind. I mean, is his plan to just keep my granddaughter a secret forever? And you." She looks at Ilya with her lips thinning. "No custody talks, really? What is *your* plan? Because I have to say, if you guys don't figure something out, as his manager I have to advise him to get a lawyer."

Ilya's throat feels tight and sticky at the thought of that.

"Go easy," David urges her. "They'll figure all that stuff out. The baby isn't even here yet."

"She's due in a few months," Yuna says, "and Shane has it in his head that he's going to *take her on the road* with him during the season."

At that, David winces. "Oh. What is he thinking?"

"He is afraid of this jeopardizing everything he has worked for in the NHL," Ilya murmurs, smoothly stroking his thumb down the hem of Shane's hoodie. "They judge him already, for who he is. This would be a lot to take in. For the fans, and the team, and his whole image."

“No one understands that better than me,” Yuna says, “but that doesn’t change the fact that he has a baby coming. This is happening, and he needs to acknowledge it and face the reality.”

Ilya grimaces. “Have you tried telling *him* this?”

She huffs. “Only about a thousand times. You’d think he’d listen to his mother. I told him we can spin this in a positive way. Hell, he could have made waves being a pregnant NHL player doing ads like I wanted him to.”

Ilya glances between her, then at Shane’s sleeping face. He looks so content right now, at peace in a lot of ways that Ilya doesn't see from him when he’s awake. No pressure or insecurity or doubt, just pleasant plains of a beautiful, sleeping face.

“I do not think that’s what he wants,” Ilya admits tentatively. “I think the idea of making her part of his *brand* does not appeal to him. He does not want her involved in his career.”

“That’s understandable,” David says. He looks at his son with gentle eyes.

Yuna sighs, crossing her arms over her chest as she leans back against the couch cushions. “I wish I could fix this for him. Fix the world. It’s so unfair that he can’t just let himself *enjoy* this. He should have a baby shower, with all of his loved ones there to celebrate. He just needs to *tell* them.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat. “Hayden knows, and us. Who has he not told?”

“Ilya, he’s got five uncles, two aunts, an ojichan, a gaggle of cousins, friends on the team and off the team-” Yuna shakes her head. “So many people love him and would want to know about this blessing.”

Ilya’s expression falls back down to look at Shane’s peaceful face. It really is unfair. This is the time Shane should be getting showered with love and excitement about this major life change. He’s having a *baby*, becoming a father, it’s truly something incredible. Ilya wishes he had someone other than Sveta to tell.

Well, other than Alexei, too.

“Maybe it is me,” he mutters, “maybe he is embarrassed because we…well, we are not married, or together, or something like that.”

Yuna frowns. “Why *aren't* you together, anyway?”

“Yuna,” David warns her again.

“What?” She looks between them, shaking her head. “I mean, it’s clear you have very strong feelings for my son. And who wouldn’t? He’s wonderful. I’m just curious why you aren’t acting on it.”

“You do not need to answer these questions,” David assures him. “My wife has a tendency to steamroll.”

“I think our grandchild’s father should feel comfortable talking to us,” she defends. “He is going to be in our lives forever. He’s family now.”

And Ilya isn’t sure why *that’s* what does it. Why, Yuna’s mention of *family* makes his chest burn hot and his throat tighten significantly. His eyes feel wet, and he clamps a hand over his mouth to stifle a pathetic, melancholy sound.

“Ilya?” Yuna asks worriedly, sitting up.

“Sorry,” he huffs, blinking back tears.

“It’s alright,” David says, warmth in his voice. “We shouldn't have pushed.”

“I’m sorry,” Yuna tells him, and she does sound earnestly apologetic.

“No, is okay.” Ilya lets out a small laugh and wipes at his eyes. “I just- I have not had *family* in a very long time. Maybe not ever, if I am being honest. I always had hoped if I ever was lucky enough to become a father, that somehow my children would get to have that.” He shakes his head. “I cannot believe it is coming true.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” Yuna reaches over and squeezes his knee comfortingly. “Of course, of course. She’s our grandbaby, and you’re her dad. No matter what happens between you and Shane, you are family. We are always here.”

Ilya closes his eyes against another flood of emotion.

“You are unbelievable,” he says quietly.

“No,” David replies, “this is what family is supposed to be. Unconditional.”

Unconditional.

Ilya has never felt that, before, except maybe with Sveta. It’s different, though. It’s not like *this.*

“For what it is worth,” Ilya tells them, “your son is the most incredible man I have ever met. I am *so* happy he is my baby’s dad. I wish I could- I wish we could-” He falters. “He does not want more. He has been clear about that. I will respect what he wants, always.”

Even as he says the words, he can’t help but think of Shane’s warm body beneath him. Their lips pressing together, passionate and hungry. The closeness and intimacy of their bodies colliding, being inside Shane and feeling like nothing bad in the world could ever reach him in that moment. Feeling utterly *complete.*

But, it is just sex. Just a biological need, to Shane. It does not mean anything to him. And he does not owe Ilya anything. Never did.

“He can be difficult,” Yuna says, eyes gleaming with the same warm shine that Shane’s get when he’s emotional but trying to hide it. “I know he’s not an easy nut to crack, Ilya. But… that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try.”

Ilya follows her gaze to the sleeping face of the gorgeous man in his lap. His chest softens a bit, processing her words. He translates them in his head, the way he always does with English.

If you want this to work, you have to make the first move.

“I hear you,” he tells her, “maybe I can…talk to him about it. Maybe convince him about the baby shower, too. He would like that, and he deserves to be celebrated.”

“Only if that’s something you’re comfortable with,” Yuna says, the tone of her voice gently switching to something more nonchalant. “We could invite your loved ones, friends or whomever you like. You deserve to be celebrated too.”

Ilya bites back more tears at that. “I appreciate you, very much for saying this to me.”

“You are a good man,” she responds, “the way Shane talks about you, well, it makes us very relieved you are the one he’s doing this with.”

“Very much so,” David agrees. “We don’t worry about him with you.”

Ilya presses a hand to his heart, unsure of how to find words big enough to properly respond to an admission so completely vulnerable and gratifying.

Luckily, he doesn’t have to. Shane stirs on his lap, a small, discontented whine pulling from his throat as his eyes flutter open.

“Hey, hey,” Ilya says, carefully cradling his head, “are you okay?”

“My hips are killing me,” he moans, “can you help me sit up? Sorry.”

“No sorry is needed, *solnyschko.* Here, move slow.” Ilya delicately helps pull Shane into a seated position, watching worriedly as he adjusts his hips on the couch. “We should get you home into bed.”

Shane nods, rubbing his eyes. “Sorry everyone, I didn’t mean to fall asleep.”

“It’s okay honey,” Yuna says, “it’s getting late. You should probably get home to rest.”

He nods again, yawning like a sleepy kitten awakening from a midday nap. He curses quietly, wincing. “Shit, my contacts are still in. Ow.”

“I grabbed your glasses for you,” Ilya says, “they are in glove compartment in car.”

“You did?” he asks, brows furrowed with surprise.

“Mm, da your eyes get dry after dinner,” Ilya reminds him.

Shane can’t seem to pull his gaze off Ilya’s face. It’s a little intense.

“Should we head out?” Ilya suggests.

“Oh. Right, right.” Shane nods, accepting his outstretched hands for assistance in standing. He lets out another small whimper on the way up, one hand flying to his lower back as his bowed legs nearly betray him. “Ow, fuck me.”

“Have you had her measured lately?” Yuna inquires as she and David stand too. “I think you’re measuring ahead, Shane. For only twenty-eight weeks, you’re getting pretty big.”

Shane cuts her a withering look. “Thanks mom, that’s what everyone wants to hear when they’re pregnant.”

“Sorry,” she says apologetically, with a sheepish smile. “You’re doing great, honey.”

The four of them congregate in the foyer to say goodbyes. Shane accepts hugs from both of his parents, and tells his mom to *please* be careful in the kitchen. She takes the teasing good-naturedly.

Ilya is surprised too, when David extends his hand to shake. His grip is firm, but friendly. He smiles at Ilya with a tenderness that he sometimes sees in Shane, buried quite deep usually.

“Thanks for patching up my wife, and looking after my son and granddaughter so well,” David tells him, “it means more than you know.”

“I- of course,” Ilya says, trying not to get choked up.

“Come back over soon, please.” Yuna reaches out and pulls him down to hug her, even though he’s nearly a foot taller. “And text me, okay? I’m always here.”

“Okay,” he breathes, “thank you.”

“Thanks guys,” Shane says, already halfway out the door.

“Be careful on the steps, sweetheart,” Yuna warns.

“Because I’m *so huge,”* he mutters so quietly only Ilya can hear.

By the time they’re in the car and on the road back to the apartment, Shane has wrenched the contact lenses from his eyes and replaced them with his glasses. He exhales a sigh of relief, leaning back against the seat with his legs spread to give his belly more room.

“Did you have a nice time?” Ilya asks, keeping his eyes on the dark pavement ahead of them.

“Yeah, other than my mom saw-trapping herself at the island and then calling me a whale.” Shane huffs, rolling his eyes. “She just says whatever she’s thinking without realizing how it’s gonna come out, I swear.”

Ilya refrains from reminding Shane that *he* has this particular habit as well.

“And I know I do it too,” he says, before Ilya can even think of a reply, “I just didn’t need to hear how huge I look tonight. I already know.”

“You do not look huge,” Ilya tuts, “you look very healthy, happy, and perfect.”

He thinks about Yuna’s advice. Making the first move. He wonders, what would be a good time? To slow down and tell Shane how he feels? That he wants to give them a shot? That he doesn’t want to split custody or worry about hiding or feel like some shameful secret thing that happened on accident?

The next time they have a *casual* romp in the hay? A friends-only, passionate, hungry lovemaking session? Would that be a good time to bring up his feelings?

Or would it be a moment like this? Where it’s quiet and peaceful between them, on the heels of a delicious dinner, and a warm evening with family. Would Shane respond better without the pressure of everything else around them?

Does he even feel the same?

“You’re too nice to me,” Shane replies, eyes drifting to look up at the stars outside his window, “I truly can’t believe you look at me and want to have sex with me. I mean, if you’re doing it out of pity, I really commend your commitment to that kindness.”

Ilya frowns. “Is not pity.”

“I appreciate it anyway.” Shane glances at him, expression bashful. “I’m sure you’d be having a lot more fun doing casual sex with Svetlana.”

Ilya clears his throat. “I told you that is long over, remember? She has a girlfriend.”

Shane hums. “But if she didn’t, you’d-”

“Still be here, with you,” Ilya interjects before he can finish.

The cabin goes quiet.

“Sorry,” Shane says after a beat, “my mom’s comments always get in my head. I’m blowing it out of proportion.”

“She shouldn’t have commented,” Ilya says calmly.

“It’s probably better we don’t do that again, anyway,” Shane admits, fiddling with the hem of his shirt. He glances sideways at Ilya, but it’s so quick he isn’t sure if he imagined it. “Right? I mean, what she said too about custody…it kind of got me thinking. We don’t want this to get too complicated. For the baby’s sake.”

Ilya swallows hard, and it feels like fire going down his throat. “Right, we would not want… complicated.”

Shane’s gaze lingers on him, and Ilya glances sideways. He looks away quickly. “Okay, so we’re in agreement then. Back to just roommates. No casual sex.”

Ilya’s knuckles go white on the steering wheel. “Is that what you want?”

There’s a pause.

“Yeah, of course,” Shane replies quietly.

How is Ilya supposed to argue with that?

“Me too,” he says, tone clipped.

“Well, great.” Shane coughs weakly into his fist. “We are both in agreement. We do not want to have sex, or kiss or do anything else like that. Just roommates."

“Just roommates," Ilya says through his teeth.

“We probably should figure out custody,” Shane adds.

“Not tonight, please. It is late.”

“Of course, Ilya. Sorry. Not tonight.”

It goes quiet again, and Ilya forces himself to focus on the road, instead of the twisting agony inside his chest.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

my last authors note was all "oooh im so excited new job hahaha"

IM A FUCKING IDIOT.

HATE my new job. its going terribly. if anyone knows anyone hiring for an excel expert/logistics/project management queen, please hit my line. im miserable. my brain has been fried and this chapter has taken far too long to write

THAT BEING SAID

i hope you enjoy and please remember i only write HAPPY ENDINGS !! <3

come talk to me on tumblr or x

boopernatural -Tumblr

imbihesgay - X

hope to get the next chapter out faster !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So where do you stand?” Galina adjusts in her chair, Russian words flowing off her tongue as she speaks quickly and scribbles on her little notepad.

Ilya sighs heavily. He glances around him at the warm orange glow of his therapist’s office. It’s a quiet, calm place. Galina has never been one to beat around the bush, she tells it to him straight after so many years of working together, but she always tries to keep the environment nice and soothing. It’s a nice touch, if nothing else.

“He just wants to be friends, co-parents,” Ilya replies, tapping the toe of his sneaker on the carpet rhythmically. He has to be to the hospital in an hour for his shift, but she’d managed to squeeze him in after a seriously pathetic, desperate text message request for her guidance. He’s sure she was a little surprised, considering he’s never done this before.

“And that’s not what you want.” Her words are not a question.

“I…” Ilya exhales raggedly. “I am finding it more and more difficult to not cross any lines.”

Galina studies him for a moment in a way that makes him feel watched. He adjusts uncomfortably under the scrutiny. She always makes him feel like she can see inside of his head.

“What?” he finally asks.

“I have never seen you like this,” Galina admits “So many years we’ve been working together, Ilya, and I have never seen you in love.”

At that, he sits up straighter, hands extended like some sort of defense mechanism. “Whoa! *Love* is not happening here. We are just- he is-”

“Ilya, I am the one person you cannot lie to.” Galina meets his eyes firmly. “He is having your baby. You are going to be a father. Why is it that you won’t be the one to make the first move, hm?”

Ilya is already shaking his head, jaw clenched. The words are at the back of his throat, a raw, honest truth too vulnerable to say aloud. He doesn’t want anyone to know this ugly, gnawing feeling inside of him. This thing with Shane has nothing to do with-

“Is it about your mom?” Galina asks.

Ilya inhales like he’s been punched.

After a beat to compose himself, he replies, “you are a mind reader.”

“No Ilya, I just *understand* your mind after all these years.”

He smiles briefly at that. If no one else, he can at least say his *shrink* is someone close to him. God, that’s depressing.

“Shane has made it clear he only wants to be friends,” Ilya repeats. “I won’t ever force him or pressure him into something he does not want.”

“And is that what your dad did?” Galina prompts. “To your mother?”

Yes, he wants to say. His mother was so young when she met Grigori, so helpless and alone. She needed him in the way you need a roof over your head and water to drink. Not a want, but a desperation to survive. And his father took advantage of that at every turn.

Maybe if she hadn’t felt so trapped, she never would have…done what she did.

Ilya’s teeth grit. “I won’t be like him. I won’t ever let Shane resent me, or feel like he was out of options just because I got him pregnant. I respect his wishes.”

“Ilya.” Galina sets her notepad down and leans forward on her elbows. “Have you considered that maybe, telling Shane how you feel, isn’t *pressuring* him? It’s just letting him know how you feel. He can choose to do whatever he wants with the information.”

“I…guess that is true,” Ilya concedes, brows furrowing as he ponders her words.

“You’re gonna do what you want,” Galina says, “but don’t let yourself think that opening up about what you want makes you like your father. You aren’t selfish. You aren’t him. Shane knows that, and deep down, I know you do too.”

“I know,” he replies quickly, shaking his head as if trying to clear it. “I will not be like him. I know this.”

“Then what harm is it, to tell Shane the truth?” she asks.

“What if he rejects me?” Ilya inquires. “What if I tell him I want more, that I want to be family, and he…he still just wants to be co-parents?”

Galina gives him a sympathetic smile. “Then at least you won’t be left wondering.”

Harsh, but true.

“You are right,” he admits, sighing. “Is better to know now.”

“Lots of people co-parent, Ilya. Your baby will be okay, no matter what happens.” She leans forward and gives his arm a gentle pat. “You are going to be a great dad.”

He reaches up and squeezes her wrist once, gently, as a show of gratitude for her kind words. “Thank you. It means a lot coming from you.”

“Because of my degree?” she says with a laugh.

“No.” He shakes his head. “Because you know my worst, and still, you think this. That is important.”

Her expression softens a bit. “Yes, I do. That’s a lucky baby, to get you as her father.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat, and smiles, and tries to take solace in the gentle honesty of her words.

“Hmmm.” Dr. Laveen’s expression is thoughtful as she narrows her eyes at the small numbered measuring tape currently pressed along the slope of Shane’s belly.

It looks… well, painful for lack of a better word. The skin is pulled tight and taut, stretch marks lining the shiny globe of flesh, and it arches his lower back from the heavy weight. Ilya is not envious. He’s a little relieved it’s not *him.*

“What is *hmmm?”* Shane demands, sitting up on his elbows a bit.

“Well, you’re thirty weeks today, but you’re measuring…” She double checks her numbers. “Thirty-two.”

Shane inhales slowly, then huffs out a breath with some difficulty. “I don’t know what that means.”

“It means your belly is bigger than we’d expect at this stage,” she says.

“So I’m fat?” Shane deadpans. “That’s your diagnosis?”

“Shane,” Ilya murmurs quietly, reaching over to place a *platonic* hand on his shoulder. With his discomfort growing, Shane has been a bit irritable the past few weeks.

Shane glances at his expression, then sighs, turning back to the doctor. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” she assures him, “this could mean a few things. You may have extra fluid buildup, or the due date calculation could be wrong, but I’m thinking she’s just a big girl. This is good news, especially during a pregnancy with HG. Most babies are born smaller when you suffer from that.”

“He has been doing so well,” Ilya tells her, “keeping down all his meals for… I mean, close to two months now really.”

“That is amazing,” Dr. Laveen replies. “I don’t want you to worry, Shane. She’s very healthy and so are you. We will keep an eye on her growth and if we need to induce, we will.”

“Induce?” At that, Shane’s face pales.

“Only if she’s getting too big,” the doctor says, “but it may level out. Let’s keep an eye on it, okay?”

“What can I do?” Shane asks her, and Ilya can hear the panic begin to creep into his voice.

“There isn’t anything you can do, at this point,” Dr. Laveen says. “Baby is gonna keep growing and developing, and that’s perfectly fine. She’s just on the bigger side. She’s got two very tall, very big dads, it’s no surprise. I don’t want you to stress yourself out worrying about this, Shane.”

“Shane,” Ilya murmurs, “is going to be okay. She is just big strong hockey player like you.”

He cracks a small smile at that. “She doesn’t need to be a hockey player. She can do soccer or something.”

“Is in her DNA.” Ilya elbows him gently. “You and your father, Mr. McGill Hockey.”

Shane groans. “If he tells you one more story about his *glory days* I’m going to have to put my foot down.”

“It’s nice,” Ilya assures him. And, he’s telling the truth. The fact that he communicates with Shane’s family enough that these anecdotes have begun to naturally come up, and he’s organically learning about them, it feels very good. The connection has been easy, which he’s grateful for.

“Well, if there aren’t any more questions for today, we’re all set.” Dr. Laveen smiles at them, expression warm.

“Thank you.” Shane shifts his hips, trying to unload from the exam cot. He huffs out a few heavy breaths, before looking desperately to Ilya.

“I have you.” Ilya extends his arms, and Shane takes them, gripping tightly as Ilya pulls him to his feet. He groans involuntarily, probably at the pain in his back and hips.

“I’m fine,” he assures the two worried people suddenly crowding him. “Just, it’s heavy. It hurts.”

“I’m sorry,” Dr. Laveen says, “you’re almost there. Just a little longer.”

“Two more months,” he mutters.

“Let’s get some lunch,” Ilya suggests.

“Yes, because I need to get bigger.” Shane scowls.

Dr. Laveen shoots Ilya a look that he thinks roughly translates to: *good luck with that!*

They end up outside at a nice cafe. The chairs are large and plush, so they offer Shane some support on his back. It’s an upscale place, because Ilya has learned Shane appreciates a certain amount of luxury, even though he tries not to ask for much.

As they sit, Shane inspects the silverware quietly with a furrow in his brow, as if trying to see intangible germs or uncleanliness. He straightens his napkin beside his menu and studies the tabletop like he’s a health inspector. He’s quiet about it- doesn’t make a fuss, or mention any concerns to Ilya. It’s ritualistic, taking stock of his surroundings and the hygiene before he deems it comfortable.

Ilya has come to appreciate these odd little quirks of his. He has a lot of them. He’s superstitious, something Ilya knows is a result of professional athletics. He still watches the Metros play every game, and if he changes his routine before a loss, it makes him spiral and vow never to do that again. He folds his clothes neatly in the drawers of Ilya’s dresser. He keeps his toothbrush and hygiene products organized by color, and still checks the Metros game schedule like a religion on his phone every week. It’s like, being overly stringent makes him feel more grounded.

“I like that you do this,” Ilya says, gesturing vaguely as Shane finishes his little inspection.

Shane’s cheeks flush an adorable pink. “My mom says it’s neurotic.”

“Mm, she is not wrong.”

He exhales, leaning back against his chair and rubbing a hand over his belly. He does this like it’s a calming gesture. “I’m high maintenance, I know. It’s a problem.”

“Is not a *problem,”* Ilya assures him. “It is okay to need to be *maintained.”*

Shane rolls his eyes. “Needing so much *maintenance* is probably the reason I’m still single at almost thirty, while the rest of my teammates are married with families.”

Ilya's forehead crinkles into a frown. Shane has this tendency to self-deprecate, almost instinctively. He wants to tell Shane that he doesn't *have* to be single- that Ilya…well, all these little things Shane thinks are hard to maintain or annoying? Ilya would *love* to provide for him.

"If it would make you feel a bit better about the baby's size," Ilya says, trying to segue into a topic less painful -well, for *him*-. "I really think we should reconsider the lamaze class. I know you said it was foop foop-"

"I said *foo foo,"* Shane interjects with a smile.

"That is nonsense too. Anyway, I know you said foop foop, but it's been proven to be very useful during labor. Will you at least consider it?"

"We can do it, if you think it's a good idea," Shane says, eyes softening. "I trust you."

I trust you.

The words fill Ilya's chest with a strange warmth. He can't help but let his gaze linger on the contours of Shane's beautiful face. He looks so healthy, full and beaming brightly. The *pregnancy glow* thing is extremely real, and Shane is radiant. All he wants to do is reach across the table and brush his fingertips along the spray of freckles on his cheeks, appreciate each perfect inch of flesh.

Before he can muster a reply, someone approaches the table. He turns to see a tall, broad shouldered man with dark hair standing there. Ilya thinks his face looks sort of familiar, but he can't place him exactly.

"JJ?" Shane's eyes go wide, and Ilya realizes this is one of his teammates. "What are you doing- why- why are you in Ottawa?"

"We have a game here tonight," JJ says, but his eyes are only focused on one thing. Shane's visibly swollen abdomen. "I saw you from over there and wanted to say hi, but, Shane, are you-"

"I can explain," Shane says, as if he's done something wrong.

"You're pregnant?" JJ asks, tone of his voice disbelieving. "Shane, what the fuck is going on? We thought you were on IR for your collarbone. What's- does coach know? Does *anyone* know? Who is the father?" He turns and looks at Ilya, blinking. "Is it *you?"*

Ilya glances at Shane, seeing the visible panic on his face. He staggers to his feet, hands outstretched like a plea.

"Oh my god, dude," JJ says, still scanning Shane's body, "how could you not *tell us?* Jesus- *this* is why you've been out all season?"

"JJ please don't say anything," Shane begs, "no one knows except for Hayden. I don't want-"

“Are you serious?” The other man demands, expression disbelieving. “Hayden knows? And kept it a secret?”

“I asked him to.”

“Why?”

Shane’s expression sets firmly. “Don’t act like you don’t know, JJ. You came around quickly, but you *know* the other guys would fucking crucify me for this.”

JJ’s face twists up, and he looks conflicted. “Shane, man, I-“

“JJ, they *barely* tolerate me being gay. How do you think they’re going to react when they see me with a giant baby bump?” Shane waves a hand at himself, lower lip wobbling. “I didn’t tell you because I don’t know how to…how to *protect* us from that.”

“Us?” JJ asks softly.

“The baby and me.” Shane’s jaw sets.

There’s a beat of quiet.

Then, JJ turns to Ilya, frowning. “Are you the dad?”

“Yes, he is,” Shane answers. “Just stay out of it, JJ. Please don’t say anything. After she’s born I’m coming back. Nothing’s gonna change.”

“It’s a girl?” JJ asks, pressing a hand to his chest. “Shane, you weren’t going to tell us? We’ve known each other for a decade, man, I…wait.” He glances between them. “What’s your plan when you come back? You *are* going to tell everyone you had a baby, right?”

Shane’s expression remains neutral. His teeth grit audibly.

“I can’t believe this.” JJ shakes his head, as though Shane’s silence is answer enough. “I know the team hasn’t been perfect, Shane, but you’re keeping your child a secret? Like you’re ashamed of her or something? I mean, what the fuck?”

At that, Shane’s fists clench. Ilya gets to his feet, hesitant to overstep, but not liking the direction this conversation is going.

“You have no idea what it’s like,” Shane snarls, and Ilya has never seen him so angry before. “I lost all of my choices, all of my control when I got outed. *Everyone* looks at me differently now. It’s already so fucking much to manage and-and this on top of it would be something I don’t come back from. I don’t expect you to understand, JJ, but fucking try to at least not be an asshole about it.”

“I’m the asshole?” JJ demands. “You’re having a secret baby that you plan to hide forever, and *I’m* the asshole?”

“I think that is enough,” Ilya interjects, placing his palm flat on the table. Both men turn to look at him. Their altercation has caused a bit of a scene, with people at other tables murmuring. It won’t be long before someone recognizes them both. They aren’t as well known here as in Montreal, but it’s still not smart to have so many eyes on them.

“I want to go,” Shane says to Ilya, big brown eyes burning with emotion.

“Then we go,” Ilya agrees. He crosses around the table and takes Shane by the arm.

“You’re not helping him, you know,” JJ says to Ilya as they brush by, “letting him hide and be ashamed, you’re doing him no good being part of this.”

Ilya turns to him, nostrils flared. “Who the fuck are you, to tell him what decisions he should make? Is like he said, you do not know what he’s going through. You don’t get to judge.”

“I may not understand,” JJ concedes, “but at least I’m not helping him be a coward.”

“Let’s *go.”* Shane grabs Ilya’s wrist and hauls him away before he can even try to think of a response to that.

They make it back to the car, and by the time they’re sealed in the cabin, Shane is pressing his hands flat against the dashboard, his breathing ragged. He ducks his head, bending in half as much as his large belly will allow. His eyes are squeezed shut, and panicked little sounds are breaking from his chest.

“Shane,” Ilya murmurs, gently smoothing a hand down his arm, “just breathe, try to relax, you are okay.”

Shane just shakes his head, breaths coming quicker, less rhythmic. Ilya recognizes it immediately, he’s having a panic attack. This has happened once or twice since they’ve been living together. Shane’s mind becomes overwhelmed, and he struggles trying to put things back in order.

Ilya continues rubbing his arm, keeping firm, even pressure. “Shane, you are okay. You are here with me in the car. Everything is okay. Try to take some slow breaths.”

“I- he saw me,” Shane gasps, “he *saw* me. He’s going to tell them.”

“No he won’t,” Ilya shushes him, “he is your friend.”

“I’m a coward.” Shane drops his head, a small sob crescendoing in his throat. “I’m a fucking coward.”

Ilya’s heart twists. Shane sounds so broken, so lost, and all Ilya wants to do is fix this for him. But, he can’t. Ilya doesn’t know the answer either. He understands completely why Shane is trying to keep this separate from his career, and from what he’s just said to JJ, it sounds like his team was a little less tolerant than Hayden made it sound.

Ilya doesn’t even like the idea of Shane going back there at all, let alone freshly postpartum. The idea makes his skin crawl a little, and he sort of *agrees* with Shane about keeping their

baby a secret. To protect her.

At the same time though, is JJ right? Is… is he only encouraging Shane to hide? To never get to truly be himself? To never have the freedom all of his teammates have to discuss their lives and families and intricacies- the way he deserves to?

Can this pressure really bear down on him forever? Isn't there a breaking point?

Maybe without the burdens of secrecy… maybe he'd…maybe he'd want to give things a try. With Ilya.

"Shane," he says softly, "you are not a coward. This is complicated, I know that."

"I just want to feel like myself again," Shane weeps, pressing his knuckles against his eyelids. "I just want to play fucking hockey, I want to just be *captian.* I'm tired of being *different."*

Ilya swallows back a painful lump in his throat. "I know, Shane. I know. It isn't fair."

"Can you please just take me home?" Shane pulls away, crossing his arms over his belly and looking out the window, like he's trying to devour all of his emotions in one quick swoop.

"Shane-" Ilya tries.

"Please just take me home," Shane repeats, jaw set, tears drying on his cheeks.

Ilya sighs, and puts the car into drive.

Ilya is on hour thirteen of his shift, when the scream pierces through his ears.

It's been a long Thursday- he's had to change out of bloody scrubs twice already. He's really hoping he won't have to do that again for the rest of the night. He'd also love not to pronounce anyone else dead. One and done is good for today.

Unfortunately, his attention is diverted from a precious cup of disgusting coffee, when the receptionist bursts through the doors yelling, "we need a doctor in the parking lot *right now!"*

Ilya is the closest doctor around when she screams that, so of course, he rushes into motion.

"What is going on?" he asks, following her through the swinging doors to the lobby, and out into the parking lot.

He gets his answer when he sees the silver SUV parked haphazardly in the ER bay. The driver side door is wide open, and a heavily pregnant woman is halfway spilling out of it. She's got one arm curled under her belly, the other gripping the handle of the door.

"Page obstetrics," Ilya says to the nurse who's at his side. He approaches the car door, resting his palm on the outside as he faces the woman. "Hi there, I'm Dr. Rozanov. What's your name?"

“C-Cassie,” she gasps, big blue eyes blown wide with panic. “My baby is coming right now!”

“Okay,” he says calmly, “I’ve called for an OBGYN right now to come assist. Who is your regular doctor?”

“Uh, Dr. Rozanov,” the nurse at his side leans over, “Dr. Julia is on call, but she’s with a patient in the OR. So is her backup call.”

Ilya exhales sharply. From the car, Cassie shrieks.

His attention is immediately drawn back to her, and he closes in. “Okay Cassie, we are going to move you upstairs to a room to-”

“You don’t understand!” She wails. “The baby is coming right *now!* Just look!”

She shifts her thighs apart, rucking up the fabric of her sundress, and Ilya’s eyes go wide.

That’s a head.

He has been fortunate in his career in emergency medicine that he has actually never had to deliver a baby. He’s been present for deliveries, and obviously he’s trained to do it, but he’s not an obstetrician. And these are far from ideal circumstances.

Still, he’s a doctor. The only one physically present at the moment. And she’s alone, afraid. She needs his help.

That’s exactly why he’s here.

“Well, Cassie, you have a very eager baby. Let’s get them here,” he says with a small smile, accepting a pair of gloves that are handed to him by the nurse. He crouches in front of her, realizing she’s pushing. “Cassie, I know it is hard, but please try not to push for a moment. I need to make sure there is no cord around your baby’s neck.”

“Okay,” she sobs.

Ilya quickly clears the baby’s neck, relieved when there’s no obstruction. “Okay Cassie, everything looks good. On the next contraction, try to pant, like this, and push at the same time.”

He huffs out a few urgent breaths, steady and even, to show her what to do. She follows his example, but is quickly overtaken by a screech as the shoulders start to make their way through.

“You are doing so good,” he tells her firmly, “just a little more, try to breathe. I know it’s hard but you are doing it, Cassie. You are doing it.”

The baby’s shoulders slip through with a small tear. Blood and fluids soak his arms and the front of his shirt. There goes his second pair of scrubs.

“Keep going Cassie, you are doing it! You are- Cassie, she is here! Your daughter is here!” Ilya catches the baby in his arms a little frantically, quickly clearing her airway and checking her color. She’s bright pink, and screaming from the top of her tiny little lungs.

“Is she okay?” Cassie weeps, body collapsing against the seat with exhaustion.

Ilya blinks back wetness from his eyes, looking down at this little baby. “She is just perfect, Cassie. You did it. Here, come meet your Mama little girl.”

He passes the baby into Cassie’s eagerly waiting arms, smiling in spite of himself at the sob she lets out. She cradles the baby to her chest like they were designed to fit together that way. In truth, they were.

“Let’s get her upstairs,” Ilya says to the staffers who have finally come out to assist them, “she needs an OB consult, fluids, sutures, maybe some blood. Baby looks good, we need to make sure Mama is good too. Let’s move!”

The nurses and orderlies hustle into gear, loading Cassie and the baby onto a gurney. He watches them go, pausing when Cassie grabs his wrist.

“Thank you,” she breathes, and then she’s whisked away for care.

Ilya stands there beside her still-running car, smeared with blood and baby fluids and all sorts of things he’s forgotten the scientific word for at this moment.

His only thoughts are of Shane. He can’t believe this is going to be them in just a few months. Looking down at their beautiful daughter, filled with life, all other troubles and strife completely inconsequential.

“Dr. Rozanov?”

He startles a bit, turning to see the orderly currently climbing into the driver’s side door of Cassie’s car.

“Yes?” he asks.

“I have to move this car. Did you want to…did you need anything?”

“Oh. No. Sorry.” Ilya nods and moves away from the car, heading for the front doors. He’ll have to call Shane, as soon as he gets some clean scrubs on.

“Hey Ilya.”

The sound of Shane’s voice is a balm on Ilya’s chest, and he can’t help the smile that envelopes his face. “Hello, *solnyschko*. What are you doing?”

“Just watching a game,” Shane replies, a note of sadness in his words. “You have a little break?”

“Mm, yes, I had to change clothes. Wanted to hear your voice. I hope that is okay.”

“Yeah, of course it’s okay.” Shane pauses, tentative. “Is…everything alright?”

“I delivered a baby,” Ilya replies. “How is the game?”

“You delivered a baby?”

“I did, in the parking lot.”

“Wha- when? Why?”

“Emergency happened, I work in the emergency department.”

“Hilarious.”

“Was not a joke.”

“Holy shit, Ilya. Are you like…okay?”

“I am fine, I am not the one who pushed a baby out,” Ilya says with a smirk. “But, it did get me thinking about you. You still want to go to lamaze class next Friday, yes?”

“Yes, definitely. You know you don’t have to go, if it’s a hassle, Ilya.”

Ilya can’t help but think about Cassie, terrified and alone in the parking lot. He shudders.

“You are not going alone,” he says, “that is final.”

“Okay.” Shane’s voice is a little softer upon reply, more gentle. “Thanks.”

“Mm. How is the game?”

Shane sighs. “We’re losing. I’m never wearing these socks on game day again.”

“You are insane.”

“I’ve been told.”

There’s a few beats of quiet, and then Ilya asks, “Shane?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you want to do something with me tonight? Go out?”

“We can, sure. What did you have in mind?”

Ilya bites back a grin. “You will see. Eight o’clock tonight?”

“Don’t you want to get some sleep? You’ve been at work for-”

“Eight, Shane?”

“Well, yeah if you want.”

“See you then.”

“See you then.”

After checking on mother and baby -both doing great- Ilya finally gets to leave the hospital and head home. To *Shane*.

He had called in a few favors to arrange tonight’s plans on such last minute notice. He hopes Shane is going to enjoy it. He’s mostly just glad he agreed to go.

Shane is dressed and ready waiting for him when he arrives back at the apartment at seven-thirty. He’s wearing a pair of maternity jeans, the one with the big elastic band around his belly he always complains about. He only wears them when he has somewhere “important” to be, which lately, is rare. His black hair is combed neatly, and he’s wearing a navy blue cashmere sweater that stretches over his round belly. When Ilya steps in, he stands off the couch with a huff of difficulty, and Ilya swears he smells the crispness of expensive cologne.

“Wow,” he muses, dropping his bag and kicking off his shoes. “You clean up nicely.”

Shane’s cheeks flush bright red, and he glances down at himself. “You didn’t say where we were going, what if it was important? Like, I dunno, a meeting about your will?”

Ilya stares at him. “You think I asked you to come have a meeting about my will at 8PM?”

“Have you updated your will?” Shane inquires. “You’re going to include the baby, right? I updated mine.”

Ilya manages a laugh as he breezes by him toward the bathroom. “I am thirty-six, Shane, I do not *have* a will.”

“What?!” Shane follows him through the door, where luckily, Ilya is already behind the shower curtain scrubbing his hair. “Tell me you’re making a bad joke.”

“I only make good jokes, *malysh.”*

“I don’t understand when you use those words. You don’t have a will?”

“Shane, how do you say, have a chill-out pill please? I will make will when the baby gets here. Do not worry.”

Shane exhales loudly. “Where are we going, anyway?”

“Do you know the word *surprise?”*

“Yes.”

“Okay, it is a surprise. You will like it.”

“How can you know that?”

“Because I know you.”

And it settles between them as he says this- that it’s true. Over the past eight months, they’ve grown to know each other pretty well. Flaws, faults, warts and all.

Shane does not have any warts. His body is impressively smooth. He does not do any elaborate skincare than Ilya has seen, so there must be something suspicious going on. Secret skincare, perhaps. Or very good genetics.

Judging by Yuna Hollander’s ethereal beauty, probably the latter.

Ilya is getting distracted. He finishes washing up, finding himself draped in a fluffy white towel as he steps out of the shower. The towels have been a lot fluffier lately, because Shane likes to wash them with this special softening liquid. Ilya had never minded the roughness before, but he thinks now he is ruined for life.

He’s ruined for life about a lot of things, because of Shane.

Ilya dresses in a pair of jeans and a black button down, something quick and easy, with a canvas jacket. It’s early spring, still quite cold in Ottawa. He grabs Shane’s skates from his closet shelf, where they’ve sat dormant for months, and tucks them into his jacket, thrown over his arm as espionage.

“Are we eating?” Shane asks as Ilya steps out of the bedroom, and he smiles at the sight of him. He’s standing in the kitchen with a jar of Nutella in one hand and a spoon in the other.

“I see you have had appetizer already,” Ilya teases lightly, gesturing to the Nutella-streaked spoon.

Shane’s eyes narrow. “*You* want to carry the baby next time?”

“No sir,” Ilya replies with his lips still tightened in a smile. “There is going to be a *next time,* is there?”

Shane rolls his eyes and puts the lid back on the Nutella. “Are we eating?”

“Yes, let’s go.”

Ilya drives them to a nearby restaurant he knows is good. It’s dimly lit, with soft orange bulbs and large greenery decorating the outdoor patio. The night is chilly, but Shane’s been boiling hot most of the time lately, so he insists he wants to sit out in the fresh air.

“So tell me about delivering a baby,” Shane says as he takes a hearty bite of breadstick. “Is it as horrible as they say it is?”

Ilya considers this, taking a moment to pull his focus off the beautiful contours of Shane's face. He's so beautiful like this- lit by the lamplight, soft skin glowing, freckles illuminated on his cheeks and his arrow-straight nose.

"It can be horrible," Ilya says, speaking quickly to assuage the sudden panic on Shane's expression, "but good support can make a world of difference. You will not be alone. I will be there, and your mom, and whoever else you need. I promise."

"I want all the drugs," Shane tells him, "don't let me try to be tough. I don't want to be tough."

"You will have all the drugs," Ilya confirms.

"I can't believe she's gonna be here in two months," Shane huffs, running his palm over the curve of his distended belly. "Like, she's gonna be a real person."

"I know," Ilya murmurs, looking contemplatively at his own breadstick, "right now she is just big belly. Soon she will be a baby."

"Big?" Shane demands.

"A belly," Ilya corrects immediately. "A very tiny, petite, itty bitty little belly. So small. Could fit in the pocket of my shirt."

Shane snorts out a laugh, shaking his head. "Nice save."

"Really though, it is exciting." Ilya takes a sip of his coke, looking over at Shane's warm brown eyes in the glowing light. "We are going to have a daughter."

"Yeah," Shane replies, voice softening around the edges, warmth spilling into his words, "we're gonna have a daughter."

There's affection in the quiet look they share, excitement, despite the circumstances. Ilya knows they both want this more than anything. Want *her*.

Dinner is easy and effortless, because it always is with Shane. They have casual conversation, discuss their upcoming lamaze class, discuss Shane's bad luck socks, discuss Ilya's work schedule for his paternity leave.

Then, they're in the car, and Ilya's nerves begin to ratchet. He really hopes this isn't a misguided, bad idea. He'd called in a huge favor to Svetlana's uncle, who owns a local ice rink. He'd also promised to ask Shane if he'd ever do publicity for the rink, in exchange. He'll probably table that request for later.

He can see the confusion in Shane's eyes when they pull up to the empty rink, and he turns to look sharply at Ilya.

"Why are we here?" he demands.

“I have not skated in many years,” Ilya tells him, “I need a good teacher. How am I supposed to keep up with you and our baby if I cannot skate well?”

Shane’s brows furrow. “Ilya…”

“Shane, do you miss being on the ice?”

“Well, yeah.”

“Then let’s go be on the ice, okay?”

Shane follows him out of the car. Ilya punches in the code Sveta got from her uncle for the security system, and they’re inside. It’s dark, so he reaches for Shane’s hand, trying to make sure he doesn’t fall.

Their fingers close around each other in the darkness, and Ilya carefully leads him through until they reach the office with the light panels. The rink is illuminated then, bright fluorescent lights over the crisp white ice. It’s freezing, but Shane looks right at home as he smiles out at the ice.

“I’m huge,” Shane says, waddling over to the edge of the boards to look at the rink, “I don’t know if I can even still skate.”

“I won’t let you fall,” Ilya says.

Shane smirks at him. “I thought I was supposed to be teaching you?”

“You are *refreshing* me, just let me get refreshed first.” Ilya winks, and unravels his jacket, handing Shane his skates.

Shane’s eyes go big and warm at the sight of them. He reaches out, fingertips brushing along the capped blades, longing in his expression.

“I will help you put them on,” Ilya says, because he knows Shane cannot see his feet anymore and cannot bend in half.

Shane smiles gratefully at him.

It’s a bit of an effort, getting his slightly swollen feet to fit comfortably into the skates, but he insists they’re fine. Ilya helps him lace them up, then grabs himself a pair from the reserves at the rink. They’re a size too small, but it was all he could find.

“Let me get my ocean legs,” Ilya says, “and then I will come get you and help you.”

“Okay.” Shane nods, probably aware that in his current state he won’t have the balance to skate without much assistance.

Delicately, Ilya glides his way out onto the ice in the ill-fitting skates. The ice is slick and unfamiliar beneath his feet, and he immediately shoots an arm out to grab the boards and steady himself from falling.

“Shit,” he mutters, and hears Shane’s boisterous laughter from the sidelines.

“Be careful!” Shane yells.

Ilya glances over his shoulder to see him sitting there, one arm braced under his round belly, legs kicked out in his skates as he watches with a fond smile. He looks utterly adorable. It’s aggravating.

“Since when is ice slippery?!” Ilya calls back, pleased to hear more laughter follow.

The laughter is nice. He remembers when he was a kid, doing this with his mama outside on the frozen lakes and ponds. There was so much laughter then, Ilya as he slipped around the ice and tried to get his bearings, Mama as she held him tightly and told him he was a natural. He really was getting good, before she died.

It’s been so long since he did this, but the muscle memory is miraculously still there. He pushes off the boards, clumsily finding his footing, before he settles a bit, his body moving rhythmically over the ice. It feels natural, surprisingly.

“*Refreshing* my ass!” Shane yells. “You’re a natural!”

Ilya smiles, feeling weirdly warm. He hadn’t expected this to mean anything to him, he really just did it for Shane. But he can’t help but think of his Mama watching him right now. She’d be so excited to see him skating again. She’d be so excited that he’s having a *baby.* She’d be an amazing babushka.

He skates back over, leaning against the boards with a smug smile as Shane sizes him up. He extends an arm, fingers delicately pointed at Shane. “Would you like to join me?”

“Yep, just let me-” Shane adjusts his hips, pushing off his hands with a grunt of effort. He wobbles a bit, one hand under his belly to steady himself, the other grasping for a hold.

Ilya takes his hand over the boards, pulling him fully upright. Shane exhales heavily, looking at him from under his eyelashes.

“Show-off,” he mutters.

“I have a feeling you are about to put *my* showing off to shame,” Ilya says, carefully pulling him along toward the entrance to the ice.

They ease him down off the short ledge until both of his skates are on the ice. Ilya keeps hold of his hand, allowing him to find his balance, reorient himself.

“Fuck,” he chokes out, voice thick with emotion, “it’s been so long.”

“Hey, you are doing it,” Ilya says gently, “do you want to try to move a little?

“I’m kind of scared,” Shane admits, one hand pressed protectively over his bump, “my center of gravity is fucked.”

“Okay, we will just sit here. All night. Not moving.”

Shane laughs. “You’re such an asshole.”

“What did I say!”

“It’s your tone, not your words!”

“I am Russian, is just how we sound.”

“I’m sure I’m imagining it, but I swear your accent gets thicker when you’re trying to get away with something.” Shane arches an eyebrow at him.

Ilya grins mischievously. “I am sure you are…how do you say…*wrong.”*

“Okay, let’s try moving.” Shane peers down at his belly, forehead wrinkled. “I can’t even *see* my skates.”

“How about I pull you?” Ilya gently tugs on his arm, making him slide forward a half foot. Shane looks anxious, but after a beat, his shoulders settle. He looks more at ease.

They glide along hand-in-hand around the perimeter of the rink, Ilya leading less with each pass and letting Shane get more comfortable. If he watches, he can easily see the elite athlete within Shane. It’s dormant right now, as the pregnancy overtakes him, but his muscles are strong, his movements agile even in his state. He’s comfortable here, the ice like a second home to him.

“It is nice,” Ilya says as they take a reprieve, leaning against the boards, “to see you like this. In the element.”

Shane is red-faced and breathing heavily, but he chuckles. “This is hardly me in my element. I feel like I just ran a marathon and all we did was skate a few circuits.”

“But you look happy,” Ilya says, smiling down at him fondly. And it’s true, Shane truly does look -for once- completely at ease. His posture is less stiff than usual, his expression is light and relaxed.

“Well, the ice makes me happy,” Shane concedes with a nod. “I wish we had sticks and pucks right now.”

“Mm, the baby might object to being hit with a puck,” Ilya replies.

“Too bad they don’t make gear for fetuses,” Shane muses.

Ilya snorts. “You are a freak.”

“I’m serious, I’d buy it.”

“And how would you get it on her?”

Shane debates this briefly. “I’d…eat it?”

Ilya bursts out laughing. “Your plan is flawless.”

Shane giggles, running a hand through his slightly damp hair. He really does look gorgeous, even flushed with exertion and bow-legged from his belly.

“I hope you are feeling a bit better,” Ilya says conversationally. “I have been… worried about you. Especially after what JJ said.”

A dark cloud pulls over Shane’s expression. “You think he was right, don’t you? That I should announce this.”

Ilya hesitates. “I do not think it’s up to him. Or me. But… I do think… it would be nice for you, if you did not feel like you had to hide or keep separate. If you could have her *and* hockey all at once.”

Shane sighs, bringing one hand around to slowly rub gentle motions over his tummy. He glances up at Ilya, expression contemplative, thoughtful.

“I’ve kinda been thinking about that too,” he admits, “it’s really exhausting having to hide. And I feel like I just was getting over that after I got outed. But you’re right. It’s a lot and how long will it last? Her whole life?” He shakes his head. “I don’t want that for her. I don’t want *her* to feel like she has to hide.”

“I don’t want that for her either,” Ilya says, then after a moment of debate, adds, “or for *you* Shane.”

“What do you mean?” He looks up at Ilya inquisitively.

“I mean, would things be different if you didn’t feel that way?” Ilya takes a tentative move closer, resting his hand beside Shane’s on the board. “Would you be more open to…letting things in?”

“I don’t follow,” Shane replies.

Ilya takes a deep breath in, steeling himself.

“Shane, I have feelings for you. More than roommates or co-parents or… whatever we are calling it this week. I want us to be together, us and our baby.” He swallows hard, trying to keep his expression confident, not waver. “What would you think of that? The three of us?”

Shane stares at him, mouth agape, eyes wide. He blinks once, twice, three times before he finally stammers out a few choked words.

“Me?” he demands. *“Feelings?* For me?”

“No, feelings for your ice skates. Yes *you*, Shane.”

“Fuck you.”

“Mm yes you have, but I would like to do more than just that.”

A silence settles between them. *That’s* not ideal, is it?

“Shane?” Ilya prompts, hating the stricken look on his face. “Is okay if you do not feel the same. I understand.”

“You don’t mean this.” He’s shaking his head fervently. “Ilya, you’re just- you’re confused. We’re having the baby and living together and we’ve had sex and it’s complicated. You don’t mean this.”

“Excuse me?” Ilya is taken aback. “I know what I mean, Shane.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying,” Shane insists. “Ilya, you don’t understand. If people know we’re together- us and the baby- you just don’t understand. It exposes you, okay? You didn’t ask for any of that. So we can’t- it’s not an option.”

“Shane, I do not care what hockey fans think of me,” Ilya deadpans.

“You’re such an asshole. You don’t understand.” Shane is shaking his head again, pushing off the boards, jaw wobbling.

“Then make me understand!” Ilya says, moving alongside him toward the exit. “You would rather pretend this is about some noble protection for me, than just tell me the truth?”

“That *is* the truth!” Shane bites out. He reaches the exit and struggles to get over the ledge, cursing.

Silently, Ilya helps him up. Shane stomps over to the bench and sits down, trying to reach for his skates.

“Let me help,” Ilya offers, moving to bend down.

“I don’t need help!” Shane barks back. “I can do it on my own. I can do *whatever* I need to do. I don’t need you or anyone else thinking I’m weak just because-“ he stops short, struggling for breath, face twisted up with distress. Tears fill his brown eyes, glistening, but he doesn’t let them fall. So much unsaid and teeming under the surface, but he holds back, resistant.

“Shane-” Ilya starts, not even sure what he’s going to say, but needing to say *something*.

“Please.” Shane shakes his head, voice breaking on the last syllable. “Just. Stop.”

It goes quiet again, insufferably quiet.

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” Shane says heavily. “This is all getting to be too much. We’re too confused. We’re having a baby together, and we’re living together and we’re getting confused.”

“I am not confused,” Ilya snaps.

Shane refuses to meet his eyes. “This is all too much. We have to- we can't let ourselves-” he stumbles over the words. Cursing, he shakes his head again. “I can’t do this.”

He locks the blades of his skates together and yanks until they both slide off his feet. Then, he shoves his feet haphazardly into his sneakers, pushing himself upright way too quickly. The discomfort is evident on his face, but he makes no notice.

“I’m gonna have my mom pick me up,” he says, holding a hand out when Ilya tries to follow him.

Ilya watches him make it all the way to the front door, where he hesitates with his fingers on the handle.

Turn around, Ilya thinks pathetically. *Please just turn around.*

Shane opens the door, and steps outside.

Chapter End Notes

come talk to me on tumblr or x

boopernatural -Tumblr

imbihesgay - X

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

avoiding life by writing gay mpreg fanfiction xx

i hope you enjoy and thank you so much if you've read and commented thus far!! its almost time to get this baby here!!!

Shane only answers on the third text.

ILYA*: can we talk about this? please*

ILYA: *where are you staying tonight? At your moms?*

ILYA*: can you at least tell me if you made it safely?*

SHANE: *Sorry, my phone was in the other room. At my parents. Safe.*

That's it. Ilya tries to call him after he receives the text, but it goes straight to voicemail.

He smokes two cigarettes on the drive back to the apartment, and lights a third when he sees Shane's Apple Watch plugged in on the end table.

He's gonna freak out without having that. Ilya should drive over to his parent's house and leave it for him. And his comfy pajama bottoms. And his toothbrush with the special bristles. And his temperpedic pillow- he doesn't sleep well without that.

Then again, if he just shows up against Shane's will, isn't he doing the very thing he assured himself he wouldn't do? Pressure him? Make him feel obligated?

It's just…he can't help but cling to one tiny, desperate, surely imbecilic bit of hope.

Shane hadn't said he doesn't feel the same way.

It's dumb, he knows. Shane had made it very clear without saying the exact words that he has no interest in pursuing anything more between them. He'd fucking *run away* he was so appalled by the idea.

Still, the hope is there, clinging and determined, even though it makes no sense.

So Ilya smokes his three cigarettes, he has one drink, and he lies on the couch where their baby was conceived, trying to think of his next steps.

He falls asleep thinking.

When he wakes up to the sound of his alarm, he remembers that he has a job, and has to get to it. He checks his phone for texts from Shane, but finds only two from Yuna and one unfamiliar number.

YUNA: *Can you call me?*

UNKNOWN: *It's Hayden. What the fuck did you do?*

Oh, lovely, Shane's unappointed bodyguard got wind. Ilya, unsurprisingly, calls Yuna instead.

"Hi sweetheart," she answers, and he's relieved she's even awake. He hadn't realized it's only six AM.

"Is he okay?" Ilya asks immediately.

Yuna exhales loudly, and there's shuffling on the line, as if she's stepping into another room. "He's been crying on my couch all night."

Ilya's eyes close against a wave of guilt. He can't believe he did that to Shane.

"I'm sorry," he begins a clumsy apology, but she cuts him off.

"Don't be. He told me what happened."

"I never meant to upset him like this," Ilya insists.

"Honey, it isn't your fault." Yuna sighs again, and he can almost picture her sympathetic expression. "He's just got a lot to work through right now, and the hormones aren't helping."

Ilya lets his head fall back against the armrest. "Does he hate me?"

"Oh, no. He's worried *you* hate *him.* I told him he needs to get his head out of his ass, but it's not entirely his fault. His father and I raised him to put his success first, and things like this… complicate his success, I suppose. At least in his eyes."

"What happened to him last year?" Ilya asks. "He has only mentioned it. I know he was outed but…well, it sounds like it was really bad for him?"

Yuna sighs again. "It isn't my pain to share, Ilya. I hope he tells you about it. It was a very hard time for him. I would hate to see him go through something like that again but, at the same time, I wish he'd let it change things in a good way, instead of still being afraid, you know? I wish I could say it made him more open and brave, but I think it only made him retreat more."

There's another sound in the background, like it's from another room, maybe a bowl being knocked over.

“I’m coming honey!” Yuna yells at someone. She says into the line, “I have to go Ilya, he’s getting sick again. Please, call him when you can.”

The call disconnects.

Sick again? Shane hasn’t been sick in months. Ilya’s stomach twists up with concern. This isn’t right, he should be by his side, not far away while he cries and vomits.

But, he has to be at the hospital. Unfortunately, he cannot miss his shift just because he is heartsick. There are *actual* sick people who need him.

Shane, as much as it kills him, will have to wait.

“You are like wet blanket today,” Svetlana says as Ilya passes the nurses’ station, hunting for his stupid tablet to pull up a chart. He’d left it on the…*something* in the *somewhere*. He just cannot locate where that is.

“Not now, Sveta,” he mutters, peering over the desk to see if somehow his tablet has made it here.

“Not now? How busy can you be without your chart?” She holds up his tablet, arching an eyebrow.

He exhales. “Where did you find it?”

“In the changing room.”

Relieved, he accepts the device from her. “I miss paper charts.”

“You don’t mean that, Ilyushka. What is your problem today?”

“Thank you for saving my evil machine.” He holds it up and moves to walk away.

He’s stopped by her petite hand on his shoulder, pulling him back. “Hold on a minute, something is in your butt today.”

He wrinkles his nose. “I think the phrase is *“up”* your butt.”

“So? What is up there? Is this about Shane?”

Ilya sighs, leaning his elbow against the desk. “You are nosey nurse stereotype, you know this?”

Her eyes narrow, and this time when she replies, it’s in Russian, which means she doesn't want anyone else overhearing. “Tell me what’s going on. I’m worried about you, Ilyusha.”

“I am okay,” he promises her, speaking back in Russian. “I told Shane how I feel. He did not respond well. He is staying at his mother’s house. Apparently he is getting sick again.”

Her forehead wrinkles. “You told him how you feel and he…left?”

“It is complicated.” Ilya runs a hand across his face.

“Oh, Ilya.” She reaches out and rests her hand over his softly. “I’m sorry. Let’s go out tonight, get your mind off of it, da?”

He hesitates. “I was going to call Shane tonight.”

Sveta arches an eyebrow. “Does he *want* you to call?”

“Probably not.” Ilya clears his throat, leaning further on the desk.

“He might need some space, Ilyusha, he is pregnant, hormonal, it is maybe just too much?” Her expression is sympathetic. “Come out with Rose and me. We’ll get dinner and just drunk enough that you're fun again.”

“I really don’t know, Sveta,” he replies with audible trepidation.

“We’re going, I’m calling Rose. After your shift!” She winks and flits off.

Huffing a sigh, Ilya grabs his tablet and heads to his patient’s room.

He tries calling Shane twice throughout his shift, to no avail. Obviously, he does not want to talk. Ilya won’t pressure him by going over to his parent’s house. Maybe he really does need space.

It kills a little, but he has to respect it.

Sveta and Rose are waiting outside his apartment door when he changes and opens it at their agreed-upon meetup time. Sveta is wearing a sleek black club dress, with elaborate straps draped over her narrow shoulders, and big intimidating high heels. Rose is dressed in a sparkly silver slip dress, with her auburn hair curled around her face. They really do make a nice couple- he can tell Rose is someone who manages to match Svetlana’s high energy.

“Well don’t you look handsome!” Rose coos, looking Ilya up and down with a smirk.

“Mm, big compliment coming from the movie star,” he teases lightly, accepting her gentle greeting hug.

“I think you look terrible,” Sveta says, giving him a hug as well.

“As usual,” he muses when they pull apart.

Since Rose is only in town for a few days, they let her pick the venue. It’s an upscale place with a colorful bartender, loud pulsing music, and flashing lights. Maybe in his younger days, somewhere Ilya would have liked.

Tonight, he is just missing the quiet tranquility of a night at home with Shane. He wants to be curled up on the couch, quilt pulled around them, watching Shane eat popcorn dipped in Nutella while a Star Wars movie plays.

“Ilya!” Rose says as she and Sveta saunter over off the dance floor. They’re already a few drinks in, while Ilya is still nursing his first. He’s checked his phone five times. No calls.

“You are not having any fun!” Svetlana admonishes him. She flags down the bartender. “Three shots please, your best Vodka!”

“Sveta-” he tries to argue, but she’s quick to cut him off.

“We are here to have *fun!”* She says. “We are going to have fun!”

The shots arrive quickly. He hadn’t realized until they’re all pushed in his direction, that all three are for *him.* He checks his phone once more. No messages.

“Down the hatch!” he says, and begins to take the shots while the girls holler.

When he checks again after his third shot, there are still no calls.

Ilya hasn’t been this drunk since the night he met Shane.

He’s trying very hard *not* to think about that night, though, so he pushes that thought away. Rose and Svetlana are standing beside him on the dancefloor, grinding on each other while pulsing club music plays. He’s on his own, with a drink in his hand and his lashes fluttering. He’s lost count of how many drinks he’s had tonight, but it’s inching up frighteningly close to the double digits.

He startles a bit, when he feels a woman’s hand brush his arm. He glances sideways, blinking slowly at the tall, lanky blonde who’s approaching him. Her gaze is salacious, and she’s grinning.

“Hey there,” she purrs.

“I am taken!” Ilya says back drunkenly.

“Why don’t you act like you aren’t for one night?” she offers, undeterred.

He scowls. “I am not interested.”

“Back off!” Svetlana tells her, leaning in with her eyes narrowed.

The woman sulks away. Ilya is about to thank his friend, when his phone buzzes in his pocket. He pulls it out clumsily, and it slips from his hands, crashing against the floor.

“Damnit,” he growls, bending down and fumbling in the darkness for it. By the time his fingers make purchase, it has stopped buzzing.

He tries to force his fuzzy vision into something more clear, and finally the words come into focus.

(1) MISSED CALL: *SHANE HOLLANDER*

"Oh fuck!" he exclaims, and makes a beeline for the bar to try and find somewhere to sit.

Svetlana trails behind him with her arm slung around his neck. They find a seat at the bar and she glances at his phone.

"Oh, call him back now!" she insists.

"I am trying!" Ilya replies, trying to move his fingers in the right direction to hit CALL BACK. It takes a few moments, but finally, the line is ringing.

"It's ringing," he informs her.

"That's what is supposed to happen," she says.

He answers on the second ring. "Ilya?"

Oh, his Shane. Ilya hadn't realized how difficult it would be to go an entire day without his voice, but hearing it again, even in his drunken state, is almost healing.

"My Shanya," he says into the line, voice wobbly, "you are medicine right now."

"What?" Shane demands.

"Solnyschko, I am so happy you called. Are you okay? Are you sick?"

Shane clears his throat. "Ilya are you…I'm sure I'm wrong, but, are you…*drunk?"*

Ilya's eyes go wide, and he looks at Svetlana. He covers the receiver with his hand. "He is asking if I am drunk."

"Say no!" Svetlana says.

"Who is that?" Shane demands, sounding more intense this time.

Ilya glances at her. "Uh, that-"

"Are you…is that Svetlana?" Shane asks. "Are you *drunk* with Svetlana right now?"

"Tell him I'm someone else!" she says.

"Shhh!" Ilya snaps. "Shane, I promise, is not what you- h-hello?"

The line has disconnected.

"Fuck, fuck, *fuck,"* Ilya curses, hitting redial. No answer. "Fuck!"

“It is going to be okay!” She tries to reassure him, but he’s already on his feet, moving for the door.

“No, no I have to get to him.” Ilya insists, pushing past her and ignoring her calls. He exits into the cold night air, leaning his back against the wall and trying to breathe.

Okay, he just has to get his thoughts together, and figure out how to call an Uber. He’s a fucking doctor, he is sure he can manage that.

When he looks at his phone, it’s blurry again, and this time he realizes it’s from tears. He blinks them back, clicking with sloppy fingers on the apps until he actually gets it right.

Fuuuuuck, what is Shane’s parents address? He has only been there a few times. Maybe it is in his phone, maybe Yuna sent it to him before.

He opens his texts with Yuna, trying to find the address. He tries to scroll, but his thumb presses down, and suddenly it’s ringing.

Shit!

“Ilya,” Yuna says into the line, and he quickly puts the phone to his ear.

“Yuna, I-”

“Look, whoever it is you’re with tonight, Shane is really upset, so I don’t think-”

“Please, is a misunderstanding! I am not *with* anyone!”

Yuna interrupts him, firm but kind. “Honey, maybe you should sober up and then give him a call.”

“He won’t answer me,” Ilya says, though it comes out more like a sob.

“I’ll try to talk to him,” she replies, “but I think right now…he’s just not okay. Give him a little space, yeah? Let him call you.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat. It goes down painfully.

“Okay,” he agrees.

“Get some sleep, honey, and be safe.”

The call ends, and Ilya stares at his phone for a while. He slides down against the wall, his butt hitting the concrete. He’s paralyzed, frozen, unsure of what to do or how to move from here.

The door swings open, and a warm body plops down beside him. Svetlana is there, putting her arm around his shoulder. She seems a bit more sober.

“I sent Rose back to my apartment,” she says quietly, “I think tonight, you need a friend, da?”

Ilya opens his mouth to reply, insist he's fine, and doesn't need to be babied just because his heart is a little broken. With how angry Shane is now, it's probably a better idea that he and Sveta not spend so much time together.

But all that comes out is a sob.

"Oh, Ilya." She murmurs, pulling him in and allowing him to cry into her hair. "My sweet, broken-hearted boy."

In lieu of a reply, he just lets her hold him, and allows the sobbing to take over.

The next few days are rough, to say the least. Shane does not answer his calls, or his texts, and after what happened the other night, he can't say he blames him. It probably didn't look good. He knows Shane would understand if he could just *explain,* but as it is, the opportunity to do that is not really there.

He's trying to do like Yuna asked, and give him space.

There is someone else he owes a call to, though. The last time he saw Alexei was at Christmas the year their father died. It was the last time he saw Yulia, his niece as well. He's been holding off informing them of the baby, mostly because he doesn't want to talk to Alexei, but they are his only remaining family. And being shunned by Shane and his parents is only a staunch reminder that, at the end of the day, Ilya has no claim on them as his own.

It's a painful reminder.

He calls late at night, to make sure it will be an appropriate time for them. He's hoping to be able to talk to Yulia. It has been too long. And even though he's replaced the photo of her on his phone wallpaper with one of Shane holding up an ultrasound, he still misses the little angel very much.

The phone rings and rings, and just when he's bracing for yet another voicemail message, the line clicks on, and his brother's voice is speaking to him in Russian.

"Ilya, you are calling me?"

"Hi Alexei," he replies back, "how are things?"

"You did not call to ask me how are things. Last time I saw you, you told me to fuck off and get out of your life."

Ilya resists the urge to sigh. He will not let his brother get under his skin. "I just wanted to tell you something. Kind of important. Is Yulia around?"

"She is in the other room with her mother." Alexei clears his throat. "What is so important?"

Steeling himself with a slow breath, Ilya grips the phone and says, "I am having a baby. It is a girl. She is due in about eight weeks."

“You’re pregnant?” Alexei demands.

“Er, no. I…*got* someone pregnant.”

“Ilya!” He exclaims with a surprising amount of excitement. “You finally found a good woman? Are you getting married?”

Ilya clears his throat. “Not a woman. A man. His name is Shane. We are not getting married.”

There's a beat of silence.

“Alexei?” Ilya prompts.

“This is just like you,” Alexei replies bluntly. “Cannot even do this the right way.””

Ilya’s nostrils flare. This is exactly why he never talks to his brother. He may no longer have to deal with his father’s abuse and intolerance, but Alexei makes sure to carry on that legacy quite well.

Galina would tell him to take a calming breath, think about *responding* instead of *reacting*, and then reply. So, he does that.

“It does not matter what you think about it, I just thought you should know you are having a niece,” Ilya says through his teeth. “Speaking of nieces, can I talk to mine? I want to tell her she is getting a little cousin.”

“Why?” Alexei demands. “It is not like she will ever meet them.”

Cruel, but not untrue.

“Can I talk to her?” he asks again, this time a little more desperate.

“I think that is not a good idea,” Alexei answers, exactly how Ilya expected him to. “I do not want her exposed to-”

“You don’t need to say anything else,” Ilya interrupts him. “It is fine. I told you. Now you know.”

“Yes,” Alexei says flatly, “now I know.”

The quiet stretches on.

“Well,” Ilya replies, “goodbye.”

“Goodbye.”

He hangs up the phone, setting it down beside Shane’s Apple Watch on his end table. It’s still charging. He’s sure Shane must be miserable without it. He likes to count his steps and check his resting heart rate and track walking down to the mailbox as a mini workout. It is probably

not healthy, but, who is Ilya to judge? He wouldn't say he's got much going on right now that's *healthy.*

Alexei didn't always used to be like this. He was kind of a snot-nosed big brother from the start, but not *cruel*. He always looked up to dad in the way that Ilya looked up to mom, but he didn't get really cold until after she died.

Ilya has moved on from all of that, he truly has. Therapy has made a world of difference. He just wonders sometimes, even though he knows it's a wasteful use of his emotional energy, how things might be different if she were still around.

Could he have helped her, once he was older? Could he have gotten her out of that bad situation with his father? Once he was bigger and stronger, could he have defended her physically? Would he have brought her here to the states with him, started their new life here? Opportunity for her, freedom for them both.

It is a nice thought, but a melancholy one all at once. He knows he cannot sit here and wallow in the regret and the *what ifs,* there is no point. She is dead, this is the reality he's been dealt, and he's made his peace with his choices.

Still, it would've been nice if his brother could just be excited for him. It does not feel like asking too much.

He misses Shane. And weirdly, he misses the baby. She isn't even here yet, but usually when he gets like this he can reach out and touch the belly she's growing safely inside. It's a comfort, a reassurance of her impending presence.

He misses his family. Not the one back in Russia. The one that's just a brief drive away.

Their lamaze class is scheduled for Friday morning at ten. They'd gone with this timeslot at a very private, small class. Shane was hesitant to be seen there at all, but he agreed because Ilya thought it would be helpful for his labor.

It has been a week since they last spoke. Still, Ilya had promised Shane that he wasn't going to the lamaze class alone. He will not break his promise.

He parks outside the Hollander house at nine-thirty, fingers drumming on the steering wheel. He hopes Shane has not already left, maybe with Yuna instead of him. It's a very strong possibility. But still, he has to try.

He gets out of the car and makes his way toward the front door, heart hammering in his chest. He is just as nervous to see Shane's parents as he is to see Shane.

Yuna answers the door before he even knocks.

"I saw you pull in," she says.

"Hi," he replies, offering her a weak smile.

“You look terrible,” she tells him. “Have you slept at all?”

Ilya grimaces. “I have attempted it, yes.”

“He still hasn’t called?” she asks softly.

Ilya shakes his head. “No, but we have lamaze. Is he here or did he leave already?”

“Oh.” She straightens up at that. “He hadn’t mentioned that. I don’t think he’s planning to go, honey. He’s…not been well.”

Jaw tightening, Ilya asks, “he is getting sick again?”

“Yeah, he’s struggling to keep food down again. Struggling to sleep. Crying a lot. Won’t really let us in. He hasn’t left the house all week. He hasn’t really left the guest room at all.”

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat. “I brought him some of his things. His special toothbrush and his watch and some things. Maybe it will help. They are in the car.”

“That was thoughtful.”

“He…” Ilya clears his throat, glancing up at her. “He really should try to go to lamaze. The baby is coming soon and this will be good for him.”

“Come inside,” Yuna says, stepping back, “if you can convince him, he’s all yours.”

“Thank you.” Ilya follows her in, waiting for her to close the door.

“He’s upstairs in the guest room, third door on the left,” she says.

Ilya nods, and makes a beeline for the stairs. He locates the door he needs right away, and knocks gently.

“Not right now please,” Shane’s voice croaks from inside. He sounds awful.

“Shane,” Ilya replies gently, “is me. Can I come in?”

There’s a long pause.

“I-yeah, yeah.”

Ilya pushes the door open, chest tightening at the sight of Shane, curled up in bed. He’s lying on his side, legs tucked up underneath the swell of his belly. His face is squished into his arm on the pillow. His eyes and cheeks are bright red. His skin is clammy, his hair is greasy on his forehead, and he…he has smelled better.

“My Shanya, *solnyschko*,” Ilya can’t help the quiet words of affection that pull from his throat as he approaches the bed. Tentatively, he sits down beside Shane’s legs, yearning to reach for him, but afraid to touch.

“I know, pretty awful right?” Shane laughs once without humor. “I think my HG came back.”

“Have you been drinking water?” Ilya asks worriedly.

“I’m trying to,” he replies, voice ragged. He glances over at Ilya, as if just seeing him now. “You look almost as bad as I do.”

“Worrying about you is a full time job,” Ilya tells him.

There’s a pause.

“Why are you here?” Shane asks.

“We have lamaze in twenty minutes,” Ilya says.

Shane blinks, expression screwing up. “I forgot about that.”

“Is okay, I remembered.”

“You’re here to…take me?”

Ilya arches an eyebrow. “No, I'm here to tell you to stay home. Yes I’m here to take you.”

Shane coughs dryly into his elbow, then winces like it hurts his throat. Ilya quickly passes him a half-empty glass of water from the nightstand. Shane drinks it slowly, exhaling with a huff and rubbing a hand over his distended belly.

“How is the baby?” Ilya inquires, eyes landing on his belly with longing burning through them.

Shane licks his chapped lips. “I think she’s pissed off at me. She’s getting so big that it’s pressing against everything inside and when she kicks it only makes me more nauseous. And- god, I have so much heartburn, that isn’t helping. And, I’m getting this…sharp, shooting pain in my…” He falters, cheeks flushing deeper red. He gestures vaguely to the space between his thighs.

“Lightning crotch, they call it,” Ilya tells him, “it is normal, but not fun. I am sorry. Have you tried some Pepcid, for the heartburn? It is safe.”

He shakes his head. “No. I guess I should’ve thought of that.”

“I will get you some,” Ilya assures him, “but we need to get up and shower so we can make it to lamaze.”

“You really don’t have to do this,” Shane mutters, “if you’d rather, like, be with Svetlana on your day off, then-”

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice is firm, deadly serious. “I am sorry that I was drunk when you called. Svetlana and her girlfriend Rose took me out because I was so insufferable being depressed about you and me. It is not like that, with Svetlana. She is my good friend. She is in love with someone else.”

So am I, he thinks, but is wise enough not to say it out loud.

“I need you to stop worrying about that,” Ilya continues, “please. She is my friend. She is important to me, and I do not want the two most important people in my life to be at any odds with each other.”

Shane swallows audibly, averting his pretty eyes. “I’m sorry. I know I overreacted to that. My mom says I’m hormonal. Apparently, I’ve got *mood swings.”*

“You are allowed to,” Ilya assures him.

“I should shower,” Shane says gruffly. “Do I have time?”

“We will make time. Let me help you up.”

Shane’s shower is quick and perfunctory, and then he’s wadding down the stairs dressed in black Nike sweats and a big gray t-shirt that wraps tightly around his swollen belly. He still looks exhausted and haggard, but he’s clean and there’s a bit more healthy color to his skin.

Yuna is waiting for them by the kitchen entryway, a cup of coffee in her hand and a smirk on her face. She takes a slow sip, eyeing her son up and down.

“Look who is out of bed,” she notes.

Shane scowls at her. “I have to do lamaze.”

“Nice of Ilya to come take you,” she replies.

Ilya glances between them, confused about the sudden tension in the air.

“I have some things for you in the car,” Ilya says to Shane, breaking the silence. “Your watch, and some other things.”

“Thank you,” Shane says, voice softer.

“Good luck boys!” Yuna calls after them as they head out into the driveway.

Once they’re in the car and on the road, Ilya glances at Shane and asks, “what was that back there? Are you in a fight or something?”

Shane crosses his arms over his belly, already having grabbed his Apple Watch and affixed it to his wrist. “She just doesn’t know how to mind her business.”

Ilya doesn’t feel like he should touch that, not when things are tentatively civil between them.

It’s a short drive to the lamaze studio, and he’s quick to cross around the other side of the car and help Shane out. He’s relieved when Shane doesn’t put up a fight, but it also probably means he really feels like shit.

“Have you eaten yet?” Ilya asks as they make their way to the front doors.

Shane shakes his head. “No, not today. I tried some soup for dinner last night and-” His skin pales a bit. “I don’t know why it’s getting so bad again. My mom says it’s stress.”

“She might be right,” Ilya murmurs, guilt-ridden.

The lamaze studio is small, with earth tone walls and floor mats that smell freshly sanitized. There are only a few other couples there, and if they recognize Shane, they don’t show it. It’s dimly lit with soft yellow lighting, and quiet instrumental music playing in the background.

“Welcome, welcome,” the instructor says as they enter, “go ahead and have a seat over there, we’re about to get started.”

Ilya takes Shane by the wrists and helps lower him to the mat in the corner. He makes a small noise of discomfort, but tries to hide it, glancing over at Ilya who sits beside him.

“You are hurting?” Ilya asks gently, reaching over to place his hand over Shane’s lower back.

Shane nods bashfully. “My back and hips are a wreck.”

“Maybe she can give us some positions to help,” Ilya says. “I have you.”

Shane looks at him, expression grateful, big eyes warm. “Thank you.”

“No need to thank me.” Ilya presses down on his back, which makes him hiss a small sigh of relief. “Just relax.”

It's nice, really, the class. Shane must be feeling exhausted, because he leans against Ilya’s chest completely, letting his head fall into the space where his neck meets his shoulder. Ilya lets him lose himself completely in the breathing exercises, helping Shane through them by example, holding his counterpressure points, practicing what he might need.

There’s an intimacy here that makes Ilya feel like his fingertips are being electrocuted. Shane’s warm, heavy body against his, the soft sound of his practiced breaths, the feeling of their baby’s feet poking against his hand as he rubs Shane’s belly.

The way Shane is letting him in, instead of pushing him away.

Afterward, Shane seems relaxed, muscles loose and expression gentle. He leans on Ilya as they exit the studio, and Ilya throws his arm around his shoulders, tucking him against his side protectively.

“You should try to eat something,” he says as he helps Shane into the passenger seat.

“Okay,” Shane agrees pliantly, his head resting against the window.

“What sounds good?” Ilya asks.

Shane winces. “Nothing really.”

“Not even Nutella grilled cheese?” Ilya challenges with his eyebrows arched.

His cheeks flush red. “Would you?”

“Of course. I have the stuff for it back at-” He falters on the word *home.* “Back at the apartment. Or we can stop at the store and bring it to your parent’s.”

Shane shakes his head. “Let’s go home.”

Ilya’s stomach feels warm the rest of the drive.

He has made sure to keep the apartment clean and tidy the way Shane likes, just in case he decided to come back. When Shane walks in, he runs his fingertips along the key holder by the front door, and the little table with the mail, and the granite countertops, like he’s trying to reignite his memories through touch.

“We should talk,” he says in a clipped tone, glancing at Ilya over his shoulder.

“Mm, first you eat.” Ilya brushes past him toward the fridge.

“Okay,” he agrees again.

Ilya cooks the grilled cheese with Nutella the way Shane likes- perfect amount of cheese goo, perfect amount of Nutella spread, perfect golden brown crisp to the bread. He makes a normal one for himself, and places them on the kitchen table beside some fruit and orange juice. Orange juice has been making the baby kick more lately, and Shane looks like he could use the vitamin C.

“Thank you,” Shane says as they sit down to eat.

“Of course,” Ilya replies instantly. He does not need Shane to thank him for doing exactly what he wants to be doing. Taking care of his family.

Shane takes a bite of the sandwich, and lets out a shaky exhale. Ilya glances sharply at him, pressing a hand to his upper back.

“You okay?” he checks nervously.

Shane nods, rubbing a hand over the curve of his belly. “A little nauseous.”

“Could be worse because you haven’t eaten,” Ilya reminds him, “small meals, remember?”

“Right.” Shane swallows his bite.

They eat in relatively comfortable silence, until their sandwiches are gone and half of the fruit is devoured. Ilya refills Shane’s orange juice twice. He looks a little more alive by the end of the meal.

Before Ilya can get the chance to think of something to say, Shane breaks the silence.

“Why are you doing all of this?” He asks. “Is it because I’m pregnant? You feel bad for me?”

Ilya stares at him blankly. “What?”

“I’m just trying to figure this out,” Shane says, planting his palms on the table like he needs to feel the surface or he’ll float away. “I…I hurt you, yeah? At the ice rink. I hurt your feelings. I freaked out. I was stupid. And then I ignored you. And now you’re here. Making me food.”

“Yes?” Ilya replies, confused.

“It’s because you’re worried about the baby,” Shane says, not making it sound like a question.

“Of course I am worried about the baby,” Ilya responds diplomatically. “She is my daughter. I love her. I am also worried about her father.”

Shane furrows his brow. “You’re worried about you?”

“I am worried about *you*, Shane.” Ilya exhales, shaking his head. “This is the problem, da? You for some reason cannot wrap that pretty head around the idea.”

His gaze drops to the table. His lashes flutter, and his breath quickens a bit.

“I think,” Ilya says carefully, “maybe is a deeper problem. Is it that you don’t like me, or that you don’t like *you?”*

“I like me,” Shane insists. “I’m far from perfect, trust me I fucking know that. But I’m an olympic athlete. I’m the face of so many brands. I’m successful, and- and smart, and-” He falters, sniffling. “It’s fucking everyone *else* who can’t seem to like me.”

“I like you,” Ilya murmurs, “and you like you. And your friends like you. And your family. What more do you need? Whole world is never going to like you. That is just not realistic.”

“But why-” Shane’s fists clench, and unclench. “You don’t understand.”

“Help me understand, please.” Ilya reaches over and rests his fingertips along Shane’s flexed knuckles.

“When I got outed last year,” Shane says, speaking through his teeth, “it was the worst thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Okay,” Ilya says evenly, giving him the space to keep talking without feeling pressured.

“Everyone in my life looked at me differently. My parents, my friends, my teammates, the *other* teams. The fans and our coach.” He shakes his head like he’s trying to whip off a bad memory. “My coach fucking sat me down and asked me if this was going to *continue to be a problem for him.* Like, *I* was being difficult by having my privacy ripped away from me.”

Ilya tightens his grip on Shane’s hand. Shane grips back.

“It was another player who did it,” Shane says, “someone on the Boston team, I don’t know who. Just that he saw me going into the lobby with some guy at a hotel after a game and-” He shudders. “The photos got posted everywhere. It used to be the first thing that popped up when you searched my name.”

“I Googled you pretty hard,” Ilya says, “I didn’t see that.”

“My mom and the lawyers have done everything they can to scrub it.” Shane wipes a hand over his face. “But the damage is done. I barely scraped by not getting traded because I’ve won them three Stanley cups.”

Ilya swallows thickly, not wanting to speak too much and scare him off when he’s finally opening up.

“Honestly? The outward homophobia wasn’t the worst part.” Shane clears his throat. “I mean, I get called *all* the slurs now, by my team and others. Some of the guys won’t shower or change with me anymore. But I can handle people being dicks. People are always dicks.”

Ilya nods. He isn’t wrong.

“It was the other stuff.” Shane rubs his eyes. “My mom and dad looking at me like I was some wounded animal. Then my mom trying to secure me LGBTQ brand deals. Hayden walking into the locker room before me every time, like he thought he was gonna have to defend me from a pack of wolves. Like I was weak, and needed his help even though I never had before. Like I didn’t *deserve* to be there anymore. Just… so *different.”*

And it all sort of clicks into place. Ilya has come to understand this about Shane, he’s understood why Shane is so afraid of opening up or going public. But he doesn’t think, until this moment saying it aloud, that *Shane* really knew it himself.

“Just imagine,” Shane says, “adding a pregnancy to that. The *problems* that would create for my coach. The fun new names I’d get called. Hayden’s been treating me like some fragile baby ever since he found out.”

“I see,” Ilya murmurs, rubbing his thumb gently over Shane’s skin.

“I sometimes think I start to believe it,” Shane admits quietly. “The names they call me and the shit they say and that feeling of being so different. Sometimes it…it does feel true. And that scares me.”

“It is not true.” Ilya’s voice is stern. “You are a great hockey player. A wonderful man. A *strong*, brave man. None of those idiots could ever do what you are doing, bringing life into this world.” Ilya meets his eyes. “Shane, *I* couldn’t do it either. I am not stroking your ego. You are so incredibly strong, and fierce, and *worthy*. You should not live in fear of them, you are stronger and better in every way.”

When Shane looks back at him, his eyes are glistening with tears. He holds them back, lips trembling.

“It is okay,” Ilya murmurs, “let them fall, Shane.”

A sob breaks from his throat, and he collapses into Ilya’s arms, weeping openly.

Ilya holds him for a little while, rubbing his back and listening to the wet sound of his cries. He shushes him gently, but doesn’t pressure him to calm down. He needs to let it out, to make space in his chest for air, and comfort, and ease.

“I know it’s scary,” Ilya murmurs, “but you are brave.”

“I don’t feel brave,” Shane whimpers.

“Just because someone says things about you does not mean those things are true,” Ilya murmurs, “my father and brother spent most of my life trying to tell me who I was. But that was not their place. No one gets to decide that except for you.”

Shane sniffs, pulling back to look at Ilya. His eyes are red and watery, lips puffy and swollen.

“You aren't afraid?” Shane asks. “Even though people might start to know who you are? And…have a problem with us?”

Ilya shakes his head. “That does not scare me.”

“What does?” Shane sniffs.

“Losing this. Losing you.”

Shane whines again, back in his throat. His cheeks are glistening with tears. He looks so beautiful. Ilya wants to kiss all the sadness out of his body.

“You’re so brave,” Shane mutters.

“I have someone to be brave for,” he replies, gesturing to Shane’s belly.

“This week has been terrible,” Shane confesses. “I missed you so much.”

“You did?” Ilya reaches out and brushes some hair from Shane’s forehead.

“Yeah. I haven’t been so happy in a long time, as I was these past few months.” He wipes the back of his hand across his eyes, sniffing like a sad little puppy. “You make me feel…”

“Annoyed?” Ilya teases lightly.

“Seen,” Shane replies.

Ilya’s throat tightens. “I do see you.”

“I see you too,” Shane murmurs, glancing down at Ilya’s hand where it’s resting on his thigh.

“Do you like it?” Ilya asks, leaning in a bit. Shane smells like Nutella and seaweed shampoo. A weirdly enticing mixture that makes no sense. “Do you like what you see?”

Shane blinks up at him through dark, thick eyelashes. His lips twitch sideways slightly, and tilts his head toward Ilya, so close their noses are almost touching.

“I love it,” he whispers. “I love it so much it hurts me. I love *you* so much.”

Ilya’s breath catches. For a moment, he has to take stock of this situation- make sure this is really happening. Shane has actually just said these words.

It could be the hormones talking, or the intensity of what they’ve just discussed, or guilt over ignoring him for the past week. These would be the obvious answers. Surely, Shane cannot feel the same way as Ilya?

“Ilya?” Shane prompts quietly, lashes brushing his cheeks. “Do you think, maybe you might love me too? At all?”

“Oh, *dorogoy*,” Ilya breathes the words out, “I have loved you since I first laid you on that leather couch and listened to your pretty moans. I have loved you more and more every day since then.”

Shane blinks back more tears, dropping his head with a quietly uttered, “fuck.”

Instead of replying, Ilya moves his face closer and presses their lips together. Shane doesn’t resist or pull back. He lets Ilya’s touch envelope him.

It is far from their first kiss. They have done so much more than this in the nearly ten months they’ve known each other. But something about it feels… deeper.

Shane tangles his fingers in Ilya’s curls, lips parting hungrily as Ilya’s tongue explores the contours of his mouth. His breaths come quickly, his body warm and buzzing as Ilya touches wherever he can reach. He’s damn near in Ilya’s lap.

When they break apart for air, Shane gasps, “I love you, Ilya. Fuck, I love you so much.”

“I love you too,” Ilya says against Shane’s neck, kissing the warm skin there. He cannot believe this is really happening.

But it is. Shane is here, and he’s real, and he’s pregnant with Ilya’s baby, telling him he loves him. It’s a little terrifying, but it’s like he told Shane.

He has someone to be brave for. And she is going to grow up with two parents who are stupidly, ridiculously, inextricably in love.

"Hey," Shane says, brows furrowing.

"Yes?"

"That word. It doesn't mean doofus, does it?"

Ilya tilts his head back and laughs boisterously, amused when Shane flushes red.

"No, my love," he says, "it definitely does not."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

hiii!!!

this one is a shorter chapter, just the way the scenes ended up working out. next one is longer and...a heavier load, so to speak!

i hope you enjoy the fluff !!!

thank you so much for reading , more to come soon !! xx

"Does it have to be written down?" Shane asks, leaning over the coffee table to look at Ilya's laptop. On it, is an open Google Doc titled **HOLLANDER-ROZANOV BIRTH PLAN.**

"It is good to have it written down and given to the staff," Ilya answers.

"But I thought you said you can't control what's going to happen," Shane mutters, fingers rubbing the fabric of his sweatshirt over his belly.

He's thirty-five weeks today, and they are finally getting to some very last minute baby prep essentials. He's done his hospital tour and chosen one about halfway between here and Dr. Laveen's office. They've got a disassembled crib in the corner of the bedroom, some diapers and other essentials stockpiled, and Yuna has even begun planning a baby shower. It's next week. She had been kind enough to tell Ilya he could invite whoever he wanted. Svetlana and Rose both made the list.

"It is not about control," Ilya reminds him gently, "it is about outlining your preferences, and giving first choices for when things *don't* go as planned."

Shane exhales nervously, drumming his fingertips on his belly. "I want the epidural. She's huge."

Ilya nods, sympathy in his expression. Their baby is, for lack of a better word, *huge*. Her growth has leveled out a bit, but Shane is still measuring ahead. The doctor estimates she's over seven pounds already, and he still has five more weeks until his official due date.

"Epidural and gas?" he checks.

Shane nods. "Yeah, whatever they can give me."

"Don't worry, *solnyschko*," Ilya murmurs, reaching over to rub his hand over Shane's distended stomach. "We will make you as comfortable as we can, da? I promise."

Shane looks at him, brown eyes soft and glimmering. “You make me feel safe.”

Ilya swallows thickly. Shane’s been doing that a lot lately- casually saying the sweetest, most honest and intimate things to Ilya over moments of seemingly casual conversation. It’s almost as if he’s given himself permission now, to be open, and the floodgates won’t close.

Ilya is not complaining.

He’s less afraid now, Shane, of someone seeing them together in public. But he wants to announce the pregnancy on his own terms. He’s going to make an announcement online when she’s born. Before that, he wants to tell his team in person so they aren’t blindsided.

Ilya doesn’t love the idea of him making the two hour drive to Montreal this far in, but he also doesn’t want to stop him from taking this important personal step. He’s quietly supportive. It’s a balance.

“You make my heart feel safe,” Ilya tells him, accepting the small kiss Shane presses to his nose. “You will not distract me from birth planning, Hollander.”

“Mmm but we’re all alone,” Shane teases, lips tilting up in a devious little smirk, “and I’m so turned on by your organizational skills.”

Ilya tips his head back to laugh. “You are such a freak!”

“I really am,” Shane practically purrs.

Fuck.

Ilya leans forward, pressing their lips together in a warm, passionate kiss. Shane is so pliant under him, so needy and hungry for it. Since they confessed their feelings for each other, he’s been unabashed and unafraid with his intimacy, giving and taking at his pleasure.

It’s a little trickier these days, with his large belly and his discomfort, but Ilya is nothing if not creative. Intimacy with Shane is beautiful, more than just fucking to satisfy an itch.

They feel…connected. Closer than he’s ever felt with anyone before. He’s sure partially it’s because of the baby, but a bigger part, he thinks, is because of his love for Shane.

Their love for *each other.*

It’s raw and real and vibrant, blossoming with each day that passes. And while there’s still some fear, the future is unknown and a little scary.

But, weirdly enough, with Shane by his side, Ilya doesn’t fear it much anymore. It’s only this.

Bliss.

“Is that what you’re wearing?” Yuna looks Shane up and down, arching an eyebrow.

Shane huffs a heavy sigh, glancing at Ilya before he turns back to his mother. They've just arrived at her house for the baby shower, and it had been a struggle to get going this morning.

Shane had had a painful bout of braxton hicks contractions that left him in a lot of discomfort, squatting by the bed with Ilya kneading his back. Once they were sure it had passed, Ilya had made him some breakfast and helped him shower.

At thirty six weeks, three days pregnant with a large baby, Shane really is not in the mood to attend this party. He agreed to it, though, and he's here. Wearing sweatpants and a blue button-down with the bottom three undone. The underside of his curved belly is visible, and his back is arched painfully.

"Mom, can you just-" Shane inhales through his teeth, exhaling sharply. "*Fuck*. My back."

Ilya moves into gear immediately, pressing his knuckles against Shane's lower back in rhythmic, smooth patterns. Shane makes a small sound in the back of his throat, something like relief.

Yuna is unaffected. "Shane, you are not wearing that to your baby shower. The shirt is blue! She's a girl! The theme is pink!"

"Pink is not a theme, it's a color," he snaps. "And this is one of the only comfortable shirts I have."

"It's halfway undone!" she exclaims.

"Oh my god." Shane presses a hand to his forehead, breathing in slowly.

Yuna looks at Ilya with exasperation. "Can you talk some sense into him? He's miserable and hormonal now but he will be so angry if we let him look like this in the photos!"

Rock, hard place, Ilya.

"What's going on out here?" David appears beside Yuna in the doorway. "Aw Shane, you alright?"

Shane groans. "No, I'm carrying around a boulder on my hips! And everything is so uncomfortable, and I-I-" he stammers, and tears begin to form in the corners of his eyes.

"Shane, Shane." Ilya moves in again, rubbing the back of his neck the way he likes in the hopes that it soothes him.

He drops his head and weeps, wiping at his eyes desperately. David's face softens, but Yuna remains steadfast.

"Shane, I'm going to tell you the same thing I told you when you had the flu the night of your first Stanley Cup game." She reaches over and takes his face in her hands, loving, but firm. "You will remember this night forever. Do you want to look back with regrets, or look back and know you gave it everything you possibly could?"

Shane sniffs. “Do I look that bad?”

“It’s sweatpants and an unbuttoned shirt, honey.”

“Okay.” Shane exhales shakily, wiping at his eyes again. His voice is lightyears softer this time. “I love you, Mom.”

“Oh, sweetheart, I love you too.” Yuna pulls him in for a tight hug and Shane rests his head on her shoulder, sighing.

“Thank you for throwing us a shower,” he says, eyes closing. “You’re such a good mom.”

“Aw, honey.” Yuna presses a kiss to his temple. “Come on inside, I’ll see if there’s anything you can wear, if not I’ll make some calls. Come on.”

Shane follows her inside, still sniffling, but seeming content.

Ilya looks at David with disbelief.

“She has a way with him,” David admits, “and his mood swings were on her side today. Come on in.”

Ilya follows David through the door, still reeling. “Did he actually win a Stanley Cup with the flu?”

“He sure did, scored the goal that won them the game too. He even went to all the after parties and everything. Then when he got home he slept for sixteen hours straight.” David leads Ilya into the kitchen, which has been beautifully transformed by Yuna’s decorative skills. There are pastel pink banners, elegant tablecloths and dishware, and a dazzling array of desserts.

David opens the fridge and passes Ilya a beer. Ilya cracks into it and taps it against David’s.

“Thank you,” he says before taking a sip.

“I know they can be intense,” David muses, pausing to listen to the shuffling and talking upstairs. He smiles warmly. “My life would be nothing without them.”

Ilya’s expression softens. David is such a gentle man, compared to his own father, it’s still hard to get used to.

“I hope I am uh…as good of a dad as you are,” Ilya murmurs, a little embarrassed at the sentiment. “I did not have the best example.”

“You’re *already* a great dad to her,” David assures him easily.

Before Ilya can get emotional at that, Shane calls his name from upstairs. “Ilya! Can you c’mere?”

He moves instantly, leaving his beer on the counter, and David laughing with amusement.

When he gets upstairs, Shane and Yuna are standing in the master bedroom. Shane's hair has been combed and gelled neatly, and he's dressed in a pair of maternity jeans he must've left here, rolled at the ankles and paired with a salmon-colored collared shirt. It looks a little tight around his belly, but at least none of his skin is visible.

"Oh, my Shanya," Ilya says, "you look gorgeous."

Shane's face flushes red. "Shut up."

"One for you too, mister!" Yuna hurls a pile of pink fabric his way. Ilya unravels it to find a pink, loose-fitted button-down.

Ilya quickly shrugs out of his t-shirt and throws it on over his bare torso.

"Wow," Yuna mutters.

"I know," Shane agrees.

Ilya scowls at them. "I am being ogled?"

"No," Shane tells him, "just talking about how horribly disfigured you are."

"Disgusting," Yuna agrees with a smirk.

"Perverts, both of you!" Ilya whirls on his heel and stomps out of the room with faux offense, while they cackle in synchrony behind him.

The shower is beautiful.

It's staged in the Hollander's picturesque backyard. Lush green grass, a small pond with a fountain, enough shade from the tall trees that the brilliant sunlight isn't too uncomfortable. There are pastel decorations everywhere, and delicate instrumental music playing while servers walk around and get people beverages or snacks. People sit at small round tables, conversing and enjoying the array of treats. There's a large gift table piled high with prettily wrapped presents.

Ilya almost cannot believe his eyes. Fucking *servers* in the backyard. Yuna is nothing if not thorough. And, apparently, massively wealthy.

Hayden and his wife Jackie are there with their four children. Ilya mostly ignores the former, but Jackie is absolutely wonderful, and he spends a good hour talking to her while Hayden watches the kids and looks annoyed. It's delightful.

Ilya meets a lot of people. Shane's ojichan, who is sort of odd but in the fun way, like most old people are. He tells Ilya a lot of stories that Shane and Yuna complain they've heard a thousand times before. Ilya did not ever meet his dedushka, so he finds the entire thing sort of magnificent.

He also gets through introductions to multiple aunts and uncles, a gaggle of cousins, several rambunctious children, and some of Shane's friends from his high school hockey team. Ilya is expecting them to be burly and showboatish, like most hockey players, but they're all pretty nice. They're clearly happy for him.

Svetlana and Rose show up fashionably late, with their arms loaded with gifts. Ilya takes Shane by the hand so he can go make introductions, a bit nervous. The entire party is pretty much the greatest hits of Shane's loved ones, so he feels a bit awkward having some of *his* people here. Embarrassed too, that this is it for him.

"Svetlana," Ilya says after she gives him a greeting hug, "this is my beautiful Shanya, the father of my child. Shane, this is my best friend, Sveta. And this is her girlfriend, Rose."

"Hi," Shane greets her with a small smile, extending his hand. "It's so nice to meet you."

"This is so unfair," Svetlana says, shaking his hand. Ilya panics for a moment, until she continues speaking. "You are in your third trimester, and still a sex god. Look at him, Rose."

"I know!" Rose fans her face with her hand. "Shane, let me tell you, if you were straight, and I was straight…"

Ilya glances nervously at Shane, afraid of how he'll react to their forward banter.

Shane though, to his credit, just grins. "I was gonna say the same thing to you."

Svetlana cackles. "Shane, have you ever heard of a little movie called *Playback?* Rose gets naked in it three times."

"Svetlana!" Rose squeals with a playful laugh. "I did more than just that!"

Shane chuckles. "I've seen it. Rose, you were great in it."

"No one's seen that," Rose replies bashfully.

"I travel a lot," Shane explains, "I watch a lot of movies. I also really liked you in that one where you get kidnapped by Bill Paxton."

"Oh my god," Rose blushes. "Well, if we're talking movies, we're also talking *hockey*. We need to discuss your hat trick at last season's game against Florida." She takes Shane by the arm and leads him toward the refreshment stand, both of them easily gabbing away.

"Good thing I met her first," Svetlana says with a laugh.

Ilya snorts, shaking his head. "I am glad they are getting along."

"He is nice." Svetlana looks up at Ilya. "Does he make you happy, Ilyusha?"

He throws his arm around her shoulders, smiling at her. "He does. More than anything."

"Good." She squeezes him. "Very good."

As much as Shane appreciates the effort put into the shower, Ilya can tell he starts to get worn out a few hours in.

Physically, he looks exhausted, but he kind of always does lately. It's his mental battery that Ilya can see slowly beginning to drain with each interaction. Each time someone touches his belly and he has to smile politely and redirect them. Each time someone asks him how he's feeling and he has to lie and say great. Each time someone offers him food and he has to take it so he doesn't seem rude, but he's getting tired of eating with a big baby vying for space inside him.

Ilya rubs his back and guides him to a chair whenever he gets the opportunity. He passes him a glass of ice cold water, which Shane thanks him for and drinks gratefully.

"Are you ready to go, *moy lyubimyy?"* Ilya asks him, rubbing the back of his neck.

"The party is still going on, we haven't even opened gifts yet," Shane replies, arching an eyebrow.

Ilya shrugs. "You look tired."

"I'm okay baby, but thank you." Shane reaches over and squeezes Ilya's knee, and he has to pretend that along with the pet name doesn't make him damn near combust. "My mom worked really hard on all of this."

"Yes she did," Ilya agrees, looking out over the swarms of people. "Is it nice? To have told your family and friends?"

"Yes," Shane admits, "I feel stupid for keeping it to myself so long. They're so happy for us."

"They love you." Ilya kisses the top of his head. "So do I."

"I love you too," he replies immediately. "Are you doing okay?"

"Me?" Ilya shoots him a confused look. "I am not the one carrying our giant baby."

"She *is* a giant."

"I know, I'm sorry sweetheart."

"Mm, it's okay." Shane leans in, resting his head against Ilya's while they watch over the festivities. "I was asking because… I look out and see lots of people I know. And you've been making introductions all day. And that can be a lot. So how are you doing?"

Ilya hums quietly in the back of his throat, touched that Shane is worried about *him* on this day. He reaches down and rubs his belly, pleased when he feels little feet bump against him.

"I am happy about our baby and that you have so much love and support," Ilya says earnestly.

"But?" Shane prompts.

Ilya hesitates, tracing little circles on Shane's stomach. "I am sad that my mother is not here for today. She would have loved this. She and Yuna probably could have talked for hours about decorating the tables."

Shane smiles. "Was she a big party planner?"

"Mm, not like this. She did what she could with so little." Ilya smiles fondly. "For my tenth birthday party, she made me decorations out of paper mache. They were so beautiful. Everyone else had, you know from the store, but mine were made by Mama. They were better."

The younger man reaches over and rests his hand on top of Ilya's where it lay on his belly. "Maybe we could do that for her?" He suggests, gesturing to their hands. "We could tell her that it's a tradition from her- um what is the word for grandma? Is it babushka?"

"It is." Ilya nods.

"That's it, then. Paper mache birthdays, just like babushka used to do." Shane squeezes his hand. "I know it's not the same as actually having her there, but would you like that? Then at least, you know in some small way, your mom is with her."

"Yes." Ilya clears his throat to keep the emotions from spilling over. "I would like that very much. Do you know how to make paper mache?"

"I will learn," Shane says with complete resolution.

Ilya's heart flutters.

"I love you," he says again, more fiercely this time.

"I love you too," Shane replies without hesitating.

"We have so many things," Ilya muses as he picks up another box of bottle cleaners.

Shane is sitting in the plush rocking chair beside the crib, rubbing his belly with a sleepy quietness on his expression. They're home from the baby shower now, changed into their PJs, waiting for the pizza they ordered to arrive. Ilya had eaten his fill at the shower, but Shane has a craving. He's wearing his favorite baggy gray sweats, and a big *McGill Hockey* t-shirt of his father's. It's rucked up over the swell of his stomach.

He pushes his glasses up on his nose, adjusting in the chair. "We definitely have a lot of stuff for a one bedroom."

"Mm, my rich baby daddy is not used to having such a tiny space, eh?" Ilya teases, dropping the box back down in the pile.

Shane's lip wobbles a bit at that, eyes getting glossy. "Are you saying I'm spoiled?"

Oh boy.

“No, sweetheart.” Ilya shakes his head, moving toward him immediately. He kneels between Shane’s knees in front of the rocker, spreading his palms out over his taut belly. He kisses the warm skin there, taking extra care to stroke along the pale white stretch marks. “I was only kidding. I am sorry.”

Shane sniffs, nodding. “Promise?”

“Oh of course,” Ilya shakes his head, kissing the belly once more. “I am sorry *dorogoy*, I should not have joked. You are perfect.”

“Is the food almost here?” Shane asks, lifting his glasses to wipe at his eyes.

Ilya bites his lip to hide the amused smile. “I will check.”

The pizza, thankfully, arrives shortly after. Shane looks completely content as they lounge about on the living room sofa, eating pizza dipped in vanilla ice cream (well, *Shane* is eating that) and watching an old romcom. Ilya is surprised at how much Shane seems to like movies like this.

“There is no hockey in this movie,” Ilya notes as they’re halfway through When *Harry Met Sally.* He knows it’s one of Shane’s favorites.

“Right,” Shane says, glancing sideways at him with confusion.

“I am surprised at how much you like these movies,” Ilya says, “romantic movies.”

“Because I’m unromantic?” Shane asks with a laugh.

“No, no. Just, you know. You are cool guy jock. Does not seem like your type of movie.”

Shane snorts. “It’s not, really. I guess on paper no it isn’t my type of movie. There’s just something…I dunno, kinda formulaic, about rom-coms. They follow patterns, tropes, and when you’ve seen one you kinda know what to expect?” Shane shrugs, taking another bite of pizza. “Yeah the couple is gonna break up in the middle and that sucks, but you know at the end, they’ll get their happy ever after.”

Ilya gazes at him warmly. “You like it? The happy ever after?”

“Who doesn’t?” Shane says.

“You know you are quite cute,” Ilya tells him. “Sometimes it makes me feel like my chest is going to explode.”

“I’m so cute it makes your chest explode?” Shane asks in a flat voice, lips curving at the corners.

“Mhm. You are very dangerous, Shane Hollander. So cute it causes explosions.”

“Shut up,” Shane deflects, blushing brightly.

Ilya scooches closer on the couch, practically crawling toward Shane on his arms, until his chin is resting on his thigh. He looks up at Shane through his eyelashes, grinning.

“You are extra cute when you blush,” he adds.

“I’m *not* blushing!” Shane’s face flushes even redder as he says this.

“So what is this?” Ilya brushes his fingertips along the pink warmth of his freckly cheek.

“I’m red in the face from annoyance,” Shane quips, gently nudging Ilya away with his foot. The action has no real malice or intent behind it.

“Were you always this cute?” Ilya inquires playfully.

“Will you think it’s cute if I smack you?” Shane asks.

Ilya considers this. “I would probably not hate that.”

“Oh my god. You’re a freak.”

“Yes, very much.” He grins wickedly.

“You know what,” Shane replies, his own lips spreading in a smirk. “I like it.”

Ilya throws his head back and laughs.

It’s so dumb, and domestic, but it feels like exactly where Ilya is supposed to be.

All that’s missing is their baby. He hopes she comes soon.

Well, not *too* soon.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

WEEE WOO WARNINGS !!

mind all the tags, this chapter features the disgusting miracle of childbirth and it is DETAILED!

come yell at me on x (imbihesgay) or tumblr (boopernatural)

and please do not forget that I ONLY WRITE HAPPY ENDINGS !!!

i hope you enjoy <3

"Um. Ilya?"

Shane's muffled voice comes from inside the bathroom door, giving Ilya pause on his way to the kitchen. He changes course, resting his shoulder on the drywall outside the door. Typically, Shane does *not* like to be bothered in the bathroom, so he's surprised by this willingness to start a conversation.

"What's up?" Ilya asks. "Out of TP?"

"Oh, uh, no."

"Can't reach? Need help wiping?"

"*Ew*, Ilya!"

"I would if you need!"

There's a small sniffle. "That's so sweet."

"Is that what you need?"

"No! I actually um…something…came out?"

Ilya stands up a little straighter. "Excuse me?"

"Something came out of me," Shane repeats, "and I'm not exactly sure what it is?"

"It is not a baby, I hope!"

“You’re such an asshole.”

“Let me in, I will take a look.”

“Ew, no! It’s gross.”

“Something gross came out of you?” Ilya clarifies.

“Oh my god. This is so humiliating.”

“Shane, will you just let me in?”

“No!”

“Okay then, describe it to me.”

“Ugh. I wiped and there is this…*goop.”*

“Goop,” Ilya repeats, deadpan. “Gwenyth Paltrow brand? How fancy.”

“I hate you.”

“Shane, seriously, just open the door. I can not be grossed out. You should know this by now. I am a doctor.”

“It’s unlocked,” comes Shane’s dejected reply.

Rolling his eyes, Ilya opens the door and steps into the bathroom. Shane is sitting on the toilet, a small folded piece of toilet paper in his hand, distress visible on his face. He extends the toilet paper to Ilya to examine.

Ilya accepts it, taking a look. There’s a faint red tint, and what looks like a booger smeared across the paper. He recognizes it instantly.

“Oh,” he says, glancing up at Shane’s ashen face.

“What?” Shane exclaims. “Is that bad?!”

“You lost your mucus plug,” Ilya tells him, “this means you are close to labor.”

“Really?” Shane’s eyes get all big, and he looks at the toilet paper in Ilya’s hand. “Shit.”

“Shit,” Ilya agrees.

There’s a beat of silence.

“You should throw that away,” Shane mutters, flushing the toilet and slowly getting to his feet.

Ilya balls up the soiled paper and disposes of it, before joining Shane at the sink to wash his hands. Neither of them says anything until they’re out of the bathroom and in the kitchen.

“We should not go tomorrow,” Ilya breaks the silence.

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice is a warning.

“You are thirty-eight weeks, and you just lost your mucus plug,” he replies, “a four-hour round trip in the car is the opposite of a good idea.”

“I was going to go last week but *you* wanted me to wait for you!”

“Shane, it is not a good idea.”

“Ilya.” Shane plants his palms flat on the table, meeting his eyes firmly. “I will not have my choices taken from me again. I am going to tell my team about the baby, in person, tomorrow. This belongs to me, okay? I get to do this. This baby can wait one more day. You can come or not, but either way, I am doing this.”

Ilya exhales slowly. The last thing he wants is Shane going without him. And clearly this is important, some sense of control about this. Ilya can understand that. But it doesn’t mean he thinks it’s wise.

“If you have even *one* contraction-" he says, even though he knows he’s kind of powerless here.

“We stop and go to the hospital,” Shane assures him.

Ilya hates this. But, he is the one who’d been encouraging Shane to be open and honest. He supposes he can’t fault him for wanting to do it on his own terms.

“I am serious, Shane,” Ilya tells him, “we have a specific birth plan. You want epidural and gas and air, and your parents at your side. We have to be smart about this. I want you to have all of those things.”

“I know, I know.” Shane moves closer to him, reaching out to intertwine their fingers. His skin is warm, the callouses on his palms familiar and even. He leans up a bit to press his lips lightly against Ilya’s. “It’s gonna be okay. We got this.”

Ilya accepts the kiss, sighing softly. “It is cheating, to kiss me so nice.”

“Mm, you love it.”

“Yes,” he replies, long-sufferingly, “I do.”

The next morning, Ilya is watching Shane as he stands outside the passenger door of his jeep, two hands planted against his lower back. He’s moving his hips slowly, expression all scrunched up in what looks like discomfort, leaning his head against the ajar door while he waits for Ilya.

If he didn’t know any better, he’d say that was a contraction.

“Shane,” he says carefully as he approaches with their packed bag, “what’s going on here?”

“No contractions,” Shane huffs, “my back is just fucking *killing* me.”

Ah, okay. This has been happening a lot lately. Their baby girl is large, and Shane is carrying low, so it’s been murder on his lower back.

“And she’s moving around so much,” Shane complains, “I think she did a fucking somersault.”

“I am sorry, *moy lyubimyy,”* Ilya murmurs, tossing the bag in the backseat of Shane’s Jeep, and reaching out to knead his knuckles over Shane’s lower back. The other man lets out a small hiss of relief, dropping his head low between his shoulders.

“That helps,” he sniffs.

Ilya’s brow furrows with sympathy. He hates this- Shane is so uncomfortable, and it’s his fault.

“I just want her out,” Shane whines, “I just want to hold her. I’m tired of this, Ilya.”

“I know, sweetheart,” Ilya murmurs, gliding his hand up to gently scruff the back of Shane’s neck. “You are doing so well. You’re almost there.”

Shane nods, grunting as he straightens his back. “Let’s just get this over with.”

“Are you sure you want to do this, *malysh?”* Ilya checks. “Four hours in the car will not be good for your back.”

Shane cuts him a withering look, and wordlessly climbs into the Jeep. Ilya had thoroughly protested taking this thing, as he hates driving it and also thinks it’s an unreliable piece of crap. But, Shane can’t get comfy in his Porsche, and he wants the leg room for the drive.

The first leg of the drive is not bad. Shane munches on the snacks they’d packed; a bag of celery sticks that he dips in Nutella, some protein bars, diced fruit, cookies and some orange juice. They listen to music and tease each other relentlessly and talk about baby names.

Shane’s back is bothering him, and Ilya checks in when they’re about halfway to Montreal.

“Shane?” he prompts gently, turning the music down to a low thrum. “Is everything okay?”

Shane nods, but his eyes are squeezed shut, and he’s pressing his fingers desperately against his lower back.

“Shane?” Ilya repeats, this time, alarmed.

“I’m *fine,”* he huffs, opening his eyes and exhaling, “my back is just fucking on fire.”

“Do you want to stop?”

“No, keep driving.”

In an effort to distract him, Ilya attempts conversation. “So, how are you feeling? About telling your team?”

Shane looks a little green in the face. “Not particularly excited. But I know it’s what I have to do.”

“Do you want me to go in with you? Be moral support?”

Shane hesitates, glancing sideways at Ilya. “Do you think that will make me look more… weak?”

Ilya’s expression softens. “No, Shane.”

“Okay, then yeah. It would be nice not to be totally alone.”

“Then I will be right there.”

Shane doesn’t reply, but he smiles softly, leaning his head against the window.

Montreal’s rink is very nice. The parking lot is huge, and there are a handful of expensive cars parked currently. Shane had confirmed with Hayden about the practice schedule to make sure everyone would be here today. He does not want to take up a lot of their time, just make everyone aware of what he’s going through, so he can come back next season with full transparency.

They haven’t quite confirmed their plans for living, considering Ilya works in Ottawa and Shane will be working in Montreal, but Shane is insisting he is fine to commute two hours for practice and home games. Considering the baby’s dad and grandparents live in Ottawa, he says it makes the most sense. Ilya and Yuna both disagree and do not think that is a sustainable plan, but since no one has offered anything better, Shane’s mind is made up.

Shane looks out at the rink and takes a big, deep breath, kneading his hands over his lower back.

“You alright?” Ilya checks.

He nods. “Yeah, just nervous.”

Ilya gets out of the car and crosses over to Shane’s side to help him out. Carefully, he takes him by the arm and lowers him to the pavement, pausing when Shane lets out a deep, pained sound.

It’s different than the grunts of discomfort he’s been making from his back. This time, he curls an arm under his belly and bends slightly, eyes squeezing shut.

“Shane?” Ilya demands, eyes going wide.

"Mmm, ah, *fuck,"* he heaves the words out with each exhale, "fuck, fuck, *ow!"*

"Shane!" Ilya reaches for him, palm pressed into his belly, gasping at the feeling of it. His stomach is rock hard.

"That's gotta be a contraction," Shane wheezes, once his face has cleared of pain. "Fuck me, that's the same pain that was in my back but it's like, radiating now."

"What?" Ilya demands. "It was that bad in your back?"

Shane nods, rubbing his belly tensely. "Yeah that shit has killed me all day."

Oh god.

"Shane, have you been having back labor? All day?"

Shane frowns. "Back labor?"

"Contractions, but felt mostly in your back. Oh my god. Shane, is this *not* your first contraction?"

"I didn't- I wasn't thinking- *mm,* oh, something feels weird." Shane looks down at his belly, protruding over his bowed legs.

Ilya follows his gaze, blanching when he sees the dark wet spot on the crotch of his pants. Liquid trickles down his leg, dripping out onto the cement.

"Your water," Ilya says, dumbfounded.

"Like, my *water water?"* Shane asks.

Ilya cuts him a look. "Is there another kind?!"

"Shit." Shane exhales. "Okay, we brought some extra pants in the bag, right? Just in case?"

"Extra- Shane, we are going to the hospital! You have been having contractions and your water broke!"

"Fuck that!" Shane snaps. "I am here, I am doing this. Get me the extra pants. I'll just go in, tell them, and then we head straight for the hospital. We have time. You're the one who told me first labors can take days."

"Shane." Ilya stares at him with disbelief.

"Do not argue with me right now!" Shane seethes. "Get the extra pants!"

Ilya wisely follows his orders. He grabs Shane the extra pair of gray sweatpants from the bag, and helps him into the backseat to change.

"Here, you are going to need this." He passes Shane a pair of the padded briefs he grabs from the bag.

“Is this a diaper?” Shane demands.

“Kind of. They are for you, postpartum. But your water is still breaking. You will need these if you’re planning to go in there.”

“Fucking fuck.” Shane grabs the briefs and slams the door shut.

Ilya waits outside anxiously, listening to his various grunts and groans before he finally kicks the door open and allows Ilya to help him out.

He’s a sigh to behold. Gray sweatpants, looking a little extra padded in the back. The large dome of his belly stretched taut under his t-shirt. His face flushed red, skin damp with sweat.

If nothing else, maybe the team will show mercy because he looks so miserable.

“This has to be quick, it’s an hour drive to the hospital,” Ilya warns.

“I know, I know,” Shane says as they begin walking toward the rink. Well, *waddling* is more appropriate for Shane.

They make it to the front doors, and Shane navigates them through like he could do it with his eyes shut. They end up outside a locker room door, where loud talking can be heard from inside.

Shane inhales, one hand on his back for support, and opens the door.

The chatter goes quiet.

A room full of grown men in various stages of undress look at them. Ilya recognizes Hayden and JJ, but the other faces are a blur of padding and smeared sweat. Their expressions, however, are crystal clear.

Some look confused, some look excited -Hayden, just Hayden- some look disgusted and some look…angry.

Ilya feels the instinctive urge to stand in front of Shane like a shield, but he refrains. This has to be Shane’s moment. He cannot make him look weak.

“Hi guys,” Shane greets them with a small nod.

“Hey Captain,” Hayden replies, when the room stays utterly silent.

“What the fuck?” one of the other guys says.

Shane sighs. “Okay, so, you know I’ve been on IR for a while now. I wanted you guys to know why. I’m having a baby. This is Ilya, he’s my partner.”

Ilya waves. “Hello.”

“Why didn’t you tell us?” This question comes from JJ, who looks…well, kind of hard to read.

Shane meets his gaze. “I was a little nervous about how you would all react. I know there is this big elephant in the room with us. I know you guys already kind of…have your opinions about me. But, I’m done hiding and pretending. I am going to be a father. I’m very excited. And I want to…share that with my team. You guys are important to me.”

Ilya resists the urge to squeeze Shane and kiss his cheek. He is so proud of him. His Shanya is so brave.

“So, are you not coming back?” one of the other men asks, and he sounds more annoyed than Ilya would like.

“I am coming back once the new season starts,” Shane affirms. His hand comes back around to press against his lower back, and his body stiffens, and Ilya knows he is having a contraction. Doing his damndest not to show it.

“Dude, this is fucked up,” says another guy. “We’re supposed to just pretend nothing happened? Like- this is normal? How are you gonna come back in a few months?”

Shane clears his throat. “I don’t want to pretend nothing happened. I am having a baby. It’s a huge deal. But, just like all of you who have children, I’ll be back and ready to play next season.”

“The rest of us aren’t *having* the kids, dude.” The same man replies.

“That has nothing to do with it,” Shane says.

“Like hell!” Another guy chimes in. “You’ve fucked us on this season, and you’re gonna be a liability for the next!”

“Hey!” Hayden cuts in angrily. “He’s still your Captain!”

“Yeah, we’ll see if that’s true after Coach Thierault finds out about this,” says another one.

Shane’s voice is remarkably level as he speaks again. “Well, I wanted to tell you all. Now you know. I hope we can still function as a team properly next season. I plan to return to work and work. I hope the rest of you can do the same.”

“We are happy for you, *Captain*,” Hayden tells him in an earnest voice.

“Speak for yourself,” someone mutters, “I think it’s weird. *Look* at him. Hollander, with a giant stomach.”

Ilya’s teeth grit so hard he feels the enamel wearing down. Shane, to his credit, doesn’t react. He just nods again and turns, heading for the door with Ilya on his tail.

“Shane?” Ilya asks as they walk. “Are you okay? That was-”

“We have to tell my coach,” he says, and steers Ilya in the direction of a small office. He knocks on the door, but doesn’t wait before opening it.

The man sitting at the desk gets to his feet, eyes going wide at the sight of Shane.

“Hollander,” he says with disbelief.

“Coach Thierault, I’m pregnant,” Shane tells him, even though it’s not really necessary, “I have been on IR for this. The baby is due… um, probably by tomorrow. I intend to return to work next season as normal. But I thought you all should know.”

“What the fuck?” the coach exclaims. *“This* is why you’ve let us down this season?!”

Shane nods resolutely. “Yes, coach.”

“This is unacceptable, Shane. What if people found out? What if the press found out? The fans? God, the commissioner? Do you have any idea how this *looks*? Players getting knocked up and leaving the team for seasons at a time!”

“It *looks* like I am a player starting his family, just like plenty of these guys,” Shane defends. “Are you worried about the optics of that, or the optics of an openly gay man, having a baby with his partner?”

There’s a challenge in his words.

Thierault flounders. “You know that we fully support-”

“Yeah, *fully support me. Won’t tolerate intolerance. Want me to be true to myself.”* Shane recites the phrases like he’s heard them a million times before. “You can say all the legal buzzwords you want. I know what I deal with every day on that ice. And I put up with it, because I love this team. I love this game. But you will *not* make me feel guilty about creating life. This is not something to be ashamed of.”

“It’s…it’s not what we do, Shane,” the coach responds, shaking his head. “You can’t expect us-the team, the fans, to think this is okay. You are an athlete. A captain, for crying out loud. You are supposed to be the toughest-” He falters. “How can you expect other teams to take us seriously after this?”

“By beating them on the ice, like I always do,” Shane snaps.

“Well.” Thierault scowls. “I think we may need to do some serious renegotiating of your contract, Hollander.”

“Do whatever you want,” Shane growls, “I’m the most valuable player in this league. You’re fucked without me.”

Ilya feels a burning pride in his chest at Shane’s bravery.

“Mmm, Ilya!” Shane gasps, reaching a hand out and curling over his stomach. His face is all wrinkled with pain.

"Malysh." Ilya quickly moves toward him, rubbing a hand down his back. "Breathe through it, there you go."

"Oh my god, what the fuck?" Thierault repeats.

"We have to go, Shane," Ilya murmurs worriedly.

"Y-yeah," Shane stammers, "this really hurts."

"I know sweetheart, I am so sorry. Come on, let's go."

They make their way out of the rink toward the parking lot again, having to stop once so Shane can take a breather. It's getting harder for him to talk through the contractions, which is extremely concerning.

Shane grips the handle above the window while Ilya pulls them back onto the highway. It's warm today, but there's an ominous gray skyline above that makes Ilya's skin crawl. It had rained hard the day his mother died. He hopes Shane does not bring their baby into the world during a storm.

"How are we doing?" Ilya asks as he drives, glancing over worriedly.

Shane's head is tipped back against the headrest of his seat, fingers white around the handle above the window, legs spread as one arm curls underneath the weight of his belly. His face is flushed and his hair is matted with sweat.

"We are doing *bad,"* he gasps out, panting heavily. "They're getting closer. Ilya, I want an epidural."

"As soon as we are to the hospital, *dorogoy,"* Ilya assures him.

Shane nods, gritting his teeth. "Okay. Yeah, just an hour, right?"

"Just an hour darling. You are okay. Just breathe through them like we practiced at lamaze. Remember? *Hah-hah-hoo."*

"That's really dumb," Shane groans, "I don't wanna breathe like that."

"Suit yourself, but you are going to rip that handle off the door."

Shane scowls at him, and lets out a few reluctant, *"hah-hah-hoo"s.*

Just one hour, Ilya tells himself, *we can make it.*

"We're not gonna make it!" Shane cries, head bowed between his shoulders as another pain courses through him. They are still a half-hour away from the nearest hospital.

"Shane, breathe sweetheart, just breathe," Ilya reminds him. He's trying to focus on the road, while also keeping one hand on Shane's tense thigh.

Shane just moans, deep in his chest. Ilya does not like the sound of that moan. That moan sounds *close*.

Just as he's about to ask Shane how much pressure he's feeling, something odd happens. The car makes a noise, an unpleasant, grinding sound. He looks down at the speedometer and watches it slowly begin to fall.

"What the hell?" he mutters, tapping the gas.

Shane glances over, inhaling sharply. "What's going on?"

The car splutters and jerks. Shit.

"We have to pull over, one second." Ilya veers the car toward the shoulder of the road and kills the engine. Shane pants loudly beside him, drenched in sweat and bright red.

"Ilya!" Shane groans. "What's happening?"

"Just, one second sweetheart." Ilya takes his hand and kisses each damp knuckle, before popping the hood of the car and getting out.

He doesn't know why he does that, honestly. He has no fucking idea what he's looking for. Everything looks normal, as far as he can see.

He gets back behind the wheel, grimacing at the sight of Shane working through another contraction. He's bent forward, groaning gutterally.

Experimentally, he puts the keys back in the ignition, and turns.

Silence.

No no no no no!

He tries again.

Nothing.

"The car isn't starting," Shane wheezes, glancing up at Ilya through wet eyelashes. "Why isn't the car starting?"

"I-" Ilya fumbles. "I am not sure, Shane."

"I have CAA," Shane huffs, "we can- *mmm*- call for help!"

"Okay." Ilya nods, brows furrowing. He accepts the phone Shane's handed to him, already calling for trip assistance. It rings for an interminable amount of time, before someone answers.

"CAA rescue, how can we help you?"

“Hi. My car has broken down on the highway.” Ilya gives them directions and Shane’s account information. “How quickly can you get someone out?”

“It’s pretty busy today, and you guys are in a dead zone. It’s gonna take us a few hours to get out there,” says the woman on the other line. “Just hang tightly, and we’ll be there as soon as we can!”

“Okay.” He swallows. “Please hurry.”

He looks at Shane, red-faced and drenched with sweat. “Maybe we should call an ambulance, sweetheart.”

Shane shakes his head. “I don’t *want*- I don’t-” He cuts himself off with a pained sound, curling over his belly again.

“Shane, my Shanya, sweetheart.” Ilya reaches for him, cupping his face, brushing hair off his damp forehead. “Do you feel pressure? Moving down?”

“Yes,” Shane weeps, “it’s so bad, it hurts, Ilya.”

“I am going to call an ambulance,” Ilya says, “just, hang on, Shane.”

He dials 911, letting Shane squeeze his hand so tightly the bones press into flesh. It rings twice, and then a dispatcher picks up.

Ilya immediately gives them their location, and says, “how quickly can you get here?”

“It’s going to take a bit of time, sir,” she replies, “you two are way out there. We will get to you as fast as possible.”

Ilya swallows hard. “You don’t understand. He is-” *He is about to have this baby in the car.*

“I understand, sir. We will do everything in our power to get there before your baby does. Just try to keep him comfortable, okay?”

“Okay,” Ilya replies dryly.

The line disconnects.

“Ilya!” Shane wails, reaching for him again. Their fingers interlock, and Shane grips him like a vice.

“I am here, s*olnyschko,”* Ilya coos softly. “Help is coming.”

“I don’t wanna do this here,” Shane sobs, dropping his head down again as tears pool in his eyes, “I want drugs, this hurts. I don’t wanna do this, Ilya.”

“I know, baby.” Ilya leans in and kisses his hair, lingering for a moment in the damp locks. “I have you. It is going to be okay.”

“Is the baby coming now?” Shane sobs. “Is she coming?”

“I- I’m not sure, my love.” Ilya pulls him closer. “Without checking your dilation, it is hard to-”

“Check, please check,” Shane begs. “Please check and tell me we’re not close and-and we’re gonna make it to the hospital and I can have the epidural. Please.”

“Shane, honey, I am not an obst-”

“You’re close enough!” Shane growls. *“Please,* Ilya!”

There is little Ilya can do, when he begs like that.

He sanitizes his hands with half a bottle of Shane’s sanitizer from the center console. It doesn’t feel like enough. He wishes he had gloves. He should not be doing this.

They get Shane laid out on the backseat, because it’s more comfortable for him, and Ilya helps him take off his sweats and briefs. There is blood on his thighs, which makes Ilya’s chest tighten with fear, even though he knows that is normal.

“I have not really done this before,” Ilya tells him, “I have only seen it done. So, I may be a little off, Shane.”

“I don’t care,” Shane sobs, “I just want to know.”

“Okay, Shane. Okay. It’s okay. Take a breath, you are going to feel me. I am trying not to hurt you, love, I am sorry.”

As gently as he can, Ilya inserts his fingers. Shane tenses up and whines, which *kills* him, but he tries to focus on the task at hand. Ilya knows *how* to do this, in theory, but that’s a little different than feeling it yourself. He’s expecting, if Shane’s really this far along, to feel the soft ridges of the baby’s skull coming through the cervix.

What he does feel, makes his heart crawl into his throat.

A tiny pair of feet.

Oh, no.

“What’s wrong?” Shane sobs, sitting up on his elbows, clearly noticing whatever frightened look has made its way across Ilya’s face.

“Shane, you said the baby was moving a lot, earlier?” Ilya asks in a shaking voice.

“Y-yeah?” Shane replies, eyes big, alarmed. *“What,* Ilya?”

She turned, he thinks with heart-stopping panic, *she’s breech. And she’s coming right now.*

“S-she is very close,” he says, trying to keep his voice even as he gently removes his fingers. He wipes them on a tissue from the side compartment. It does not clean him. “She is coming, Shane. We are too late for an epidural, baby.”

Shane drops his head back against the seats, crying out in pain again as another contraction overtakes him. He grips the material of the seats, body tensing, tears streaking down his face.

Ilya holds his ankles, murmuring sweet nothings until the contraction subsides. Then, he speaks.

“Shane,” Ilya says, voice haunted, “there is something else.”

Shane sits up again, breathing raggedly. “What? Is she okay?”

Ilya swallows thickly, rubbing his palm along Shane’s leg in a futile attempt to soothe him. “She is breech, Shane. She is turned the wrong way. Her feet are coming first.”

Obviously, Shane knows what this means.

This is more dangerous for him, and the baby. This is a birth they wouldn’t advise him to deliver naturally if he were in a hospital. This is a birth he needs *pain relief* for.

“Oh my god,” Shane breathes, “Ilya, are we going to die?”

Ilya’s heart wrenches in his chest like someone has yanked on it with a pair of pliers. His poor, sweet, beautiful Shanya. He is so terrified. Ilya cannot let him know how afraid *he* is. He has to be calm, and in control, and make Shane feel safe.

He is a doctor. He can do this.

“No, of course not, beautiful,” Ilya murmurs, rubbing his leg up and down, “you are going to be just fine, I promise. I am here. I will get her here safely, Shane, and get you both home.”

“I’m gonna be sick,” Shane cries. Ilya grabs the empty ziploc bag from Shane’s snacks earlier, and quickly hands it to him. Shane leans over and retches noisily into the bag. Ilya rubs his legs, shushing him quietly while he cries and throws up.

He gets no relief. Another contraction slams through him, and he cries out, fingers fumbling for purchase. Ilya gives him his hand, allowing him to squeeze so hard something cracks.

“You are going to have to push, *malysh,”* Ilya tells him, trying his damndest to sound calm. “She is ready to come now. She needs you to push her out.”

“I can’t,” Shane sobs, “I can’t do this, Ilya. It hurts so bad. I’m so fucking scared. I want- I need my mom. I can’t do this without my mom.”

“Your mom is going to be waiting for us at the hospital,” Ilya says gently. “She will be so proud of you, for what you’re doing sweetheart.”

The other man shakes his head, eyes closing as he cries out again. The pain is not giving him much reprieve now, contractions on top of one another.

When it's over, Ilya says, "how about we get you some gravity, Shane? Help you get her out. It will be better. Does that sound good? Maybe hands and knees?"

"No, I- I can't-" he stammers, sounding delirious, "I can't do it. I'm not doing it. She has to wait. You have to turn her back around, Ilya."

"I cannot do that, *moy lyubimyy,"* Ilya says, blinking his own tears away. "She is coming now, feet-first, and we have to deal with it. I know it is unfair, my beautiful Shanya, but this is what we have."

"I can't," he gasps, "I'm gonna die-"

"No, baby, you will not." Ilya moves up, pulling Shane's body closer until their faces are inches apart. He grabs Shane's cheeks in his hand, forcing their eyes to meet. Shane's big brown gaze is watery and red, fear permeating each breath he takes. Ilya can't say he's any better, but Christ he is trying.

"Look at me, Shane Hollander." Ilya's voice is firm, not trembling, though it badly wants to. "You are a three-time Stanley Cup winner. You won cup with the fucking flu! You are an olympic athlete. You are a self-made millionaire. You are a beautiful, strong, brave, incredible man. You can *do* this. Our baby girl needs you, Shane. You *have* to do this."

Shane sobs again, but this time, he nods. "O-okay."

"I am going to help you," Ilya promises, "we are going to do this together, every single step, da? I am here, baby. I am here."

"Okay," he weeps, allowing Ilya to help readjust him.

Ilya touches the crucifix around his neck, and says a quiet prayer.

They end up with Shane on his hands and knees on the seats, Ilya sitting behind him, hands braced on his thighs. It's not the most comfortable position for either of them, but Ilya thinks this way will be easier for him to push, with some gravity on his side.

"Okay, Shane," he says, "when you feel that contraction start, push, like we practiced. Pant, *heh-heh,* and small pushes."

Shane groans, deep and guttural.

"Push, Shane!"

It is unbelievable- watching Shane's progress as he pushes and breathes raggedly. Ilya has never seen a breech birth before, at least not in person. Shane is in agony, and it kills him, hurts Ilya too all the way down to his bones. He wishes more than anything, he could be the one feeling this. If he could take it all away from Shane, soothe these horrific sounds, he would in a heartbeat.

Shane just keeps pushing.

“Her feet are coming, Shane,” Ilya tells him, voice choked up. “You are doing so good, my love. So, so good.”

Both feet, Ilya catalogues as her small body moves, *that is good.*

There is a lot of blood. He thinks, maybe too much, but he's not exactly sure. This is a bloody activity, usually.

“Keep going, *malysh,”* he says through tears, “you are doing it. I see her legs now.”

Shane wails in pain, breathing hard. Ilya strokes his thigh, trying desperately to be any sort of comfort. Her waist starts to come through, and Shane yelps.

“I know, I know,” Ilya soothes him, “keep pushing Shane, oh baby, I know it hurts.”

Mostly nonverbal now, Shane just groans, effort in his throat like he’s lifting a truck. He pushes again, and Ilya takes hold of the baby’s bottom half, utterly in disbelief that he is holding half of his child as she comes out of Shane’s body.

There is more blood. Shane has torn. Ilya wants to tell him to be careful, but he thinks now, it is urgent that they get her head out so she can breathe.

“Take a few breaths, baby,” he tells Shane wetly, “you are doing amazing. Oh my god, she is almost here, Shane.”

Ilya carefully helps guide her shoulders out, wincing in sympathy when Shane screams. His entire body is trembling, and he’s drenched with blood.

“You are so close,” Ilya whispers, not even sure if Shane can hear, “keep going, my love. Keep going.”

Everything sort of gets fuzzy, narrowing to one fine point. Their baby’s head, slowly stretching him- Shane’s bloodcurling screams, Ilya’s sweat-drenched face. The fabric of the carseat under his knees, the slippery wriggle of their baby in his hands.

Shane’s screams.

Ilya’s pathetic attempts at encouragement.

Blood, too much blood.

“Almost there,” Ilya croaks, “almost there, my love.”

With another guttural scream, a grunt of effort, and an alarming gush of blood, their baby is born.

Ilya is holding her in his arms, heavier than he expected, slick with fluids, skin flushed red. She’s got dark hair matted over her skull, and teeny, tiny little fingers that wriggle.

She isn't crying.

"She's s'posed to cry," Shane says, and Ilya is alarmed at how weak his voice sounds. He's fallen on his side against the seat, breathing raggedly and attempting to roll on his back.

"I have her," Ilya assures him, aggressively rubbing her back and tilting her forward to clear her lungs.

Come on my baby girl, he thinks desperately, *you will not leave us. You will not leave us.*

"Ilya?" Shane asks. "Ilya, where's the baby? I wan' her."

"She is coming to you now, honey," Ilya replies, still frantically rubbing her back and chest.

Cry, baby girl, cry for Papa. Please, baby, cry. Do not leave. Do not leave.

He clings to her, the way he tried to his own mother- with desperate, clutching fingers. But, unlike with Mama, his fingers do not ghost through her. He makes contact.

The baby starts to scream.

Relief nearly bowls him over.

"Ilya," Shane repeats, voice weak, "gimme her."

"Right here, my love." Carefully, Ilya places the baby on Shane's chest.

Shane's tired eyes light up, lips curving into a big, sloppy smile. He kisses the top of her dark hair, exhaling heavily.

"Oh, my baby," Shane whispers, head lulling back, "my baby, she's here. Ilya, I did it."

"You did it, *solnyshko*," Ilya murmurs, "you did it."

He glances between Shane's legs, alarmed at the pool of blood suddenly surrounding them. It's too much. Too much blood. He looks back at Shane's face. Pale, ashen.

"Shane?" he prompts. "Are you with me?"

"She's beautiful, Il'ya," Shane mumbles, lashes fluttering, "so pretty. Made her."

"Y-yes," Ilya says, "Shane, stay with me, okay? Keep talking."

In the distance, Ilya thinks he can hear sirens.

"Help is coming!" He says frantically.

"Oh, good," Shane whispers, "help her, make sure *she'skay…"*

"Shane!" Ilya cries, reaching for him.

Shane's head falls back against the seat. His eyes droop closed. His body goes limp.

No, Ilya thinks, surrounded by Shane's blood, and reaching for their crying baby.

Do not leave me.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

HAPPY FRIDAY !!

i TOLD you guys happy ending !!

i have actually a few more things i wanna write for this, so not near the end yet. forgive me for dragging on but im having so much fun writing this au!!

i hope you enjoy and pls be nice to me im sensitive ! <3

The ambulance was too late, when it came for his Mama.

Flashing lights, deafening sirens, shouting from his father and a gaggle of paramedics. Futile chaos in an effort to save someone who was beyond saving.

Not today. Ilya is the doctor now.

“He is hemorrhaging,” Ilya says to the paramedics when they get to the car. He’s sure it’s quite a scene. Shane, unconscious and covered in blood, Ilya sitting beside him, also covered in blood and holding their screaming baby.

“He needs a uterine massage so he can deliver the placenta,” Ilya says, “then he needs sutures and a blood transfusion. He tore twice. He is A Negative. The baby is in good condition, her APGAR is 8 or 9 I’d say.”

The paramedics look stunned.

“Move!” Ilya shouts.

“What’s his name?” One of them asks as she squeezes by Ilya to get to Shane and take his vitals. He is still breathing, but his blood pressure is tanked.

“Shane Hollander, he is twenty seven. He delivered her at 38 weeks two days. His water broke. He progressed very fast and she was breech. No complications with the pregnancy other than HG.”

“Are you his doctor?” Another paramedic with a gurney asks.

Ilya shakes his head. “No. I’m his partner.”

They move quickly, loading Shane on to the gurney. Ilya cuts the baby's cord, not even having time for the sentimentality of it. They get Shane an IV and get the three of them loaded into the back of an ambulance.

"She needs a blanket," Ilya says to one EMT.

He is handed a starchy white blanket that he wraps around her, trying to shush her cries. She's upset, obviously, she wants Shane.

"You have to massage him," Ilya says, "he has to deliver the placenta or the bleeding will not stop."

"I've never-" the paramedic starts to say.

"Fucking move then." Ilya tucks the baby under one arm, and approaches Shane. "I'm sorry, *malysh*, for this pain."

Ilya has never done this either, but he's seen plenty of research. He knows *how.*

He'd never expected to do it one-handed in a moving ambulance, while his baby cries in his arms, but he's adaptable, he supposes.

Shane comes to as Ilya is massaging him.

It's not with any words, but a guttural noise of pain. Ilya's throat tightens, but he knows he can't stop what he's doing. He has to stimulate the uterus so contractions will keep happening, Shane has to get the placenta out.

"Stop…" Shane moans, *"hurts…"*

"I know sweetheart, I'm so sorry," Ilya says thickly.

It's awful and ugly and miserable, but somehow Shane has the strength to deliver the placenta before he goes limp again.

Then, they're at the hospital.

Ilya isn't used to being on this side of things.

Everything is moving so quickly, and he tries to stay in control, the way he does at work. The paramedics are racing Shane's gurney though the entrance, shouting his status to the waiting physicians. Ilya tries to keep up while being careful of the now calm baby in his arms.

"Wait, where are you bringing him?" Ilya asks frantically, as the gurney swerves toward the ICU and away from the maternity ward. Shane is supposed to be *there*, where people have happy bouncing babies. Where there are flowers on the walls and cute photos of pregnant bellies. Not the ICU, where people are hanging on to life by a thread. He's not supposed to be where Ilya works, never, not there.

“Mr. Rozanov?” A kind nurse touches his arm. “Let’s get you and your baby up to postnatal care so she can be examined. You’ll get an update on your husband as soon as we have one for you.”

Ilya looks down at the baby. Her eyes are still closed, lashes drawn down on her soft, chubby little cheeks. Dark hair fanned over her head. A little button nose and curved bow lips. She is beautiful.

He’s hit then with this feeling in his chest, like being struck by a heavy object that doesn’t relent.

He is a father.

Shane would want him to be here, with her. Make sure she’s safe.

“Okay,” he manages weakly.

The nurse smiles, and guides him toward the elevators.

Yuna and David show up before he gets to see Shane.

The last update was that he is okay, they are almost done stitching him up and giving him blood, and then he’ll be brought in. The baby has just finished all her testing, so now Ilya is waiting with her in the empty room. They gave him a bottle to feed her, which feels wrong because he knows Shane wants to breastfeed, but she needs to eat.

So he feeds her, watching her little face as she suckles the bottle, no idea of the calamity she was born through. He’s shirtless, because skin-to-skin is important, and she seems very content here. It’s a relief, at least, that she doesn’t seem too traumatized by the circumstances. He knows she must be confused and wondering where Shane is- he was a warm, safe home for her for 9 months. She’s probably disoriented and terrified, the way Ilya is.

But all they can do right now, is be with each other. So he feeds his baby, and tries not to let her feel the panic that’s coursing through his veins.

A gentle knock on the door gets his attention, and he turns to see David entering, followed by his wife. They both look solemn. More than he’s used to.

He wishes they would smile. Because if they’re worried, then he should be worried, and- and-he *can’t* be worried right now. He has to be calm, for Shane and the baby. Everything has to be okay.

“Oh, she’s beautiful.” Yuna brings her hands up to her face, liquid pooling in the corners of her eyes.

Instead of replying, Ilya manages a small nod, and then bursts into tears.

“Oh, Ilya.” David moves over to sit beside him, bringing an arm around his shoulders and squeezing tightly. Yuna approaches too, squatting in front of his chair and gripping his knees.

“He’s going to be alright,” she says, like she’s trying to convince herself of it too. “My son is tough. He’s a fighter. He will be alright.”

Ilya nods again, unable to quell his sobs.

The baby makes a small noise, lips parting around the bottle. She flutters her eyes, almost as if she’s trying to look at him.

“She feels this,” Yuna says softly, gazing down at her. “She knows her Papa is upset. You have to breathe, Ilya. For her.”

For her.

Weirdly, that makes it easier to take a long, slow breath, and settle himself. She goes back to taking the bottle.

“Do you think I could hold her?” Yuna asks quietly.

Ilya shakes his head no. “S-sorry. Just…not before he can.”

Understanding crosses her expression, and she nods.

It quiet for a moment, until David breaks the silence. “She looks so much like Shane. His hair was just like this.”

Ilya sniffs, glancing at him. “Really?”

“Oh yeah.” Yuna smiles. “I had heartburn every day for months. He came out with dark hair just like this. Didn’t lose it, either.”

“I am not sure if I did,” Ilya confesses. “She is pretty though, isn’t she? Not just how all babies are supposed to be cute. Like, she is very pretty, no?”

“She is beautiful,” Yuna says. “You two did good.”

“He did it all.” Ilya sniffs. “She is so healthy, too. Nine pounds eight ounces. Perfect test scores.”

Yuna grimaces in sympathy at the number. “Almost ten pounds and she was two weeks early?”

Ilya chuckles breathlessly. “He *did* say she would be a giant baby.”

David clears his throat, as if trying to unstick some emotion that’s lodged there. “Our brave boy.”

“He did it,” Yuna says. “He’ll be okay.”

Her words hang in the air, looming in a way that feels hopeful. They *have* to be.

“He’s on some pretty good pain meds,” the nurse warns Ilya as they stand just inside the door of the room.

Ilya keeps one hand on the ledge of the bassinet, where his baby is sleeping soundly, curled up in her swaddle. Yuna and David stepped out to get coffee for everyone a few minutes ago.

“How is he doing?” Ilya asks, fingers tightening anxiously on the bassinet’s edge.

“He lost a lot of blood,” she says, keeping her expression neutral. “I don’t have to tell you, that takes a toll. He was in shock and just a lot of pain. His body has been through a lot. Luckily, he didn’t need surgery. But, this isn’t going to be a snap your fingers type of recovery.”

Nodding, Ilya responds, “of course not. But he is stable? How are his vitals?”

“Much better,” she says.

“The meds he’s taking,” Ilya adds, “for the pain. Can he still feed her? He really wanted to try.”

“Once this initial round wears off, we’ll have him on a lower dose of an opioid, if he wants it. That’s safe for breastfeeding, as long as it’s used as prescribed.”

Ilya nods again. He keeps nodding. He feels stupid, but he is trying to make his brain process everything she’s saying. All he can really think to do is nod. He’s not used to being the patient, in these situations.

“That is good,” he says.

“Yes.” The nurse touches Ilya’s arm gently. “How are you holding up, Dad?”

Dad.

That still hasn’t really settled in yet.

“I am fine, I just want to see him.” Ilya hopes his voice doesn't waver as he says this.

“We’ll bring him right in.” She pats his arm again, and then heads out the door.

Ilya paces back and forth beside the bassinet, working his teeth over his lower lip forcefully. His shoes squeak on the linoleum floor. They’d managed to get him a spare pair of scrub pants and a t-shirt to wear, since his clothes were soaked in blood, but they couldn’t help with his shoes. It’s hard not to look at the smears of red on his Nikes. He really doesn’t like wearing these at the hospital.

The door opens then, and a bed is being wheeled in, and on that bed is *Shane*. He looks rough. His skin lacks color, and there are circles under his tired eyes and his lips are dry. He’s got an IV port in his hand, and he’s wearing a crisp paper gown. Where earlier there was a large bump under the blanket on his belly, is now a small slope.

His eyes brighten a bit when he sees Ilya, lips spreading in a sloppy smile. *"Ilyaaa!"* He singsongs, reaching a hand out toward him.

Ilya moves immediately, taking his hand. His grip is weak, but his fingers curl around Ilya's while the nurses arrange his bed.

"Hi, *moy sladkiy,"* Ilya greets him, squeezing his hand. "How are you feeling? Any pain?"

"It is all better," Shane affirms, wrinkling his nose cutely. "Hey, where's the baby? I miss her. She's supposed to be right here, with me." He points at his midsection. "But she's not here. I don't feel her kicking."

Ilya's throat burns with unshed tears, but he manages a smile as he slowly rolls the bassinet over beside Shane's cot. "She is right here, sweetheart. She's sleeping. You brought her into the world, remember?"

"Ohhh, I did." Shane shudders. "She's okay?"

Ilya nods. "Mhm, she's perfect. You did so well."

"Can I hold her?" he asks, eyes glistening.

Ilya glances at the nurses, who nod at him with a smile. He carefully reaches into the bassinet and scoops her up, shushing her softly when she stirs.

"Easy now," he murmurs, lowering her into Shane's waiting arms. The nurse by his bed helps in placing a pillow under his elbow for support, but the baby eases into his hold naturally.

"Oh," Shane grunts, "she's heavy."

Ilya manages a small, breathless laugh. "She is a big girl."

"No wonder it hurt," Shane muses, reaching down to ghost his lips over her soft hair in a tender kiss. "Is that baby smell? She smells so *good."*

"Yes, she does," Ilya agrees, running his fingertips lightly over her cheek, "she's beautiful, like you, *malysh."*

"Mmm." Shane makes a soft sound in his throat, halfway between a sigh and a groan. "She is beautiful. You think she looks like me?"

"Just like you," Ilya says fondly.

"Are you mad? Did you want her to look like you?"

"I have never been happier," Ilya assures him. "Nothing is better than more of you, my love."

Shane smiles at him, looking quite enamored.

"Call us if you need anything," the nurse says as she passes by, and they leave the trio alone.

“I don’t want to put her down,” Shane says suddenly, looking at Ilya like he’s afraid.

“I won’t take her from you,” Ilya replies, resting a gentle hand on his arm.

“I don’t want you to go either,” Shane adds.

“I won’t leave your side.”

That doesn’t seem to comfort him, the way Ilya is hoping it does.

“I don’t wanna go back to the apartment in Ottawa,” Shane says, looking down at her sleeping face, “I like it there but it isn’t home.”

“Okay,” Ilya says immediately.

“I want to go somewhere safe.”

“Okay, Shane. Do you want to go to your parents?”

He shakes his head, looking up at Ilya with his brown eyes warm and glimmering. “Will you…come to my cottage with us?”

Ilya blinks at him, confused. “You have a *cottage?”*

“Uh-huh. It’s on a private lake. Like, a half hour from my parents house in Ottawa. I had it built a while ago. I usually go there in the summer.”

“I did not know this,” Ilya says.

“Well, I wasn’t planning to go there, I thought we’d just stay at your place after the baby but…” Shane shrugs. “I feel scared. I want safe.”

Ilya’s heart clenches at his casual words. Shane says them like he is doing something as simple as ordering at a restaurant. *Safety and comfort, please.* But he has been through something so traumatic today. His body and mind are probably on fire with panic and the urge to protect himself and their baby. Somewhere familiar, cozy, secluded, where he can just recover and care for her.

“I have 12 weeks of leave,” Ilya says, “I will go with you wherever you want me to.”

Shane smiles at him, dopey and happy and protected at the moment from remembering exactly how horrific all of this has been.

“Thank you,” he says, “and thank you for getting her here safely.”

“My love, *you* did that.” Ilya brushes hair off Shane’s forehead, smiling. “You did so well. It was so hard, but you did it.”

“I have stitches in so many places,” Shane says matter-of-factly.

Ilya pouts a little with sympathy. “I know, I am so sorry sweetheart.”

“It’s okay. She’s really cute.” Shane looks back down at her sleeping face. “I like the name we picked. I really want to use it.”

“So do I,” Ilya agrees softly.

Shane had picked her name, suggesting it to Ilya a few months ago. He wanted to name her after someone he admired. In the end, they’d gone with the woman who was the first female to play full-time professional men’s hockey, in a position other than goalie. And later, became a doctor as well. In Shane’s eyes, the perfect combination of them.

“Hayley Yurina Hollander,” Shane says aloud, voice soft and syrupy around the words.

The baby makes a small sound, a soft little gurgle as she settles again into Shane’s chest. Ilya’s heart tugs at the noise, an instinctive desire to get closer and shield her body with his own.

“She likes it,” Shane decides.

Ilya gins. “She definitely does.”

Hayley makes another small noise, content and quiet, as if trying to agree with them.

Shane sleeps a lot, at first. It’s a combination of the meds, the exhaustion and the blood loss, so it’s normal, but it still makes Ilya pace around the room anxiously.

Yuna and David return, and the coffees go cold as the three of them huddle around the bassinet for a long while, just watching Hayley sleep.

There is so much to figure out. Their car, still stuck on the side of the highway. Getting their things from the apartment in Ottawa over to the cottage before they leave here. Getting a ride *to* the cottage after leaving here. Shane doesn’t want to go back to the apartment, he wants to go right there with her.

Yuna takes Ilya’s face in her hands and promises him she will handle it all. He’s so fucking relieved to have her that he could cry. But he refrains.

They want to keep Shane and Hayley at least overnight, to make sure his blood pressure doesn’t dip again and he has no more serious bleeding or high risk of clots. Ilya plans to watch both of them like a hawk, there will be no postpartum complications getting missed on his watch.

Shane wakes up in the evening with a quiet groan of discomfort, which sets Ilya on alert immediately. He’s been holding Hayley while she sleeps, but he quickly deposits her in the bassinet to rush to Shane’s side.

“Fuck me,” Shane is murmuring, obviously more lucid than he was earlier.

“What hurts, my darling?” Ilya asks, cupping his cheek. He presses the call button for the nurse, glancing at Shane’s IV line.

“Um,” Shane blinks up at him, expression distorted with pain, “kinda everything? *Really* bad…down there. And my stomach, ah-” He presses a hand over his belly, grimacing. “Crampy.”

“Okay, help is coming,” Ilya says, running his fingers through Shane's damp hair.

“How long was I asleep?” Shane asks gruffly, adjusting on the bed with visible discomfort on his face.

“A few hours,” Ilya replies, “I gave her a bottle.”

“Why didn’t you wake me?”

“Because you need your rest, sweetheart.” Ilya smooths his nails gently over Shane’s scalp. “But she is due to eat soon, if you want to try feeding her?”

“Yeah.” Shane nods hastily. “I feel like I’ve already missed so much of her life.”

Before Ilya can reply, the nurse pokes her head in. “You called?”

“Yes hi,” Ilya greets her, he thinks her name is Martha. “He’s in a lot of pain. Can we get another dose?”

“Wait, hold on.” Shane sits up a little, an involuntary huff of pain punching out of his lungs. “I don’t want more drugs. I want to feed her.”

“Shane-” Ilya starts.

“No, I don’t want any more pain meds.” Shane shakes his head resolutely. “I don’t feel like myself, I’d rather be in pain. I- I don’t want to sleep more. I want to hold my daughter.”

Ilya looks helplessly at the nurse.

“We can give you some Tylenol?” she offers.

“That isn’t strong enough,” Ilya argues immediately. “He’s being stubborn.”

“I don’t want opioids,” Shane insists. “I’m okay. I’ve managed injuries before without them.”

“Shane, you are being ridiculous,” Ilya replies flatly, “there is no need to tough this out.”

“We have to respect the patient’s preference,” Martha says to Ilya.

“The *patient* is traumatized!” Ilya snaps, more aggressive than he means for the words to come out. “How could you listen to him, right now?”

“Ilya!” Shane exclaims, looking distraught.

“Okay, now I know this has been a big day for everyone,” Martha says levelly, “but we-”

"Big day?" Ilya demands, getting to his feet. "A big day? You did not *see*- you were not *there*- you did not *hear*-" He cuts himself off, realizing both people are looking at him like he's lost his damn mind.

"I-" He stammers, trying to find the words. "He can't be in any more pain, please, you have to help him."

"It's not your decision," Martha replies calmly.

From the bassinet, Hayley stirs, and she starts to cry.

"Please," Shane says from behind him, and when Ilya looks at him, there are tears in his eyes.

Fumbling, Ilya picks her up, shushing her softly, and carefully passing her to Shane's waiting arms. He grunts under her weight, adjusting stiffly, but his eyes soften when he sees her.

"Shhh, it's okay honey," Shane murmurs. "Daddy's here. Are you hungry? Huh?" He looks over at Martha, concern shining in his eyes. "Can I feed her?"

"Yeah, of course. Let me know if you want me to bring a lactation consultant through for the first time, it may be tricky." Martha smiles warmly at him. "And I'll get the doctor to order Tylenol."

"Thank you," Shane says roughly.

Martha leaves them to it.

Shane doesn't look at Ilya while he unbuttons the top of his gown, slowly lowering it to expose his chest. It's swollen, which is hopefully a good sign for his supply.

"Do you need-" Ilya starts.

"We're fine," Shane says curtly, cutting his gaze to Ilya. "Maybe you should take a walk or something. Get some air."

He deflates. "Shane-"

"Please." Shane looks at him pleadingly. "Just, give me a few minutes with her."

Ilya nods, swallowing thickly. "Okay, Shane. I'll be back soon."

"Okay." Shane looks back at Hayley, focused on the task at hand.

Ilya heads for the door, feeling a little sick to his stomach.

He takes the opportunity to, in fact, get some fresh air. He really wishes he could smoke a cigarette right now, but he does not have one. The alternative, he supposes, is to phone a friend.

Svetlana answers on the first ring. “Ilyusha! How is the day off?”

“Can you do me a favor?” he asks bluntly.

“Of course. What is wrong?”

“My paternity leave has to start now.” He clears his throat. “I will email Wiebe, but could you warn him I will be out as of today?”

“Oh my god. Ilya. The baby is here?”

“Born earlier today.”

“Oh my god! Well, how is she? How is Shane?” She falters. “You do not sound as excited as you should.”

His voice breaks a little on the reply. “They are both here, so that is good. But it was… difficult.”

“Oh, Ilya.”

“He had her in the car,” Ilya explains weakly, “she was breech.”

“Ilya, oh my god.”

“He bled a lot so… they had to…he needed blood and sutures and he lost consciousness.”

“Is he alright, now?”

“He is awake.” Ilya sniffs, wiping at his eyes and leaning his back against the hospital wall. “He is awake, and he’s in a lot of pain but he won’t take more meds because he doesn’t want to miss her, and I don’t know how to fix it for him, Sveta. I was so fucking *scared*. I thought he was going to *die.”*

The tremble in his voice gives him away, tears streaking down his cheeks.

“Oh, *moy sladkiy,”* Svetlana coos, “it is okay. Cry it out, Ilyushka. What a scary fucking day.”

“Yeah,” he sniffs.

“You cannot fix it for him,” she says softly. “You cannot give him medication to help this. It will take time, for both of you. You need to just be *together*, you and your baby. Remind yourselves that you are all still here. That is what matters.”

Ilya exhales shakily. His friend is right, he knows this. As traumatic as today was, it could have ended a lot worse. Shane is here, Hayley is here, they are going to be okay. They should focus on that, and not get too lost in the fear and pain. It’s still fresh and new, so that’s going to take time, but they have to be patient. He’s also going to need to do a video conference with Galina. Like…as soon as possible.

"Ya tebya lyublyu, Sveta," he says.

"I love you too. Go be with your family, Ilya."

"Thank you."

They hang up, and he runs a hand through his hair. He's shaking. He probably should drink some water. He's turning to go back inside when he runs into David, who is making his way back in. He's alone, carrying a few bags.

"Ilya," he says with a small smile. "I stopped by the store and got you some comfortable clothes, a pair of shoes, and some food. Yuna is handling everything else, right now."

Ilya blinks at him. "Oh."

"You need to eat, kiddo," David says, holding up the fast food bag in his other hand. "Shane mentioned you like McDonald's?"

"I-I do," he stammers.

"I always thought doctors didn't eat junk food," David muses, passing him the bag as they walk inside the front doors.

Ilya barks a laugh. "We do lots of things we are not supposed to do."

He reaches into the bag and pulls out a double cheeseburger. Christ, it smells fucking good. He glances at David.

"There are three burgers in here, and fries. Do you want some of this?"

David shakes his head politely. "Yuna will kill me. My cholesterol. You fill up, kid."

"She is a smart woman." Ilya takes a bite of the burger and has to resist the urge to moan in delight.

"That she is," David agrees. They make it to the elevator and he punches in the number for Shane's floor.

"Thank you for this," Ilya says as he starts in on the second burger. He'd wolfed the first down in three bites.

"Of course. You gotta keep your strength up. I know today has been kind of a nightmare." David hesitates, glancing over at him. "Thank you, Ilya. For…getting them here safely. I know you helped him deliver her. I'm sure that was terrifying."

Ilya swallows his food with a wince. "Um. Yes. He did the hard part."

"He did. But don't forget to look after yourself, okay? Yuna and I are here for you both." David smiles, like he's just had a thought. "Actually, all *three* of you. I can't believe I'm a Grandpa."

“You will be a good one,” Ilya tells him.

“Mm, thanks Ilya.” David pats his shoulder gently. “And, in case no one has said it yet, congratulations.”

Ilya smiles at him, trying not to be rude with his mouth full. No one *had* said it yet.

“Thank you.”

David knocks gently on the door when they get to Shane’s room, before he nudges it open. Shane is upright in bed with Hayley in his arms, gown still undone over his chest. There are tears in his eyes, and his face is flushed red.

“I’ll give you two a moment,” David says, ducking out into the hall.

Ilya softly closes the door and steps toward them. “Hey, how is it going?”

“She ate a little, I think,” Shane mumbles, “but I can’t really tell if she’s getting much. She won’t stay latched.”

“Okay,” Ilya says, reaching out to rest his hand lightly on her blanket. “Do you want me to call for the lactation specialist?”

“Not just yet,” he replies, stroking his fingers over her soft hair, “I’ll just…keep trying for a little.”

It’s quiet, for a beat.

“I’m sorry,” Ilya speaks first, and Shane looks up from Hayley to meet his eyes. “I should not have spoken for you, like that.”

“You don’t have to be sorry,” Shane says. “It’s been a fucked up day. We’re both…dealing.”

Ilya nods. “This shouldn’t have happened to you.”

“No.” Shane smiles wryly. “It was my fault, though.”

“Shane-”

“Look, it’s over now, we don’t have to harp on it.” Shane adjusts her on his chest. “I’m just so fucking glad she’s here, and okay. I shouldn’t have insisted we make that drive when I was so far along. That’s on me. But, blaming ourselves won’t do us any good, right? Let’s just be here, *enjoy* this, with her. She’s all that matters.”

Ilya’s expression softens, and he leans over to cup Shane’s cheek, brushing his fingers across the spray of freckles there. Shane exhales softly, like he needed to be touched this way. Like the tenderness is medicinal.

“I was thinking about when we first met, what you said,” Shane starts, curling his hand around Hayley’s hair protectively as he guides her back to his chest. “About, um, fate and

everything."

Ilya thinks for a moment, remembering the conversation they'd had at Shane's table, when Ilya had first followed him home from the hospital.

"It is funny coincidence though, is it not?"

"What is?"

"That you end up in my ER, eight weeks after we met at a bar. Like fate."

"Fate isn't real."

"And yet here we are."

"It's called I had two games against Ottawa in two months. It's pretty standard for our schedule."

"And both times we were at the same bar, then the same hospital. Sometimes big man upstairs has big plans."

"Oh you're one of those."

"I am one of those."

"I'm surprised, working in the ER, you could believe in all that stuff. You must see awful shit… Sorry. That probably was insensitive."

"No, is okay. It's true. I do see bad stuff. All the time. I think, maybe, believing in all this stuff helps me make sense of it. That probably sounds stupid."

"It doesn't sound stupid,I…I wish I could go there, when things feel overwhelming. It sounds better than just floundering."

"Ah, floundering can be good. You floundered into my ER. I am glad you did."

"Ah yes." Ilya nods thoughtfully. "The big man upstairs was asleep at the wheel today, I think."

Shane laughs. "I dunno, we got out safe and sound. We probably…shouldn't have, all things considered."

"We should not think about that," Ilya says roughly.

"Well anyway." Shane looks down at Hayley's face, nestled against his chest. "I was gonna say that I…I think I might understand it now. Fate. Seeing her, holding her, *feeling* her….I don't know. It's corny as fuck but, everything sort of makes sense now. *She* is the reason why. You know?"

Ilya swallows back hot tears, nodding as his lips part in a small smile. “Y-yes, I know. It feels like… the world exists inside her now. Nowhere else even matters.”

“And you and me,” Shane adds quietly, “we *made* her. Us. Together. We did this.”

“We did,” Ilya replies, resting his hand on her warm back. “I am proud of us.”

“Me too.” Shane smiles at him, and it’s sleepy, haggard, worn-down, and utterly gorgeous.

Then, he glances down at the baby, and exhales. *“Oh*. She’s latched.”

Ilya goes still, not wanting to mess up her flow.

“Keep talking,” Shane tells him, “I think she knows your voice. It’s relaxing for her.”

“Mm, hi *moya lyubov,”* Ilya says to her, scootching a chair closer to the bed so he can sit facing her. Her little face is scrunched up, but peaceful as she drinks. “Papa is here. Are you hungry, little darling? Daddy has milk for you. Yum!”

Shane snorts. *“Yum?”*

“Shane, do not break my focus, I am talking to Hayley.” Ilya shoots him a look, which makes him laugh. “See how he makes fun of me, baby girl? Is so disrespectful. Do not learn this from him.”

Shane’s laughing again. “Stop! You’re making me move too much, she’s gonna fall off.”

“Hold on, baby!” Ilya pretend-yells through cupped hands. “If you do not stay put, I will come do it myself!”

“Pervert!” Shane snaps, grinning.

“Mm, yes.” Ilya leans in and rests his chin on Shane’s shoulder, so they’re both gazing down as their daughter happily drinks her milk.

The teasing rolls right off, because underneath it, he knows exactly what Shane is really trying to say.

I love you.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

this story has possessed me, mind body and soul

i hope you guys are enjoying reading as much as im enjoying writing.

shane hollander, i love you so much. im sorry for always putting you through the horrors. im going to continue to do it until your character arc is satisfactory to me.

I HOPE YALL ENJOY TY FOR READING PLS BE NICE !!! XX <3<3<3

The time between the hospital and the cottage feels suspended, in a way. Everything sort of happens in this weird liminal time.

Yuna, somehow, has gotten them a car, a big black SUV with an expensive carseat locked into the back already. She says the cottage is all ready with everything they need, and the personal belongings they'd requested have been delivered. Shane's Jeep is at the shop, and she'll arrange to have it picked up and dropped off when it's ready. All of Hayley's things are waiting for them there, as well.

Ilya thinks it's equal parts exorbitant wealth, and equal parts Yuna Hollander's determination that makes it happen so swiftly.

Hayley is eating pretty well, and pooping plenty, and in general good health, thank God. Shane is eating too, and *trying* to poop, and in a lot of pain, but overall, on the road to recovery.

After three days in the hospital, they are released.

Sitting behind the wheel of the SUV, glancing at Shane in the backseat with Hayley, Ilya tries very hard not to remember the last time they were in a car together. He keeps looking in the rearview mirror while they drive, knuckles white on the steering wheel, trying to focus on the directions Shane's punched into the GPS.

The images of Shane, sprawled across the backseat, blood soaking his body, unconscious and limp won't leave his mind. The memory of frantically trying to get Hayley to cry, to *breathe,* sticks in his brain like it's been superglued.

"How is she?" Ilya asks tensely.

Shane looks up from her, meeting Ilya's eyes in the mirror. He smiles softly. "She is fine. Snoozing."

“Breathing?” Ilya asks.

Shane arches an eyebrow. “If she wasn’t, that would have come up, Ilya.”

He lets out a painful exhale, looking back at the road ahead.

“Hey.” Shane’s voice is gentler this time. “We’re okay, I promise.”

“Forgive me if I ask ten more times. Or twenty.”

“I’ll answer as many as you need,” Shane replies. “We’re okay, baby. It’s okay.”

Ilya nods, trying to feel the words in his body rather than just his brain. His nervous system has been a bit of a wreck since Hayley’s birth. He hasn't really been able to relax. He needs to talk to Galina, as soon as he can find the time.

The cottage is beautiful, picturesque, secluded. It’s really more of a *mansion* than a *cottage*, but he’s not complaining. He is concerned about the obvious fact that it’s a two-story, which means Shane is likely going to have to navigate stairs to get to bed.

“How is she?” Ilya asks again, as he opens the back door for Shane.

“Still sleeping,” Shane affirms. He moves to lift her carseat, but Ilya rests a gentle hand over his.

“Shane,” he says, “can you please let me carry her? The seat is heavy and you have stitches.”

It’s clear he wants to argue, but he refrains, nodding. “Okay, Ilya.”

Relieved, Ilya moves around to the other side and unclips her seat from the car. She makes a soft sound, the gentlest, *baby-est* little snuffle. It makes Ilya’s heart flutter in his chest. He gets her situated on his arm, and then reaches for Shane with his other to help him out of the car.

“You’re so strong,” Shane muses as he allows Ilya to help him down. “I miss that.”

“*You* are strong,” Ilya reminds him, “you carried her for nine months and then brought her into the world. Me carrying her from the car is nothing.”

Shane smiles and ducks his face to hide the blush.

The inside of the cottage is just as beautiful as its exterior. High vaulted ceilings, huge paneled windows, unfinished wood architecture. It’s gorgeous, expensive, but at the same time, inexplicably cozy and warm.

Shane immediately seems to relax, shuffling over to the large L-shaped sofa tucked against one of the back walls in the adjacent dent. He lowers himself into it, sighing as he sinks down and opens his arms.

“I wanna hold her,” he states matter-of-factly.

Ilya smiles, and sets the carseat down gingerly. He's heard that it's not wise to get her used to sleeping in someone's arms, but he needs to take her out of the carseat anyway, and fuck anyone who tells them they can't hold their baby close right now. After what they've been through, Shane can sleep with her tucked inside his shirt if he wants.

Carefully, Ilya lowers Hayley down into his arms, and Shane makes a small sound of contentment, so quick and breathy that it almost seems like he doesn't realize he's doing it. His eyes shine, big and warm, as he gets her nestled against him. Hayley snuffles in her sleep, soft and angelic.

"Fuck, she's so cute," Shane murmurs, glancing up at Ilya, who adjusts a pillow under his arm for support.

"I know." Ilya sits beside him, tucking his knees to his chest and leaning over to look at her. "A little you. Perfect."

"I think she'll get your nose," Shane argues.

"Mm, I hope not." Ilya grins back at him.

"I love you," Shane says, a bit suddenly, looking over at Ilya's face.

"I love you too, *malysh,"* Ilya assures him, reaching over to rest his hand on Shane's thigh. "Can you believe it? She is here."

"It still sorta doesn't feel real," Shane admits, laughing gently.

"For me too," he agrees.

They look back down at her face, both utterly enamored. Unbelievable as it is, she's definitely real.

Ilya makes them some dinner around six that evening. Shane has taken a shower, which he insisted on doing by himself, despite Ilya's anxious hovering in the doorway of the bathroom. He's dressed for comfort now in a pair of sweats and an open flannel shirt, Hayley at his chest drinking while he reclines in one of the living room chairs.

Ilya brings him a bowl and a huge glass of ice water, alongside some diced fruit and orange juice. Shane arches an eyebrow at him, lips quirking up.

"Are you feeding a small army?" he asks.

"I am feeding you, and you are feeding her," Ilya replies, "aren't you hungry?"

"I am," he concedes, "just set it there, I'll eat it when I'm finished feeding her."

"Ridiculous. You will eat while it is hot." Ilya scoops him a big spoonful of pasta, twirling it around on the fork so it's nice and neat, before he brings it to Shane's mouth. The other man seems mostly too stunned to object, parting his lips and accepting the bite.

“You’re feeding me,” Shane says after he’s swallowed.

“Yes,” Ilya says.

“Yours is gonna get cold,” he argues.

“This big fancy cottage has a microwave, I’m sure.”

“Ilya-”

“Shane. Just, let me, okay?” Ilya offers him a smile that probably looks more like a grimace. “Please.”

“Okay.” He acquiesces, accepting another bite.

After he feeds Shane, Ilya grabs his own food from the kitchen and scarfs it down cold at the island. He checks in to find Shane burping her over his shoulder, his cheek smushed into her hair and his eyes closed. He looks utterly content.

It’s so beautiful and domestic, Ilya can’t help but snap a photo. He quickly puts his phone away, having successfully snagged his candid. Seeing Shane and the baby are both still occupied, he quickly cleans up the kitchen, then heads back in to check on them.

After all is said and done, he finds Shane back on the sofa, Hayley in his arms, his head reclined against the back of the sofa. Ilya sits beside him and opens his own arms in asking. Shane nods and carefully passes her over.

He settles her weight against his chest, sighing in relief. It’s an odd feeling, but it’s almost like when she isn’t close enough to touch, he’s walking around with a vital organ outside of his body. Having her close, in his arms, it soothes that ache a little.

“Just changed her diaper,” Shane informs him, grabbing his cell phone off the coffee table. His mother had recovered it for him with the things CAA took out of the Jeep. “She pooped.”

“Good girl, *moya lyubov,”* Ilya murmurs to her, “you do such a good job pooping.”

“I’m jealous,” Shane mutters, half paying attention as he scrolls through his phone.

“Did you take another stool softener?” Ilya asks sympathetically.

Shane nods, looking distracted.

“That is Daddy’s phone,” Ilya says to Hayley, “he loves it more than us. Prepare yourself for that.”

She blinks up at him curiously. He sticks his tongue out at her.

“Eat shit,” Shane hits back, still looking at his screen.

“Who are you texting anyway?” Ilya demands teasingly. “All important people are on the couch.”

“Hayden,” he replies.

Oh.

Ilya clears his throat. “He is sending his congratulations, I assume?”

Shane glances up at Ilya for a beat, before he looks back at the messages. “He did, yeah.”

Something is unsaid there.

“And what else?” Ilya asks, adjusting Hayley on his chest. She makes a soft huff, like she’s annoyed at being shifted. “Sorry sweet baby, you are heavy girl.”

Shane doesn’t reply, fingers tapping away at his phone rapidly.

“Shane?” Ilya prompts again, worriedly this time.

“Sorry.” Shane sighs and looks up from the phone. “Just, team drama.”

Ilya arches an eyebrow.

“Coach wants me back next month for training,” Shane mutters, tapping his thumb on the side of his phone. “Hayden is annoyed about it.”

Scowling, Ilya replies, “why would Hayden be annoyed you are coming back? You embarrass him so much on the ice?”

Shane clears his throat, adjusting a little on the couch. “It’s a month earlier than everyone else. Guess he thinks I’ll need the extra training to get back to baseline.”

Oh.

Ilya suddenly -*infuriatingly*- understands Hayden's feelings.

“He’s not wrong I guess,” Shane murmurs, “I feel weak. I probably *will* need the extra training.”

“Shane,” Ilya says, “you are *not* weak. What you’ve done is incredible. You-”

“I know,” Shane replies softly, giving Ilya his best attempt at a smile. “I appreciate you for saying it so much. I just haven’t been *myself* in a while. You’ve kinda only known me pregnant and vulnerable. That’s not, you know, who I am. This is hard for all of them. It’s a different image of me.”

“You are not defending them for their behavior?” Ilya demands in disbelief.

“Of course not,” he assures him. “They were assholes. And coach was a fucking idiot. But I knew he wasn’t serious about trading me, they’d be lost. I’ve dedicated ten years of my life to

that team. I'm not just going to bitch out because they want me to train a little harder after a season off."

"*Bitch* out?" Ilya repeats with disgust.

Shane sighs again. "Can you just be supportive, please? I miss hockey."

Ilya composes himself, nodding. "Of course I support you. It is your career. I would never, ever want you to feel you had to give that up, Shane. I just wish…it wasn't so…"

Homophobic? Unfair? Despicable?

"I know," Shane says softly. "But I can handle it, okay? I'm tough."

You should not have to handle it, Ilya wants to say. But he knows it will make no difference, so he refrains.

"The doctor has to clear you first," he says instead. "It is not very much time to heal."

"Of course," Shane agrees. "I only go back if I'm all clear."

"And when I go back to work?" Ilya asks lightly. "Who will be with her?"

"My mom said she would watch her," Shane replies, "but if we need to hire a nanny, we can."

"That is fair." Ilya glances down at Hayley, who has fallen fast asleep against his chest. He smiles, longing for her even though she is here. He looks back at Shane. "Will you want to continue breastfeeding?"

"Yeah I'll pump." Shane is looking back at his phone, running his teeth over his lower lip contemplatively.

"You will have to eat a lot more, breastfeeding and doing intense training. It will be a lot on your body," Ilya reminds him. There's worry tinting each word, even though he's trying very hard to sound impartial.

"I know babe, I will." Shane nudges Ilya's foot with his own. "Relax, okay? Everything's fine."

Ilya nods, tucking Hayley a little tighter against his chest, and trying to trust Shane's judgment.

Ilya is having trouble sleeping.

He looks out through the window at the trees swaying in the darkness. Hayley's bassinet is by his side, and he keeps poking his head in to make sure she's breathing. She's a remarkably good sleeper, though he's read that that might change once she hits a few months old. And then change over and over again. Shane has an alarm set to be up in an hour to feed her again. Luckily, he and Hayley have found a good rhythm with feeding.

Shane is snoring beside him, his face resting on Ilya's bicep. He seems really content here, safe and comfortable. It is a sanctuary for him.

Ilya likes it here too, but it's only the first night. To him, it's just a strange new place.

Against his better judgement, he grabs his own phone off of the nightstand and opens a text thread.

ILYA: *be awake*

HAYDEN: *is something wrong with shane?*

ILYA: *you think YOU would be my first call????*

HAYDEN: *what do you want rosanov?*

ILYA: *it is spelled with a Z*

HAYDEN: *bfd who cares*

ILYA: *i am texting you with real problem but you just give me bad sass*

HAYDEN*: well spit it out this is my precious free time after my kids go to sleep*

ILYA: *why does your idiot coach demand shane comes back before everyone else? It does not seem right*

HAYDEN: *oh yeah. Its not right. Thierault is just a prick i hope shane told him no*

ILYA: *shane most definitely told him yes*

HAYDEN: *wtf how could you let him do that?????*

ILYA*: i am not boss of him, hayden in case u forgot he has a father already*

HAYDEN*: their not going to make this easy on him.*

Ilya resists the urge to correct his grammar on the "their". Pathetic, considering English is not even Ilya's first language and *he* knows this.

ILYA: *there is nothing we can do?*

HAYDEN: *not if you want him to stay on the Metros*

Ilya sighs, glancing sideways at Shane's peaceful, sleeping expression. His chest tightens painfully with worry. The idea of sending him back into that locker room *next month*...

He can't even bear the idea.

In his sleep, Shane makes a small discontented noise. Ilya studies him worriedly, scrutinizing for any sign of pain or bleeding or anything else that could go wrong. Shane settles again,

snoring.

Ilya taps his fingertips nervously on his phone, praying he can get some sleep before their feeding alarm goes off- knowing the prayer will be in vain.

The days pass like this.

They wake up throughout the night to feed her, or soothe her, or change her. They're good about taking turns. Ilya tries to take the lead when he can, since Shane's body has been through a lot and he definitely needs the rest. But he wants to help, and he wants to feed from his chest as much as possible, knowing he'll be pumping to leave her bags soon enough.

Before Ilya can really blink, Hayley is four weeks old.

It's been a blur, honestly. Sleepless nights, exhausted mornings making breakfast, sitting on the deck outside the cottage, watching the lake while they drink their coffee and listening to Hayley's soft, happy sounds. She's getting hungrier as she grows, and she's starting to make little practice smiles, Ilya calls them.

She is, potentially, the most beautiful girl who has ever existed in the world. He may be biased, but he also does not care. She has the same big brown eyes as Shane, glimmering and shining when she looks up at him, even though he knows she's probably not really *focusing* on him. It still makes him feel loved, seen in ways he didn't think he could ever understand. When he holds her, it's like everything he ever thought he was missing is right there, pieced together in his arms.

Shane is still having a lot of discomfort. The recovery hasn't been easy. Still, he's insisting he's ready to go back to the ice in just two more weeks. They're waiting for final confirmation from his doctor, but the idea of it makes Ilya's skin crawl.

Today, Shane has invited Hayden over to meet the baby, and apparently discuss team stuff. Ilya hadn't known the latter was in the plans.

Luckily, Hayden has brought along his lovely wife Jackie and their adorable children. Ilya makes everyone little sandwiches for lunch, and the kids are delighted by the small bread, which is amusing. His niece, Yulia, she likes these too.

After lunch, they all settle in the living room to fawn over the baby. Shane and Ilya don't want anyone holding her yet, except for his parents, but everyone seems content just to look at her.

"How'd the baby get out of your tummy Uncle Shane?" One of the Pike twins, Jade asks, looking up as Shane shows the swaddled baby to them.

"Remember we talked about this?" Jackie says to her. "When mommies and daddies are ready for their babies, we make a special wish, and we get a little tummy ache, and then the baby arrives."

Ilya thinks a *little tummy ache* is putting it too mildly. He still hasn't been able to sleep without dreaming of that day in the car. He has a virtual appointment with Galina at the end of the week, though. There is much to discuss.

"So you got a tummy ache?" Ruby inquires, looking at Shane curiously.

Shane laughs. "Yeah I got a little tummy ache. And then Ilya held my hand so nicely, and then Hayley got here."

Jade looks at Ilya contemplatively, sizing him up. "My daddy says you're a doctor."

Ilya glances at Hayden, then her, arching an eyebrow. "Yes, I am."

"Do you know how come I have a rash?" she holds her little arm up for him to see.

Ilya bursts out laughing while her parents both scold her.

"That isn't why we're here, honey!" Jackie chides.

"No, no is okay. Let me have a look, Jade." Ilya squats down and gently takes her forearm between his fingers. He purses his lips, studying the red bumps on her arm. A quick glance at her sister gives him some inclination.

"Ruby," he says, "do you by chance have any perfume in that purse?"

The little girl glances down at the pink clutch hanging off her arm. She nods. "How'd you know?"

"Did you spray it on Jade's wrist?" he asks.

"She did!" Jade exclaims.

"Ah. Miss Jade, I think you are allergic to Miss Ruby's perfume." Ilya offers her a sympathetic smile. "But the good news is, some Benadryl cream will help. We have some in the kitchen."

He gently applies the Benadryl to Jade's rash, pleased when she gives him a toothy, relieved smile.

"Thank you Dr. Ilya," she says.

He presses a hand to his heart. "Of course, sweet girl. You are a very good patient."

The kids run off to play soccer on the grass, while the adults and Hayley all lounge in chairs on the deck. Ilya holds her, while Shane and Hayden discuss hockey.

"So just two more weeks?" Hayden asks, taking a sip from the lemonade Ilya had handed him.

Shane nods, nursing his Ginger Ale. “Yep, coach set me up with a trainer to do some drills and get me back to baseline.”

“Aren’t you still in the diapers phase? I was for weeks,” Jackie says.

Shane shifts uncomfortably in his seat. He *definitely* is still in the diapers phase.

“They’re padded briefs. And I’ll be good to go by then,” he replies.

“If his doctor clears him,” Ilya adds, rubbing his thumb along Hayley’s back.

“She’ll clear me.” Shane sounds quite confident for someone who still tears up every time he uses the bathroom. Ilya decides not to call him on it.

“Well, don’t push yourself,” Jackie says in a gentle voice. “From the sounds of it, this was as traumatic as giving birth can get. It’s okay to give yourself some time.”

Shane’s jaw gets tense at that. “It wasn’t that traumatic.”

Ilya’s head whips around to look at him in disbelief.

“Dude,” Hayden says flatly, “you almost died.”

“I didn’t-” Shane sets his Ginger Ale down, exhaling shakily. “I don’t like thinking about it like that, okay? She’s here and she’s okay. I don’t wanna…get stuck on the bad stuff.”

“No one’s telling you to get stuck, hon,” Jackie says, “just be gentle with yourself.” She glances over at Ilya, and smiles. “And Ilya. It was probably pretty traumatizing for him too.”

Shane follows her gaze, eyes piercing him in that intense way he sometimes does. Ilya manages a small laugh, tucking Hayley a little tighter against his chest.

“He cannot listen to me, if it were up to me Shane and Hayley would never leave my sight again.” He clears his throat roughly. “Would be very hard to get anything done.”

Shane’s eyes soften a little at that. Ilya hopes he can’t hear the raw emotion in his voice.

“I promise,” Shane says to them all, meeting their eyes seriously, “I will not go back if the doctor doesn’t clear me. I wouldn’t put myself at risk like that, okay? I have a daughter who needs me. I’m not an idiot.”

His words, though forceful, aren’t malicious. His tone is gentle and affirming. Ilya wishes that helped make him less anxious. It does not.

“Okay,” Hayden says, breaking the silence with a practiced smile. “I’m sure it’ll be fine, buddy.
Let’s not talk work.”

“Great,” Shane says, shoulders relaxing a little.

Hayley makes a small squeak sound in Ilya's arms, a noise he thinks roughly translates to: *is everything gonna be okay?*

I hope so, he thinks back to her, *I really hope so.*

Shane has a follow up with Dr. Laveen the day before he's set to go back for training.

Ilya and Hayley came along. Not because Ilya doesn't trust Shane to tell him the truth about the doctor's findings, but because he's worried about Shane and wants to make sure he's in the loop. It's a full physical today, to evaluate his postpartum healing and general health at six weeks post delivery.

Ilya sits in the companion chair with Hayley in her carseat beside him, tapping his foot on the linoleum anxiously. He doesn't want to stifle Shane's career, or make him feel like he has to give anything up, but something inside of him is *really* hoping the doctor doesn't clear him.

"Any pain here?" Dr. Laveen asks, pressing two fingers along Shane's lower stomach. He's been a little shy about baring it lately- it's gone soft and squishy, still decorated with stretch marks. Ilya's been trying to give him his privacy while also helping him when he needs the occasional assistance in the bathroom or shower.

Truthfully, Shane's body is the most beautiful thing Ilya has ever seen. The utter and complete strength he holds in it- what Ilya has seen him do, it's only made him fall more deeply in love. It's a body that grew their *child*- from a tiny, pea-sized little idea to the heavy weight of the warm baby in Ilya's arms right now. Scars and all, it's the most phenomenal a human being has ever looked in Ilya's eyes.

"A little," Shane murmurs, "just- um, mostly just tender."

She nods thoughtfully. "And you said the bleeding has improved?"

"A lot, yeah."

"Your suture sight is looking healed up," she says, "that's great. I'm going to clear you for modified exercise."

Shane sits up abruptly, rolling his t-shirt back down, expression sharp. "What does that mean?"

"It's still a little early to be doing intense physical training," Dr. Laveen says, "avoid heavy lifting and intense cardio. But gentle exercise is encouraged."

Shane drums his fingers on his knee. "I can skate though, right?"

"Ice skate?" she clarifies.

"Yes."

"I don't see why not."

Ilya clears his throat, needing to remind the doctor of something important. “He is a hockey player. Contact sport. Violent.”

Shane cuts him a look.

“Hmm.” Dr. Laveen leans back on her rolling stool. “I would advise against any rough hits right now, your body is still healing from a pretty significant trauma.”

Shane exhales in a tight, sharp huff. He really hates when people use that word to describe Hayley’s birth, Ilya has noticed.

“I’m just doing some drills,” Shane explains, “the rest of the team isn’t even there yet, so no hits. It’s just conditioning stuff.”

“I can write you a restriction memo,” she offers, “modified training should be alright, but I can’t clear you for any intense physical conditioning yet.”

“For how long, do you think?” he asks. “The season starts in two months.”

“Two more months is a good amount of time,” she says carefully, “but we can’t say for sure until we see how your healing looks closer to, okay? For now, modified training is a good start.”

Shane nods. “Okay, understood. If I could just get it in writing, I can give it to my coach.”

“Of course.” Dr. Laveen smiles, glancing over at Ilya and Hayley. “And how are dad and baby? First month down! How exciting.”

“She is the best thing ever created,” Ilya replies with a warm smile.

He sees Shane’s smile grow, knowing he agrees with the sentiment.

They leave the office and load up into the car to head back toward the cottage. Shane seems okay, albeit a little disappointed that he wasn’t cleared for full-duty, but at least he didn’t argue.

“So you will give to the coach tomorrow?” Ilya gestures to the note in his hand.

“Yes.” Shane nods, running his finger over the printed words. “I feel like a kid again. Getting a doctor’s note.”

Ilya laughs. “I write notes for people’s employers all the time, Shane. Is not a kid thing.”

“*You* write them?”

Ilya shrugs. “We have a template. I sign them.”

Shane chuckles, reaching across the center console to wrap his fingers around Ilya’s. His hand is rough and calloused, but warm and familiar all at once. Ilya grips him tightly, clinging.

“Thank you for listening to her,” Ilya says in a gentle voice.

“Of course.” Shane leans back against his seat. “It sucks being on limited duty, but I’m gonna do what she says. I don’t particularly *want* to die.”

“That is very good.” Ilya glances briefly at him before looking back at the road. “Your coach will take it seriously, yes?”

Shane looks back at the note. “Yeah, I’m sure he will. No reason for him not to. I’m better than all of those guys at fifty-percent.”

“I love it when you get cocky, Shanya.”

“Speaking of cock. You know what I *am* cleared for?” Shane wags his eyebrows teasingly.

“Oh!” Ilya grins wickedly at him. “Maybe Hayley will bless us with uninterrupted sleep tonight.”

Shane cranes his neck to look at the carseat, putting on his best “stern dad” voice. “You hear that, missy? You are sleeping through the night!”

“Yes!” Ilya adds. “You have been greedy with Daddy’s boobs. It is my turn.”

“Ilya!” Shane exclaims, face flushing brilliant red.

“What? I am just communicating with our daughter,” Ilya scoffs, waving a hand dismissively as Shane laughs.

“You are allowed to be greedy,” Shane says to Hayley, “the boobs are for you. And they’re not *boobs!”*

Ilya arches an eyebrow, glancing at Shane’s engorged chest.

The other man plants his hands over them, scowling. “See if you get any after this.”

“Fuck.”

Hayley, mercifully, does give them some uninterrupted time.

It’s just after ten o’clock, both of them freshly showered and in bed. Shane is lying on his back, arms tucked underneath his head, while Ilya rests on his torso. His face is smushed into Shane’s bare chest, lips pressing light kisses there as they relax.

“Do you think my body is ruined forever?” Shane asks, his voice quiet and haunted.

Ilya tilts his head up to look at him, brows furrowing. *“Ruined?”*

Shane clears his throat, eyes focused on the ceiling tiles. “I feel, um, worried.”

“Shane.” Ilya props himself up on his elbow, trying to meet his eyes, though Shane staunchly averts his gaze. “Worried about what?”

“That you aren’t-” He blows a harsh breath out, like he’s embarrassed. “Fuck, this is humiliating.”

“Shane?”

“Are you still attracted to me?” he asks quietly, brows furrowing as if he’s mad at himself for even asking it out loud. “I hate how that makes me sound. I hate that I’m worried about this right now. I know I should just be happy she’s here and okay, but I feel- fuck, like my body has betrayed me.”

“Oh, sweetheart.”

“And I know I shouldn’t, you know? Like, my body got me through that. The pregnancy and having her and now my body is literally keeping her alive, feeding her.” He shakes his head. “I guess I’m just worried after what you saw you won’t…want to…” He falters, grimacing.

Ilya presses a soft, tender kiss to Shane’s chest, pleased when it makes a small sigh slip from his mouth. He continues kissing the warm skin of his torso, moving down from his chest to the soft, slightly sagging skin of his belly. Shane tenses up immediately, but Ilya takes his time, slowly worshipping the resilient flesh.

Shane smells like his body wash and seaweed shampoo- crisp, clean, *home.* His warmth and smell is a lighthouse beacon during a storm, it recenters Ilya, comforts him, reminds him of exactly where he belongs.

“So fucking beautiful,” he groans quietly, teeth nipping at a pale stretch mark on Shane’s hip. Shane lets out a soft sound, half-whine half-sigh. A good sound, Ilya knows.

It encourages him to keep going, pressing his lips into the soft skin under Shane’s belly button. This is the area he’s most insecure about, where the skin is wrinkled and still slightly distended. Stretch marks dance up from his hips and the underside of this little swell of skin, like lightning bolts illuminating the sky during a storm. Both beauty and power wrapped into these delicate little lines.

Ilya could eat him up.

He moves lower, pressing kisses to Shane’s skin until his mouth reaches the waistband of his gray sweatpants. He feels the muscles underneath tense, and glances up at Shane, who is suddenly looking at him with wide eyes.

“I-” Shane chokes out. “I don’t think I feel ready yet, Ilya. I’m sorry, I-”

“Shh, Shanya, is okay. It has only been six weeks, that is not much time.” Ilya kisses his belly again, humming quietly against the warm skin. “Just let me kiss you, da?”

Hesitantly, Shane nods.

Ilya gently lowers the hem of his pants, sliding them down until Shane's thighs and briefs are exposed. Smiling, he lightly drags his lips over the warm skin of his inner thighs. Shane lets out a small, shuddering sigh of pleasure.

"Ilya," he huffs gently.

"Yes, my love?"

"I'm scared."

Ilya pauses. "I won't touch what you don't want, Shane, I promise."

"No, not of *you."*

Ilya looks back up at him inquisitively.

Shane exhales painfully. "Tomorrow. Training. Modified duty. I'm afraid."

Propping himself up on his elbows, but still leaning against Shane's warm body, Ilya asks, "are you afraid it is too soon?"

"Kind of," Shane confesses, glancing sideways at the bassinet beside their bed. "She's so small, still. And she eats so often right now, I'm afraid pumping is gonna fuck with her schedule. And- we bond, you know?" He sniffs, blinking up at the ceiling and cursing under his breath. "I'm really gonna miss her all day. And what if he doesn't- what if he's mad about the modified training?"

Ilya clears his throat. "You said it yourself, Shane, he will not trade you. They need you. He has to respect what you need. And if you need more *time-"*

"I've already taken almost a whole season off," Shane interjects. "I can't ask for more time."

"You could just go back regularly with everyone else next month instead," Ilya suggests.

Shane is already shaking his head. "I *do* need to train again. I'm out of shape."

Ilya resists the urge to grit his teeth together. "Shane, please, you have to stop saying these things about yourself. You are not out of shape. You have been through-"

"*Stop* saying trauma," Shane snaps, voice hard and cold. "I'm tired of everyone saying that about her birth."

Ilya sits up, arms crossing over his chest, jaw flexed. "Well, Shane, it was pretty fucking traumatic. I have had two therapy sessions about it already."

Shane's eyes narrow. "Well, I'm sorry that me giving birth to our daughter was so fucking horrible for you, Ilya."

"Shane," Ilya says, "you know very well that is not what I meant."

The other man sits up, grabbing his shirt from the bedside table and throwing it on over his bare torso. His face is tight, emotions coiling under the surface.

“You know,” Ilya adds, “they gave us resources at the hospital. Postpartum counseling, if we needed it. Maybe you should talk to-”

“I don’t need a therapist, or another doctor, or *more* people to tell me I’ve been through something horrible!” Shane moves to the edge of the bed, and Ilya notices his hands are shaking. “I got her here, we’re both okay. Why the fuck doesn’t anyone want to just be *happy* about that?”

“Shane,” Ilya tries again. “We are all extremely happy about it. But that doesn’t mean what we went through was-”

“We?” Shane snaps, head turning sharply in Ilya’s direction. “Oh, sorry, did *you* endure hours of labor and tear twice and almost bleed to fucking death? Did *you* miss the entire first day of our daughter’s life because you were unconscious and drugged?”

Ilya goes quiet, hands folded in his lap. From her bassinet, Hayley makes a small sound in her sleep. A quick glance into the bassinet finds her well, sleeping soundly.

He meets Shane’s eyes, tension pulled taut between them.

“Are we still talking about training?” Ilya asks roughly. “Or did you want to talk about something else?”

“I’m tired of talking.” Shane gets to his feet. “All anyone wants to do is talk about how traumatic all of this has been. I just- I just want everything to be normal. I want to play hockey and come home to her and you and it not be- some- fucking *miracle* or something.”

“It *is* a miracle,” Ilya says defensively. “Whether you want to admit it or not, Shane, it was scary as fuck. I know you had it worse, but it was not easy to be there and not be able to help you, or her. It’s okay to not want to focus on only the bad, but you have to at least *acknowledge* it, Shane.”

Shane is shaking his head again before Ilya’s even done talking. He has come to realize that this is Shane’s defense mechanism. It’s the same thing Hayden told him he did when he first got outed. It’s what he tried to do when he wanted to keep the baby a secret. He pushes things down, pretends they are of no consequence. He thinks if he skates away fast enough, the pain can’t catch up with him.

But he’s wrong. It will always be there waiting for him, and eventually, it will be too big to face without completely crumbling.

“I just want to go to sleep,” Shane says bluntly, “I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

“Shane, the answer is not to ignore it,” Ilya insists. “I know that might seem easier, but you are only hurting yourself. Why don’t we consider one of the counselors they referred us to? We can go together.”

“Stop handling me,” Shane bites back angrily. “I don’t need to be babied, or rescued. I’m still- I’m not different now, okay? I’m *fine.*”

Different.

There’s that fucking word again.

“Well, I am glad that almost dying and our baby struggling to take her first breaths was not even a little upsetting to you,” Ilya mutters back, knowing it’s immature, but unable to help himself. “The rest of us are not so tough, da? And we fucking love you, so we worry. You do not have to act like we are doing you some disservice by caring.”

Shane’s fists clench. “That’s not what I fucking said, Ilya.”

“Oh, maybe if you actually went to the counselor, you could communicate what the fuck it is you *do* mean!” Ilya snaps.

Shane barks out a laugh. “Right, cause you’re a doctor, so all you wanna do is *fix* everything for me. There’s something wrong with me I guess.” He shakes his head and points to the door. “Why don’t you sleep in the guest room tonight? I’d hate to bother you by being such a burden.”

Ilya gets to his feet as well, hair standing on his arms. This is getting really out of hand. He has to access the part of him that’s more mature, more calm than Shane is right now. He has to remind himself that Shane is absolutely reeling from what he’s been through, *and* the postpartum hormones still wreaking havoc on his body. He may not *want* to be treated differently, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t *need* to be.

“Okay,” he says with restraint. “I think we should take a step back here. We are arguing for no reason, Shanya.”

“No, we’re arguing because you’re treating me like a baby,” Shane says back, “and I want you to leave me alone tonight.”

“I am *not* treating you like a baby!” Ilya throws his hands up with frustration, attempts to be diplomatic already failing. “I am treating you like the man I love, who had a very difficult birth and is still postpartum, and is going to put himself at risk by going back to work too early!”

Shane’s voice is icy when he replies. “I have a restriction notice.”

“You and I both know you are not going to listen to the fucking doctor,” Ilya growls.

At that, Shane looks genuinely hurt. “What? You seriously think I would ignore her orders?”

Ilya gestures angrily at the bassinet. “You ignored me about driving to Montreal, and she was born in the fucking car. Why would I trust you now?”

The silence that settles between them feels immeasurably heavy.

Regret, thick and weighty lands in Ilya's gut. He cannot believe he just said that to him.

"Shane," he starts, apology already prepared to spill from his lips.

"Please leave me alone," Shane says hoarsely, turning his head away, though there is thick emotion audible in his words. "Please just sleep somewhere else tonight."

"Shane, I am sorry, I did not mean-"

"Yes you did." Shane looks back at him, eyes burning red, jaw tensed, though no tears fall. "I know you meant it. And I know you're right. But right now I fucking hate you for saying it to me. So please, just *go."*

There is not much else he can do. Ilya turns for the door, swallowing the lump in his throat. He steps into the hallway, shutting the door quietly behind him.

He pauses when Hayley starts to cry. Instinct moves him in the direction of the door, but he forces himself to stop when he hears Shane's voice, weak and wet.

"Shh, it's okay baby girl, Daddy's here," he murmurs, voice layering alongside her cries, "I know, I know baby. I know. I'm here. I'm here."

Ilya rests his forehead against the door, eyes closing against a barrage of hot tears that spill over his cheeks.

He doesn't open the door, but he stays, listening to his family on the other side.

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

posting this before i have to go make dinner for my kids

i have already started ch13 writing to distract from my problems IS the recipe tried and true

I LOVE YOU THANK YOU FOR READING !!!!

XX

Shane is gone by the time Ilya wakes up the next morning.

Hayley's bassinet has been moved to the bedside in the guest room, and she's still sleeping soundly when he opens his eyes. There's a note in Shane's handwriting on the end table that just reads:

FED HER AT 5:20. CHANGED HER AT 6:00.

There is no mention of when he will be home.

It's nearly eight now, and Ilya realizes this is the longest he's slept since they brought her home. Probably because his body dragged him under after a few hours of restlessly pacing around the guest room, resisting the urge to walk down the hall every time he heard her cries break through both closed doors.

Shane must have had a very long night, by himself.

He should have made it to the rink by now, it's about an hour and a half drive from here.

Ilya grabs his phone and sends a text.

ILYA: *did you make it safely?*

No answer, of course. If he did make it, surely he's just busy getting into training. Still, before their fight, he'd promised he would text when he arrived.

Unable to help his worry, Ilya presses the call button.

It rings a few times before Shane answers, very out of breath.

"What's wrong? Is she okay?"

Ilya frowns. “Yes, she is fine. Still sleeping.”

Shane sounds aggravated when he replies. “Why did you call me?”

“Because you said you were going to text when you made it, and you didn’t.”

“Oh.” Shane gets a bit softer at that. “I’m sorry. I forgot. My location is turned on, though. Just check that next time.”

“Oh, right. I should have. Sorry.”

“It’s f-“

Shane’s reply is cut off by a demanding voice yelling, “*Hollander! Break’s over!”*

He exhales loudly into the phone. “I gotta go. I’ll be home around five, okay?”

Ilya nods to himself, relieved that at least Shane is speaking cordially to him. “Yes, okay. Have fun. We love you.”

“Thanks, I-“

The line disconnects before Shane can say it back. Ilya tells himself it was by accident.

Ilya slowly gets out of bed, scooping Hayley up in his arms. She mewls softly, bowed lips parting and eyelashes fluttering. Her eyes open slowly and she looks up at him with her big, warm brown gaze. His heart clenches in his chest. Looking at her, sometimes it feels just like looking at Shane. Immeasurable, all-encompassing love that’s so broad and full it almost feels like it might explode his insides. Simultaneously, a yearning for something he can’t explain, even while she’s here in his arms.

“Good morning, *moya lyubov,”* he tells her quietly, rocking her back and forth in his arms in a rhythmic motion. “I am sorry Papa was not with you last night. It was terrible for me. I hope it was not so bad for you, *malyshka.”*

She looks up at him with her big eyes and makes a soft sound. So sweet and tender, unintentionally light in the darkness clouding his vision this morning.

“Did you know,” Ilya says softly as they make their way down stairs toward the kitchen, “that Papa prayed for you?”

Hayley, of course, does not reply.

“Is true,” he murmurs, rocking her gently in one arm while he prepares his coffee with the other. It’s quiet in the kitchen, weirdly haunting without Shane by his side. Even though the other man is not particularly chatty or loud, especially in the mornings, his absence is palpable.

“There is big man in the sky, you do not know about him yet,” Ilya tells her, watching the drip of his coffee press through the beans. “He makes everything. The clouds, the sky, the

sunlight. He even makes the best thing of all. You, *malyshka."*

Hayley looks up at him, enthralled. Beautiful.

"Daddy made you, mostly," Ilya says, "he did lots of hard work building you a body and a brain and all the things you need to make your little heart beat. But, I think, the big man in the sky wanted it to happen. Wanted *you* to happen. You were meant to be, *malen'koye chudo."*

His coffee is done, and he pours the hot liquid into the little *The Office* mug he's come to claim as his own since staying here. Shane says David left it here one time a while ago. It has a photo of Dwight on it that reads *"Time for coffee? Time for work."* It is a really stupid mug, but Ilya has grown fond of it.

"Daddy would probably disagree with me," he muses, taking a sip and letting the black liquid burn his tongue. "He thinks it is all random chaos, and things happen just because. I get why he thinks this. It is easier to think that, if you ask me. But believing in a *reason* for it all…that can be hard. I still do, though."

He walks Hayley out to the back deck with his coffee, perching down in one of the chairs as he looks over the water reflecting amber by early sunlight. There's a cool, crisp breeze this morning, and it washes over his face while he sips.

"For a long time, *malyshka*, Papa did not know the reason either." He looks down at Hayley again, who is staring up at him with those big, doe-brown eyes. "I prayed every day that I would someday understand. That I would have *this.* That I would have you. My reason."

He sets his coffee down on the end table, and runs his warm fingers along the soft tufts of hair on her head. She blinks a few times, fingers wagging toward him. Each little digit is so tiny, it's incomprehensible that she could possibly be sitting here waving them at him.

"I am sorry we fought last night, beautiful girl," he says mournfully. "I promise, we do not usually do this. Daddy is… Daddy is in pain. He just does not want to think about it, because the pain is in his heart and his mind, and sometimes that is the worst kind. He has been through so much. You changed our lives very beautifully, *moy sladkiy.* But that can be hard. Papa is going to help him, though, do not worry."

Hayley reaches for him with her tiny fingers and coos a small *"ah"* sound. Ilya smiles at her, chest warmed.

"*Ah* indeed, little love. We will get Daddy feeling better. It just may take some time. Big hearts need a lot of recovery when they get hurt. And Daddy has a very big heart." He reaches down and kisses her soft, squishy little hand. "I know you will have this too, because his heart made yours."

Ilya presses his fingertip lightly over her chest, where her butterfly heart is beating quickly.

"I love you, my beautiful Hayley," he says reverently, "no matter what happens, always know this. I love you, and I will never, ever leave you."

“Ah!” she squeaks back at him.

He’s sure she probably means*: I love you too Papa!*

Right now, he’ll take what he can get.

His phone rings around noon, just as he’s finished putting Hayley back in her bassinet to nap. He races for it, grabbing it off the countertop in the hopes of quieting it before it wakes her. He answers without looking at the caller ID, expecting it to be Yuna checking in.

“Hello?”

“Hi. Shane wants to know how the baby is.”

Ilya blinks, momentarily stunned. “Hayden?”

“Yeah. He’s in the bathroom pumping right now, doesn’t want coach to see him on his phone today, but he wants to know how Hayley is doing.”

“Why are you- you’re with Shane?”

“No, I’m just calling you to make up stories for fun.”

Ilya scowls. “Go fuck yourself, Pike.”

“Wait, seriously, Shane wanted me to check in. Is Hayley doing okay?”

“She is fine, she is napping.”

“Did she take her bottle okay?”

“Eh, she drank most of it. She was fussy though. She misses him.”

“I’ll leave that part out of my report,” Hayden mutters.

“Why are you there?” Ilya demands.

“To keep an eye on things here, I didn’t want him to be alone,” Hayden replies. “I’m training with him, in solidarity.”

Hesitantly, Ilya finds himself asking, “did he give your coach his restriction notice from the doctor?”

“Yes,” Hayden replies flatly. The displeased tone of his voice lends Ilya to believe Shane probably filled him in on last night’s argument. Though, Hayden never sounds particularly pleased to be talking with Ilya.

Ilya sighs. “Of course he did. I should not have doubted that.”

“No, you shouldn’t have.”

“Alright, Pike.” Ilya glances over at the bassinet, then speaks again. “Is he doing alright? How is he holding up for training?”

Hayden exhales loudly into the phone. “You know Shane. He’s not exactly gung-ho to let everyone know when it’s getting to be too much. But safe to say, it’s too much. Coach doesn’t seem all that worried about his *restrictions.”*

Ilya’s teeth grit. “Can’t you do something?”

“I am doing everything I can.”

“He is pumping in the *bathroom?”*

“Coach didn’t want him using the locker room.”

Ilya presses two fingers along the bridge of his nose to keep a frustrated scream from leaving his body. “Why is he subjecting himself to this?”

“Don’t you have any idea of how hard he’s worked to get here?” Hayden demands. “I get why he isn’t just going to throw it all away.”

“So he should run himself into the ground trying to please your piece of shit coach?”

“No.” Hayden sounds dejected at that. “But, he’s working with what he’s being given, Rozanov. He’s just doing his best. Lay off him a little.”

“I am *worried* about him,” Ilya exclaims.

“I get it, so am I. But I’m here looking out for him too, man. Just…when he gets home tonight and tells you it was a great day, just let him have that. Please.”

“Alright,” he concedes, “I would like to not spend another night fighting with him. I will make nice.”

There’s a beat of silence.

“Hayden,” Ilya says, “please, he is at increased risk of injury right now. Please just- if he’s going to do something that will hurt him, even if you think he will be mad, please don’t let him-”

“I won’t,” Hayden interrupts, voice firm. “I won’t let it go that far, Ilya.”

“Thank you.” Ilya sighs with relief.

“But, for what it’s worth,” Hayden adds, “he’s working hard but he’s not killing himself or anything. He was serious about the restriction notice. He even said no to a second round of bag skates. And he’s been taking breaks for snacks and to pump.”

Ilya swallows thickly. “I am sure he is doing everything he’s supposed to. I should not…hold the delivery against him, the way I did last night.”

“Yeah, he told me about that. Pretty fucked up. He feels guilty enough already.”

Ilya sighs again.

“I get it, you’re both hurting,” Hayden says, “just, tackle it together, okay? Don’t let it tackle *you.* I gotta go, more drills. See you.”

The line disconnects.

Ilya stares at the phone in his hand for a while, trying to drive the image of his freshly postpartum partner, sequestered and alone in an ice rink bathroom, pumping. It’s so dank and depressing it makes Ilya’s stomach turn. Shane should be here, relaxing in his glider, a happy smile on his face while he feeds their daughter and Ilya spoons ice cream into his mouth.

But, maybe that isn’t what Shane needs right now. Maybe he needs to try to feel as normal as possible. And even though Ilya doesn’t like it, and doesn’t like the people he’s surrounding himself with to do it, he doesn’t really get a say. Especially since Shane is doing what the doctor said.

And, reluctantly, Ilya has to admit something else.

Hayden Pike is a better friend than he’s ever given him credit for.

The front door opens at 4:45 that evening.

Ilya is in front of the stove, Hayley in her little swing a few feet away. She’s being a very good girl, just watching him cook with big, curious eyes. He’s making a stir fry, something he knows Shane really enjoys, with garlic noodles and lots of veggies. Hearty but wholesome.

He glances over when he hears footsteps, and watches as Shane drops his bag on the floor beside the counter, immediately moving for the swing. Wordlessly, he bends down and scoops Hayley up into his arms, pressing his face into her hair and closing his eyes.

For a few long moments, no one speaks. Ilya lets Shane just soak up this moment with her. She squeals and wags her little fists and mouths at him. He makes a small sound, from deep in his chest- a primal noise. Quiet, but heavy with emotion.

Once he has the strength to look up from her, their eyes meet, and Ilya breaks the silence.

“Dinner is almost ready,” he says gently. “Are you hungry?”

Shane nods, still clinging to Hayley. “Starving. I should feed her first, though. I showered before I left so I’m good to go.”

“Why don’t you sit? I’ll bring your food while she eats,” Ilya offers.

“Okay, thanks.”

Shane shrugs out of his hoodie and t-shirt, situating himself in one of the chairs at the kitchen table. His voice is soft, tender as he speaks quietly to Hayley.

“You hungry, Hayles?” he murmurs, fingers delicately cupping the back of her hair. “Huh? I’m here baby, it’s okay. Let’s eat, hm?”

Ilya swallows a surprising lump in his throat as he plates Shane’s dinner and sits in front of him. Shane’s eyes dart up briefly.

“Thank you.”

“Is she eating?” Ilya asks.

“I think, um-” Shane’s halting voice is restrained. “Maybe the bottles today were confusing. She’s not latching.”

Instead of talking, Ilya comes around the back of the chair and rests his hands on Shane’s shoulders. Carefully, he kneads the bare skin there, massaging his muscles. Shane exhales, a low sigh, tension slowly seeping out of him.

“That’s nice,” Shane breathes softly. “You don’t have to do that.”

“Just relax,” Ilya says.

Shane continues trying to get Hayley to latch, even resorting to squeezing his engorged chest between two fingers and shoving it in her mouth like a hamburger. This produces results, thankfully.

“She’s eating,” Shane says, relief evident in his voice.

“Good job,” Ilya replies. “Do you want me to feed you your dinner so it doesn’t get cold?”

Shane hesitates. “I got it. That feels really good, what you’re doing.”

“I will not stop.”

One-handed, Shane eats his dinner while Ilya massages his neck and shoulders. It’s quiet, save for Hayley’s soft snuffles of breathing and suckling. It’s a comforting sound, their daughter’s nourishment.

After she’s eaten, been burped and changed and is asleep on Shane’s chest, Ilya makes himself a plate and eats his cold noodles at the table beside Shane. He’s leaning back, resting his cheek in her hair, eyes closed again.

“About last night-” Ilya begins tentatively.

“I’m sorry,” Shane says before he can continue. “I know I’m all over the place right now, and it’s probably scary. But, me going back to work is non-negotiable. I have fought too hard to get to where I am. I’m not giving that up.”

“I know-” Ilya starts.

“Listen,” Shane interjects. “I made a dumb decision, and that led our daughter’s birth to be something terrifying, and…*traumatic*. I know it was as hard on you as it was on me. And I’m really sorry about that.”

“You do not have to apologize,” Ilya responds softly.

“Yes I do. It’s my fault.” He clears his throat. “And I have to live with that. But I’m going back to work. I’m going to do what I need to do, to be the captain of my team. To be myself. *But*, if it would…make this easier, I will make an appointment with the counselor.”

Shane meets his eyes. Ilya arches an eyebrow.

“Is that fair?” Shane asks.

“Of course,” Ilya replies immediately. “I think that’s very fair, Shane. I do not want you to give anything up, I just want you to take good care of yourself.”

“I get it.” He shifts Hayley in his arms. “Even fucking Hayden was worried about me. He sacrificed time with his own family today to come look out for me. That feels so shitty. I don’t want to be the person stressing everyone else out.”

“Thank you,” Ilya says. “I appreciate you being willing to do this.”

Shane nods. “Can we…could we talk about anything else?”

“Yes of course.” Ilya sets his fork down and smirks. “I rented *When Harry Met Sally* on your fancy TV and we are going to watch. Hayley and I also made a trip to the market in town and got that fig jam you love. I am going to bake it into some biscuit dough. How does that sound?”

Shane’s smile spreads. “That sounds…so fucking good.”

“Perfect.”

“Did Hayley like the market?”

“She slept through the market,” Ilya admits, “I wore her in that thing we got at the baby shower. The baby tortilla.”

“The baby wrap,” Shane corrects.

“Same thing. A group of old ladies came over to talk about how cute she is.”

“You didn’t let them kiss her or anything, right?” Shane asks.

Ilya laughs. “You think I let strange old people with shingles leave their spit on our baby?”

“Yeah no, that was a dumb question sorry.”

“Is okay.” Ilya reaches across the table and rests his hand on Shane’s knee. The other man sighs, still cradling Hayley to his chest.

“It was really hard today,” Shane huffs. “I missed her so much. I cried in the bathroom every time I pumped.
“Oh, Shanya.” Ilya squeezes him. “I am sure I will be the same way when I go back.”

“I don’t know how to do this,” he admits, “I don’t know how to have her and still be me. Everything feels…” He shakes his head. “A year ago my life was one thing. And it had been that way for a decade. And all of a sudden *everything* is different.”

“I know, *moy sladkiy.”* Ilya’s voice is gentle with sympathy. “It is weird for me too. Life has changed forever. It will always be different now, with her. But that is a good thing, da?”

“It is,” Shane says immediately, “I love her so much sometimes I’m afraid it’s gonna burst my chest.”

“Da yes, like the aliens in that movie.”

Shane’s lips twitch. *“That movie?”*

“I forgot, what is it called?”

“*Alien*, Ilya!” He laughs, keeping a careful hand on Hayley’s back so he doesn’t jostle her too much.

The sound of his laugh, after the past few days, is like a soothing balm on Ilya’s heart. It settles his shoulders, it makes him smile, it puts his frightened mind at ease.

If he can keep Shane laughing for the rest of his life, he’ll count himself lucky.

“Come on,” he says quietly, “let’s get pajamas on and I will bake the biscuits.”

“Okay,” Shane agrees.

Shane falls asleep about halfway through the movie.

They’ve both eaten way too many fig biscuits, and Shane had a few glasses of orange juice. Hayley is asleep in Ilya’s arms, and Shane’s face is smushed into his thigh while he snores. Ilya does not have the heart to move either of them, right now.

He watches the film, though. At first he hadn’t expected to like this one so much, but knowing it’s Shane’s favorite made him want to understand why. It’s about two stubborn people who struggle to communicate their true feelings, who struggle to acknowledge the love between them. Two people who are afraid of what the future holds. Harry, overly literal and a bit emotionally stunted- Sally, dramatic and compassionate, but in her own ways, emotionally stunted too.

He wonders if Shane watched this as a child, and saw something in himself. Yearned for the long-earned love the characters end up sharing, after so many years of struggle and

uncertainty. He wonders if Shane has always liked a guaranteed happy ending, because unlike real life, it meant there was nothing to fear, even when heartbreak struck.

Ilya likes it too. There is something safe in the certainty of promised happiness. It would be nice if real life could offer that too.

“There’s my beautiful girl!” Yuna accepts Hayley as Ilya gently passes her over, smiling and bounding her lightly against her chest. “Oh, my girl! She’s getting heavy!”

Ilya laughs gently as he follows Yuna into the door, diaper bag slung over his shoulder. That’s his primary accessory lately. Hayley is ten weeks old today, and growing like a weed.

“She loves to eat,” Ilya says, “she takes after me.”

“Mm, I’m sure.” Yuna kisses his cheek and leads him into the kitchen, pressing Hayley close. “So, you’re going back to work in a few weeks. How are you feeling about that?”

Nervous, is the answer Ilya wants to give. He’s equal parts excited, and equal parts devastated. He does not know how he is going to cope without seeing her all day every day. But, he’s been a doctor for twelve years now, and he very, very much misses it. He misses the hospital, he misses his patients, his team. He misses using his brain for things other than how many ounces of milk Hayley will drink after her nap.

“I am going to be fine,” he says, “if Shane can do it, so can I.”

“Ah yes, our hockey prodigy.” Yuna rolls her eyes. “He’s miserable, you know.”

Ilya grimaces. “Yuna.”

She isn’t wrong, per say. Lately, training has been getting more and more intense. Practices run later. Now that the team is all back and the season is restarting soon, it’s been a lot on Shane’s shoulders. He’s having a hard time trying to keep up with everyone else while also taking care of himself, making sure he has time to pump, and getting home in time to actually enjoy their daughter. He’s been pretty ragged lately. And even though he’s cleared now for regular duties, Ilya still thinks he’s pushing himself pretty hard.

“He’s driving three hours roundtrip everyday to go get tortured at drills and pump in a bathroom stall,” Yuna says grimly. “He should have taken another year.”

“If he waited another year, he would get traded,” Ilya reminds her.

“They’d be idiots to trade him,” she retorts.

“That does not change anything, Yuna.”

“I just don’t know why he’s like this,” she mutters, hiking Hayley up a bit higher in her arms. Hayley tracks her with her eyes, gummy smile spreading, as if she recognizes Grandma’s voice.

Ilya clears his throat. He refrains from pointing out that Shane is probably like this because his parents pushed him so hard in his youth. Success wasn't optional for Shane growing up, it was the only way.

"He has had an appointment with the postpartum counselor they recommended," Ilya says instead. "He said it was helpful. They are meeting again next month."

"That's good." She nods, glancing down at Hayley's inquisitive face. "Isn't that good, sweetheart? Daddy's going to the brain doctor! We like the brain doctor, don't we?"

"Bah!" Hayley informs her.

"Bah is right, honey." Yuna bounces her a bit, glancing at Ilya over her shoulder while he smiles.

This is difficult sometimes, watching Yuna with Hayley. It brings up deep-seated, bitter, painful things he'd rather not think about. Things about his own mother, and what it would have been like to see *her* holding Hayley.

He really can not go there, right now.

"When's his first game?" Yuna asks, kissing the top of Hayley's head before she walks over to the fridge and opens it with one hand. She pulls out some weird bottled yogurt smoothie concoction and takes a sip.

"Two weeks from now," Ilya says. "It's a home game. I'm off that day, so I thought we'd go together? Shane says we can get Hayley some special headphones for the crowd, if we want to bring her. To protect her ears."

"She'll probably sleep through it anyway," Yuna agrees. "So after that, he's traveling?"

Ilya gets a bitter taste in his mouth at this reminder. Shane is going to be on the road for a while, with at least 3-4 games per week on his schedule. Half of them will be at home, but the other ones he's going to be traveling pretty often. And if they make it to the playoffs, even worse.

"Yes," Ilya replies tightly. "Some home games and then Toronto, Ottawa, and Boston I think."

Yuna nods sadly. "It's been so nice having him around the past year. I'm gonna miss him."

"Us too," Ilya says, waving at Hayley while she tries to hold her head up and look at him. "I feel awful, she's going to lose him and me all at once."

"Hey." Yuna steps closer, eyes softening. "No one is *losing* anyone, Ilya. Lots of parents work. David and I both did Shane's whole life. Shane will still get a lot of time with her when he's here or in the off season, and you will see her every moment you can."

Ilya tries to be comforted by her words, but it's difficult.

“And in the meantime!” She says, smiling and kissing Hayley’s cheek. “Hayles can have so much fun with Grammy and Grandpa!”

Before he can reply, the feeling of his phone buzzing in his pocket gets his attention. Ilya pulls it out, surprised to see Shane’s contact on his screen. It’s the photo he’d taken the first day they brought Hayley home to the cottage- Shane with his eyes closed, cheek resting in her hair as he held her.

“Hello?” he says into the receiver.

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice is a thick, wet sob.

Instantly alarmed, Ilya’s reply is urgent and panicked. “Shane? What is wrong? Are you okay?”

Yuna’s head snaps in his direction worriedly.

“I-I-” He heaves another sob, words breaking apart.

“Shane, oh my god, please, what is going on? You are scaring me, *malysh.”*

“I’m okay,” he weeps, “it just *really* hurts, Ilya. It hurts so bad and I forgot my- my- my *pump.”*

“Oh, Shanya.” Ilya presses a hand to his own chest in sympathy. “You need to express?”

“It *hurts.* And I missed pumping this morning because I realized I forgot it at home. I thought I could get through the day but- I can’t.” He sniffles loudly. “I tried to order one from a nearby store but I couldn’t find anything close that sells them.”

Ilya curses himself quietly, realizing he’d walked right by the pump on his way here today, still sitting on the kitchen table. Stupidly, he hadn’t thought anything of it, too sleep deprived from the newborn phase to put two and two together.

“I am at your parent’s house,” he says, “just an hour away. I will come to you, baby.”

“Please,” Shane cries.

“I will come right to you, okay?” Ilya says, turning and opening his arms for the baby. Yuna hands her over without question. “I do not want to waste time going home for the pump, I’ll just come with Hayley, okay, Shane?”

“Okay,” his wobbly voice replies, “please hurry, please.”

“On my way, my love.” Ilya hangs up the phone and says a quick goodbye to Yuna, explaining as he hustles for the front door. “Shane forgot his pump, Hayley needs to eat. Going to meet him at the rink.”

“Oh, drive safely!” Yuna calls after him, the door already closing on her words.

“I know baby, I know,” Ilya says into the rearview mirror as he parks the car outside Montreal’s rink. Her crying is the shrill, desperate, *hungry* cry that makes his chest hurt and his stomach turn until he can make her feel full and happy again. It was a long drive, but she’s been a trooper, until the last few minutes when her feeding schedule being thrown off truly made her lose her cool.

Shane is already sitting outside when he pulls up to the curb, head hanging low. Hayden is sitting beside him, one hand on his back in a comforting gesture. When the car stops, his head snaps up, and Ilya can see how red and swollen his eyes are from crying.

Shane staggers toward the car, opening the back door and sliding into the backseat.

“Oh, baby girl,” he says to her, immediately unbuckling her and shrugging out of his dry-fit t-shirt. His let-down reflex has already been triggered by her cries, and his chest looks painfully engorged. Ilya cringes with sympathy.

Before he can pull into a nearby parking spot, the passenger door opens and Hayden climbs in, shutting it behind him.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Ilya demands. “Get out!”

“Hayd’s fine,” Shane says distractedly, cupping his hand behind Hayley’s head as she quietly suckles. There’s audible ease in his voice now that her cries have quieted and he’s getting some relief.

Hayden looks smugly at Ilya, who scowls and parks the car. He turns to watch Shane feed her, something in his own chest settling with relief at the sight of them.

“Thank you,” Shane says, glancing up at him through his eyelashes. “I know it’s a shitty drive just because I forgot my pump. That was stupid of me.”

“Shane, you are doing so much,” Ilya says softly, “I am sorry I did not realize it and bring it to you sooner. I am just glad I could get her here to you. How is the pain?”

Shane huffs out a breath, laughing dryly. “Um, it fucking kills. But she’s helping.”

“You are helping her too,” Ilya reminds him. “You are literally keeping her alive with your body. It is amazing, my Shanya.”

“Jackie always said she felt like a cow,” Hayden muses unhelpfully from the passenger seat.

Ilya cranes his neck, eyes burning. *“Why* are you still here?”

“I need a break from those neanderthals' in there,” he mutters, jerking his chin toward the rink.

Shane hums quietly under his breath, gently nudging Hayley to the other side of his chest to drink. Luckily, she’s quite hungry.

“Is it a bad day?” Ilya asks, worry clear in his tone.

“I’ve been pretty useless for a few hours now,” Shane says, stroking his thumb gently over Hayley’s hair. “Mostly just hiding in the locker room or bathroom crying my eyes out. I’m sure everyone’s ready to kill me.”

“Everyone else can fuck off,” Hayden says, before Ilya gets the chance.

“Agreed,” Ilya says mildly.

“Practice is almost over,” Shane says, “once I’m done here, I’ll only have an hour left.”

“Then your drive home,” Ilya reminds him. “Have you eaten?”

“No,” Hayden answers.

“Don’t speak for him,” Ilya snaps.

“I haven’t eaten yet,” Shane says.

“Why?”

“We haven’t had any time,” Hayden says.

“Here.” Ilya digs through the diaper bag until he produces a plastic ziploc full of mini Nutella jars with dipping sticks. He passes two to Shane. He still craves Nutella like crazy.

“Thank you.” Shane bites into one of the sticks and sighs contently.

Ilya catches the mournful look Hayden is giving him, and exhales gruffly, passing him one as well.

“Score,” he mutters before taking a bite.

“How is she doing?” Ilya asks Shane.

“I think she’s almost done,” he replies with his mouth full.

“How about I drive you home after practice? Ilya suggests. “There is only one hour. Hayley will take her nap and I will walk around Montreal discovering how boring and lame it is.”

“But what about my car?”

“I will drop you off tomorrow morning. Is okay.”

“Ilya, that’s-”

“Shane,” Hayden interjects, “it’s been a hell of a day. You probably shouldn't make that long drive tonight by yourself.”

“Plus, you’d get to ride with Hayley,” Ilya adds, grinning.

“Alright,” Shane concedes, carefully removing her from his chest with a sigh. She’s gently nudging him away to signal she’s full, but he looks comfortable, and his chest has visibly deflated. He burps her efficiently. “I’ll probably have to feed her before we make it home again anyway.”

“I will see you in one hour, then.”

Ilya watches as Shane gently eases Hayley back into her carseat and straps her in. He throws his shirt on over his torso again and leans down to press a lingering kiss to her forehead. He sighs, yearning in the sound, and then pulls away.

“Thank you,” Shane says, leaning over the seat to kiss Ilya flat on the mouth.

Ilya relaxes into it, kissing back until Hayden clears his throat loudly from beside them. Ilya is going to punch him in the neck.

“We should get back.” Shane pulls away with a soft smile for Ilya. “I’ll see you in an hour.”

He hops out of the car, looking back curiously at Hayden.

“I’ll be right in,” Hayden says, “just want to ask Ilya about my rash.”

“Ugh. Gross.” Shane waves to them and heads for the doors.

“I am not looking at your rash,” Ilya says flatly.

“That was obviously a lie. I want to talk to you about Shane.”

“Oh.” Ilya leans back against his seat, brow furrowing. “What?”

“They’re targeting him,” Hayden says.

Ilya blinks. “What?”

“During practice. They’re trying to- I don’t know, see how far they can push him?” Hayden shakes his head with frustration. “Targeting him for rough hits and difficult plays, almost like they’re testing if he’s still the same as before. Like they want him to prove himself before our game. Like, seeing if he’s more breakable now or something.”

Ilya’s jaw clenches. “He is breastfeeding. It affects bone density, hormones, *lots* of things. And he only gave birth two months ago. He is *not* exactly the same.”

“He’s going to get hurt,” Hayden says.

Ilya leans forward and presses his forehead into the steering wheel. “I imagine your coach has nothing to say about this.”

“I’m sure he’s the one who told them to do it.”

Exhaling roughly, Ilya shakes his head. “I cannot convince him, Hayden. His doctor told him he was cleared for this. There is always risk of getting hurt in your job. He will not just stop because I ask, and honestly, I don’t blame him. He got permission.”

“Well, that was without knowing he was being targeted.” Hayden presses a hand to the dashboard. “I can’t fucking watch this anymore. If they keep this up he’ll get hurt before the game even happens.”

“What does Shane say about this?” Ilya asks.

“There’s nothing *he* can do about it,” Hayden insists, “if he calls them on it, they’re just gonna double down. It’s not like they listen to him.”

“I fucking hate this team,” he growls.

“I’m pretty fed up myself,” Hayden mutters. “I’m a free agent next season. Maybe I’ll shop around. I hear Ottawa is nice.”

“Take Shane with you,” Ilya begs.

Hayden laughs dryly. “I don’t think he’s willing to give up that *C* on his jersey so easily.”

Unfortunately, Ilya thinks he’s probably right.

“He has worked very hard for it,” Ilya says, “since he was a teenager.”

“Yeah well, sunken cost fallacy,” Hayden says. “He’s gotta learn to let the fuck go.”

Ilya scowls. “It is not fair that *he* should be the one who has to let go, just because they cannot behave themselves.”

“He should just coach or start his own team or something,” Hayden muses. “He’s such a control freak, that would probably be fun for him.”

“Is not a bad idea,” Ilya concedes.

“In another life.” Hayden opens the door. “Gotta go. See ya.”

He shuts the door behind him, disappearing into the rink, where Shane is enduring terrible, terrible things.

In the car on the drive home, Ilya brings them through a fast food restaurant. Shane has a craving for a crispy chicken sandwich, and Ilya makes it happen.

“These breastfeeding cravings are worse than when I was pregnant,” he says around a mouthful of chicken.

“I hear that happens,” Ilya says, taking a bite of his own sandwich. “And you are burning so many calories training.”

“True,” he agrees, “I’ve *lost* three more pounds somehow.”

“Need to eat more,” Ilya replies.

“Yes, I will.” Shane nods and takes another bite. “You got me fries too, right?”

“Yes, and another sandwich.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course, my love.”’

“What did you guys do for your hour in Montreal?” Shane asks, leaning his head tiredly against the window as they drive.

“Oh, we had much fun. Hayley and I went for a walk in the park, and we watched birds.”

“Did she like them?” Shane asks with a grin.

“She did not seem to care,” Ilya admits, laughing. “But she was cute.”

“She’s always cute.” Shane finishes his sandwich and fishes a few fries from the bag. “So are you excited to go back to work?”

Ilya taps his fingers on the steering wheel thoughtfully. “I actually am. I am very nervous to leave her. But I can’t wait to be back at the hospital. A doctor with no patients is like a dolphin with no ocean.”

Shane snorts out a laugh. “Is that a thing people say?”

“I said it, so.”

“I’m sorry your commute is longer now,” Shane murmurs apologetically. The cottage is almost halfway between the hospital and the Metros rink, so Ilya’s drive to work is closer to forty minutes now, instead of fifteen like before. Still, it’s nothing compared to Shane’s hour and a half.

“Mm, it is okay. We will figure something else out eventually.” Ilya stuffs the rest of his sandwich in his mouth.

Shane licks fry salt off his fingers. “Thank you again, for today. I don’t know what I did to get so fucking lucky, that you’re my person…but I’m really grateful, Ilya.”

Ilya glances at him, emotions stuck in his throat at the sudden sentimentality. This hasn’t been easy for them, post-partum, and figuring out their new normals. So to hear Shane say these words, it feels fucking amazing.

“I feel like I am the lucky one,” Ilya tells him softly. “I know you think so many things of yourself-”

“I *know* I’m a pain in the ass,” Shane says.

“No, my love.” Ilya shakes his head. “Just seeing you smile makes me feel like there is nothing we cannot survive. I love you like it is breathing. It happens so easily, and it’s why I live.”

“We should have sex,” Shane replies, and when Ilya glances at him, his big brown eyes are glimmering with desire.

“Oh?” Ilya asks, grinning.

“Yeah, you’re so fucking romantic. God, I love you so much.” Shane reaches over and palms Ilya’s thigh, which makes his breath catch.

“Shane,” he replies with a small, flustered laugh. “Is this hormones talking, or you?”

“Probably both,” Shane admits, “but I want you. I’m ready. When we get home…can we… try?”

Ilya’s foot presses down harder on the gas pedal.

Shane laughs, releasing his thigh and leaning back. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Ilya’s back hits the wall as soon as Hayley is asleep in her bassinet.

Shane’s mouth is desperate, greedy on his neck as he leaves a trail of hungry kisses. The sensation is so intense that it makes Ilya’s head *thunk* back against the wall. His eyes flutter, breaths coming quickly as Shane drops to his knees in front of him.

“Shane!” he gasps, body tensing up as he feels the warmth of Shane’s mouth around him. There’s a low hum in the back of the other man’s throat, a pleasured sound, that vibrates against Ilya’s skin.

Shane’s tongue and lips drag back and forth along his hard length, greedy and wet. The sounds are obscene. Ilya has to clench his fists to keep hold of himself. What the hell has gotten *into* him?

His hand fists in Shane’s hair. It’s grown thick and longer since he first got pregnant, glossy locks that fall messily atop his head. He tugs lightly, pleased when it makes Shane moan again.

“Shane,” he huffs, “need to stop or I’m gonna- I won’t last.”

Shane pops his lips off with a wet sound, pulling back, eyes glowing with desire. He’s a fucking vision right now, on his knees before Ilya. Dark hair disheveled, skin warm and glowing, deep brown eyes glistening.

“Fuck.” Ilya reaches down and grabs him, pulling him up until their mouths collide. His lips bend pliantly under Ilya’s- plush and curved. He kicks off his sweatpants, and they both strip

out of their shirts.

Standing before each other in the glowing orange lamplight of the foyer, both fully exposed and breathing heavily, Ilya feels like his heart is going to combust.

Shane is so fucking beautiful. He's trimmed out over the past few weeks, muscles sharpening to something more lean. His abdomen is flat again, but still decorated with stretch marks and a few inches of wrinkled skin under his belly button. His chest is thick and puffy, dark nipples erect in the cool air. And his cock hangs heavy and proud between his thighs, dripping with precum already.

"I want to touch you," Ilya says brokenly, eyes drawing down between his legs.

Shane nods, reaching desperately in his direction.

Somehow, they end up tangled together on the sofa. Shane underneath Ilya, while he hovers above, kissing and sucking at every inch of skin he can reach. It has been so long since they did this- and every time except the first, they had Shane's large belly to contend with. Now, it's just the two of them.

Ilya brings his lips between Shane's shuddering thighs, kissing lightly, teeth nipping at the sensitive skin. Shane lets out a series of tender, breathless moans, head tilted back against the pillows. His fingers rake across Ilya's curls, needy, begging for more.

Carefully, he wets his finger and traces it around Shane's rim, moving with slow precision. Shane exhales, a hissing sound, and writhes his hips closer, as if pleading. Ilya slowly, tentatively, inserts one finger, glancing up at Shane to check his expression.

His eyes are closed, lips parted, chest heaving. No objections.

Ilya touches him reverently. He wants Shane to know that when he sees his body, he doesn't think about those bloody, horrifying moments in the car. Shane's body is a fucking miracle- each pale stretch mark, each wrinkle of skin, each scarred, permanently altered inch of flesh. All of it is *Shane*, and therefore it is the most beautiful body that's ever existed.

"You are so fucking gorgeous," he purrs, adding another finger when he hears Shane's breath quicken. "So beautiful, baby. Opening up so nice. Your body remembers me, mm?"

Shane nods, a whine in his throat. "Y-yeah, want you."

"That's right, *malysh,"* Ilya coos. "Want to take this big, hard cock?"

"Yes," Shane moans, "y-yes, so bad, missed you Ilya…"

He adds another finger, carefully watching Shane's face for any signs of discomfort or resistance. All he sees is bliss, but he has to be sure.

"Is okay, *moy sladkiy?"* he asks gruffly. "Everything feel okay for you?"

"*So* good," he breathes.

It doesn't take long before Shane is begging, insisting he's ready, and to just *do* it. Ilya lifts himself up a bit, kissing the contours of Shane's jaw, sighing softly at the familiar feeling.

"I have to get a condom," he says, "I will be right back."

"No!" Shane's thighs tense, and he grips Ilya by the hair. "I want to feel you. Just you."

"Oh, Shane, I don't-"

"You can't get pregnant while you're breastfeeding right?" Shane huffs, eyes opening. "I've heard that, I think."

Ilya laughs wetly. "Shane, that is a myth."

"I don't care," he insists, "please, Ilya, I want *you!"*

Fuck….

"I'm sorry, *malysh,"* Ilya murmurs, kissing his neck again. "One of us has to be responsible here. You are still healing. We cannot risk it."

Shane groans with displeasure, but nods. "You're right, you're right."

"I will be lightning fast." Ilya kisses him once more and hustles toward the bathroom.

When he returns, Shane is splayed out on the sofa, keeping himself open with two fingers. His skin is dewy with sweat, lashes drawn down over his cheeks, breathing heavily.

All the blood in Ilya's body is in one place, and he cannot think anymore. He *needs* Shane.

It's an effort to move slowly when he presses the tip of his cock against Shane's opening. His breath is thick and heavy, ragged in his chest just from the tight warmth enclosing the head. But he has to go slowly, make sure he doesn't hurt him.

"Please," Shane begs, "more, Ilya, more."

He juts his hips forward until he's sheathed inside, buried to the hilt in the blistering warmth of Shane's hole. His head drops between his shoulders and he inhales slowly, an attempt to control himself.

"Are you okay?" He asks Shane roughly.

"Yes." Shane nods, trembling. "Please, please."

Ilya moves his hips, making both of them groan in pleasure at the sensation. Slowly, he increases his speed, hips ratcheting against Shane's while their heavy panting and moaning intermingles.

"Oh fuck," Shane whines, burying his face in Ilya's neck, "I love you, I love you, *ah*, I *love* you!"

“I- love you- *too.”*

Ilya loses track of how long they do this, their bodies grinding together, their breaths hot and heavy, whispering *I love you’s* into the darkness.

Shane comes with an elated sound that’s half laughter, half overwhelmed moaning. He buries his face in Ilya’s neck, body jerking with the force of his climax. Ilya groans, his senses whiting out as he too crosses the threshold.

For a few moments, they just lie there, still panting, still clinging to one another. Ilya brushes slick hair off Shane’s forehead, fingertips dancing along the length of his cheekbones until his eyes flutter open.

“Hey,” he breathes, reaching down to press his lips against Shane’s chastely.

“Hi,” Shane replies when their mouths part, smiling. He blinks clarity back into his pretty brown eyes. “Thank you.”

Ilya lets out a shaking laugh. “Thank *me?* Thank *you.”*

“I missed you,” he murmurs, reaching up and drawing little circles on Ilya’s bicep with his index finger. “I missed this. Us. This is the reason that any of this even happened.”

“Mm, this and a faulty condom.”’

“You’re hilarious.”

“That was probably part of it too, you like my sense of humor.”

Shane rolls his eyes fondly, still smiling. “That was definitely part of it.”

“I am going to pull out now, okay?”

“Okay.”

Ilya disengages their bodies, both of them grimacing and grunting at the sensation. He quickly races to the bathroom and wets a rag with warm water, passing it to Shane.

“I am going to check on *malyshka,* I will be right back.”

Shane nods, cleaning himself up.

Ilya goes into the adjacent room, finding Hayley sound asleep in her bassinet. He smiles down at her, watching the little movements of her tiny chest. Her fingers wiggle slightly in her sleep, nose snuffling. Beautiful.

A hand on his shoulder startles him, and he turns to see Shane at his side. He rests his head on Ilya’s shoulder, leaning in to look at Hayley.

“She’s so perfect,” Shane whispers.

“She is,” Ilya agrees. “I hope she will be okay.”

“She will be.” Shane kisses his bicep. “We’re gonna figure it out.”

“Yes.” Ilya rests his head on Shane’s, sighing contentedly. “Together, we will figure it out.”

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> not only am i NOT a doctor i am even more NOT a hockey player so youre gonna have to SUSPEND UR DISBELIEF as you read
>
> that being said
>
> i hope you enjoy thank you so much for reading writing this to distract myself from life has truly been so fucking helpful and it makes me ecstatic that anyone else is enjoying
>
> ily

"And you have your first shift in two hours?" Galina checks her watch, making a show of lifting it in front of her webcam so Ilya can see.

He rolls his eyes at her antics. "Yes, I am on the nightshift this week."

"And how are you feeling? There is a lot to think about here right? It's been three months since you worked at the hospital. Shane is working too, and your schedules will be opposite this week."

Ilya swallows the lump in his throat. Leave it to his therapist to open the door in his brain he was trying to keep closed. "I do not want to think about missing bedtime with her. It will make me cry ugly."

Beside him in her swing, Hayley makes a small sound. He reaches over and shushes her gently, patting her little belly with his palm. Shane should be home soon to relieve him so he can drive to the hospital for his shift.

"How are you feeling about the thought of being at work, aside from missing your family?" Galina asks more pointedly. "After what you and Shane went through during her birth, and how tough postpartum has been."

"I do not get your meaning," he replies.

"I mean, when we experience something traumatic, it can be hard to go into situations that remind us of that moment. This was a pretty serious medical trauma, and you are going to be in the epicenter of medical traumas."

"Oh." Ilya nods thoughtfully. "I had not thought of it this way. The hospital is like an escape for me, from life. Yes, I guess there is medical trauma there, but I am in control of it. I am helping people, I am not helpless. I have a team, and tools and protocols."

“Unlike in the car, with Shane,” she adds.

He sighs. “Yeah I guess not.”

“Will you walk me through what you are going to do, if anything gets to be too much tonight?” Galina asks.

“You know I cannot just take a break whenever I want.”

“I know, Ilya. Your job is intense and you can’t just leave a patient if you get triggered. But, what is the plan if it does happen?”

“I am going to take ten deep breaths, finish the task at hand, and then I am going to take five minutes to collect myself somewhere quiet,” Ilya repeats their agreed upon game plan. “If I need to, I will go find Svetlana and talk with her. Or I will call Shane and ask for pictures of Hayley. If I *really* need it, I will call Yuna.”

“Good.” Galina smiles at him. “Our support system has gotten bigger. That’s a good feeling, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” he admits. “I feel very lucky.”

Before Galina can reply, Hayley fusses in her swing, a small cry. Ilya instantly moves for her, his frame disappearing from the camera for a second. He reappears a moment later with her in his arms, pressing a kiss to the top of her head as her cries settle.

Galina smiles at him through the camera. “Is she alright?”

“Mm, yes, just wanted Papa. Sorry.”

“No, do not apologize Ilya.” Galina shakes her head. “I see a side to you nowadays that I always hoped I would get to see. I know things have been stressful with her birth and Shane’s recovery, but there is something more peaceful about your heart these days.”

He offers her a small smile, stroking his thumb down Hayley’s back and glancing at her big, glimmering brown eyes. “She makes my heart feel at peace. She is everything good in a little blanket. Does not seem real, most days.”

“But she is,” she reminds him. “Don’t let yourself forget that. Good is real, and you are allowed to have it.”

Ilya nods. “I wish my mom could have held her. Even just once. I think of them meeting each other and it makes me so sad. She deserved to be a babushka.”

“She did,” Galina says, “we have to accept what is, and fit it into our lives, though. What is something you could do to help feel closer to your mom, while you raise Hayley?”

He looks down at her content little face. “I will tell her stories about my mother, and teach her Russian, and when she’s big enough she will get Mama’s crucifix.”

“These are all really great things, Ilya. I’m sure your mother would love to know you’re doing that.”

“Thank you.” He tucks Hayley a bit tighter against his chest. The front door downstairs opens and closes, and he knows Shane is home. “Is our time up?”

“Just about. Good luck at work tonight, Ilya, I am here if you need anything. Otherwise, we’ll talk next week.”

“Yes. Have a good week.”

“You too. Bye bye Hayley!” Galina waves to the baby, smiles, and disconnects from the call.

With a quiet breath, Ilya shuts the laptop and gets to his feet, still holding her. She’s a bit of a latchkey kid already, he does not think she will do well not having him around for bedtime.

Shane is shedding his jacket and bag when Ilya finds him in the kitchen. He looks up when Ilya enters, and smiles.

“Hi!” Shane steps in and kisses Ilya’s cheek before he opens his arms for the baby. Ilya passes her over. “How was therapy? I heard you speaking Russian.”

“It went fine,” Ilya replies. “You have your next appointment on Monday, yes?”

Shane nods. He’s had a few sessions now with the postpartum counselor. He’s been attending each one and telling Ilya it’s going well. That’s reassuring, if nothing else.

“How was practice?” Ilya heads for the fridge to hunt down a quick, easy dinner for them before he has to leave.

“Long,” Shane admits, falling into a chair and guiding Hayley to his chest. “I keep hoping it’ll get easier the further out I am from delivering her, but it kind of isn’t.”

“You haven’t had much rest,” Ilya points out. “You might be running on a- what is the word? Behind? In debt?”

“Deficit,” Shane says. “I know. You’re probably right.”

“Maybe after a few games, during your next few days off, I can plan ahead and we can take a little trip, just the three of us?” Ilya sets out some ingredients and begins throwing together some sandwiches.

“That would be so fun.” Shane smiles at him. “I’ll check the schedule. I definitely should have a few days off between traveling in a month or so.”

“Perfect.”

“I’m just hoping after this first game, they’ll lay off,” Shane says, “they’re trying to test me, make sure I’m game ready, I know. But I’m tired of proving myself. I’m a great player. It’s

just like recovering from an injury, you know? They weren't like this after I broke my collarbone. They have to give me some time."

Ilya feels a brief jolt of pride in his chest. He can tell Shane has really been taking his counseling seriously. It is a far cry difference from how harshly he was treating himself last month.

"You are exactly right," Ilya agrees, setting the plate with his sandwich and chips in front of him.

"Once they see me in action, I'm sure it'll get better. Thank you for the food." Shane takes a bite of his sandwich and exhales happily. "You excited for work?"

Ilya sits beside him with his own food. "Yes. I miss Svetlana, and Wiebe, and even my baby residents. They will probably not even need me anymore."

"It's only been a few months, babe."

"Mm, then I do worry my *actual* baby won't need me anymore." He reaches over and pinches Hayley's tiny toes between his fingers. "What do you say, *moya lyubov?* Without Papa at bedtime, will you grow up so fast you put yourself to sleep?"

Shane tilts his head. "*Daddy* is still gonna be here, so, no."

"Unless you are at a game, or traveling," Ilya adds. "I wonder if she will adjust well to your parents having her so much."

The other man considers this, looking at Hayley longingly. "It does suck, that we both work such hectic schedules. I wish I could be here with her all the time. Or at least, on my own terms and not the league's."

"You should start your own league," Ilya says, half-joking.

Shane sighs. "If it were that easy, baby, I would."

Ilya nods back. They both look down at Hayley, who is watching them with mild interest.

"I have to leave," Ilya says regretfully. He hates that he's about to leave when Shane just got home and he hasn't seen him all day. He hates that he won't be here tonight for the calm ritual of her bath, Shane feeding her on the couch, and her falling asleep in someone's arms.

"Okay babe, I hope you have a great shift." Shane smiles at him, and it's genuine, but there's so much exhaustion in his handsome face that it gives Ilya pause.

"There are snacks in the pantry, make sure you put them out before you sit down to feed her," Ilya reminds him, grabbing his bag off the counter. "And I filled your water bottle, it is in the fridge. Her burp cloth is on the glider in the living room. And if you need help, your mom said she would be ready to come over at a call. And-"

“Ilya,” Shane interrupts him, but his voice is gentle. “We are going to be fine, okay? She’s my daughter. I don’t need help.”

“I’m sorry.” He smiles contritely. “I hate that I won’t be here to take care of you while you take care of her.”

“I will send you updates on how she’s doing every hour, the way you do for me.” Shane grips his hand and kisses each knuckle sweetly. “We will be fine. Now go, save lives!”

“I love you both.” Ilya kisses him fiercely.

“We love you too.”

The *“Welcome Back Dr. Rozanov!”* cake and balloons in the breakroom are almost enough to make Ilya, in his newborn-sleep-deprived mind, break down into tears.

He does not cry in front of his residents or colleagues, thank god, but he does give them all a very grateful nod and express his thanks.

“Funfetti is my favorite,” he assures them, “thank you for this. I am so glad to be back.”

And, he really is.

Ilya became a doctor for a reason. Aside from his personal motivations regarding his mother’s death, he really and truly does love his job. He gets to meet new people, he gets to be on his feet moving around, he gets to *help*. He makes use of himself, in ways that most people don’t get to say they do.

Tonight, his shift flies by.

Svetlana is in a great mood, excited to have him back. Every time he passes her desk she has some sort of witty rejoinder for him, and she keeps referring to him as *“Dr. Papa”* which is so creepy it makes him laugh.

Luca and Troy have both made impressive strides since he last saw them. It’s funny how much can change in a hospital in just a few months. They’ve learned a lot, and Luca only bothers him once. It’s a little bittersweet.

Chief Wiebe catches his attention before he’s leaving early in the morning. It’s just about five-AM. He’s got a long drive ahead of him, and he’s got to make it home to relieve Shane before practice.

Still, he stops for his boss, who he hasn’t had much chance to interact with tonight due to how busy the ER was. Wiebe doesn’t usually work so late into the night, he must have had obligations.

“Dr. Rozanov,” Wiebe says, smiling at him, “I wanted to say congratulations again. I’m so glad Shane and the baby are doing well. And we’re so glad to have you back. If you need anything, you know you can just ask, alright?”

Ilya is touched. He knows his boss is a good man, he's been working here for a few solid years now. But the stark contrast of his return to work, compared to what he knows Shane is dealing with, makes him a little sad.

"Thank you Dr. Wiebe," he says, hand on his heart. "It really does mean so much."

They part ways, and Ilya heads out into the parking lot. It's a nice night. The air is cool and crisp, the impending fall weather looming on the horizon. He feels good. It was a good shift, the perfect way to return after being gone for some time.

"Is that him?" a voice behind him in the parking lot stops him short.

Anxiously, he glances over his shoulder to see two teenage boys standing by one of the parked cars at the entrance. One of them is wearing a bright blue Montreal Metros jersey. Shane's number is printed on the chest.

Oh.

"Excuse me," the other one says, voice meek. "Are you Aye-la? Aye-la Rosinoff?"

Ilya stares at him in disbelief.

"That's him!" The other boy whispers. "He looks just like the pictures!"

"How do you…" Ilya hesitates. "You have seen pictures of me?"

"Aren't you Shane Hollander's baby dad?" The other boy asks.

"Dude." The kid in the Metros jersey elbows him. "It's *husband,* you don't say *baby dad* to people!"

"We are not husbands," Ilya finds himself saying. "Uh- I mean, how do you know-"

"You got doxxed, bro," says the kid without the jersey. "Hollander posted the baby announcement online and then someone posted a bunch of pics of you guys at a restaurant in Ottawa, so everyone figured it out. You're all over hockey Twitter right now."

"So it's you?" Jersey- kid asks.

Ilya has absolutely no fucking idea what one does in this situation.

"I am Shane Hollander's biggest fan," he continues, "do you think we could get a picture?"

"My name is pronounced *Ilya,"* he finds himself saying, though he isn't sure why.

"Oh, sorry." Jersey-kid looks genuinely contrite, at least. "So, could we get a pic?"

"N-no, I'm sorry, no." Ilya shakes his head, taking an involuntary step back. "I work here, I can't-"

“We won’t show your work!” Jersey-kid offers. “We’re here to see our Mom right now, she’s sick. This is like, the fucking best luck we’ve had in months, running into *Shane Hollander’s*…whatever you are!”

Ilya has no idea what to do. On one hand, he’s honestly flattered that these kids are such big fans of Shane. And clearly they are not as homophobic and terrible as some of the fans he’s heard about.

But at the same time, Ilya is not a fucking celebrity and he does not want to take a photo with some strange children outside the hospital. He’s wearing his scrubs. It will not be a good look. Not only does he not want to get in trouble at work, but he doesn’t want to expose himself or Hayley to this kind of thing.

The kind of thing Shane tried to warn him about months ago.

“I can not take a photo with you, I’m sorry,” he says. “Why don’t you tell me your online usernames and I will tell Shane? He can sign something for you and send it.”

“No way?” Jersey-kid brightens at this suggestion.

Ilya nods. “Yes, I promise.”

“Shit. Here’s my Instagram.” The kid shows Ilya his phone, and Ilya takes the username down in his notes app. “You’re awesome dude, thanks!”

“Be safe, hanging out in parking lots is not safe.” Ilya waves to them and hustles toward his car, really hoping they do not take photos of him behind his back.

Jesus, he’s never had to think about that before.

Once he’s in the safety of his car, with his hands trembling, he opens his phone and searches his name.

There are *way* too many results.

HOLLANDER’S BABY DADDY REVEALED: *A few weeks ago, legendary hockey star Shane Hollander shocked the world by revealing his season-long hiatus from the ice was due to a secret pregnancy. Hollander’s daughter* ***(NOT PUBLICLY NAMED, NO PHOTOGRAPH AVAILABLE)*** *seems to have been fathered by Hollander’s new beau. Photographs show the pair at a restaurant in Ottawa when Shane was still visibly pregnant. We have obtained these from a reliable source. Speculation has occurred that this mystery man is actually a working physician at Ottawa General. Doctor Ilya Rozanov.*
PUBLISHER’S EDIT: *A source has reached out to us to confirm this.*

His heart drops into his stomach. Who the fuck confirmed this? Who betrayed his trust? Who would-

Take a deep breath, he thinks to himself, *Shane warned you this might happen. It is just a one-off thing. No one will care that you are Shane’s…baby daddy.*

Right. It was just bad luck, with the two kids outside the hospital.

He tries to calm himself down, practicing the breathing techniques Galina taught him, as he puts the car in drive, and heads home.

Shane is waiting by the front door, when Ilya arrives. He's a bit later than he'd intended. With the delays in leaving the hospital and morning traffic, he's probably made Shane late for practice.

Still, when he sees him he's smiling. Ilya smiles back, setting his bag down at the door and accepting the kiss Shane plants on his lips.

"Hayley's still sleeping," he says first, and then, "how was your shift?"

"We can talk later, I know you need to leave." Ilya squeezes his biceps.

"I've got a long drive, can we call?" Shane suggests.

Ilya nods. "That works, Shane. I love you."

"Love you, call you from the road."

Then, he's gone.

Ilya sighs, walking through the foyer until he finds Hayley, sleeping peacefully in her bassinet. He smiles, despite his exhaustion from the overnight shift, and watches her for a few moments, just taking in the details of her face. He had missed her first bedtime, and it was difficult, but the world did not stop turning. Clearly, she slept. Clearly, him going back to work does not make him a bad father, or like his own.

His phone buzzes and he puts it to his ear, smiling already, "hello."

"Hey," Shane's voice comes, a bit crackly through his car speaker, "how's Hayley?"

"Still sleeping, same as five minutes ago."

"So tell me how your shift went?"

"It went great." Ilya walks into the kitchen to make himself something to eat. "They got me a cake and everything, to welcome me back."

"That's so nice!"

"It was." He grabs a frozen burrito from the bottom drawer and heads for the microwave. "How was your night? How was bedtime and everything? Did she sleep okay?"

Shane hesitates. "She eventually went down, yeah."

"Oh no." Ilya watches his burrito rotate in the microwave. "She had trouble?"

“She was just fussy, that’s all,” Shane assures him, “she’s only a few months old, it’s normal. She didn’t want to latch so it took us a while to eat and that threw off her schedule and I couldn’t get the lights dimmed the right way while I rocked her, it was kind of a perfect storm. Tonight will be better.”

Guilt courses through Ilya, and he hears the microwave beep loudly. “I can not help but notice, it was her first night without us both there and-”

“Ilya,” Shane says softly, “even if that were why, it just is what it is. She has to get used to it. She’s gonna have to go lots of nights without me when I travel for games.”

The mention of Shane’s schedule reminds Ilya of something else they needed to talk about. Something kind of important.

“Hey, speaking of games.” He clears his throat and removes his burrito from the microwave, hissing at the burn of heat against his fingers.

“You okay there?”

“Da, yes, burrito just burned me.”

“Burrito?”

“Shane, I have to tell you something.”

“Oh.” His voice gets immediately more serious. “What?”

“Have you Googled yourself, lately?”

There’s a lengthy pause. “I don’t really make a habit of doing that, Ilya. Why are you asking me this?”

Ilya exhales, the noise sharp and painful.

“No,” Shane says, “what is *wrong*, Ilya?”

“Nothing is wrong, take a breath. I got recognized. I guess after you posted her announcement, someone found photos of us out to eat in Ottawa. From the night when I took you to the ice rink.”

Another long pause. “And they’ve put it together? That you’re her dad?”

“It would seem so. Some young fans of yours approached me in the parking lot.”

“What? Why would you not say- are you alright? What did they say to you?”

“I am fine, sweetheart. They were very nice. Big fans, one of them had your jersey. I got his Instagram, his name is Zach. You have to send him something.”

Shane sounds flabbergasted. “Why would you promise-”

“It was the only way I could get rid of them, they wanted a picture of me.”

There’s another pause. This one, alarmingly long.

“Shane?” Ilya prompts. His burrito is getting cold, sitting on the plate in front of him.

“I’m sorry.” Shane’s voice is ragged when he replies. “I thought- I thought we were being careful, I didn’t think- and at your *work-”*

“Shane, breathe love, it is okay.”

“It’s my fault,” Shane rambles, “this is my fault. I’m so sorry, Ilya, I never wanted this to happen. Does your boss know, are you in trouble?”

“No, my love. Everything is okay, take a breath with me.” Ilya inhales slowly, listening for Shane’s trembling breath on the other line. “Are you okay to be driving right now, Shane?”

“I’m fine, I’m fine.” He clears his throat. “I’m sorry I just- fuck, this brings up old issues I guess.”

“We knew this might happen,” Ilya reminds him gently. “I am sure it will not be a regular thing.”

“I have to call my mom,” Shane says, “and figure out a plan in case this happens again or if anyone else approaches you. You need security. What if you’re out with Hayley? Fuck. I gotta-”

“Hey,” Ilya interjects, voice soft. “Do not let your brain go faster than the world. Everything is okay. I do not need security, my love.

“Oh god,” Shane mutters, breath quickening again. “I think, um, I’m sorry Ilya, I think this might be- fuck, I might be-”

“Triggering?” Ilya asks softly. “Remembering what happened before, when you were outed?”

“Fuck. Yeah. Sorry, I-I’m not trying to overreact.”

“You are not overreacting, *malysh*, you are just reacting. And I know it is scary. I don’t like the idea of it happening to you either.”

“You’re so good at therapy.” Shane huffs a dry laugh.

“I have been doing it a lot longer than you,” Ilya says. “What did your counselor tell you to do, when you feel overwhelmed like this?”

“Um, five things I can see, five I can smell, five- Ilya, I’m okay, I promise.” Shane exhales. “Are *you* okay?”

“It was a little weird,” Ilya admits, picking up his lukewarm burrito. He takes a bite. “We will figure it out though, okay? Like everything else.”

“Okay.” Shane exhales again, a little calmer this time. “I’m sorry, again. And I should let you go so you can sleep.”

“Mm, probably. I love you, Shane.”

“I love you too. Talk soon.”

“Yes, my love. Goodbye.”

“Bye.”

Their routine develops, though not without its difficulties.

Being back at the hospital is the best kind of exhilarating. Ilya has missed this so much, and he is starting to feel like himself again, the more time he gets to spend with his patients.

At the same time, it feels like a huge chunk of himself is missing, at home in her little swing. She squeals with delight when he gets home to hold her, and that somehow makes it feel a little better.

He is exhausted. He thought he knew exhaustion before, honestly. College, med school, residency, working in the hospital, all of this tested his ability to power through exhaustion. Working nights with a newborn baby at home and no childcare outside of a swapped schedule with his partner? There is no English *or* Russian word for how exhausted he is.

Mercifully, his schedule worked out so he’s got three days off for Shane’s first game. It’s a Saturday night, and a home game in Montreal. David, Yuna, Ilya and Hayley are all packed up into Yuna’s car for the drive to the arena.

Ilya sits in the back with Hayley, while David drives and Yuna mans the radio. It feels a little bit like a family trip he never got to take- two loving parents in the front seat, joking and laughing happily while they seek out their destination. Ilya keeps one hand resting over Hayley’s little legs, thumb brushing along her squishy calf. It’s a comforting, soothing gesture, to have one hand protectively on her at all times.

The atmosphere in the car is warm and comfortable, and Ilya is exhausted, so it’s not much of a surprise that about halfway there his head droops to the side and he falls asleep.

No one wakes him until the car comes to a stop.

A soft hand nudges his arm, and he jolts awake, immediately looking for Hayley. She’s still sound asleep in her carseat beside him, which makes him exhale with relief. He glances sideways, seeing Yuna is standing beside his open door, smiling gently.

“We’re here, sweetheart,” she says.

“Oh. I am sorry.” Ilya rubs the remnants of sleep from his eyes. “Why did you not wake me?”

“Because I know you needed it.” She squeezes his arm, and he glances over as David comes around the other side of the car.

“I’ll get her,” he tells Ilya, and begins carefully pulling her out of the carseat. Ilya nods, and climbs out of the car beside Yuna, stretching his aching muscles.

Yuna grabs Hayley’s baby wrap from the diaper bag and Ilya affixes it to his body before accepting his sleeping baby from David’s waiting arms. Yuna carefully places the soundproof headphones over her little ears, smiling down at her content face.

“She’s so beautiful,” Yuna whispers reverently, taking pause to stroke her little cheek.

“She is most perfect girl in the world,” Ilya agrees, cupping his hand under her butt to keep her stable in the wrap.

The arena is a little overwhelming, but fortunately Yuna and David seem to know how to navigate it seamlessly. Their seats are damn near behind the boards. Shane had offered to get them private box seats, but Yuna and David don’t like to watch that far away, and Ilya was fine with anything. It’s his first ever in person hockey game. He’s very excited to see Shane in action.

Ilya’s leg taps anxiously on the concrete floor, one hand braced against Hayley’s back protectively as they settle in for the start of the game. He keeps her tucked close, face mostly obscured by the wrap. Neither of them want photos of her released, and if anyone spots Ilya, surely they’ll be eager to get close to her as well.

The thought of that makes him feel a little sick to his stomach, but he has to push it down. This is Shane’s career. He signed up for this.

“How is she?” Yuna leans over a bit to look at Hayley, smiling.

“She’s fine,” Ilya says, “still sleeping.”

“It’s so weird to think she’s kind of been here before,” David muses from his other side.

“What do you mean?” Ilya asks.

“Well, Shane still played for a bit before he knew he was pregnant,” David says, “she was with him, then. Weird.”

“I hadn’t even thought of that,” Yuna says with a laugh. “That *is* weird.”

Ilya smiles down at her squishy little face. Sometimes, it is still incomprehensible to him that this tiny, breathing, squeaking little human was *inside* of Shane. They *made* her together. It’s the kind of miracle that he couldn't really understand until he’d experienced it from start to finish.

“She will always be with him.” Ilya kisses the top of her head, careful not to jostle her headphones. “*Malen’koye chudo.”*

“What’s that?” Yuna asks him gently.

“Small miracle,” he replies, not sure why his eyes suddenly feel wet. He blinks back the emotion, laughing breathlessly. “I think we are all getting sentimental, da? His first game of the season. He has worked so hard for this.”

“He has,” David agrees. “Shane’s never been one to let a challenge stop him.”

The talking is done then, because the game starts.

Ilya’s eyes find him immediately. Even under all his gear, somehow, he zeroes in on those big, pretty brown eyes. He tracks the movement. The big **24** on his jersey, the small piece of tape wrapped around the edge of his stick that reads *Hayley,* the well-worn skates that so often hang by their front door.

Emotions swell in his chest at the sight of Shane’s brilliantly beaming face. He looks serious, not smiling, but there’s an excitement and eagerness under it all. A glow to him, as the crowd cheers and hollers for The Metros team. He looks right at home, like he belongs here.

The game hasn’t even started yet, and Ilya can already start to understand why Shane was willing to put himself through everything he has the past few months. This is where he belongs.

The jumbotron above them suddenly previews Shane as he skates over to the boards, waving at the screaming fans. Now, he does smile, reaching up with two fingers, kissing them, and extending his hand toward the crowd.

Ilya realizes a moment later, that Shane has blown him a kiss.

His own face appears on the jumbotron, redder than he would like. His hand goes protectively over the back of Hayley’s head. She isn’t visible beneath her wrap, but he holds on anyway. Yuna and David laugh and clap beside him, and he finds himself laughing too, a strange elation in this feeling. He hates all of the attention, but he likes the way it feels to be publicly claimed, publicly *loved* by Shane Hollander.

He is the bravest man Ilya has ever met.

The joy doesn’t last long, unfortunately, because the game starts shortly after. And Ilya realizes, with alarming clarity, exactly *why* hockey is considered a “contact sport”.

It’s different than watching on TV, where he’s far away and does not really hear the impacts hitting the boards or the amplified grunts of players getting beat around. It’s impossible to turn off the part of his brain that is rapidly identifying the most likely injuries occurring with each harsh check, each reckless motion of the body, each play. His brain categorizes each one, wide-eyed as he watches these men put their bodies and safety at risk.

That’s a mild concussion

That could have been a severe tibial fracture

That's a hyperextended elbow, god that must have hurt

Jesus, his knees

He winces in sympathy, heart racing as he watches the number 24 with almost heat-seeking focus.

Luckily, Shane is *good.* Like, really good. Ilya had watched games of his in bits and pieces when he looked him up, but seeing him in action just a few rows away is something else.

Even after being off the ice for a season, and putting his body through the tremendous effort that is growing and birthing a human, *and* practically killing himself with conditioning and breastfeeding all at once, Shane dominates the ice.

It is no wonder he proudly bears that ***"C"*** on his uniform.

He's fast, too. He skates by offense like he's gliding through butter. It shows, Ilya supposes, that Shane has practically been on ice skates as long as he could walk. David played in college, and started him so young, Shane doesn't even *remember* life before the ice. Watching him move, you can really tell.

By the time the third period is about to start, the Metros are up by two, and Shane is gearing up to deliver a hat trick for the team. Ilya watches intensely. He spots JJ, Hayden and a few guys he doesn't recognize talking with Shane over by the bench. Shane is nodding while they speak, gesturing with his hands instructionally. There's a competency to it, watching him be a *captain* that is a lot sexier than Ilya would've expected. He categorizes that discovery for later as well.

Hayley stirs in her wrap, making a small sound, and Ilya glances down to check on her. She's still sleeping, thank god, but she's a little restless. He shushes her gently and pats her back in the rhythmic way she likes. It settles her, and her lashes flutter closed.

It happens when he's looking down at Hayley. A loud collision, the sound of a whistle, and Yuna shooting to her feet beside him.

"Where's the goddamn defense?!" she shouts.

Ilya looks up, just in time to see Shane shoot to his feet, pushing himself up off the boards. Hayden skates over the next moment, hand on his arm like he's worried. Shane shakes his head, and he's smiling again, waving a hand dismissively. Then, the two of them skate right back into the fray.

He's okay. He's *okay.*

Thank god.

The game gets a little rougher, from there.

The defense, as Yuna had pointed out, continues to be a problem.

Shane has the puck really often. He's the fastest, most agile skater. He's not greedy with it, he passes when he needs to, but he's the one doing the faceoffs. He's all over the ice, from goal to goal.

And his team is not *defending* him.

Fortunately, they've managed to stop the other team from scoring at all. The Metros are still up by two. Ilya can see Hayden trying his best to help, but he's offense as well, so there isn't much he can do.

"They're hanging him out to dry," David says to Yuna after a particularly rough check. "How is he supposed to keep scoring if there's no defense? Jesus."

"I'm pissed off," she replies.

Ilya hugs Hayley a bit tighter against his chest. She'd woken up during the second period briefly, and he'd given her a bottle and changed her. She seems content again, thankfully. The headphones aren't bothering her and she likes being pressed against Ilya's chest listening to his heart. He's sure it's much too fast right now.

Shane is about to score his third goal, when it happens. He's got the puck, moving at lightning speed down the center toward the goal. Ice shreds off his skates as he cuts through, moving so fast he's almost a blur. Ilya is transfixed- for once, he looks wide open. No defense to be seen, either.

Then, as if out of nowhere, a lineman from the other team collides with him. Shane gets the shot off half a second before he's hit, and it flies past the goalie, signaling a score.

But Shane hasn't gotten up.

Ilya stands, heart racing in his chest. Yuna is standing beside him, gripping his arm. He even hears David exhale an anxious, worried sound.

Hayden skates over and extends a hand to Shane, who accepts it. Okay, not unconscious. Good. Didn't look like he hit his head on the ice, he'd landed sort of awkwardly with his knees spread, but that spared his skull from the impact.

Ilya's fingers trail over the crucifix around his neck. A silent prayer.

He can't hear what they're saying, but Hayden is asking Shane something while he helps him up. Shane is shaking his head, one gloved hand coming down to clutch at his midsection.

He's hurt.

Another whistle blares and it gets quieter in the raucous arena. Shane skates over to the bench, bent in half awkwardly. Hayden has a hand protectively on his back while they move.

The coach accepts him at the bench, and Ilya sees two medical jerseys. His heart tangles into a knot. Shane is limping.

“Yuna-” he stammers, already unbuckling Hayley’s wrap.

“I’ve got her,” she says, quickly accepting the baby, “the medical exam room is on the other side, past the benches. Take hall E.”

Ilya nods, already moving to exit the row. He’s sure the back of his head is being projected on the jumbotron while he hurries out. He does not care.

He’s running, more than walking as he follows her instructions down the cavernous hallway. He’s granted permission to enter by a big security guy when they see his face. It’s dark and cold in the tunnel, but he finds the medical exam room easily, not bothering to knock before he busts in.

Shane is laid out on a makeshift cot, wearing nothing but compression shorts and some light padding. He’s drenched in sweat, and breathing kind of harshly. The team doctor and his coach are both standing beside the cot, mid-sentence when Ilya bursts in.

“Ilya,” Shane exclaims, looking surprised. He’s clutching his thighs, expression twisted up with obvious pain.

“What is wrong?” he demands, moving toward Shane. He rests a hand carefully over his arm, glaring at Thierault, who seems to wither a bit under his harsh gaze.

“Looks like a grade two groin tear,” the doctor replies.

Shane huffs a frustrated exhale.

“I understand you gave birth recently, Shane,” the doctor continues. “That would put you at a higher risk for an injury like this. You might see some bruising start to form on the inner thigh here.” He gestures to where Shane is clutching his legs.

“A grade two is a significant muscle tear, Shane,” Ilya tells him worriedly.

“Fucking feels like it,” he replies through gritted teeth.

“It’s moderate,” the doctor adds, glancing at Thierault before he continues speaking. “Some ice and over the counter pain meds should do the trick.”

Ilya’s jaw tenses. What the doctor is saying is not untrue by any means, but he doesn’t like the dismissive tone he’s using. It’s a painful injury, and Shane is going to need rest and ice for at least two weeks for a proper recovery and full restoration of use of his abductor muscles.

“Third period’s almost over, Hollander,” Thierault says to him. “You got one more goal in you? That’s all we need, and we can handle the rest.”

Ilya blinks in disbelief. “Wait, *what?* You are not asking him to play?”

“This really doesn’t concern you, don’t make me get security,” Thierault replies coolly.

“Surely the *doctor* will not advise you to return immediately to strenuous activity when you have a grade two muscle tear?” Ilya demands, looking expectantly at the team doctor.

The doctor glances at Thierault, who narrows his eyes in a demanding manner.

“One more period of play shouldn’t…impact you *too* much,” the doctor says hesitantly.

“Have you lost your fucking mind?” Ilya interjects before Shane can reply. “You should have your license to practice revoked!”

“Sir-“

“Do not *sir* me. If he puts any more strain on this muscle right now it’s going to go from a grade two, to a grade *four* tear.” Ilya looks at Shane desperately. “Shane, you cannot play.”

Shane’s expression is distraught, jaw clenched, eyes hard. It’s that face that scares Ilya a lot. The face he makes when he’s about to make a very big decision.

“It’s not your decision,” he says roughly, averting his gaze.

Ilya’s heart drops.

Coach Thierault smirks in his direction.

“It’s not *yours* either,” Shane says to him.

A quiet settles between the four of them, uncertainty in the air.

“It’s *my* decision.” Shane clears his throat. “I’m not playing.”

Relief nearly bowls Ilya over, but he refrains.

Thierault’s teeth grit audibly. “Hollander, after all the grace we’ve given you the past year, you-”

“You haven’t given me anything but fucking grief,” Shane interrupts him, voice angrier than Ilya thinks he’s ever heard it. “You’ve mistreated me for years, taken advantage of me. You saw that I wanted to be the best and you let me torture myself to do it, so I could win you cups. And it worked, because for so fucking long, *this,* hockey, this was all I had.” He glances at Ilya, eyes softening a bit. “Well, that’s just not the case anymore.”

Ilya’s heart goes all fluttery in his chest.

“I am the best hockey player in the fucking league,” Shane says, pushing himself upright and scooting toward the edge of the cot. Ilya immediately reaches out to help, and Shane lets him.

“Shane-” Thierault tries again, clearly getting nervous.

“No. Fuck this. I’m the best goddamn player in the league. I don’t need to put up with this anymore.” He leans against Ilya’s side while they stand. “I’m *done.* Good fucking luck

without me."

"You have a contract," Thierault says, as Ilya and Shane are about to exit through the exam room door. "That's millions of dollars on the table if you buy it out."

Shane turns his head sharply in the coach's direction, eyes hard. "Then I'll fucking buy it out."

And with that, they exit.

There is no time for discussion, once they're alone, because Ilya is too busy pulling Shane close and kissing him so hard he feels like he's going to pass out.

Luckily, Shane kisses back. He tastes like sweat and peppermint, and the exhaustion of a life-changing evening.

But his mouth is warm and familiar. His soft breaths against Ilya's face are like coming home after a long day. Their bodies pressed together is enough sanctuary to make Ilya feel invincible.

Then, they pull apart, and Shane huffs, "I gotta sit down. Can we get to the car?"

Ilya laughs briefly. "Yes, my love. I will text your mom and have them come meet us."

"She's gonna be so mad at me," he mutters while they limp their way down the hall, Ilya's arm wrapped around Shane's waist to support him.

"No, Shanya, she will be proud." Ilya kisses the top of his head as they make it to the exit of the arena. "You are betting on yourself, and fighting for your happiness. That is who you are."

"Thank you," Shane tells him, as the cold evening air hits their faces.

"For what?" Ilya asks.

"For giving me something real to fight for."

He pauses, looking down at the expression on Shane's face. There's a lot of emotion teeming underneath the surface, but right now in this moment, all Ilya sees is *love.*

"I love you," Ilya tells him. "Then, now, and forever."

"I love you too," Shane says. "My fucking thighs hurt."

Ilya bursts out laughing again, shaking his head. Shane has never been one for the sweeping romantic declarations. But, his actions, those tell Ilya everything he needs to know.

"Come on, *malysh,"* he says as they begin hobbling toward the car, "it's time to get some rest."

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> oh man. we're almost there everyone . one more to go after this.
>
> thank you from the bottom of my heart for reading and commenting so far. this story has been immensely fun to write and has truly been my escapism from a really shit month. we're coming to a close here on what i have for this story.
>
> thank you so much for reading and commenting . as always, pls be nice xx

Shane wakes up on his first day no longer a Montreal Metros team captain, and immediately turns to Ilya. Ilya is already awake, scrolling on his phone, Hayley still asleep in the bassinet. He glances down at Shane's sleepy face, his haggard under eyes, his disheveled black hair. Sunlight streams in through the curtains and illuminates his freckled cheeks.

Beautiful.

"Hi, *moy sladkiy,"* Ilya greets him in a tender voice.

"Ow," Shane replies, voice cracked.

Ilya follows his gaze down to his thighs, remembering the muscle tear. "Stay put, love, I will get you ice and Tylenol."

He hurries downstairs and gets him a few ice packs, some fresh water and Tylenol, and returns to find Shane sitting up in bed, thighs parted, grimacing.

"Here, darling." Ilya places the ice delicately over his inner thigh muscles, and Shane shudders an exhale.

"Thanks," he murmurs, taking his pain meds. "How long was I asleep?"

"Thirteen hours," Ilya tells him with a smile.

"How-" Shane blinks. "Didn't Hayley-"

"You slept through it," Ilya tells him, "I just fed her what we had in the freezer. Do not worry. She is okay."

"Shit, I'm sorry."

"No, sweetheart, you slept so long because you *needed* it."

“I’m the unemployed one,” he mutters, “I should be doing all the feedings.”

“About that,” Ilya says, adjusting on the bed nervously. “Your coach said that your contract buyout is millions of dollars. Is that-”

“It’s 1.3 million,” Shane says, “that’s not a problem.”

Ilya stares at him. “Shane.”

“What?”

He hesitates. “Are you…is this a joke? You do not have 1.3 million dollars.”

Shane smirks. “On me right now? No.”

“Shane.”

“Ilya, I already started the process to list my Montreal house. That’s gonna bring in at *least* five mil. And I’m ahead on the mortgage, so most of that’s profit. And-”

“*Five* million?” Ilya demands.

“Worst case scenario,” Shane replies.

Ilya is in disbelief. “I cannot believe that.”

“Well, that’s just the house. I’ve got apartments as well, and a few other investments that-”

“Slow down.” Ilya shakes his head. “You *own* an apartment?”

“No.”

“Oh, okay. For a second, I thought-”

“I own an apartment *building.”*

Ilya stares at him blankly.

“Ilya, why do you think I was on you about making a will?” Shane nudges him gently. “Our child has some real assets that need to be properly handled if anything happens to us. Don’t you have savings?”

Ilya grimaces. “I have $180,000 of med school debt from Boston.”

“But you make way more than that?”

“I make…a *little* more than that.”

Shane studies him. “And…investments?”

Ilya hesitates. “I have a retirement plan.”

“Okay.” Shane nods thoughtfully. “So, I’ll just be the breadwinner. No big deal.”

Ilya scoffs. “I have bread, Shane.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“Why are you so rich? Hockey player does not make five million dollars, Shane.”

“I have *more* than-”

“Shane.”

The other man shrugs slightly, rolling over on his side, teeth gritting a bit as he adjusts the ice between his thighs. “I dunno, Ilya, I was drafted at eighteen. I had more money than I knew what to do with, so I invested, and then I got all these sponsors and endorsements and- I had nothing to spend it on. I don’t take vacations, or buy expensive jewelry, or fancy cars. I’m practical, you know this.”

“So you are going to be fine?” Ilya asks. “To buy out the contract and be free agent. And…if it takes you a while to find another team?”

“I’ll be fine if I never work again,” Shane says.

Jesus.

“First thing is we gotta pay off that med school debt,” Shane muses, grabbing his one phone from the end table. “Once the Montreal house sells, I was thinking about looking at real estate in-”

“Shane,” Ilya says gently.

“Yeah?”

“Do you think this morning we could just…” Ilya holds his hand up flat, as if trying to represent a stagnant tide.

Shane’s forehead furrows. “I’m going a million miles an hour again, aren’t I?”

“I really love that about you. But last night was a big deal. You can not try to push past it. You have to process it.”

“I’m not-” He catches himself and falters. “You’re right, I guess. I don’t know how to process leaving the team I dedicated the last decade to, Ilya. It’s too big.”

“You are not handling it alone,” Ilya reminds him. “You also do not have to handle it right now. Right now, I have a few days off. We are together, all three of us. Maybe we order breakfast, and eat it in bed?”

Shane’s lips tilt up in a soft smile. “That would be really nice.”

“Then we start there.” Ilya kisses his forehead lovingly. “And everything else can just take its time."

Ilya has been trying *not* to hold a vendetta against whichever colleague he suspects may have released his information to the press. He knows it was someone in the hospital who had to have recognized him from the photos of Shane and him at lunch, then given his employment details. It’s a violation of his privacy, of course, but he does not know if there’s actual legal action that can be taken against them if they’re exposed. It could literally be any of the hundreds of employees there, down to the orderlies who make the beds. It doesn't matter much anyway, who did it, only that the damage is done.

He does, however, find himself very frustrated at the prospect of it.

He is getting recognized. It’s concerning.

Tonight, he’s sitting in the triage area with Svetlana and their sixteen-year old patient, who is here for her allergic reaction. It is a simple fix, just some over the counter allergy medication, but they are waiting for her mother to get here to sign consents. She’d been brought in by her boyfriend, who is also sitting at her side.

“So, Melody,” Ilya says to her, while Svetlana sets out the medication on the bedside tray, “we are going to give you some over the counter allergy meds. This seems to be a very mild reaction, so I am not worried. But I do want to have you hangout for an hour or so afterward to make sure it resolves, okay?”

She nods. “Thank you Dr. Rozanov.”

The boy beside her perks up, tilting his head slightly. Ilya makes the mistake of meeting his eyes, and sees recognition there.

“Oh, shit,” the boy says, “you’re that doctor? With Shane Hollander?”

Svetlana snorts.

Ilya sighs. “I would prefer not to-”

“Dude. Did he quit hockey? There’s a rumor that he quit after that Montreal game. Is it true you guys have a baby together?”

“Ethan,” Melody says, “he’s like, at work! You’re being parasocial!”

“He knows Shane Hollander!”

“I am going to leave you both in the capable hands of Nurse Vetrova,” Ilya says, patting her shoulder gratefully as he escapes through the curtains. He hears her laughter as he departs. He’s glad it is so funny to her.

It is not funny to him.

When he gets home that morning, Shane and Hayley are already awake. Shane is sitting on the living room couch, Hayley in his arms, and a glass of orange juice in his free hand. He's dressed in a pair of gray sweats, with an unzipped hoodie exposing his midsection, his glasses low on his nose. He looks up at Ilya's entry, and smiles that warm, private smile that's just for him.

"Hello my loves," Ilya says, shrugging out of his jacket and dropping his bag. He approaches the couch and gingerly sits beside them.

"Just about to feed her," Shane says.

"Finish your juice first," Ilya encourages.

Shane nods and takes another sip. "How was work?"

"Long shift," he admits, clearing his throat. "How was the night? Did she sleep any?"

"She slept pretty good," Shane assures him.

"And you? How is the pain?" Ilya gestures vaguely toward his thighs. It's been almost two weeks since he tore the muscle.

"Feels a lot better. I haven't been doing shit." Shane glances down at himself somewhat critically. "I'm getting a gut again, look."

Ilya follows his gaze to Shane's exposed belly. It looks a little softer, less defined, but certainly not a *gut.*

"It's because breastfeeding makes me so hungry," Shane complains, "and I'm not conditioning anymore. It's gonna catch up with me."

"It makes you hungry because it burns calories," Ilya reminds him, reaching over to rest a hand on his thigh gently. "You have never looked more beautiful than you do like this."

"With a baby on my tit?" Shane teases.

"No." Ilya shakes his head. "When you are happy. Here with her, you always look happy."

Shane glances down at her, lips curving a bit into that beautiful, bashful smile of his. His eyes soften.

"She does make me happy," he admits. "And so do you."

"Likewise, *malysh,"* Ilya murmurs. "Thank you for taking the lead on her these past few weeks. I know it is like full time job, looking after her so much while I work."

Shane laughs. "It really isn't. Well, actually, the only job I've ever had is hockey so I wouldn't know, but. She's easy."

Ilya leans back against the couch, taking the empty orange juice glass from Shane while he guides Hayley to his chest to eat. “You never had summer job as a teenager?”

Shane shakes his head, looking down at her while she eats. “My job was hockey. Pretty much since I can remember.”

There’s a brief pause.

“It’s all I know,” Shane adds, voice a bit haunted. “I have no idea what I’ll do without it.”

“Hey.” Ilya scoots closer, resting his head on Shane’s shoulder. “You will find another team, Shane.”

At that, Shane exhales. Hayley makes a small snuffling sound, and he quietly shushes her. The moment is serene, but there’s something unsaid in the air.

“What?” Ilya prompts, arching an eyebrow.

“I was just thinking,” Shane says, “what if I never did find another team?”

Ilya tilts his head questioningly.

“I wonder what it would be like to…just *be* for a while?” Shane continues thoughtfully, like even he isn’t sure if the words he’s saying make sense.

“I think you have earned that,” Ilya tells him, voice solemn.

“That’s scary to think about,” he replies. “I don't know life without hockey. But um, I wonder if that’s…maybe bad? Maybe the thought of not having hockey *shouldn’t* be so scary, you know?”

“It’s a huge part of your life,” Ilya says, “and it’s okay to love it, and want it, and even *need* it a little. I do, with my job.”

“But, being a doctor is your job,” Shane says. “And it has been since you were in med school.”

“Yes?”

“Hockey is more than a job to me. It’s my *life.* Every memory I have, is…is *tinged* with it.” He shakes his head. “My thirteenth birthday we were traveling for an away game for the juniors. My eighteenth I was vying for a draft pick. I didn't even party on my 21st because of my strict regimen. Finding out I was pregnant because I passed out after a game. Delivering my daughter in the car because-” He falters, eyes closing against harsh memories.

“I don’t know where along the way *Shane* disappeared, and became *number twenty-four,”* he whispers. “But it feels irreversible now. And that’s scary.”

“It is not irreversible.” Ilya kisses his bicep through the flannel. “Maybe this is perfect opportunity to find that out, yeah? Take a break. Just be with her for a year or two. And if you

want to go back, go back."

"A year or two would tank my career," Shane says roughly.

"You are Shane fucking Hollander. You could take *ten* years and still come back as the best player in the league."

Shane's face flushes a warm shade of pink. "You're too nice to me."

"No, I am serious. You know who you are. You are the best. But even the best sometimes need to take a break."

Shane exhales, expression thoughtful. "I'll think about it."

Ilya squeezes his arm. "Excellent. How about some breakfast, da? I will cook. Whatever you want."

"Ilya, you just worked all night. I don't need you to make me breakfast."

He leans in, pressing his lips delicately to the shell of Shane's ear. The other man shudders slightly, a small, content sigh slipping from his lips. His eyes flutter, and he glances over at Ilya with warmth coursing through his brown gaze.

"If I didn't have you," Shane tells him, "I would be so fucking lost."

Ilya's chest warms all the way through, a buzzing in his heart. The way Shane is looking at him, like his smile could solve the world's problems, it makes him feel fucking invincible sometimes.

"I feel very much the same way, *dorogoy,"* he murmurs. "I have a family now. You will never know what that means to me."

"I do," Shane says, "it means the same to me."

"I love you." Ilya punctuates the words with a kiss, before he stands to head for the kitchen. He will prepare Shane the most delicious fucking breakfast anyone has ever had. He deserves it.

"I love you too," Shane calls to him, and from the other room, the words echo.

It's on a day off, that they decide to take a little family excursion.

Shane has been officially free of his Metros contract for a month now. Despite numerous attempts from their coach to renegotiate and keep him on, Shane refused. It has been difficult for everyone.

Shane's got a new therapist now, who is helping him navigate these feelings. He isn't sure if he'll go back to hockey or not. Ilya tells him that it is okay not to know. All they can control is the here and now.

They'd thought telling Yuna would go over a little worse, considering her intensity about Shane's career, but she seemed to understand. It probably helped that she was holding Hayley when they told her. It is hard to be angry when you are holding Hayley.

Little Hayley. She is six months old today. She is grabbing hair, and giggling at Ilya's silly faces, and trying to eat everything they put in her tiny, chubby little hands. Her favorite food (aside from Shane's boob) is a homemade puree Shane makes her in their fancy food processor. It is a blend of fruits and she goes absolutely insane for it every time.

Sometimes, when Ilya looks into her big brown eyes, he sees his own reflection and it is a stranger looking back at him. This man is one he does not always recognize. But he thinks that might be the best thing that has ever happened to him.

Everything is…gentler, these days. Slower. Ilya goes to work, he laughs with Svetlana, he takes care of his patients. He comes home to Shane and Hayley, who are both always ecstatic to see him. It is a far cry from the way he watched his parents. His mother would spend hours mentally preparing for Grigori's return. His presence always soured the atmosphere of the house immensely. Everyone was on edge and uncomfortable with him around.

When Ilya walks in the front door, he hears Hayley's squealing babbles, and he instantly finds himself beaming. He seeks them out like a missile, takes his baby in his arms and kisses Shane like they've been apart for centuries.

It's this weird *bliss* that he thinks neither of them ever expected they would find for themselves.

So, on Hayley's half-birthday, Ilya has the day off, and they plan a day together just the three of them. They are going to hit the farmers market, then some local cafe for lunch, and afterward have dinner with Yuna and David. Yuna even made her a "half cake". Which is stupid, but also really sweet.

Shane is wearing Hayley in her baby tortilla, bouncing her lightly and grinning down at her as they walk past the vendors. There is a fair going on right now, with little homemade jewelry vendors and baked goods. It's an overcast day, a little chilly, but no rainfall to disturb their easy pace. Ilya's carrying a bag full of produce, one arm protectively around Shane's shoulders as they walk.

"Should we get some of those cookies?" Shane glances up at Ilya, squinting behind his glasses at a beam of sunlight breaking through one of the clouds.

Ilya smiles at him. "We should get whatever you want, sweetheart."

"I mean. Those cookies smell amazing."

"Cookies it is, darling."

"Bah!" Hayley says, wiggling her hands at Shane's face. Her little fist catches his jaw, and he laughs softly.

"Bah baby girl," he replies warmly. "Do you want Daddy to have cookies? Hm? Do I get cookies, *moya lyuobov?"*

Ilya's throat tightens, the way it always does when Shane uses the sparing Russian phrases he's learned. Something about the way Shane has willingly encouraged Ilya to share his heritage with their daughter, and also immersed himself in it as well, makes Ilya feel unbelievably close to his Mama. Looking over at his baby girl, held and loved by Shane, soft Russian terms of endearment- it is like a dream come true.

"Ah baba, bah!" Hayley enthuses, blinking up at Shane like she's transfixed by his face.

"I think she agrees, sweetheart," Ilya tells him. "Daddy should have all the cookies he wants."

"Hell yeah." Shane grins at him, and the sight of it makes Ilya's heart go haywire in his chest. God, Shane is fucking beautiful.

Ilya buys three boxes of cookies, despite Shane's protests that it is too many. He wants Shane to have flavor options. He wants Shane to have everything he's ever wanted.

They make their way back to the parking lot, Ilya's arms weighed down by grocery bags, Shane still cuddling Hayley to his chest in her wrap. He's finishing his last few bites of cookie as they make it to the car. Ilya opens the trunk, preparing to load the bags into the back.

"I think I'll have to change her before we go," Shane notes, "she might've peed."

"Okay, the diaper bag is-"

"Shane Hollander?"

They both turn to see the man standing there beside their car, his eyes locked on Shane and the baby. He's tall, with broad shoulders and a harsh cut to his jaw. Imposing looking.

"Hi," Shane says hesitantly, a hand protectively splayed across Hayley's back. Ilya angles his body in front of them, shoulders back, posture defensive.

"So it's true?" The dude gestures toward Hayley, which makes Ilya's fists clench. "You really left hockey for this shit?"

Shane's voice is firm when he replies. "We're not interested. Bye."

He turns to get in the car, Ilya doing the same, when he feels a harsh hand clamp down on his bicep. He shoves the man off, watching as he stumbles into the car next to them.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Ilya demands. In her wrap, Hayley begins to cry. Shrill and unhappy.

"I'm just trying to figure out why the best team in the league went to shit," the man replies, "it all started with fucking Hollander. You've been making trouble for this team for years

now. Do you know how much money I lost on that last game? You were supposed to *be there.* And all because of some stupid kid?"

The man moves to get past Ilya, toward Shane. Ilya shoves him again, harder this time. The man hits the back bumper of the car and careens toward the pavement.

Ilya turns to Shane, who is frantically trying to shush Hayley's cries. "Get in the car, Shane. Now."

"Ilya, are you-*hey!"* Shane gasps and stumbles back as the man gets to his feet and swings his fist wildly at Ilya. He reaches up to protect his face, deflecting the man's fist with his own arms, but it still knocks him backward into the trunk door.

"Shane, get her in the fucking car!" he shouts.

Shane immediately listens, opening the passenger door and climbing in with Hayley still pressed to his chest. Her cries are muffled now, inside the car.

The man is moving toward Ilya again, and he swings his fist forward, connecting with the man's nose. He curses and cries out, bending forward as blood spills between his fingers.

"What is your problem?" Ilya demands once the man is subdued. "Are you insane? Attacking a man and his baby? Have you lost your fucking mind?"

"He fucked with my money," he groans, "I lost so much on that game because he wasn't there."

"He is not a fucking derby horse," Ilya growls. "He is a human being. If I ever see your face again, I will make it look much worse than this."

He turns to make for the driver's side door, hesitating when a nagging feeling in his chest tugs at him. Sighing, he turns back to the man.

"That might be a nasal fracture. You should see a doctor. If not, at least apply ice for fifteen minutes on, fifteen off, and take Ibuprofen. Keep your head elevated."

"What the fuck?" the man spits.

Ilya gets behind the wheel and slams the door shut, trying to keep his hands from shaking as he pulls out of the parking lot. Shane has climbed into the backseat with Hayley, who is in her carseat, cries calmed.

It's hauntingly silent for a few minutes.

"Shane," Ilya says, once they're on the highway.

"Are you okay?" Shane asks in a feeble voice. "Did he hurt you?"

"I am fine," Ilya assures him. "Is Hayley alright?"

“She’s okay, but she seemed scared and confused.” Shane clears his throat. “It’s getting bad again. That kind of thing. It-it was pretty bad right when I got outed but it had kinda calmed down. It feels worse than ever, now.”

“What do you want to do, Shane? Should we get some security?”

“I hate the idea of that. But maybe we need to.” Shane looks back at Hayley, his expression haunted. “That could have been really bad, Ilya. What if you weren’t there? What if it was just her and me, alone? I- I could’ve taken him but not with her strapped to my chest. Fuck.”

“My Shanya, *breathe.”* Ilya’s knuckles tighten around the steering wheel, a protective bite grinding under his teeth at the mere thought of what could’ve happened, had he not been there. “Everyone is okay. Just take a breath, we are all safe here.”

Shane lets out a small whimper, eyes watering. Ilya watches him from the rearview mirror, heart aching in his chest at the distress on his face.

“Baby,” Ilya murmurs, “everything is alright, just try to calm down. We are safe, *solnyschko.”*

“I’m so tired of this,” Shane sniffs, wiping at his face with the back of his hand. “I’m tired of all of this.”

“I know sweetheart.” Ilya reaches a hand behind him and squeezes Shane’s knee. “We are okay. It is okay.”

Shane nods, still sniffling. He tries very hard to put on a brave face, but they both know very plainly, it is *not* okay.

Shane insists he wants to make dinner that night.

One thing Ilya has come to know -and love, truly- about Shane, is that he needs to be in control. When things are out of his control, whether it’s his own emotions, or his schedule, or the way the world views him from outside, if he has no sense of control over it, he spirals.

Tonight, Ilya lets him cook, at least giving him some control over their dinner plans.

Ilya sits beside Hayley on her mat on the kitchen floor, wagging her colorful squishies and rattles while encouraging her to roll over. She’s doing so well hitting all her milestones, and he knows it’s in part due to Shane’s devotion to keeping her on a regimen.

“It smells good, *malysh,”* Ilya says, glancing up to where Shane is standing at the stove, shifting his feet.

“Almost ready,” Shane replies, tone a bit clipped. He’s been on edge all day after the incident in the parking lot.

Ilya can’t lie- he has been too. Getting approached by strangers, especially aggressive ones, is quite new for him and he *really* does not like it. He extra does not like it when Hayley is

involved.

“I called my mom,” Shane adds, “she’s going to see about arranging some security for us. Nothing major, just someone to come with us when we make…outings with Hayley. I told her I didn’t want it for just the two of us.”

“That sounds fair,” Ilya replies.

Shane turns to him, setting his whisk down on the spoon rack. His big, brown eyes are wrecked with emotion.

“I’m so sorry,” he breathes. “This is all my fault. I’ve invited so much stress into your life, and I know you didn’t sign up for any of this when you had a fucking one-night stand, and I just feel like-”

“Shane.” Ilya’s voice is deadly serious as he gets to his feet and approaches the shorter man. Shane glances up at him through his eyelashes, blinking lightly as Ilya reaches his hand out to cup his cheek. He brushes his thumb tenderly over the constellation of freckles on his warm skin.

“Please hear me when I say this,” Ilya murmurs, watching as Shane’s eyes flutter closed, content from the sensation of his gentle touch. “I am so in love with you it fills my lungs with air. The only thing you have *invited* into my life, is the love of you and our daughter. Everything else is just details. We can figure anything else out, da? We have proven that by now, my sweet Shanya. I signed up to love you, and everything that comes with it. Forever, okay?”

Shane nods, sniffling again. His eyes are wet, and he lets a few tears fall, exhaling like it's a relief to allow himself to feel the emotion without suppressing it.

“I’m tired,” he says, words thick with a myriad of overwhelming feelings. “I’m just tired of everything except you and her, Ilya.”

“Oh, baby.” Ilya circles his arms around Shane, pressing his face into his sleek black hair. He smells like seaweed shampoo, and his postpartum hair growth has been stunning to witness. Long, thick, glossy locks that curl around his ears.

“I don’t want any of it anymore,” he sniffs, “I’ve given too much to hockey. I just want our family.”

“Then you have it,” Ilya whispers, “you have whatever you want, Shane. I make it happen.”

“I don’t think I want to go back,” he murmurs. “I don’t think I…I don’t think I want to belong to anything besides her, anymore.”

“Okay,” Ilya replies gently. “That is okay, Shane.”

“I want to know who I am without hockey. I want to get to know *her* without it interfering. I want you and me to be able to…*build* something together. I want it to stop being the center of my life and start being a memory.”

Ilya cups his cheek. “If that is what you want, you know I support you Shane.”

“I’m scared,” he admits with a tremble in his voice. “What if I leave and regret it? What if I don’t like what I am, without the hockey?”

“You are everything wonderful in the world.” Ilya leans down and kisses his lips tenderly. “You are kind, selfless, funny, brave, incredibly strong. You are a miracle in a beautiful package, with or without skates.”

Shane smiles at him, his lower lip tucked into his teeth bashfully. “You make me feel so good about myself.”

“Da, me and the therapy, I hope.”

“Yes, the therapy too.” He hesitates, glancing over at Ilya. “I have to say. I never used to… take mental health seriously before. I was kind of the person who just shoved it down.”

“No shit.”

“You’re hilarious.”

“I know.”

“But you kind of opened my eyes,” Shane adds, “mental health is really fucking important. And I know you of all people get that. I’m sorry it took me so long to prioritize mine. I know that made some hell for you.”

“Hey.” Ilya shakes his head. “Never apologize for your pain, sweetheart. It is your burden, but we carry it together, just like all things. As long as I am breathing, you will never face it alone.”

Shane looks up at him, big, warm eyes swimming. “I’m sorry that…I’m sorry that your mom couldn’t have that.”

Ilya goes still, surprised.

“Having Hayley, and dealing with postpartum and…all that came with it.” Shane clears his throat. “I wouldn't have survived it without you, or my parents, or even Hayden and Jackie. My support system is huge. I’m so fucking lucky. I think about your mom, sometimes, when I look at Hayley. I know I never met her Ilya, but sometimes, I think I see her. I feel her.”

Ilya blinks quickly to keep his eyes dry, overcome by Shane’s words.

“What was her name?” Shane asks softly.

Ilya takes a slow, deep breath. “Irina. Why?”

Shane reaches out and interwines their fingers, squeezing Ilya’s hands tightly, like an anchor. “I was thinking…I have so much fucking money. So much more than we will ever need.

Maybe I could start a charity, like, a hockey camp for kids? Hayley could come with me. And I could donate the money to mental health organizations. Like suicide prevention."

Ilya's voice catches in his throat.

"Would you be okay with that?" Shane asks gently. "I could call it *The Irina Foundation.* We could maybe save a lot of lives, because of Hayley's babushka. Because of your mom."

Ilya is overcome, words escaping him.

Shane hesitates. "I'm sorry if-"

Ilya cuts him off by grabbing his face in both hands and kissing him so hard he feels dizzy. Shane sinks into the embrace, a small, happy sigh in his chest. From her mat, Hayley lets out a tiny squeal. A joyful sound, Ilya thinks. The sound of *life*.

"I love you," he says against Shane's lips, his own eyes dripping with tears, his words breaking at the edges.

"Oh, Ilya. I love you too. So fucking much."

They kiss again, impassioned, heated, intense.

"Never thought I would be so grateful for broken condom," Ilya says as their lips part.

Shane lets out a wet laugh, shaking his head. "You're such an asshole."

"Mm, you love it."

"Yes." Shane leans up again and kisses him hard. "I fucking do."

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

i truly have no words

this was supposed to be a silly little oneshot of an idea i just couldnt let go of. one hundred thousand words later, and i am so grateful to anyone who read, commented, shared their love and kind words, or even just quietly enjoyed this silly little story.

endings are so hard. this shane and ilya have burrowed into my heart and will live there forever.

thank you so much for reading, i am so happy you found some escape here, and i cant wait to write more of these two in so many different universes and situations and contexts.

thank you thank you thank you xx

“Dr. Rozanov, we have one for you in room five.”

Ilya glances up from his prescription pad, seeing Svetlana approach the nurses’ station where he’s camped out. He arches an eyebrow curiously, accepting the tablet she hands to him. It’s a busy night tonight in the ER, but luckily he’s on shift with his favorite charge nurse, and best friend.

“We got her blood work and everything back already, but Kent’s shift is over so he left and couldn’t follow up.”

“Fucking Kent.”

“Yeah, fucking Kent.”

“I am out of here in forty-five minutes,” Ilya reminds her.

“I know I know, birthday party prep.” She wags her eyebrows excitedly. “I am very much looking forward to seeing my goddaughter stuff her face into a cake.”

Ilya pouts. “Shane said no to that.”

“Rose and I are bringing an extra one.” She winks, and flits off down the hall. Ilya finds himself laughing, as he pulls up the chart on his tablet.

He reads through the results of the lab work on the tablet, eyes softening a bit in understanding. With a sigh, he heads for room five, steeling himself to deliver this news. He hasn't had one of these in a while, it feels sort of serendipitous on the eve of Hayley's birthday.

There's a young woman on the exam cot, her name is Naomi. She looks like hell. She'd been brought in for excessive vomiting and dehydration. Ilya swears he saw a sister or a friend of hers walking around, but she is alone now. She seems on edge, anxious and uneasy. This is obviously not uncommon in the ER.

"Ms. Rodriguez?" he asks gently. "How are you feeling?"

"Like crap," she replies flippantly, rubbing her eyes. "Have you figured out what's wrong with me?"

Ilya laughs lightly. "Yes, we have."

"Okay, you're laughing. That's gotta be a good sign."

"Mm." Ilya pulls a rolling stool over and plops down in it, meeting her eyes seriously. "The results of your blood work came back very high for HCG. Do you know what that is?"

Her eyes go wide. "I-I think so. Isn't that the…pregnancy hormone?"

Ilya nods, offering her a gentle smile. "Yes, it is. From your levels, you are around six weeks pregnant."

"Oh my god," she gasps.

"I take it this was not expected?" he prompts.

She shakes her head rapidly, breath coming quicker. "N-no, it wasn't."

"I know this is a lot, all at once," he replies softly. "But, take a deep breath. You have options, Ms. Rodriguez. There are plenty of choices here, let yourself take some time to consider them carefully. You have options, okay?"

"Please, Naomi, please." She waves a hand at him. "I…I'm keeping it. I can't- I want to keep it. That's my choice. I already know."

"Okay." Ilya nods. "Next steps would be to follow up with an OBGYN. Do you have regular care established?"

Naomi shakes her head. "No I…fuck." She drops her head into her hands. "How am I supposed to do this? I've only been with the father for a few months. Fuck, he's going to freak."

For a beat, he watches her. The fear is palpable. Her breaths are rapid and shallow. Her entire body is tense and taut like a bowstring.

And in her panic, in her utterly world-consuming fear, he sees something incredibly familiar.

“I do not want to overstep,” Ilya says quietly. “But, if it helps at all, I received some similar news. Not very long ago.”

Naomi glances at him, eyes wide. “Yeah?”

“Mhm. My daughter Hayley was born a year ago tomorrow. It was *very* unexpected, I can assure you that.” He smiles at her. “I had no idea what I was going to do, or *how* I could ever do it. But, you know what?”

“What?”

“None of that seemed to matter anymore, when I saw her face.” Ilya shrugs lightly. “Everything ends up okay, as long as she is here, smiling at me. The world makes a lot more sense now, with her in it. There is nothing to be scared of, as long as she is okay. I think, if you truly do decide to go through with this, no matter what happens, you will feel the same. And it will be the best thing that’s ever happened.”

Naomi’s expression softens a bit. “That’s…fucking sweet.”

“You will be okay,” Ilya tells her. “Just take it one step at a time, da?”

She nods, smiling lightly at him. “Okay. *Da.* Sure.”

“I can make a recommendation for a good OBGYN, if it is needed,” Ilya says, getting to his feet. “Do you have any other questions for me, right now? I am going to discharge you after your IV is finished, and send you with a Zofran prescription to help your nausea. And we have so many resources here, if you need someone to talk to. You are not alone in this, okay?”

“Thank you, doctor,” she says gratefully.

Ilya steps out of the room, a little overcome by the intense deja vu. Svetlana is waiting for him at the desk when he returns, and she smiles.

“Bring back memories?” she asks teasingly.

Ilya rolls his eyes, sliding his tablet in her direction across the counter. “I am taking a break. I want to Facetime Shane.”

“Isn’t it past his bedtime right now?”

“He will answer me.”

“Of course he will. Have fun Papa!”

“Ilya, can you grab that- thank you.”

Ilya passes Shane another strip of paper. He's sitting at the kitchen table, brows furrowed thoughtfully, tongue poking out between his lips. Hayley's birthday party is not until tomorrow afternoon, but he's insistent on making sure everything is staged and ready to go today.

"Da-da!" Hayley says, stumbling over to his chair while Ilya hovers to make sure she doesn't fall. She's a good walker, honestly she is, but sometimes she loses her footing on the slick floor and takes a tumble. Ilya does not want any trips to work with a screaming and injured one-year-old.

The decorations are nearly finished. A myriad of paper mache in rainbow colors. Bright pastel yellows, soothing baby blues, pretty blushy pinks. Shane has spent hours making them, swatting Ilya's hand away when he tried to help. He put Ilya on hanging streamers, which feels less creatively inclined.

But, he has to admit, Shane was right to take the lead. The decorations are beautiful. They make Ilya's chest feel warm in a soft, nostalgic kind of way. They bring him thoughts of his mother, of the gentler parts of his childhood. Of the moments where the *bad* seemed to recede, even for a little while.

All of their days are like that, lately. Just…*good.*

They're in the apartment in Ottawa for another few months until their house is finished. They'd bought one a few miles from Ilya's hospital, and Shane insisted on some renovations before move-in. He has particular visions for their long-term home, and Ilya is happy to oblige him, even if it means delaying their move in. So, they're riding out the remainder of the lease here.

The new house is much roomier- a bigger place than Ilya has ever lived. Their daughter will get her own bedroom, a playroom and a big grassy backyard so they can rescue a dog.

"There are other bedrooms too," Shane had said, *"for her brothers and sisters."*

The casual way he'd said that made Ilya's heart flutter in his chest. He hopes he gets to have tons and tons of wonderful kids with this gorgeous, incredible man. Sue him, he's desperately in love.

The house is also only a few short miles from the rink Shane had purchased from Svetlana's uncle, for *much* more than it was worth. That rink is going to be the home for The Irina Foundation. They've already been by a few times to check out the space and so Shane can work on his plans. A few of his former teammates have already agreed to be involved, like Hayden and JJ, and he's networking to get some from other teams as well. They're going to announce the charity at the beginning of the new year; his agent is already working on all of that stuff. It will be an incredible opener, and Shane can run things on his own terms, his own timeline.

Yuna has thrown herself into it too, apparently she needs something to manage now that Shane has removed himself from the public eye. He's been asked to go on for interviews,

podcasts, exclusives since retiring, but has refused them all. Public appearances are at an all-time low, and he's never seemed happier.

He's chosen peace. It's a good look on him.

In letting himself slow down, enjoy this life more, Shane is transforming into someone Ilya is sure he wouldn't have believed a year ago. He smiles a lot more, laughs with an unburdened sound, and gives himself grace.

He's still the same, mostly high-strung, intense, control-freak man Ilya fell in love with, because that's who he is. But it's not burdened with outside pressure and expectations the way it used to be.

"Hi baby." Shane reaches down and scoops Hayley up under her armpits, kissing her cheek while she giggles. "Do you like your birthday decorations, hm? We made them like babushka used to do for Papa. What do you think? Do you think Papa likes them?"

"Papa loves them," Ilya is quick to reply. *"Oni potryasayushchiye, moy sladkiy."*

"Papa says they're amazing," Shane reiterates to Hayley, bouncing her on his knee. "It makes us happy when Papa is happy, doesn't it baby girl?"

"Pa-pa!" she squeals, reaching her fist in Ilya's direction.

Ilya smiles and immediately moves to scoop her up into his arms. He kisses her a few times, blowing little bubbles on her chubby cheeks which makes her shriek with giggles. When he pulls back, Shane is looking over at them with big, glimmering eyes. His expression is what can only be described as lovestruck. Being looked at this way, even now, it makes Ilya's heart feel like it's doing jumping jacks in his chest.

"I love you," Shane says the words, despite the way his face is already saying it for him.

"I love you too," Ilya replies, knowing his own expression is giving him away just the same.

It's a small event, which is what they both want.

Like the baby shower, this party is in the Hollander's picturesque backyard. Today though, the only decorations are store bought streamers and banners, and the paper mache flowers Shane had painstakingly spent days working on. There is pizza and wings ordered from a local joint, and two-liters of soda on foldout tables. In attendance are David, Yuna, Svetlana, Rose, Hayden, Jackie, their children, Shane and Ilya.

It's quiet, and calm, laughter over the shared food and clumsily opened presents that Hayley coos over for a few moments before moving on to the next. Their only request for gifts was no electronics, which has led to a beautifully colorful array of interactive books, perfectly stimulating toys, some new clothes, and a couple adorable stuffies. Ilya is sure Yuna would have gone a little more insane if they'd let her, but it was a repeatedly reiterated request that she keep it calm and not overstimulating. Thankfully, she'd respected it.

It's been a small thing, but Ilya's noticed Shane is a little bit *off* today. Not in any particular way that worries him greatly, but just a little odd. From the corner of his eye, Ilya sees him picking at his food with disinterest, even shying away when Yuna tries to offer him more. This is Shane's favorite local pizza place, so that's a bit unnerving to Ilya.

He's been doing so well, lately, with being comfortable in his own skin and doing what feels right for his body. He still exercises pretty rigorously, but it seems to be because he enjoys pushing himself in that manner, more than he feels a pressure to stay in shape. He's also been listening to his body and eating what he wants and needs, which has unsurprisingly made a remarkable impact on his mental health.

Seeing him look dubiously at the plate, it sets off quiet alarm bells in Ilya's head. He doesn't call him on it in front of everyone, but he catalogues it for later with a slightly bitter taste on his tongue.

The party continues on, and it's really nice. There's a lot of gentle laughter and quiet conversation. There's a lot of cooing over Hayley as she rambunctiously waddles around and grabs at the guests, hungry for their attention and affection. There's a quiet reflection as Shane and Ilya sit on the grass with everyone, watching her play with her new toys.

"Everyone," Shane says, addressing the group with a warm smile, "I wanted to thank you all so much for being here for this. The fact that our daughter is so loved means more than any of you will ever know."

"Of course she is," Yuna replies, reaching over to squeeze his shin.

"Dah!" Hayley says to Shane.

"Yes, baby," he replies, as though they are having an actual discussion. "As Hayley has kindly pointed out, I actually had something else I wanted to say."

Everyone politely tunes in. Ilya reaches over and scoops Hayley onto his lap, smiling as she wags a new stuffy in his face.

"A year ago today," Shane begins, "we had the most terrifying day of our lives. Hayley was born under some pretty scary circumstances. She and I were lucky to make it out unscathed." Shane glances over at Ilya, eyes softening. "Well, I shouldn't say *lucky*. Luck had nothing to do with it. It was all Ilya Rozanov."

Svetlana whoops and there's a small chorus of laughter from the group. Ilya's face feels warm.

"I was going to say that the day Hayley was born, you saved me," Shane says, and now it feels like he's only speaking to Ilya, despite their small audience. "But that's not exactly true. The truth is, Ilya, you started saving me the very first moment we met."

Ilya's throat feels tight. Hayley babbles in his arms, her chubby little hand smacking against his cheek. He kisses her fingers, keeping his eyes locked on Shane. Why is he saying all of this, right now? Has her birthday got him sentimental?

“You told me before, that you believe in a higher power, that you believe in fate. That, even when we first met, you thought that was what brought us together.” Shane swallows audibly, reaching into the pocket of his jeans for something. “Sitting here today, with our daughter and our family, and the life we’re building together, I can say I was completely wrong to have disagreed with you. This is exactly where we’re meant to be. Together.”

From his pocket, he removes a small, velvety black box. Ilya’s eyes go wide.

“Doctor Ilya Rozanov,” Shane says solemnly, flicking open the box to reveal a smooth, gold band, the same color of the crucifix around Ilya’s neck. “Would you do me the honor of marrying me?”

For a moment, everything goes quiet. Yuna makes a small sound like a gasp, David covers his mouth with disbelief, Svetlana and Rose both cling to each other eagerly, and Hayden looks absolutely dumbfounded.

All Ilya can really see, though, is Shane.

Shane Hollander, with his beautiful big brown eyes, and that perfect statuesque nose, and the spray of freckles on his rosy cheeks. His gorgeous, hopeful smile. His thick, sturdy body, the one that grew their child from scratch and gave her life. The man who fought through unimaginable odds to be here today, smiling and laughing and loving in ways that Ilya never thought he’d be lucky enough to receive.

The man who has given Ilya everything.

“Yes,” Ilya says, his voice more a whisper than anything, “yes, Shane.”

Their relatives all scream and cheer, but it’s white noise in Ilya’s eardrums as Shane leans in and slides the gold band around the ring finger on his right hand. A perfect fit. He must have done some research, to know to put it on Ilya’s right instead of his left. Ilya loves that about him.

Then, they’re kissing. Salty, tear-stained lips pressing together in a passionate, rhythmic embrace. Hayley’s weight is still heavy in Ilya’s arms, and he clings to her, holding her close as her fathers consummate their agreement to love each other forever.

“Holy shit,” Shane says when their lips part. He’s breathing heavily, mouth turned up in a sloppy grin. “I can’t believe you said yes.”

Ilya laughs dryly. “You thought I would say no?”

“No, I mean, I *feared* it.”

“Solnyschko,” Ilya murmurs, chasing Shane’s lips with his own once more, “this is all I want, forever. Never doubt that, da?”

Shane kisses him again, quickly and chastely. “Keep that ring on your finger, and I won’t.”

Ilya winks. “Whatever you say. What is phrase, eh? Happy wife, happy life?”

Shane laughs again and kicks away, grabbing Hayley and taking her with him as he stands to join their family, who are all excitedly celebrating and awaiting their turn for hugs and congratulations.

“I’m not your *wife*, Rozanov,” Shane says, but there’s a mischievous glint in his eyes that tells Ilya, maybe, he doesn’t actually mind it all that much.

Later that evening, they are curled up on the sofa, mouths exploring each other's necks tenderly and intimately. It had been a rough, passionate lovemaking session once Hayley was down for the count. She’s sleeping pretty well through the night these days, which makes bedtime intimacy much easier to accomplish, even in the small apartment.

“I am going to get some water, *solnyschko*,” Ilya murmurs, leaning in to plant a gentle kiss on Shane’s cheek. “Do you want anything? A drink or a snack?”

“Mm.” Shane huffs out a relaxed, distracted sound. His eyes catch on Ilya’s right hand, and he reaches forward to tenderly trail his fingertip along the knuckle of Ilya’s ring finger.

“Is it pretty?” Ilya asks quietly, resting his chin in Shane’s hair. “Do you like how I look, when I am claimed by you?”

“Yes,” Shane whispers, “like that you’re mine. That everyone knows. My baby.” He leans up and presses his lips a bit forcefully against Ilya’s. “I love you.”

“I love you,” Ilya replies without hesitation.

“We should get married outside somewhere nice,” Shane muses thoughtfully, looking up through his lashes at Ilya’s face. “Would you like that?”

Ilya nods. “Yes, that sounds nice, sweetheart. I think my parents got married in this big church that had a large outside garden. I saw a few photos. Was pretty.”

“You want a religious ceremony?”

“No, no. I have my belief, my faith, I do not need anyone else to reinforce it. Something just about our love would be nice. They only did in church because, it is what everyone around them at the time did, I think. My mom was very religious, but my dad not so much.”

Shane tilts his head slightly. “Can I ask about your dad?”

“You can ask me anything you like, *moy sladkiy.”*

He hums in his throat, deliberating for a brief moment before he speaks again. “You’ve told me your dad was not the nicest. He would drink and hurt you guys sometimes. He was that way with your mom, too?”

“Yes,” Ilya replies easily. “He was like that with everyone, honestly. Even right before he died.”

“How did he die?”

“He had dementia. Things got very bad, at the end. I was not there but my brother Alexei, he would update me a lot. I think he sort of blamed me, in a weird way.”

“Why would he blame you?” Shane demands.

“I am a doctor,” Ilya says softly, “and I did not see the signs until his disease had progressed a lot. Only then did we get him a diagnosis.”

Shane wrinkles his nose. “But you live across the ocean, why didn’t your brother notice sooner?”

“My brother has always been a little preoccupied with himself. There is no cure anyway, so it would not have made a difference, knowing earlier. But it maybe, I don’t know, would have spared my father some suffering, if we had answers sooner.”

“In what way?”

“Just, if he’d had more help, when things were confusing and he wasn’t in his right mind. I am sure before his diagnosis, Alexei wasn’t the most supportive son.”

“Maybe he resented your dad for how he treated you guys,” Shane says gently. “I kind of don’t blame him.”

“Probably,” Ilya agrees, “I do not either. But it was all we knew, for most of our lives. I did not even realize what my father did to us was considered *abuse* until I got much older and started seeing Galina.”

Shane looks at him with a troubled expression.

“He called it discipline,” Ilya explains quietly, “and my mom did what she could but she could not stop it. She did not stop it. So it was normal for us.”

“Why do you think they got married?” Shane asks. His voice is tentative, like he knows he’s poking at a purple bruise and doesn’t want to irritate it further.

Ilya blows a breath out heavily, running his fingers through Shane’s thick hair. There’s a few moments of weighty silence, where he tries to formulate the right words.

“She did not have choices,” is what he lands on. “It was simple, really. Marry my father, or wonder where her next meal was coming from, wonder if she’d have a roof over her head the next night, if she’d be safe. Her parents were not in our lives, and I assume that is because she did not have a relationship with them. She was younger than my dad, by a lot. He was decorated policeman. He had good money and he could give her a stable life. Well, financially at least.”

Shane studies Ilya’s face silently.

“And, I am sure he did not start their first date by drinking and hitting her.” Ilya smiles wryly. “That probably came once she was in too deep to turn back.”

“I wish…I wish I could go back in time and save her, somehow,” Shane murmurs, fumbling over the words a little, like he’s afraid they cross some unspoken line. “I can’t believe the woman who made you, suffered so much. She must have been so strong.”

“She was,” Ilya agrees, “strong and brave, just like you, *malysh.”*

Shane’s face flushes red, and he cups his fingers along the edge of Ilya’s jaw. “You know, I *know* you know, but I have to remind you. You’re an amazing dad. Hayley is the luckiest girl in the world to have you. You know that, don’t you baby?”

“It is so kind of you to say, *solnyschko.* Thank you. I will always try my best to be what she deserves.”

“Thank you for talking about this with me. I like knowing about your life before and where you come from. I wish I could have met Irina.”

“Da, me too *lyubimyy.* She would have loved you.” Ilya kisses his temple. “Like I love you.”

Shane sighs, leaning back. “Alright, you were going to get water. Sorry I sidetracked you.”

“Mm, is okay. Are you sure you do not want to eat? You barely touched your food earlier.”

“Yeah, it’s alright. My stomach is weird today.”

“Weird how?” Ilya is instantly on alert, pressing his palm flat over the soft skin of Shane’s belly. He’s filled out a bit more, so there’s a lot to grab, and it’s fucking delicious. But they’d been pretty rough, and he’s worried he’s hurt him.

“I dunno,” Shane admits, “just kind of weird. Like, queasy but not, all at once? And I really thought I needed to use the bathroom but I couldn’t. Just, weird. I don’t have much appetite.” He shrugs. “Probably just overtired. I’ve been up late going over plans for the foundation launch.”

Ilya furrows his brow.

“I’m fine, doctor,” Shane replies teasingly, cupping Ilya's cheek in his hand. “I promise. I’d tell you if something major felt bad.”

“Alright…” Ilya hesitates. “If it still feels weird in the morning, we will go to the doctor.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “Go get your snack, you drama queen.”

Ilya gives him one last kiss, lingering longer than he needs to, and parting from his *fiance*.

God, that feels fucking good.

It’s unexpected, the decision to just elope.

See, Shane’s mom has all these plans. A big, pretty venue that seats one-hundred people. A three-tiered cake with lots of decorations and garnishes that look like beautiful flowers. A full catering set up, servers, an open bar, even elegant fucking chairs.

In the first few weeks following their engagement, the wedding planning is in full effect. It’s overwhelming. It’s big and showboatish, and completely, utterly, not them. There are long, late nights going over venue options and budgets and seating charts, and it truly feels more like a job than anything else.

Shane is exhausted, run ragged by the planning and working on the foundation and being a present father. He’s been falling asleep on the sofa in the middle of the day, or letting his eyes droop shut during dinner. Ilya is starting to worry all of this stress is taking him back to a bad place, mentally. He’s even been skipping meals, saying his stomach has been off. Most likely, anxiety.

Ilya wakes up one morning, a month after their engagement, and turns to Shane. He’s already up with Hayley on his chest, half-awake as he feeds her. They’ve started the process of weaning her, so the feedings are becoming less frequent. Ilya is sure he’ll be happy to fully have his body back once she’s completely weaned off his chest. But, he knows there’s an element of bonding here that Shane really loves. It makes him feel close to their daughter in a way no one else can. It’s special, and he also knows Shane is mourning the fact that he will have to say goodbye to that soon.

He is truly the most beautiful human being alive.

“Would you like to get married?” Ilya asks him abruptly.

Shane pops an eye open, expression amused. “I beat you to this question last month, nice try.”

“No, would you like to get married today?”

Shane does a double take, adjusting Hayley on his chest while she quietly snuffles against his warm skin. “W-what? Today?”

“Yes. Today.”

“I- we can’t! There’s not enough time to plan- there isn’t- we can’t possibly-”

“Shane,” he repeats tenderly, “would you like to get married today?”

The other man wilts, relief overcoming his expression. “Yes, Ilya. I very much would.”

“All you have to worry about, my love, is finding something to wear. Okay?” Ilya reaches over and squeezes his thigh. “And maybe dressing Hayley, too. You are better at it.”

Shane’s expression falters, and then, a smile begins to grow on his lips. “You’re serious?”

“This is my serious face, is it not?” Ilya purses his lips.

Laughing, Shane nods. “I guess it is. We need witnesses, though. And someone to perform the ceremony.”

“I have good news about that. Svetlana is ordained.”

“Excuse me?”

“Uh-huh. She was supposed to officiate an old friend’s wedding last year, Sasha, and he backed out at the last minute. She is still ordained, though.”

“Shit.” Shane blinks. “But, witnesses?”

“Your mom and dad? Hayden and Jackie? Rose?”

“Okay, yeah.” Shane nods again. “Shit, could we really just do this? Like, could we just get married if we want to? We don’t have to do like, the venue and the cake and the wedding rehearsal dinner?”

“We can do whatever we want,” Ilya says.

“I want to be your husband,” Shane replies. “I want it to be us, and Hayley, and…and I just want it to be *simple.”*

Ilya understands the sentiment. Nothing about their relationship, even from the start, has been exactly simple. It would be nice if this could be as easy as saying *let’s do it.*

“Let’s do it,” Ilya tells him.

“Okay,” Shane says, grinning. “Let’s do it.”

The obvious obstacle in their ham-fisted, impulsive plan, is Yuna Hollander. Fortunately, she has a soft spot for Hayley. Ilya brings her along to make his arrangements, knowing the other woman cannot get *too* angry when she’s looking at her sweet, chunky granddaughter.

It takes a lot of convincing, and some begging, and some holding Hayley up with her big Shane-eyes, but eventually, Yuna agrees.

Ilya puts his expertise in running an emergency room to use, and delegates like his life depends on it. David is dispatched to handle getting the marriage license, Hayden and Jackie to find some rings, Svetlana and Rose to prepare a last-minute ceremony speech, and Yuna to clear out the cottage backyard for enough space to have the small gathering.

True to his word, Shane has to worry about nothing besides getting ready. Ilya sends Rose over to help him pick something out, and she takes Hayley with her to get her ready as well. He figures Rose’s calming presence and having Hayley close by will help Shane not stress so much about getting ready.

“Come on honey,” Yuna says to Ilya, “let’s get you something to wear. It’s your wedding day, I don’t care how much you beg, you are not wearing an old pair of scrub pants.”

Fair enough.

And, somehow, it really all does come together. David comes through on the marriage license, apparently he knows someone through work and makes it happen. The Pikes confirm they’ve got rings. Svetlana gets something written for them. And Yuna sets the cottage backyard up with some chairs for everyone to watch the quiet festivities. They plan to go out for dinner after, nothing too dramatic, no big deal. Just their family, together, and close, celebrating this eternal unity.

Ilya, dressed in jeans and a loose-fitting button down, finds himself nervously combing his hands through his curls as he waits for Shane outside the back door. They haven’t had much time to chat the past few hours, while Ilya was arranging this last minute elopement, but he hopes Shane is as ready as he feels.

He’s nervous, yes, but also so fucking excited. This is all he wants, forever, his Shane and his Hayley. He’s dreamt about this life, and he wants to keep building it with Shane, as long as they live.

“Hey.” Hayden approaches him, with one kid on his hip and another tugging on his sleeve. Despite his numerous, lengthy, substantial flaws, Hayden is not the worst father in the world. Ilya will give him that.

“Hi,” he replies. “Thank you for getting the rings, and making yourselves available to be here today.”

“Lucky it’s off-season and I was home,” Hayden says.

“How sweet.” Ilya rolls his eyes. “You are enjoying playing for Ottawa, then?”

“Best decision I’ve ever made, aside from marrying Jackie.” Hayden hesitates, then speaks again. “And speaking of it. I know I give you a lot of shit. But, well, you make Shane so happy. You’re a great dad to Hayley. I hope you know…I’m really happy for you guys. I never thought he’d let himself have this. I’m really glad he finally does.”

Ilya’s expression softens. “I appreciate that, Pike, even from you.”

“Oh, eat shit Rozanov.”

“I-”

“Ilya.”

His retort is interrupted by a voice calling for him urgently. He turns to see Rose standing on the deck in the backyard, eyes locked on him. She looks anxious, which is bad because she's been on Shane-duty. Something is not right.

Ilya rushes toward her. “What is wrong?”

“Shane’s upstairs, he needs you. Yuna has Hayley.”

“Thanks.” Ilya hurries past her, taking the stairs two at a time, until he finds the door to the room they often used as theirs. He knocks. “Shanya? Can I come in?”

“Y-yeah.” Shane’s voice is wobbly, like he’s crying. It instantly puts Ilya on alert, and he shoves his way in.

Shane is sitting on the edge of the bed, fingers braced against his knees, head hanging between his shoulders. His cheeks are glossy with tears. He glances up when Ilya enters, offering him a weak attempt at a smile. He looks gorgeous- his hair is combed neatly, he’s wearing a pair of jeans and a nice blue shirt that makes his skin look perfectly sunkissed and his freckles pop. If he weren’t currently crying, Ilya would probably start hitting on him and see if they had time for a good quickie.

“Shane.” Ilya lets the door fall shut behind him and approaches, wrapping his arms protectively around him. “What is going on?”

“I know it’s kind of bad luck, or something,” Shane sniffs, wiping at his eyes with the back of his hand, “but I had to see you.”

“What is wrong?” Ilya pulls back and takes his face in his hands, brushing tears off his cheeks with the pads of his thumbs. He hopes to god this isn’t cold feet, or second thoughts. He trusts Shane, though, and firmly reminds himself that they’re in love.

Shane lets out a small, hiccuping laugh. “You know how, um, I’ve been feeling weird? My stomach? And I’ve been so exhausted?”

Ilya nods, brows furrowed with concern. “Did something happen? Are you okay?”

“Well, I mentioned it to Rose.” He laughs again, a dry sound. “And she suggested I…take a test. Isn’t that so stupid, we hadn’t thought to do that? We haven’t been as careful lately.”

“A test.” Ilya processes this for a moment, before his eyes go wide, and he leans back. “A test. A *pregnancy* test?”

“No, the SATs,” Shane retorts.

“Shane. Are you-” Ilya breathes in sharply. “Did you? Did you take one?”

“I knew we had some here, so.” He clears his throat. “I thought I’d wait and um, do it with you? If you want. You’re the one who told me I was pregnant before. I kinda wanted to be in the know at the same time.”

“Okay.” Ilya rubs his hand softly over Shane’s thigh. “You are scared, about what it might say?”

Surprisingly, Shane shakes his head. “I’m more scared of it being negative, I think. Is that insane?”

Slowly, a smile begins to spread over Ilya's cheeks. "No baby, it is not insane. We have the best daughter ever. We obviously make really perfect babies. Who would not want more, eh?"

Shane laughs wetly. "So, it'd be okay with you, too?"

"Of course, my love." Ilya kisses a tear off the sharp tip of his nose. "As long as you feel ready."

"I do." Shane nods. "I mean, I've got a handle on my mental health, and we'll be in our house soon, and the foundation is almost ready, it feels like things are falling into place. And…I know it's soon, but I was an only child, and I remember how lonely it got at times. It would be really nice if she had someone to play with."

Ilya grins at him. "She would be very good big sister. The best."

Shane sniffs another quiet sob. "Fuck, that's so cute."

"Let's take the test then, okay?" Ilya gives his knee a gentle squeeze. "And we will know for sure."

"Is everyone waiting for us?" Shane worries.

"No, do not stress about that. Whole point of doing it this way is that we have nothing to worry about. We take care of you first. Come on, *dorogoy."*

Carefully, he guides Shane to his feet, and they walk together to the ensuite bathroom. There is a box of tests under the sink. Ilya opens one, trying to keep his excitement at bay, and passes it to Shane. The other man exhales shakily as he opens the box, running his teeth over his lower lip.

The next few minutes are mostly quiet.

Ilya can't help but ruminate on the way they'd found out about Hayley. In the chaos and confusion of the emergency room, barely knowing the other's names, finding out about the life growing inside Shane from a series of lab work that Ilya had lazily looked over on his tablet. It had just been another patient to him, before. Just five minutes of his life. It was supposed to not ever matter again, after those five minutes. How naive he'd been, how foolish, waltzing into that room expecting Shane to leave that night and never see him again.

Unknowing, that both of their lives would change forever that night.

He's so fucking glad to have been wrong.

The timer on Shane's phone goes off, startling both of them. Their eyes meet in the fluorescent lighting. There's a heaviness between them, tension thick, but undercut with a buzzing sort of eagerness. There is no fear this time, only hope and promise. If it's negative, they have nothing to grieve. If it is positive, they have everything to love.

"Should we look?" Ilya asks softly, hovering over the test with his fingers.

Shane flexes and unflexes his hands. He nods once. “You look at it. Please. I’m too nervous.”

“Okay, my love.” Ilya moves toward the sink and delicately picks up the test, exhaling once before he flips it over.

It’s instant, the way his eyes well with tears.

“Oh, Shane,” he breathes, pressing a hand over his mouth as warm tears spill over his cheeks.

“Ilya?” Shane asks, eyes wide, hope teeming under the surface of his voice.

Ilya just turns the test toward him, allowing him to see for himself.

“Oh my god,” Shane gasps, hand flying to his stomach in a protective gesture, “I’m pregnant?”

Ilya manages a wet laugh, at the deja vu of hearing him say this again, in the same bewildered tone he had so long ago in the hospital. Only, this time, Shane sounds downright *ecstatic*. It’s such a beautiful sound for him. He is so beautiful.

“You’re pregnant,” Ilya says, “we are having another baby.”

“Oh my god,” Shane repeats, stumbling forward until they’re standing a few inches apart. Ilya sets the test down on the sink, meeting Shane’s eyes. His heart is racing in his chest with unfettered glee.

Both of them are overwhelmed, teary-eyed and utterly joyous. Shane is glowing, warm and radiant as if lit from within. He is *everything.*

“I love you,” Shane says, voice unwavering, words completely confident and determined. “I love you, and I’m so fucking happy we’re doing this together.”

“I love you more, my Shane.” Ilya pulls him close and kisses him so hard he feels dizzy. Their lips fall into rhythm, familiar, passionate, beating like the thrum of a heart spilling over with love.

They don’t separate until a small knock on the door gets their attention.

“Shane?” Yuna calls softly. “Ilya? Are you boys ready?”

Ilya pulls back, grinning at Shane. He wipes tears from his lashes, kissing each inch of skin on his face before he repeats her question.

“Well?” he asks. “Are you ready?”

Shane smiles back at him, beaming and beautiful and life-sustaining in every possible way.

“Yes, Ilya,” he says, “I’m ready.”

Hand in hand, they walk toward the door, ready to cross the threshold into their forever.

Together.

End Notes

PLEASE BE NICE IM NOT A PROFESSIONAL IM NOT A DOCTOR AND IM JUST HERE FOR A GOOD TIME NOT LITERARY DISSERTATIONS

-the back button is your friend. i have had to say this so much more often recently. please just keep negative or critiquing comments to yourself! i dont need or want them! we are all just here for a good time

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!