

Cinnamon Bread

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Cinnamon Bread

by [hollano_ov](#)

Summary

“You fucking knocked me up.”

There’s a pause before the corner of Rozanov's mouth tilts up, words nearly purring through his grin. “Ah. You are trying to turn me on, yes?”

or: Shane gets pregnant. Unfortunately the father is Ilya Rozanov, the bane of his existence.

Notes

my first hollanov multi chapter work. whoaaaaa guysssssss. getting crazy.

title from Cinnamon Bread - Ryan Beatty (of course. of course i’m still spreading the calico agenda. the streets are saying new ryan beatty this year PRAY FOR ME!) okay let’s move on to:

► DISCLAIMERS/WARNINGS THAT CONTAIN SPOILERS

thank you to my dear beta [Lizzie!](#) i appreciate you!

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

Chapter 1: I. Cut Me to the Bone

Chapter Summary

7-8 weeks.



Everything is fine.

"Hollander! Let's go!"

"Yeah," Shane calls back, voice strained and weak. "I'll—I'll be out in a sec."

Everything is fucking *fine*.

His hand trembles as he brings it up, wiping his mouth and ridding it of the saliva and bile. The sheer thought of it brings another wave of nausea, this one more violent than the rest that have been tormenting him all morning. He groans, squeezing his eyes shut and dry heaving, hands clutching the sides of the porcelain toilet and reminding him that he's hunched over on the floor in the bathroom of the university arena. It's fucking disgusting, unsanitary and—

"Oh no," he mutters before spilling his guts again.

He's shaking to his core by the time he gets a bearing on his surroundings again. His vision is bleary, there's sweat beading at his hairline. He hasn't even changed into his fucking gear, still wearing a dry-fit. He hadn't had a chance to so much as glance at his things before the churning in his stomach he did his best to ignore throughout the morning came back full force, sending him calling out something of an excuse and then stumbling to the private bathroom hoping no one would tell him to get the fuck out.

For the first few minutes between the puking, he could hear J.J. Boiziau—teammate and probably only friend other than Hayden Pike who was also helping, only less effectively—shooing people away. *Capitaine is not feeling good*, he had said. *Give him some fucking space, boys*. And even though Shane was somewhat mortified, he was also grateful and hopeful that they would cut him some slack.

Three loud knocks sound again, heavier this time, nearly rattling the door on its hinges. What follows is an agitating Russian accent, one Shane is all too familiar with. "Hollander! Get the fuck out, we are waiting on *you!*"

Maybe the sickness has finally subsided, or maybe Shane has always been a bit petty and stubborn at heart when it comes to Ilya Rozanov—whatever the reason is, Shane finds the strength to pull himself up. The hissing of the toilet flushing is nearly muted in his ears as twists the sink faucet splashes cold water over his face, mouth hanging open as he takes several deep breaths, glancing up at his reflection.

Dark splotches beneath his eyes greet him mockingly. He hasn't been sleeping too well lately and the proof is in the heaviness of the thin skin. Cheeks flushed, pink at the high points, the color stretching to his nose and his chin. Water drips off his lower lip, nearly raw from all the wiping only to vomit again within the second. He's had better days, but at the very least there's proof in the way he feels like shit. It'll get the guys to give him some fucking grace, he's only human.

Of course, it's all wishful thinking, especially when it comes to the human embodiment of all things annoying and irritating.

Ilya Rozanov is standing right in front of the door when Shane finally emerges, raising one of his eyebrows, his light eyes flickering down to take in Shane. For a moment, Shane is certain that he'll be sympathetic. Only for a moment, though.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" Rozanov says, ever so eloquent. He's already in his gear except for his skates, wearing slides instead like the Russian asshole he is. The strap to his helmet is unclipped, swinging as he tilts his chin at Shane. "You look like shit."

"Fuck off," Shane answers back easily with barely any energy to sound as nasty as he wants to. It comes out tired, almost lost in an exhale as he shoulders past Rozanov. "I feel like shit, so that's probably why."

Unfortunately, Rozanov follows him anyway, the stupid sound of his slides slapping against his heels amplified as they go down the hall. "You are sick?"

"I don't know, probably," Shane grumbles, taking a sharp turn into the dressing room and earning several stares from his teammates. "Sorry," he finds himself saying to them, knowing it's probably best to just address it right there. "Wasn't feeling too good. Thinking I ate something funny last night—"

Their coach, Coach Wiebe, comes in, raising an eyebrow and looking at Shane with something close to concern. "You should sit this one out if your feeling sick, Hollander. I'm sure Rozanov wouldn't mind—"

"Rozanov would not mind," Rozanov grins just as Shane says: "No, no. I'm fine, I feel better."

The answer comes in the form of a shrug from Wiebe (seemingly not wanting to get in the middle of all *that*) and a frown from Rozanov, and that's that.

Embarrassment nips at Shane's flushed face as he hurries to get himself dressed, looking down the whole time to avoid the way he knows Rozanov is staring at him. Part of him is tempted to ask what the fuck his problem is, but he knows it'll probably make him elated that he's managed to get under Shane's skin so quickly today. As captain and alternate captain, they're probably supposed to get along better than they do, but it's hard to when they're so fucking different.

Where Shane is all logic and careful, Rozanov is impulse and rash decisions. Shane likes things in a nice order, easy to dissect, and Rozanov wrangles order until it spills between his fists and dissolves into chaos. Shane is day and Rozanov is night and there couldn't be two people more different than they are.

On the ice, though, they work together well. In tandem, always picking up where the other left off. Some sort of connection that Shane can't deny even if he wants to. Sometimes, it feels like he was born to play alongside Rozanov, but he wouldn't say it out loud. Wouldn't let himself stroke an already massive ego like that.

As if reading Shane's mind, Rozanov follows him up and out to join the rest of the guys on the ice. They're alone, just the two of them, and a blush clumsily starts to lick at Shane's neck even as he does his best to look forward, refusing to acknowledge Rozanov's existence.

Rozanov has always been stubborn in the same way. "Hollander," he clips, grabbing at Shane's wrist to stop him.

Still somewhat nauseous and irritated beyond belief, Shane wrenches himself away from the touch, whipping around to shove at Rozanov's chest. "Don't fucking touch me."

Rozanov's eyebrows shoot up toward his dirty blond curls plastered on his forehead. "Ah, that is not what you were saying last week, no? Was more like... *oh, harder Rozanov. Fuck me, just like that—*"

This time Shane shoves him harder, driving him against the wall until Rozanov's back hits it, knocking the breath out of him. Shane presses his lips together, shutting his eyes and inhaling carefully to gather himself before he can do anything stupid. Anything *more* stupid than what he's already let himself do. "Not here," he says, opening his eyes to glance at Rozanov's confused expression. "We don't talk about that here, you know that."

"Your rules are stupid," Rozanov says back. "Was also a rule to not fuck on weekdays, but here we are."

Again, Shane is shutting his eyes like that will make this moment pass. He hates that there's some truth to what Rozanov is saying. He hates it even more that he doesn't have a fucking backbone when it comes to the Russian prick standing in front of him. If he did, he wouldn't even be standing here giving him the time of day.

But Ilya Rozanov's flesh is made of the forbidden fruit Shane had heard of growing up, and at the pit of his stomach laid a hunger dormant and ignored until Rozanov came stumbling into his life two years ago, freshman year of college. Loud, obnoxious, more confident than anyone Shane had ever met or seen. Pretty gold hair with curls that always seemed to be placed just right, body carved from marble and desire, light eyes always equipped with a glint of intrigue and mischief. Shane was pulled into his orbit without realizing.

All it took was one night after practice, one night where they were the only ones left to the showers. One glance over his bare shoulder to find Rozanov already looking at him, already touching himself. Shane had barely thought of the repercussions, had barely heard the small voice in his head saying *this is a bad idea* and instead let the hunger awaken and take over.

An hour later he found himself bouncing in Rozanov's lap in the back seat of his admittedly decent looking coupe that smelled like cigarettes and cologne. What was supposed to be a mistake turned into a scheduled reoccurrence, into rules and regulations to make sure they could get what they wanted without bringing the complications onto the ice.

"Hollander."

Shane snaps out of his racing thoughts, swallowing roughly as his eyes find Rozanov's again, only for a moment before he's looking away. "We should go."

"You are sick," Rozanov says before Shane can make it far.

Exhausted, Shane sighs, tilting his head back and staring up at the ceiling. "Why the fuck do you care, Rozanov?"

"I don't," Rozanov answers with a shrug. "Just do not want you throwing up on my dick later —"

"Fuck off," Shane manages through a small laugh, hating that it sort of was funny. "I'm fine now."

Rozanov looks him up and down, lips pressed together in subtle disbelief. "Okay. But if you do not feel good, stay home. I do not want to get sick either."

"Yeah, whatever," Shane mumbles, clipping his helmet and leaving Rozanov in the hallway.

Even though he truthfully does feel fine now, his mind is elsewhere the entirety of practice. He hadn't eaten anything weird the night before—his dinner was what it has been for the last several months after starting a new diet recommended by the nutritionist his mom found for him. Rice, salmon or chicken depending on the day, a hefty side of vegetables, and water. If he was feeling wild, then maybe a zero sugar ginger-ale instead. No alcohol, not in the last year and a half, at least. Hardly any sugar, only what came from the fruit from his breakfast. Nothing crazily processed, nothing that could fuck his stomach up like it had been today.

It would be easy to brush off if this hadn't been happening for the last couple of weeks. Then it had been easy to brush off, when the feeling dwindled before he could make it to practice scheduled after classes or later in the day. Even some morning practices were easier to push through, only having thrown up once or twice right before leaving his apartment only to forget about it as he threw himself into his craft.

It's a little harder to ignore now, a little more concerning than it had been yesterday or the day before or the day before. It must show in his performance because by the time practice is ending, Coach Wiebe is pulling him aside, nodding at a nosy Rozanov who falters at following the rest of the guys, subtly telling him to mind his fucking business and go. As stupid as he can be, Rozanov takes the hint, jaw tightening as his gaze racks over Shane before he turns and is leaving, too.

Wiebe faces Shane, raising an eyebrow. It doesn't take long for Shane to get defensive. "Coach—"

"You played like shit."

Shane blinks, mouth gaping. "What? No I didn't, I—"

"Look, we all know that you're incapable of playing anything less than great," Wiebe starts, raising a hand to silence Shane when he goes to open his mouth again, "*but*. You definitely weren't playing your best today and I know you know it."

"I'll do better tomorrow," Shane promises. He can do better, there's always room for improvement even if he's already great.

"No you won't. Tomorrow you're staying home and resting," Wiebe says, shaking his head when Shane tries to interrupt once again. "Enough, Hollander. I'm not asking you, I'm *telling you*. As a father first and foremost, kid. You need to take care of yourself if you wanna be on the ice."

"Yes sir," Shane nods, too exhausted to feel embarrassed.

Wiebe nods, patting Shane's shoulder before sending him on his way. The rest of the guys are already hitting the showers, all caught up in their own conversations while Shane sheds his gear, tiredness already nipping at his skin. For once he's hoping he'll be hit with a fucking fever or something so that he can go ahead and say, *ah, okay. That's what that was.* Taking a nap would probably help speed along recovery—he hasn't been sleeping all too well either. That could be it.

He looks up to find Rozanov coming out of the showers, a towel wrapped low around his waist, his wet hair pushed back with his hand as he laughs at something one of the other guys says, his pecs jumping at the motion. It's a little infuriating how attractive he is, at how he commands attention wherever he goes. He knows Rozanov's got a fucking roster of girls (and probably guys, though mostly secretive) out there. He knows he's probably just another name on the list, but the rumors all simmered down in the last couple of months. The guys say Rozanov isn't as fun as he used to be, doesn't give them a run for their money when they're out at the bar picking girls up.

Rozanov's head turns, eyes finding Shane's quickly. Shane looks away and grabs his own towel from his locker, the anger prickling at his chest when he sees Rozanov roll the towel down further like he knows Shane can see him in his peripheral, like he wants him to regard him in all his marble carved glory, like he knows everyone fucking wants him just as badly.

The hairs on the back of Shane's neck prickle as a whisper brushes against them when Rozanov walks by, leaning in and quietly, for only Shane's ears, saying: "See you tonight."

In an instant, the anger settles, replaced by content. Smugness. The corner of Shane's mouth tilts up for a fleeting moment before he wills it away and heads for the showers.



Though Shane will never admit it, no one knows him quite as well as Rozanov.

On and off the ice, it's like there's something telepathic there. Always in tune, always paying attention in some way shape or form. Shane can admit with a good chunk of confidence that he knows Rozanov just as well. He knows when he's pissed, impatient. When he's about to drop gloves, and when he's simply putting on a show but has no intention to throw any punches.

Rozanov knows when things get a little too tunneled for Shane. He knows when a chirp is nothing more than a chirp versus when he's cutting through to the bone.

He knows that when he kisses Shane just below his pulse point, he'll keen, head falling back against the mattress giving him more access. He anticipates the way Shane gasps, arches into the touch and turns his head, and he's right there waiting to catch his mouth into a heavy and sloppy kiss.

This is the only time Shane can turn his brain off almost all the way, function on blissful autopilot while Rozanov's heated palms paw at his chest, down the ridges of his abdomen

until he's wrapping a hand around Shane's erection, smirking against his mouth when Shane gasps in relief.

"Come on," Shane manages through gritted teeth, curling his hand into Rozanov's curls and pulling the way he knows he likes, satisfied when he can feel Rozanov's mouth go slack against his skin. "You're taking too fucking long—"

"So impatient," Rozanov chastises through a hitch in his breath he tries to hide by pressing short kisses to the corner of Shane's mouth. "What if I want it slow tonight, hm?" He licks up Shane's neck, nips at his throat. "What if I want to take my time with you?"

It makes Shane shudder against Rozanov's heavy and bare body on top of him, and although the thought makes his dick throb in Rozanov's grasp, he shakes his head. "You don't want that."

Rozanov hums, teeth sinking into the junction between Shane's shoulder and neck. "What do I want?"

"You wanna fuck me," Shane starts, swallowing when Rozanov pulls away to look him in the eye, getting him off with dragging pulls, making him trip over his words. "You—you wanna fuck me hard, fast. You don't wanna take your time."

"That sounds like something *you* want, Hollander," Rozanov points out, and he's right. Shane wants it rough, wants to feel it tomorrow when he's in his own bed missing out on practice. He wants something to remember, something to think back on when he shoves his hands past the waistband of his pajama pants. The thought of it makes him whimper, swallowed by Rozanov's mouth on his again, his hand working faster against Shane. "You want me to be mean? Treat you like a *slut*?"

A moan tears from Shane's throat instinctively. There's no point in hiding it anymore. He nods feverishly, a small smile flickering on his flushed face when Rozanov manhandles him onto his stomach, pushing his head into the mattress and fumbling for the lube beneath his mismatched pillows.

From there, it's all a hazy and lustful blur. Rozanov's fingers dig into the flesh of Shane's thighs as he pries them apart, fucks him with two fingers until Shane is rutting against the sheets desperately. When he notices, he forces Shane to pull himself on all fours, chastising him for trying to get himself off selfishly. It makes Shane leak pathetically, his cock aching with neglect as Rozanov works a third finger into him, curving them just right and pulling embarrassing noises from the pit of Shane's stomach.

Finally, *finally*, Rozanov is pressing himself into Shane, the heat of his cock filling Shane until he swears he can feel it in his throat. His legs tremble as he tries to hold himself up only for Rozanov to throw some mercy, pushing a flat palm between Shane's shoulder blades, forcing him back flush against the mattress while he fucks into him roughly. Shane's hands clutch at the sheets and comforter, drool pooling out of his gaping mouth as he curses, gasps, asks for it *harder, harder, harder—fuck, just like that, Rozanov*.

A string of Russian words spitfire from Rozanov's mouth, a telltale sign that he's close. But he's stubborn, and that stubbornness is sometimes the best thing quality he has, especially when it comes to fucking like this. He always makes sure Shane is finishing before him, holding off on his own orgasm to make sure Shane's hunger is sated first and foremost.

"Fuck, Hollander," he grunts, shoving Shane's head into the mattress for a few seconds before he tangles his finger in his raven hair, using him as leverage as he quickens his pace, his thighs slapping against Shane's ass enough for the skin there to bloom an angry red.

"I'm close," Shane manages to garble through his moans. "Rozanov, I'm close—*fuck fuck fuck*—I'm g'nna—gonna come—"

Rozanov's hand moves to the back of Shane's neck, squeezing just enough for there to be a muted pressure. It's all it takes for Shane to spill onto the sheets, his body tensing for a moment before he starts to tremble, his orgasm stretching as Rozanov slows down, fucks back into him slowly and roughly.

He can hear Rozanov cursing, can feel him pull out and barely manages to surface from his post-orgasm bliss to slur, "In my mouth—finish in my mouth."

"Jesus Christ, Hollander," Rozanov hisses, flipping Shane around and shuffling up, knees on either side of Shane's arms as he shoves the tip into Shane's mouth, holding his slack jaw as he fucks into his mouth once, twice, barely a third time before coming inside. A drop slides out of the side of Shane's mouth as he closes it and swallows the rest, leaving the small mess to be cleaned by Rozanov licking the corner of his mouth and then into his empty mouth, exhaling shakily when he seemingly tastes himself on Shane's tongue.

After, Rozanov smacks a flat palm against Shane's stomach in the way he always does, like a sort of punctuation to this activity, signaling the end. He gets up, goes to the bathroom to get a damp rag and tosses it right onto Shane's face.

Shane scrunches his nose, plucking the rag off and cleaning his stomach and doing his best to get some of his come off the sheets.

"I will clean them tomorrow," Rozanov says flippantly, plopping down on the bed and sitting against the headboard. He reaches over and grabs the pack of cigarettes sitting on his nightstand, placing one of the sticks between his lips and lighting it with one hand in a way that shouldn't be so attractive.

"You're disgusting," Shane says, rolling over and off the bed, swaying on his feet slight. A flash of lightheadedness makes him blink, eyebrows furrowing as he straightens himself, taking a moment to get a bearing on his surroundings. Rozanov ten thousand (four) roommates should be getting back any second, sexiled and knowing better than to not listen to Rozanov when he tells them to get the fuck out of the apartment between the hours of eight to eleven. Meaning they should be back soon, and Shane has to get the fuck out of here, but he can't help but take another second to blink away the weird feeling.

"What are you doing?" Rozanov asks unhelpfully, annoyance clipping his tone. "Get the fuck out, Cliff texted and said they were on their way."

"Fuck off," Shane says back, though it isn't as sharp as he'd like it to be. He doesn't look over his shoulder as gathers his clothes strewn on the floor, tossing Rozanov's own garments aside when he accidentally picks them up and ignoring it when the fucker tells him he might as well go put them in the laundry basket. By the time Shane is dressed, the tiredness nestled in his body all day has nearly consumed him. His movements are slow, lethargic, as he pats himself down to make sure he has his keys and wallet. "Alright," he says eventually. "See you."

There's a beat of silence that Shane ignores, reaching for the doorknob of the bedroom door. Then, Rozanov's voice is vibrating in the air, stopping Shane. "Are you okay?"

Shane blinks, snapped out of his muted thoughts. He looks over his shoulder, at Rozanov who is staring at him with furrowed brows. Genuine concern, maybe. "I don't know," Shane admits, backtracking when Rozanov's eyes widen and he starts to sit up, putting his cigarette out in the glass of water on the nightstand. "I mean—I'm *fine*. Just feel off, that's all. I don't think it's contagious, I'm probably just, like, sleep deprived or something."

Rozanov's eyes flicker from Shane's face down to his feet and back up. "You are going to practice tomorrow?"

Shane shakes his head, eyes drifting down to the floor. "No. Coach told me to sit it out and get some rest."

After a few seconds, Rozanov nods stiffly. "Okay," he says simply, plucking another cigarette out of the pack, pushing it between his plush lips. "Bye."

Shane gives him a lazy wave, finally turning around and hurrying out of the house before the others can arrive.



It doesn't go away the next day. Or the day after that, or the day *after that*.

Again, Shane wakes up to a wave of nausea punching him in the gut, sending him stumbling into the bathroom of his small apartment and throwing up what is left of last night's dinner and then bile when there's nothing left. Not only that, but instead of losing weight, he's gained five fucking pounds. When the nausea isn't there, he finds himself hungry even when he just ate. He's always a little more pissed off than usual, even at people who aren't Ilya Rozanov. Yesterday, he snapped at Hayden for standing too close to him and breathing a little too loud. He also snapped at their poor goalie, Wyatt Hayes, when he was eating a breakfast burrito that smelled like fucking eggs and nearly made Shane vomit on the spot.

None of it makes sense, and he can't help but realize something is wrong. He falls back on his ass, panting as he stares at the ceiling with a flare of panic clawing at his chest and throat.

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and Yuna Hollander is his emergency contact for a reason.

She answers on the second ring, her voice bright and cheery as she greets him. "Good morning, honey! I was just thinking about you, your dad saw that donut shop you used to love when you were a kid and was thinking maybe this weekend we should stop by with some if you're free, what do you think?"

The thought of eating makes his stomach churn, and a weak groan slips past his lips as he shakes his head. "No—that's—I can't. No sugar."

There's a pause, and for a moment he's sure she's going to tell him what she always does about not being so strict. "Shane," she says firmly. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," Shane answers, voice cracking as his eyes burn. He curses under his breath, pinching the bridge of his nose to keep himself from fucking crying. He hasn't cried in so long, he doesn't want to start now, but *fuck*. He's scared. "It's—I've been sick for the last few weeks, mom and it's—it's not getting better. I don't know what to do, I've been playing like shit, I can't fucking sleep but I'm tired all the time—"

"Okay, okay, breathe. Honey, you need to breathe," she says over him. The sound of her shuffling around is loud, but it gives him something to focus on instead of the panic in his chest. "Listen, I'm going to make you an appointment, okay? Just a check up so we can at least get a referral. I'm sure you're okay, sweetie. Stress will do crazy things to your body, so I just need you to *relax*."

Shane can't help but huff out a laugh. "*You're* telling me to relax?"

"I know, I know," she laughs. "Cut from the same cloth, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. I've heard it all from your father, honey. But really, take the day and maybe meditate, that usually helps you out, right?"

"Yeah," Shane nods, inhaling through his nose, counting to five before he exhales. "Okay. I can do that."

"Perfect. You'll be getting an email confirmation for an appointment tomorrow morning, around eight. Can you make that?"

"Yeah, we don't have practice until five," he tells her. He takes another slow breath. He'll be fine, it'll all get resolved soon.



He goes to practice after his classes anyway, though he speaks with Coach Wiebe privately, asking if it's okay if he sits this one out but still observes from the bench. Luckily, Wiebe is a decent person and lets him know that it shouldn't be a problem. When the rest of the guys spot him on the bench instead of stretching on the ice, the questions come rapidly, and Shane does his best to answer them all.

Yeah, I'm fine.

No, I'm not dying.

Just feeling sick still, don't wanna push it.

It seems to be uninteresting enough for them to leave him alone and get on with practice. Rozanov doesn't say anything, surprisingly. No chirp when he does a double take and makes eye contact with Shane. No questions when he doesn't go down to join the rest of the team. Instead, he's quiet throughout practice, shooting glances that he probably doesn't realize Shane notices.

When they're wrapping up, Shane makes sure to tell them good job as they file off the ice. Rozanov comes last, stopping right when he reaches Shane.

"Good job," Shane says instead of *fuck off* because at the end of the day, he's a good captain.

"You are still sick," Rozanov points out unhelpfully.

Shane shrugs, looking away and out toward the rink. "Yeah, it's whatever."

"Not whatever," Rozanov says, surprising Shane slightly. "You should see doctor. Is not... normal. To be sick for long time."

"Obviously," Shane scoffs. It's not like Rozanov knows how much Shane has been fucking tormented by this, terrified of going to sleep, wondering if he's slowly dying, if one day he's just not gonna wake up. When Rozanov doesn't make a smart-ass remark back, Shane rolls his eyes. "I have an appointment to get checked tomorrow morning, so yeah. It'll be fine, I'll be back on the ice and you won't be so fucking bored."

It makes Rozanov smile, something that sparks a flame in Shane's chest, quickly blown out within the second. "Eh. Maybe. Or maybe you never get better and I can become better, more sexy captain."

"Go fuck yourself, Rozanov," Shane says, shoving at Rozanov's shoulder as he walks past.

"It is more fun when you do it, Hollander!" he calls as he walks away.

Shane smiles to himself, ducking his head down.

©

8

Medical spaces have always been intimidating. Ever since Shane could remember, a sense of dread filled his chest the moment he was sitting between white walls, inhaling the scent of sterilization until it felt like his mind went numb.

Now, he sits on an exam table where the nurse had left him after asking him a few questions about his medical history before pausing, reading something over and over and over again on his chart before giving him a delayed smile and promising that she would be back. He doesn't want to call her a liar, but she doesn't come back. Someone else joins him in the room, this woman much older, grey and thick curls pulled away from her face and into a ponytail. She's

wearing dark blue scrubs, a white lab coat, and has a stethoscope around her neck, and the badge hanging from her hip lets him know that she's a doctor.

"Shane Hollander?" she asks as she shuts the door behind her. Shane nods as she turns to face him with a smile. "Hi, I'm Dr. Hana Seif. It's nice to meet you, I see here that you've been experiencing some symptoms you're concerned about. Do you mind going through those again, just so I know what we're looking at?"

"That's fine," Shane says, clearing his throat, hands intertwined between his knees, clenching as he tries to remember the gist of what he told one of the nurses. "So, it's, um... I started noticing that I was waking up really nauseous about three, maybe four weeks ago. At first I could push it down pretty easily, but it started getting worse. I play hockey, so I'm on a pretty strict diet right now, so I haven't been eating anything out of the ordinary. Rice, salmon, vegetables. No sugar, no alcohol, no drugs. I thought maybe I caught a bug—I haven't been sleeping that well either—but no matter what I do I just keep waking up exhausted and sick."

Dr. Seif nods, sitting down on a swivel chair, crossing her legs. "How long does the nausea typically last?"

"Usually for a few hours after I wake up," Shane tells her. "I skip breakfast because I can't stomach anything until it's lunchtime."

"I see," she nods. "And are there any other concerns?"

Shane sighs. "Like I said, I haven't been sleeping well. I'm—I feel like it's making me irritable. And I've—I've noticed some weight gain that isn't normal. I'm not bulking, if anything I should be losing weight, right? I haven't been reaching my typical calorie intake, plus I've still been playing while I can. It just... it doesn't really make sense."

She says nothing for several seconds, eyes flickering across his chart. "It certainly would be very odd in normal circumstances," she starts before flipping the page. "However, it says on your chart that you have a genetic mutation causing the possibility of masculinum graviditate."

"Yeah," Shane says after a beat, clearing his throat as his face burns with embarrassment. He hasn't been asked about that in years. Doctors tend to ignore it, assuming that it isn't relevant to whatever it is that brings Shane into their office, but he supposes this is different. He's usually never sick, so they've gotta tick all the boxes, but it's still fucking weird.

The doctor hums, reading the chart again and pushing her glasses up with the tip of her middle finger. "Have you been sexually active with a man recently, Mr. Hollander?" When Shane's mouth drops, spilling out a rather pathetic croak, she smiles kindly. "This is all confidential, and above all, this is a safe space, Mr. Hollander. I'd prefer it if we were honest with each other so you can receive the best care possible."

Shane swallows back the mortified *oh god* on the tip of his tongue, hanging his head down and bringing shaky hand up to pinch at the bridge of his nose. He nods, just barely, and his lip trembles. "Uh, y-yeah. Yes, I've um... with—with a man."

"Okay," she says kindly, writing something down. "When was the last time?"

"Four days ago," Shane admits weakly. He can't bear to look at her, even when she tries shooting him another smile.

"And before that?"

"It's, um," Shane sighs, straightening up and dropping his head back to stare at the fluorescent lights until they blur in his vision. "It's—it's pretty much weekly. Has been for a few months now."

Some more scratching of pen against paper. She taps the end of the pen against the clipboard, swivels in the chair. "Is there any sort of contraception you use regularly?"

Again, Shane closes his eyes, watches the burnt blots of red and yellow and orange dance behind his eyelids. How does he tell her that just before summer break, Rozanov ran out of condoms. That in his haste and impatience, Shane begged Ilya to just fuck him, knowing that their physicals and screenings came back recent and clean. That they haven't so much as thought of using condoms since then because yeah, maybe Shane has some fucked up genetic thing that effects less than 5% of males, but it wasn't like it was ever going to be *him* that actually faced the consequences. It was still rare, always heard as a bat-shit crazy story from a friend of a friend who had an uncle who—

"We're careful," Shane answers back, breath caught in his throat. It's only half the truth and it weighs down on his tongue, into his throat as it clicks.

She must know what he means because she nods with her lips pressed together. "Okay. Thank you for being honest. I think we can start with some blood work and a urine sample, okay? Just to rule out the possibility—"

"That's fine," Shane says over her. He just wants to get it over with, wants to see the negative results and figure out what he needs to do to get back to normal and on the ice again.

With that, she reaches over and pats his leg in what is probably supposed to be comfort, but only makes the panic in Shane's chest flare up further. She says something Shane misses, but he gets the general gist of it. The nurse will be coming back with a cup for his urine and then after that they'll take some blood.

He isn't sure when exactly, but slowly it starts to feel like some sort of dream. Like he's watching himself from outside his own body as he does as he's told. Eventually, as he's sitting on the exam table and waiting, waiting, waiting, he comes to just as the door opens with a click. He snaps his head up, swallowing shakily as Dr. Seif turns and offers him a careful smile before sitting back in the swivel chair, holding what looks like a packet and two brochures.

"I'm sorry to keep you waiting," she starts with another carefully tailored pull of her mouth. "I know it's a little nerveracking to have to wait so long, but I do believe we have an explanation for your symptoms."

"Okay," Shane says quickly, the pit of dread nearly choking him. This is good. He's gonna be fine. "So, um. What, do I just get prescribed something or—" He cuts himself off when he

watches an unfamiliar expression flicker across her face. "What is it?"

"I'm sure you've already had masculum graviditate explained to you more times than you can count," Dr. Seif says with a small laugh, just barely there. Shane doesn't join her in humor. The floor seems to fall beneath his feet as he stares at her, eyes blurring with wetness. "But I always find it best to explain, seeing as it is something that is incredibly rare and it may be difficult to process. Typically, the male reproductive system works to maintain, create, and transport sperm to, ultimately, transport it into a female reproductive system. With masculum graviditate, the function becomes different when male sperm comes into the system from an outside source. The mutated epididymis branches from the testicles and to the additional reproductive system that formed in utero, as I'm sure you know. From there, the egg gets fertilized, and—"

"I'm pregnant," Shane says over her, voice barely audible through his cracking whisper. His gaze is locked onto the floor, the reflection of the fluorescent lights wavering as he struggles to focus. He manages to choke out a breath, the noise grating against his ears as his breaths become thicker, refusing to enter his burning lungs. "That's—that's what you're saying, right? I—I'm fucking *pregnant*?"

Dr. Seif presses her lips together, her eyebrows curving almost sympathetically. "Yes. Eight weeks today. Typically, male symptoms come later, which is why it feels like it hit you all at once so suddenly."

Shane squeezes his eyes shut, a dull roar flooding his mind as her words refuse to crack through his skull, but still linger in his ears. *Eight weeks. Eight fucking weeks.* "What the fuck," he finds himself saying, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. "What the fuck—*what the fuck.*"

"I understand that you currently play hockey," Dr. Seif says, caution heavy in her tone. "For now, it's best to step away from that until you decide on what your next steps are going to look like. Any trauma to your body will not only be a risk for the fetus's health, but for yours as well." He drops his hands, watching as she places the packet of papers and the two brochures beside his leg. "You have choices, Mr. Hollander, and you have time to decide. There's no pressure. Is there anyone we should contact for you? Does the other father—"

"No!" Shane bursts, hands out in front of him like that will stop anything from happening. She startles at the sudden movement, making him realize that he's being frantic. He drops his arms, breath trembling as he struggles to catch it. He hadn't even thought of the fact that he's not the only one that led him here. "He doesn't—he isn't—"

A sudden realization crashes into him, curling unpleasantly in his stomach.

Ilya Rozanov is the fucking father.

Dr. Seif is already pushing the trashcan beneath his chin when he vomits.

There are four missed calls from his mom by the time Shane gets back to his apartment. It's late in the day. He skipped his classes, skipped practice, the doctor note heavy in his backpack as he trudged into his apartment after the appointment and laid back on the sofa, staring at the ceiling until his eyes drooped shut.

Even with the exhaustion, he didn't sleep. His mind was loud, every event of the day crashing over him, refusing to let him come up for air. By the time he's pulling himself up, there are tear tracks staining his face and neck and a pain in his chest from the crushing weight of the back to back panic attacks he finds himself having after every single one of the missed phone calls.

He doesn't even know what to say to her. *Hey mom, you know that one Russian asshole you hate and I hate? Yeah, we've been sleeping together for almost two years. And he fucks me raw. And I never told him I could get pregnant because I have a weird and hidden god-complex and thought I was fucking invincible. I just found out I am, in fact, human. And I'm pregnant. And he's the father.*

The sheer thought of the conversation makes him push his face into his hands, a groan muffled into the skin as he drags them down his face. The stupid packet on prenatal health is crumbled on his coffee table. He had read it and started hysterically laughing almost immediately when he realized he accidentally conditioned his body to be in perfect shape to accept and carry out a pregnancy. The laughter turned into wheezing breaths until he was gripping the papers almost desperately before tossing them aside.

Now, he stares at the two brochures. One on the next steps to a healthy pregnancy journey for men. It's in blue instead of the pink one meant for women, he noticed that when he left and saw the neatly organized brochures on the wall. The pink ones needed to be restocked, and the blue ones had a film of dust coating the front.

The second brochure is neutral. Greys, reds, some green, some blues. *Your Choice Matters*, it says. Shane turns it over in his hand until he slices the side of his finger on the edge of the paper. The blood swells into a bead that breaks as it slides down. He throws both brochures on the floor near the trash can after, crawling into his bed and turning off his phone.

Fuck, he thinks. It's all he can think, really.



For three days he misses his classes and practice. Of course he's not stupid. He sends emails to his professors, lets them know he has a doctor's note he will attach as soon as he can. He texts Coach Wiebe that he's still not feeling well and he'll explain in more detail when he comes back. Coach Wiebe sends him a simple, *get well soon* and he's able to push that worry away for a little bit.

He makes sure to call his mom and tell her with a dry throat that it's just a stomach bug. He needs to rest and hydrate and he'll be as good as knew. As much as it pains him to lie to her, he knows it'll probably pain her more if he tells her that things actually aren't that okay, and he can't do that to her. Not over the phone, at least. That's another issue to worry about later.

Hayden texts him a few times asking if he's fine. Shane replies with a thumbs up, promising he'll be back soon. He gets a few more texts from his teammates here and there, all wishing him well, some chirping that it seems like he's actually not so perfect after all. He replies to most of them. There are a few from Rozanov sitting unanswered in the heap of it all.

Rozanov

4 days ago

where the fuck r u

still sick?? if i get sick i swear to god hollander i am going to bite your dick off

actually no. no dick in my mouth for u.

3 days ago

making boys do suicides >:) they wish u were back. russian terminator is brutal

made pike throw up hahahahahaaaaaa

everyone thinks i am villain come back so we can hate u more

1 day ago

seriously where the fuck ar e u hollander??

coach says u are still sick. do u need anything?

i will go ask your mother ;)

Today

hollander. is not funny anymore.

are you okay?

Shane turns his phone over, shoving it under his pillow and pulling himself up to go shower. It feels like a constant battle taking care of himself now, knowing that his body is different, changing. He feels like a foreigner in his own skin, barely recognizing his reflection, barely able to stomach the thought of looking at himself. When he showers, he scrubs his skin raw, hesitating over the space between his belly-button and his pubic bone. He finds himself staring at the area, the way it isn't as flat as it used to be, the slight curve to it.

His throat aches, nearly choking him as he forces himself to look away.

When he gets out, dressed in a dark blue hoodie and sweatpants, he makes his way to the small kitchen area, leaning against the counter as he stares into the nearly empty pantry without an ounce of hunger.

Before he can decide to choke down a piece of plain multigrain toast, several consecutive raps sound against his front door. He pauses, turning his head slowly, eyebrows furrowing as he racks his brain for answers. His mom wouldn't go out of her way to check on him, not when he told her he was fine, even if it was a lie. He's not expecting a package. Hayden would never show up unannounced, he knows Shane too well to do something annoying like that.

Luckily, he doesn't have to rack his brain for much longer because a booming, accented voice yells: "Open the fucking door, Hollander!"

Shane stumbles back slightly, eyes widening as his mind catches up with reality. Rozanov is pounding on his fucking door. Shane should probably talk to him, but that's the last thing he wants to deal with right now. Maybe if he pretends he's not—

"I know you are here!" Rozanov yells, fist colliding with the door again. "I will break this down, I don't care. Answer the fucking door!"

"Jesus Christ," Shane mumbles, rubbing a hand over his face, knowing that Rozanov isn't bluffing. Shane watched him shoulder a bedroom door open at some frat party once when there was a girl in there calling for help. Fortunately, it was all consensual, but he's seen what Rozanov can do when desperate times call for desperate measures. So, he squares his shoulders the best he can and treads to the front door, unlocking it and swinging it open. "What the fuck do you want, Rozanov?"

Rozanov's eyebrows shoot up, like he wasn't expecting to get an answer. His expression shifts quickly, the corner of his mouth tilting up. "Ah, he lives." A pause. "Jesus, you look like shit."

"Thanks, asshole," Shane huffs, rolling his eyes and leaning against the doorframe.

"Is not mean, just the truth," Rozanov says simply, hands in the pocket of his hoodie. The frigid, November air paints the tip of his nose and apples of his cheek pink, even with the added warmth of the beanie on his head. He says nothing for a moment, pressing his lips together and ducking down slightly to meet Shane's eyes. "But, um... You are okay, yes? Coach is being very, ah... secretive? Maybe? He will not tell me what is wrong with you."

"Nothing's wrong with me," Shane says, although it doesn't come out as confident as he'd like it to be. Rozanov blinks, the corners of his mouth turning down, not believing Shane in the slightest. It's then that Shane realizes how much tension he's holding beneath the tiredness, beneath all the uncertainty. As much as he wants to close the door and continue spiraling, he knows that isn't fair. This is just as much Rozanov's concern as it is his own. He has the right to know even if Shane wishes it was anyone else in this situation with him. "You should, um... You should come inside."

If Rozanov is caught off guard by the sudden request, he doesn't show it. Instead, he complies, stepping over the threshold and pulling off his beanie, tossing it onto the coffee table alongside the crumbled packet, completely oblivious to its contents as he takes a few steps before turning around and grinning at Shane. "You are feeling better then, yes?"

"Sort of," Shane mumbles, sighing and gesturing toward the sofa. "You should, um... Maybe you should sit down."

"Mm, no," Rozanov says, stepping toward Shane, placing his hands on his waist. The touch burns in the best and worst way possible, but Shane is weak and sways into the warmth. "I do not think you want that."

"I'm serious," Shane tries, eyes fluttering shut when Rozanov starts to nose at his cheek, lips brushing against his jaw. It's hard to concentrate like this. It almost makes him laugh—of fucking *course* it would be Rozanov that got them into this whole situation in the first place. He puts his palms on Rozanov's chest and pushes enough to gain some space. "Rozanov, I'm trying to talk to you."

"Too much talking," Rozanov whines, leaning forward to kiss Shane only to miss when Shane turns his face. "Come on, Hollander, what is the issue?"

What is the issue? What is the fucking issue? Shane shoves him back more forcefully, nearly seething. "The issue is you fucking—you—*god*. This is all *your* fault, asshole!"

"My fault?" Rozanov repeats blandly, pointing at himself. "This is my fault?"

"Yeah, it is," Shane snaps, nearly hysterical. "If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be—this wouldn't —"

"You are making no sense, Hollander. Maybe you need my cock, yes? Will make you think more clearly—"

"I don't fucking need your cock, you already—" Shane reels back, swallowing back the anger and gathering himself, voice falling as his gaze flickers to meet Rozanov's. Bite the bullet. "You fucking knocked me up."

There's a pause before the corner of Rozanov's mouth tilts up, words nearly purring through his grin. "Ah. You are trying to turn me on, yes?"

"No—*no*, Rozanov," Shane says, swatting Rozanov's hands away from his waist. He looks down, refusing to fucking cry. He's tired of fucking crying. "You—I'm fucking pregnant, asshole. And it's yours."

Rozanov's mouth drops open and then close and then open again. He shakes his head slightly before laughing. "Ah, last time I checked you have dick and balls."

"You're a fucking idiot," Shane hisses, turning away to start pacing. Rozanov stays planted in his spot, eyebrows slowly creasing as the silence stretches, as Shane's footsteps become quicker. "They didn't teach you shit in Russia, did they?"

"They did," Rozanov says eventually. His voice is quieter, in disbelief. "I do not remember the name, but they told us it was, um... Unnatural, yes? That if it happened, it meant you were... doing things maybe you should not be doing."

"Like sleeping with men," Shane finishes, huffing out a small and bitter laugh. Rozanov nods, just barely, his mouth tight. "Is that what you think? That I'm a fucking freak?"

Rozanov is shaking his head before Shane can even finish the sentence. "No," he says firmly. "Of course not. I do not agree with that bullshit, is why I am here in lovely fucking Canada, no? I had to get out of there, I—" he pauses, shaking his head again. "Does not matter. Is... you are sure? That you are...?"

"Yeah," Shane breathes, pausing his pacing in front of the sofa. He plops down onto the cushions, staring ahead at the black TV screen. "Went to the doctor a few days ago. They said I'm eight weeks. Did tests and everything."

Rozanov hesitates before he sits on the other side of the sofa, his hands on his knees. "And you are sure that it, um... it's *mine*?"

Shane snaps his head to look at him. "Are you fucking kidding me?"

"I need to be sure!" Rozanov defends, raising his hands.

"I haven't been with another guy in over a year," Shane admits. "They said conception was around late September or early October. It's definitely you, Rozanov."

"Okay," Rozanov says after a moment, wiping the corner of his mouth with his thumb as he stares at the sofa cushions. "So you are..."

"Knocked up," Shane finishes ungracefully, punctuated with a clumsy nod. "Yeah. Unfortunately."

Suddenly, Rozanov straightens up, his eyes wide. "Is—I was..." he trails off, throat bobbling as he swallows, mouth opening with a slight tremble as he speaks quietly. "I was not gentle with you last time, Hollander. Did I—?"

"No, *no*," Shane says quickly, picking up on the unsaid concern quickly. "You didn't hurt me or the—yeah. We're fine. I think they would have noticed if something was wrong. Maybe."

"Maybe," Rozanov repeats blandly. "So you are not even sure—"

"There's an ultrasound scheduled in four weeks," Shane tells him. "I'll be sure then."

A long stretch of silence passes. Rozanov's eyes dance around aimlessly in thought. He picks at the fabric of his sweatpants, pinching it until it folds. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," Shane admits softly. "I can either keep it or terminate, but it's—I don't know. I have no clue. What do you think—"

"Is not my choice," Rozanov tells him firmly but not unkindly. He finally meets Shane's eyes. "This is not my body that is changing, Hollander. I cannot tell you want to do. I cannot be selfish like this."

"But if you had a choice?"

Rozanov's mouth falls open, words caught on his tongue. He shrugs. "I have always wanted to be a father," he says, almost inaudible. "But it does not matter. What are you thinking?"

It's a loaded question for more than one reason. He's always wanted to be a dad, too. Always thought about what kind of parent he'd be. If he'd be strict but loving like his mom. If he would inherit his father's easiness and optimism.

But that would mean giving up hockey, maybe even his education. Having a whole other commitment that matters more than anything else should. It would mean a lot of change, change he can't even begin to imagine.

"I don't know," Shane answers honestly. "It's kind of hard to think right now."

There's a beat of silence before Rozanov mutters curse. "Yes, sorry. I... I cannot imagine. I'm sorry." Shane wants to say *it's not your fault*, but he knows that's not true. "Your parents... do they know?"

The question lands like a left hook to his gut. Shane drops his head into his hands with a groan. "Fuck. No, no I haven't—I completely forgot about that. God—oh *god*."

"They will not be good about it?"

"No, I mean—they won't, like, hate me," Shane rambles into his palms. "They know I'm gay, but they definitely don't know I've been having sex with you, so. I can't imagine what they're gonna say when I unload all of that plus the fact that you fucking knocked me up—fuck. This—this is gonna—"

"Hey," Rozanov says, suddenly kneeling in front of Shane, right between his knees. He pulls Shane's hands away from his face, forces him to look right into Rozanov's light eyes dancing between his in concern. "Hey, you are okay, yes? Do you want me to be with you when you tell them?"

Shane inhales. "Would you?"

"Of course," Rozanov says easily. "This is... this is both of our problem now, yes? I will not just leave you. I am not an asshole like that."

"Could've fooled me."

"Ha," Rozanov huffs. "Yes. Maybe."

Shane presses his lips together, closing his eyes and forcing himself to take a few slow breaths. "You could if you wanted, you know."

He doesn't have to look to know Rozanov is staring at him in confusion. "Wanted to what?"

"Leave," Shane says, opening his eyes and finding Rozanov's confusion melting away into something softer, tinted with hurt. "You could leave if you wanted to. I'm not gonna force you to deal with this if you don't want to—"

"No," Rozanov says over him, shaking his head repeatedly. "That is not—I would not do that. Is not okay, I am—I am not a terrible person, Hollander. Don't—"

"Okay," Shane says quickly, forcing Rozanov to shut his mouth. If he looks close enough, he can make out the tremble in his mouth. So he looks away, down at the floor where Rozanov is still kneeling. "Sorry. I didn't mean—I know you're not a bad person. I just didn't want to put so much pressure on you."

"Is not too much pressure," Rozanov says quietly, no longer trying to meet Shane's eyes. "It is... responsibility."

"Yeah," Shane agrees. Rozanov wipes at his own eyes before getting back up, turning away from Shane and standing in front of the television. "I'm really tired," he finds himself saying. "So I think I'm gonna head to bed. Um. I'll—I'll let you know when we can meet up with my parents. I'll text you or something. I probably won't be at practice anymore, so, yeah."

"Okay," Rozanov says eventually. "I will make sure no one asks stupid questions. And they respect your privacy."

"Thanks," Shane says honestly. He sighs, letting his shoulders drop. Admittedly, it feels nice getting some of this off his chest. "Thanks for being, um. Nice, I guess."

"You do not need to thank me," Rozanov tells him. He gives Shane a tight lipped smile. "Get some rest, Hollander."

"You too," Shane says, not watching as Rozanov leaves, the sound of the door shutting amplified in the silence. When he's sure he's alone, he falls back into the sofa and stares at the ceiling. "Holy shit," he mumbles before pressing his palms into his eyes in hopes of maybe waking up from a weird nightmare.

Instead, he falls asleep on the sofa and wakes up the next morning with an ache in his neck.



According to Rozanov, the only people who have been asking about him in the last couple of days are J.J., who is understanding in giving Shane some space, and Hayden, who is too persistent. Shane should have figured—he's been avoiding them like the fucking plague until he gets some of this whole situation sorted out, and Hayden has the tendency to overreact. First and foremost, he needs to talk to his parents.

Fortunately and unfortunately, that day is tomorrow.

He thinks about it in-between classes, when he gets home, when he's lying on the sofa watching reruns of some shitty sitcom from the early 2000s. It doesn't occur to him that the entire day has passed in a blur until there's a knock at his door.

Shane scrambles up, muting the TV, slowly getting up and contemplating hiding in his room until they go away.

"It's just me, Hollander!" Rozanov calls through the door.

Shane sags with relief, hurrying to open the door, greeted with Rozanov holding what looks like a takeout bag. "What are you doing?"

"Checking on you," Rozanov says simply, shouldering his way in and placing the bag on the coffee table, turning to give Shane a once over. "You look better."

Shane ignores him, tilting his chin toward the food. "What's in there?"

"Dinner," Rozanov says.

"I can take care of myself—"

"Yes but sometimes you are so bad at it," Rozanov tells him, already toeing off his shoes and shrugging off his coat, putting both items in their respective places on the shoe rack and coat rack by the door. He goes to sit on the sofa, picking up the remote and unmuting the television. When Shane doesn't follow, he raises an eyebrow. "What are you doing? Come eat. I got you boring chicken and rice. There is broccoli too, but I think is seasoned so maybe you will die, I don't know."

"I don't need you to do this," Shane snaps, crossing his arms over his chest. It's one thing to get a text every fucking hour asking how he's doing, it's another when Rozanov shows up to his door trying to feed him like he's a fucking damsel in distress. "I already ate."

"You could eat more," Rozanov answers, not moving his gaze away from the TV. When Shane doesn't move, he groans, rolling his eyes. "You are so annoying."

"You're the one who came to my place!"

"Yes because I knew you would not come to mine," Rozanov argues back. "Why are you so defensive? I cannot be nice anymore?"

Shane nearly fumes, anger nipping at his skin. "I don't need you fucking babying me, Rozanov."

"It is not you I am babying!" Rozanov snaps before shutting his mouth, closing his eyes for a moment and taking a breath. Shane realizes what he means quickly, eyes widening as Rozanov shakes his head and starts to get up. "You are right. I should not be bothering you —"

Shane stops him with a hand around his bicep. As annoying as he finds this, he knows that all Rozanov is doing is showing support in whatever way he can, even if it's barreling into Shane's home and forcing him to eat. It's not just about Shane anymore, is it? There's something more now. Something made up of the two of them. He's in the right to care a little more than Shane is used to.

"Don't," Shane finally manages to say, swallowing back his protests. "Stay. I'm just—I'm a little stressed about my parents. Seeing them tomorrow."

The tension in Rozanov's face softens into sympathy and understanding. "Ah, yes. That will be a lot for you."

"For us," Shane corrects, letting go of his bicep and sitting on the other end, accepting the container of food he's handed. He takes several bites, hating that it's actually really good. He hadn't realized how hungry he was. "They're gonna hound you too, you know."

"I can handle it," Ilya says too easily, punctuated with a careless shrug. "I tell them I fucked their son, got him pregnant. Oops, sorry."

"You're not fucking saying that," Shane says, rather exhausted. "You're gonna keep your fucking mouth shut until I tell you you can talk."

Rozanov makes a noise, wagging his eyebrows at Shane. "Oh, that is very sexy, Hollander. I think I like it when you talk to me like this—"

"You're fucking insufferable—"

"Mm, big word. Think I might come."

This time Shane laughs despite himself. At the very least, it erases all the tension from his and Rozanov's shoulders, letting them enjoy the rest of the night in something close to peace.

Chapter 2: II. Red in the Face

Chapter Summary

9-12 weeks.

Chapter Notes

whoaaa im very much blown away by how many people enjoyed the first chapter. i genuinely had no clue if pregnant shane was gonna be a hit or not (not that it mattered, i selfishly was going to make it happen one way or another) anyway thank you so much for the love! i hope you enjoy this chapter as well :o) of course we gotta go thru some things real quick

► DISCLAIMERS:

as always thank you my dear beta [Lizzie](#) for looking this over and being honestly the best and sweetest person ever. ilysm my friend!

anyway, please enjoy ch2!

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

Yuna and David Hollander live two and a half hours from McGill University, in the Ottawa home Shane grew up in.

Their house takes up a good chunk of the street on a suburban neighbourhood, a ten minute drive from Shane's old school and a twenty minute drive from the rink he grew up playing on. The front door is blue, standing out against the red and orange bricks the house is made of. Two story, standing tall with its black trimmed windows and stretched driveway where his mom's Lexus is parked, white and polished to perfection. The grass is trimmed neatly and is incredibly vividly green despite the November weather. He remembers his dad mentioning planting the winter seed about a month ago. He must be happy with how it's turning out.

"Nice house," Rozanov comments from the passenger seat, craning his head to get a better look past the trees lining the streets with their thick trunks and bare branches.

Shane inhales sharply, pulled back to reality as it unfolds before him. His hands are gripping the steering wheel, knuckles white, a rush of red returning to the skin when he loosens his

grip, rolling his shoulders back to get rid of some of the tension.

Rozanov had been surprisingly fine about the long drive, hadn't even argued when Shane said he would be driving because he heard some of the guys mention that Rozanov had very little respect for traffic laws. While the ride wasn't awkward, it definitely wasn't comfortable. Shane spent most of it thinking about how he thinks he thinks too much. Meanwhile Rozanov had headphones perched on his head, over his backward facing baseball cap, and stared out the window. Every now and then he would push one of the sides away from his ear and ask, "Okay?" and Shane would say yes and that would be that.

Shane realizes too late that they probably should have planned what to say. He also realizes Rozanov is still staring at him, still waiting for some sort of reply. "Yeah," he says several beats too late. "Um. It's my childhood house. I grew up there."

Rozanov nods, his lower lip jutting out as he does so, looking over at the house again. "Is big. You have brothers? Sisters?"

"It's just me," Shane says, voice cracking. It's just him. Just one kid to look at, to look forward to. One kid that's managed to fuck up more than his poor parents probably anticipated.

"Do they know that I am here?" Rozanov asks, each word treading with caution, like he's afraid Shane might disappear if he speaks too suddenly.

"I said I was bringing a friend," Shane explains, gesturing vaguely, hand falling back into his lap with weight. "But obviously I didn't say..."

"Ah," Ilya says with a stiff nod and a tight smile. "Your parents already hate me."

"I didn't say that—"

"Yes, but I know what you meant."

Shane's eyes close and he tilts his head back against the seat. While his dad doesn't entertain the gossip or anything, his mom tends to take things a little more to heart. Every little rant Shane would go on about how much of a dickhead Ilya Rozanov is is most likely filed away into her head. His aggressiveness on the ice is something she isn't all too fond of, especially when some of his chirps are aimed at his own teammates, banter or not. "You're kind of an asshole on the ice, Rozanov. And you're not the nicest off of it either."

"Don't worry I will play nice," Rozanov says, tone bland and even, though he's not looking at the house anymore. Instead, he's fidgeting with his headphones in his lap, unfolding and refolding them before muttering something unintelligible and tossing them onto the center consol. "Whatever. You are ready?"

"I don't really have a choice," Shane reminds him, unbuckling his seatbelt with a shaking hand. He ignores the look of concern Rozanov sends him and opens the car door. He stops when he feels a hand on his wrist, looking over at Rozanov with his eyebrows furrowed.

"Take a second," Rozanov tells him. He tilts his chin up toward the car door, nodding when Shane closes it and settles back in the seat. "Breathe. Is okay, yes? You are not telling them alone."

Shane doesn't point out that it probably isn't the best thing that it's Ilya fucking Rozanov here with him, but he can't find it in himself to say it when Rozanov is being so... supportive. It feels weird, but he's appreciative nevertheless. It *is* nice to not be alone, to know that if shit somehow goes sideways, he can glance over and have someone to fall back on. So, he breathes, lets himself sag into the seat until it feels like his head is steady on his shoulders. This time when he opens the car door, Rozanov does the same from the passenger side.

Rozanov follows him up the driveway, nearly hovering over Shane by the time they make it to the front door. The doorbell chimes, and Shane counts down from one hundred to keep his mind occupied, getting to sixty three when the door swings open and reveals his dad.

"Hey, son!" he starts cheerily, open arms dropping slowly when he takes in the person standing beside Shane.

Rozanov is stiffer than a board, hands clasped in front of him, only breaking apart to give one awkward wave. "Hello," he says.

Shane takes a very big breath. "Dad, this is my, um..." he glances at Rozanov, hoping that maybe he can help.

Rozanov nods like he understands, placing a hand on Shane's shoulder. "Friends with benefi —"

"No," Shane says over him quickly, voice loud enough to drown the rest of that out. His father is more than confused which is better than him understanding whatever the hell Rozanov was trying to say. "No, he's um. My friend. Teammate. You remember him, right?"

"Yes, I do," David says before giving Rozanov one of his kind smiles, reaching out to shake his hand. "It's nice to see you, kid. I just got done making some pasta, come in. Yuna should be down in a second, she was finishing up something on her computer. An email, maybe, I don't know I don't ask questions."

Rozanov steps over the threshold, peeking over his shoulder and meeting eyes with Shane who looks away just as quickly. Everything inside is just as neat and tidy as it normally is. Light wood floors polished, nearly shining against the warm but bright lighting. The walls of the hallway leading to the open living room and kitchen area are decorated with family photos. Lots of Shane in his hockey gear at almost every age. He watches as Rozanov's steps slow down, his eyes locked on a frame of Shane at three years old, on ice with his small skates, guided by David wearing a blinding smile.

He doesn't comment on it, distracted by David offering him some water. "Or vodka," he says with a knowing wink. "I have the stuff straight from Russia, it's great."

"Oh," Rozanov says, glancing at Shane. "Ah. Maybe later. But thank you—"

The sound of steps ascending from the staircase interrupt him. Yuna Hollander's voice chimes as she rounds the corner. "I thought I heard the doorbell! You said you were bringing Hayden—" she stops in her tracks, eyes widening when they lock on Rozanov. She blinks, mouth opening and closing before shutting altogether.

"I said I was bringing a friend," Shane corrects lamely, gesturing toward Rozanov, letting his hand drop against his side. "This is Ilya Rozanov, mom."

"I know who he is," Yuna says pointedly. She narrows her eyes when Rozanov waves at her, just as stiff as he did with David. "Honey, I thought..." she trails off, seemingly trying to find the right words before giving up altogether, choosing bluntness and truth instead. "I'll be honest, Shane, you said you hated this kid and that he hated you."

"I do not hate Shane," Rozanov says right as Shane mutters *I don't hate him*, turning with wide eyes and creased brows, like he can't believe he was accused at doing such a thing. "He is annoying and boring and, how do you say... uptight? But I do not—"

"We're friends," Shane finishes for him.

"Friends," Yuna repeats, disbelief thick in her tone. She lets it go for whatever reason, nodding mostly to herself and plastering a smile on her face. "Okay, sure. Why don't we sit down and eat, I'm sure you boys are hungry."

There's no small talk as they get settled at the table, plates full of pasta and glasses filled with some Italian sparkling water his mom found online. The silence is thick and Shane swears he might start choking on it. The longer no one says anything, the longer Shane has to sit alone with his thoughts, reminding him of why this isn't just dinner with his parents. Why he's got Ilya Rozanov sitting next to him, shoveling forkfuls of pasta into his mouth like he hasn't eaten in days. Why even though he really shouldn't, Shane eats an entire plate and is still hungry after.

He should probably bring it up now. Just bite the fucking bullet and say it instead of trying to ease into it. There really is no easy way to outright say it, no other way that would lessen the blow he's about to inflict on his parents. His poor parents who worked so hard to make sure his path in life was free of any obstacles—

Rozanov's hand on his thigh pulls him out of the spiral he's slowly sinking into. Shane blinks, coming to and finding Rozanov ducking his head down slightly to meet his eyes.

"Hollander," he says gently. "Your mother is talking to you."

Shane snaps his gaze to his mom, the wrinkles between her brows as she blinks at him. "Sorry—sorry, I, um. I was just thinking."

"I could see that," Yuna tells him, tilting her head to the side. "Shane, sweetie, is there something bothering you?"

Instead of answering right away, Shane turns his head, looks at Rozanov like he has all the answers. Rozanov gives him a small smile, just barely the tilt of the corners of his mouth, and

squeezes his thigh again. It's not much, but it's just enough encouragement that Shane sucks in a breath and focuses back on his parents sitting across from them.

"I have to tell you guys something," he says, all in one breath. They both straighten up, glancing at each other in the way parents do when they're communicating without words. Shane figures it's best to just let it leave his chest. "I'm gay."

It's not what he was planning on starting with, but there's no way to take it back now. Even Rozanov is taken aback, eyes widening and flickering toward Yuna and David who gape at Shane.

"Oh," David says eventually. "That's, um. I thought we knew that?"

"David," Yuna hisses, smacking his chest before turning to Shane, reaching across the table to hold his hand. "Thank you for telling us again, honey. We know that was probably difficult the first time, and maybe more so the second time, but just know that we still love you so, *so* much." Her eyes slowly drift to Rozanov. She leans back, her touch leaving Shane as she pulls her hands onto her own lap. "Is... is there a reason you decided to bring your... *friend* along for this?"

"That's not the only thing," Shane manages to force out, refusing to look at his parents, staring at a scratch in the table, wondering how and when it got there. He hadn't seen it the last time he was here. "It's... god. I don't know—I don't know how to—"

David holds a hand up, cutting him off. "It's okay. I think we've got it figured out."

Shane and Rozanov look at each other, and then back at Yuna and David. This time, it's Rozanov asking: "You do?"

"Well, it's sort of obvious," Yuna says with a small laugh. "Though, I do have questions."

"Questions," Shane parrots back weakly. His mom has questions about him and Rozanov having sex.

"About your relationship," Yuna clarifies. "You know, like when you started dating."

"No! No, no, no," Shane and Rozanov say at the same time. Rozanov laughs out loud, head tossed back like it's the funniest thing he's ever heard. Shane can feel his ears burning up.

"We're not," Shane starts, closing his eyes and hoping that maybe the earth swallows him whole, "together. Dating. It's not—that's not what I wanted to talk to you about."

Unsurprisingly, his parents are only more confused.

"Okay," Yuna says, huffing out a laugh as she shrugs. "What is it then, Shane?"

There really is no easy way to say it, so he says it. "I'm um. I'm pregnant." He pauses, glancing at Rozanov, tilting his head toward him. "And he's the, um. Rozanov's the father."

The harsh silence is briefly interrupted by the clattering of both Yuna and Davids silverware falling from their grasps. They say nothing, the quietness vast, never ending as they stare back and forth between Shane and Rozanov, like one of them will suddenly yell *just kidding!* and make things easier for everyone.

But the punchline never comes, and Shane is left shrinking in his seat, hiding his face in his hands. He can feel Rozanov shift beside him, can barely register the way Rozanov's hand is kneading at the back of his nape without saying anything. A sweet sort of attempt to ground him that Shane wishes he could enjoy.

"I'm sorry," Shane finds himself muttering, unsure of how long he's been apologizing, only knowing that it definitely isn't the first time it's left his mouth in the midst of the silence. "I'm sorry, I didn't—I fucked up. I know I fucked up—"

"Shane," Yuna says calmly, standing to kneel beside him, guiding his hands away from his face like she used to when he was little and the world felt too big. "Sweetie, breathe. Come on, in for five, out for five. You're okay, you're fine."

Eventually, the world seems to settle again, and through the blurriness of his tears, he can see his mom and her kind, brown eyes. "I'm sorry," he says again, just in case she didn't hear him the first time around.

"You have nothing to be sorry for," she whispers, patting his cheek before getting up and sitting back down. She runs her hands through her hair, pressing her clasped hands to her mouth. "Okay. Okay, we knew maybe this would be a possibility one day. It looks like that day came, so, let's—let's talk, boys, okay?"

Rozanov nods, not having spoken since Shane dropped the bomb. If Shane didn't know better, he'd think that Rozanov was scared. He doesn't think he could even place fear on Rozanov's face if he even tried. "I am sorry too," he says.

"You don't have to apologize for having an adult relationship," Yuna says almost hysterically. "You're both adults, you don't have to explain yourselves to us."

Shane knows she's right, but he still can't help but feel like a little kid, hoping that his parents can come and save the day. Though, he knows it's not that easy anymore. "I'm scared, mom. And I don't know what to do."

"Oh, I know, sweetie," Yuna whispers, holding his hand above the table. "It's terrifying, believe me. We planned you and we were still so scared."

Shane finds the courage to finally look up at her. "You're not... you're not mad?"

"Of course not," David answers for them. "Shane, you're a great kid. You've never given us a hard time, you've always been so great, son. It would take a hell of a lot more to disappoint us."

The relief washes over Shane, so much so that he starts crying, dropping his head against the table to gather himself. Rozanov is in his ear within the second, tone hushed and gentle. "Are

you okay?"

"I'm fine," Shane manages to mumble. "Almost done freaking out. Give me a second."

Luckily they give him a second and Shane is somewhat composed. Well, as composed as he can be all things considered. Of course, Yuna Hollander is already getting the ball rolling.

"How far along are you?"

"Nine weeks," Rozanov answers for him. "Conception month is late September, early October, yes? And when you told me, it was eight weeks, so. Nine weeks."

Shane wants to die. He wants his parents to *not* know when Rozanov fucked a baby into him, thanks.

"Okay, nine weeks," Yuna says, thankfully ignoring the hidden implication. "That means... your due date is sometime in June, right?"

"June twenty-seventh," Shane nods, remembering being grateful it would be in the summer when things wouldn't be so hectic.

Yuna nods before pausing, pressing her lips to her knuckles before dropping her clasped hands on the table. "Are you... Do you have a plan yet, boys?"

Rozanov shoots Shane a look, shrugging. Shane knows what he's trying to say. *It's your choice, it's all your choice*. He wishes he didn't have to be the one making all the fucking choices. "Not yet," he says eventually. "I really don't know what I want, I guess."

"It's a hard decision," David says. "But at the end of the day—"

"It's my choice, I know," Shane says over him, exasperated. He doesn't want to hear the word *choice* anymore.

As if sensing his thoughts, Yuna gets up, digging through a junk drawer and coming back with a notepad and pen. "How about we talk through your options. I'm sure they spoke to you about your options at your check-up, right?"

Shane nods. "There was two brochures I got. One on what pregnancy would look like and the other on termination. There was something else they mentioned—adoption, but I didn't get a brochure for that." He pauses, remembering that he did bring them along. "They're in the glove compartment in the car, actually—"

"I can get them," Rozanov offers, accepting the keys when Shane hands them over to him and excusing himself with a tight and polite smile.

Shane doesn't blame him for wanting to get some fresh air. It's starting to feel a bit suffocating in here, especially with his parents watching his every move.

After the front door closes, Yuna is quick to speak. "You let Ilya Rozanov get you pregnant?"

"Mom," Shane snaps, cheeks flaring with heat.

"What!" she says back, looking at her husband like he's gonna agree. Unfortunately, he nods and shrugs when Shane shoots him an exasperated look too. "I'm just surprised, that's all! It didn't seem like you liked him all that much before."

"He's annoying," Shane agrees, with a sigh. "But he's actually kind of nice in a weird way. I know you don't get it, but, I mean. Look at him right now." He pauses, voices quieter as he picks at the skin on his thumb. "I gave him an out, you know. A chance to walk away so he didn't have to deal with all of this."

Yuna's face softens. "He didn't take it."

Shane shakes his head. "He couldn't even wrap his head around the fact that I even thought about him leaving. So, yeah. Maybe he's an asshole, but he's... he's not a terrible person." He smiles, just barely. "He said he always wanted to be a dad."

David smiles. "Well. At least he isn't taking the cowards route."

Rozanov is back quickly, his chest rising and falling faster than before. He ran, Shane notes, hiding his smile in his palm, hating that he's sort of endeared by Rozanov's haste.

Across the table, Yuna reads through both brochures carefully, jotting some notes on the pad here and there. Then she places them back on the table with a hum before looking at Shane. "I need to know what you're thinking, Shane."

What *isn't* he thinking is the real question. He doesn't think he could even try catching one of the spiraling thoughts that has been plaguing his head since he found out. "At first I thought it'd be easy just terminating," he admits. "My body changing is... it's fucking terrifying. I do my best to take care of myself and the thought of—of everything getting all messed up was all I could think of. It's selfish, I know—"

"Not selfish," Yuna says firmly. "At the end of the day, it's your body. First and foremost. You choose what you want to do with it."

Shaw nods. "I know. But the more I think about it... the more I read about it, I'd be fucking up my body either way. Did you read...?"

Yuna nods and sighs. "Yes. With termination in males, it involves removing the additional system altogether, and there's also a very high risk of complications when doing so. There's a forty percent chance the main reproductive system won't function normally again. Higher risk of clots and strokes. It's a procedure that is done differently, more intrusive, than it would be with a woman. More complications, risks, things that can go wrong—"

"Yeah," Shane croaks over her, the air trapped. "And, um. I mean, there's the other thing too."

Rozanov looks between the both of them. "What other thing?"

Yuna presses her lips together. "With male pregnancies, it gets very complicated. The first pregnancy will determine whether or not it will be the last pregnancy possible. If there are

complications with labor and delivery, then and the additional system will get removed during the c-section to prevent, well... death. But that's only if there are any complications, and if the additional system does not get removed."

Rozanov says nothing for several seconds, eyes hardened in concentration. "So, if things do not go well, you will not be able to have another child?"

Shane shakes his head. "Not of my own, at least." He shrugs heavily. "Pretty much if I want a kid of my own—"

"This might be your only chance," Rozanov finishes for him.

Again, Shane nods. "It's not convenient."

"You have options in the future if that's the case," Yuna reminds him, tacking on a smile that is more crazed than comforting. "You'd still be able to have children—"

"But they won't biologically be mine," Shane says before backtracking. "Not that that matters, I know, but. I don't know." He's being selfish, he knows, so he shuts his mouth. Without thinking, he blurts out, "I don't want to give up the last of my hockey." From beside him, Rozanov makes a face. Shane twists his neck to properly look at him. "What was that?"

Rozanov shakes head quickly. "Nothing—"

"Tell me," Shane snaps despite himself, somewhat pleased with the way Rozanov doesn't try arguing.

Surprisingly, he doesn't get called selfish. Instead, Rozanov says, "You would not have to give up hockey forever, or at least, your last year of it. Just until, what? End of July, maybe beginning August, after you have the baby and are healed. That is before last year and season starts, I am sure coach would be happy to have you back."

In a way, he's right. But there's still a lot to account for. "And what about the baby?" Shane asks. "It's not like it's born and suddenly everything's fine. Someone's gotta take care of it, and who's that gonna be? I can't do that if I'm getting a degree and playing—"

"Me," Rozanov answers easily. "I will do it. I will figure it out."

Shane blinks, mouth falling open, unsure if he heard correctly. "Sorry—*what?*"

"I have friend, Svetlana," Rozanov starts to explain. "She has business with another friend. Daycare, six weeks to five years old. She would help me with the, um... enrollment, yes? There is scholarships, it would be free."

Again, Shane finds himself dumbfounded. "Taking care of a baby is a lot of work, Rozanov. Do we even have time to be—to be parents?"

"You do not have to," Rozanov says, quieter than before. He's pulling at his fingers in his lap, not looking up from his repetitive task. "You can transfer custody. I looked it up. Is called 'sole custody', I think." He pauses, mouth twitching as he comes up with his words. "You

would not have to stop your life like this. And this way, if maybe one day you want to be there, you can. I would not say no to you."

This time, it's Yuna that's gaping at him. "You would do that?"

"Yes," Rozanov says without hesitation. "For my child, yes. I would do anything, I think." He looks at Shane. "But only if you make the choice to keep it, yes? This is only if you have the baby. I do not want you to think this is something you have to do. It is just a... an option."

"I can't ask you to give your life up," Shane says.

Rozanov shakes his head. "I would not give up my life. Maybe it will be a little hard, yes, but it will be okay. I think I will still be happy no matter what."

"For what it's worth," David says carefully, glancing at Shane and then Rozanov, "we would help too. Even if you decide to go with sole custody. We would be here for you too, Rozanov."

For a moment, the heaviness in Shane's chest lightens, even if it is short lived. It's weird, seeing a different side to Rozanov, one that would make a good parent, a great dad. Despite everything, Shane can't imagine what it would be like having anyone else sitting beside him, in the eye of a storm.

If there's anyone out there that Shane could trust to give his kid the best life possible, somehow, someday, he thinks it'd be Ilya Rozanov in all his selflessness.

Maybe he's a little selfish in this choice. Maybe he's starting to have a soft spot for Rozanov, even if it's just barely.

"I like that option," he finds himself saying.

Rozanov lights up in a way Shane has never seen in the few years of knowing him. He quickens dampens it, shaking his head slightly. "Don't make this choice because it is what you think I want—"

"You're so fucking full of yourself," Shane teases, a burst of pride filling his chest when Rozanov chuckles bashfully. "I'm doing this because I want to, okay? And maybe... maybe you don't have to do it alone."

Rozanov blinks, tilting his head like a confused puppy. "What do you mean?"

"Co-parenting," Shane starts. He'd done some of his own research too, it's in his nature. The certainty that not only would he have his parent's unwavering support, but also Rozanov's, solidifies his choices even more. Makes it easier to lean toward what his mind keeps drifting back to. "We, um. We raise the baby together, equal effort. Both of us get to have our own lives outside each other, but at the end of the day we're still there for... for our kid."

"Hollander," Ilya starts slowly. "Are you saying...?"

Shane sighs, dropping his head for a fleeting moment before gathering himself. "Yeah. I think I am."

Across the table, Yuna makes a small noise. She's smiling so hard Shane thinks she might start crying. "Sorry," she whispers, grasping David's hand. "Can we be excited yet?"

Shane can't help but let out a breathy laugh. It's all so fucking surreal. "Yeah, go ahead."

A squeal leaves Yuna's mouth as she claps, leaning into David giddy. "Oh! We're gonna be grandparents, honey!"

"Gosh, I already felt old," David jokes. "Now I'm gonna be *grandpa*?"

"I've seen Americans use cool names for grandparents now," Rozanov mentions unhelpfully, pulling his phone out. "I think Canadians can copy because they are better people, yes? I have seen people say 'Glamma' instead of 'grandma'—"

"They're not calling my mom *Glamma*," Shane says just as his mom's eyes widen in interest. "Put the phone away, Rozanov."

He makes a show of setting his phone down, but not before winking at Shane's parents. "We will discuss details later."

It makes the two of them laugh, and as much as Shane wants to be annoyed, he can't find it in himself to do anything but smile down at his empty plate.

Fortunately, everyone is normal for the rest of the evening. As if sensing Shane's still lingering nerves and uneasiness, the conversation drifts away from him and toward the most common interest: hockey. Rozanov listens politely as Yuna tears apart players from every major NHL team, picking apart their weaknesses, their shortcomings. It takes up a majority of their time there, and Shane has never been so grateful to hear his mom call Sidney Crosby sexy so many times.

By the time they're being walked out with a tupperware container full of pasta, Shane feels like he's ran several marathons. As if sensing his exhaustion, Rozanov places a hand on his lower back, pushing him toward the passenger seat and shooting him a rather intimidating look when he opens his mouth to argue. It's an unsaid agreement that Ilya will drive back to Montreal.

An hour into the drive, Rozanov finally breaks the silence.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired," Shane mumbles, already starting to doze off. "Wasn't nauseous this morning, so I'm hoping that I don't have to deal with that anymore."

"That's good, but no, I meant how are you feeling in your head," Rozanov clarifies, glancing over for a second before focusing back on the road.

"Oh," Shane blinks, taking a moment to wrangle together the events of the day. "I'm okay, I think. I'm not that scared anymore—well, no. That's a lie. I'm scared, but for different reasons, I think."

"Tell me," Rozanov says.

"It's stupid—"

"From you, yes probably," Rozanov shoots back quickly, grinning when Shane tells him to fuck off. "Okay, now I am being serious. Tell me, Hollander. I won't laugh."

Shane tugs his bottom lip between his teeth, staring at the stretching lines in the road. "It's gonna be weird getting... bigger. Having something in me, like, invading my space. I don't know. It's just weird to think about."

"You make it sound very weird," Rozanov says, earning something of a laugh. "But, yes. I know what you mean. I would probably feel the same way."

For some reason it's a relief to hear that his worries aren't in vain. "You couldn't deal with this," Shane says just to be annoying. "You'd complain the whole time."

"Ah, no," Rozanov argues back. "I would be better pregnant person than you. Would not complain once. Would not even cry—"

"Oh fuck off, you'd be ten times more annoying."

"I would be perfect," Ilya grins. "And sexy. Everyone would be jealous—"

Shane cackles at that, dodging the way Rozanov starts to swat at him. "You're gonna crash the fucking car, asshole!"

"Do not swear in front of the baby, Hollander," Rozanov scolds. "Is not okay. If you swear, it has to be in Russian so baby can sound cooler."

"Our kid is not speaking fucking Russian."

Rozanov clicks his teeth in disapproval. "You should not have fucked a Russian, then."

As much as Shane wants to argue, he can't help but admit the fucker's got a point.

⊗

Sitting across from Shane in the office of Coach Wiebe is Coach Wiebe.

He leans back in his seat, looking at Shane with raised brow and tight mouth. It probably has to do with the fact that Shane has been sitting there staring at him, mouth opening and closing around unsaid words as he tries to place how to start this conversation. It's not often that

Shane asks to speak with him alone, so. There is probably a million thoughts of concern racing through his mind. Shane knows that's how he would feel, given the situation.

"Thank you for taking the time to talk to me, coach," he starts, voice cracking in the middle of the sentence. He continues with less confidence slotted in his pocket, doing the best that he can. "I know you're very, um, busy."

Wiebe sighs, rubbing a hand over his face and leaning forward, elbows on the desk. "Listen," he starts, tone drenched with exasperation. "I don't know what the hell is going on, but I'd appreciate if you'd go ahead and just tell me instead of wasting both of our time."

"Okay, sorry," Shane says because that's fair. They've already been sitting in silence for a good ten minutes. He starts carefully, drying his hands on his pants. "Um. So I have a—a medical thing. Genetic mutation. Masculum graviditate—I don't know if you're familiar...?"

Much to Shane's surprise, Coach Wiebe nods, his face softening in understanding. "My brother in law has it."

"Oh," Shane blinks. "Has he—"

"He is happily married to his wife," Wiebe explains. "But I'm familiar with the... condition." He pauses, Shane can see in the way his eyes flicker between Shane's that he's piecing it together. "Before I jump to conclusions, I'll let you explain."

Shane wishes he could just make the assumption, but he supposes that it's probably best for it to come out of his own mouth. "I'm, um. With child, I guess." He pauses, face twisting in embarrassment. The word choice never sounds quite right. "Or, well—not *I guess*. I *know*—I mean, it's confirmed. Um. I'm—I'm due in late June and I'm at ten weeks today. I won't be able to continue with the season and I'm—I'm so sorry. I really wanted to play—"

Wiebe raises a hand to silence him. "You don't have to apologize, Hollander. Life happens, and while I can't say I was expecting *this*, I had a feeling you were having some medical issues. You wouldn't miss practice even if the world was ending. It wasn't hard to assume something was going on."

"I'm sorry," Shane says again, even when Wiebe starts shaking his head. "I also wanted to—listen, I know that it's not ideal, that I'm gonna be missing so much but I promise to work hard. I can bounce back, I know my body. I know I'm capable of being a great player, even after—"

"If you're asking me to guarantee that your spot on this team is waiting for you when you get back, you must be stupid." Before Shane can fucking throw up, Wiebe is grinning. "No way in hell am I letting our best player go that easily. The second you get cleared, Hollander, I'm expecting you back on that ice."

Relief floods Shane, settling everything in him from his mind to his bones. He sags against the seat, dropping his head as he lets himself simmer in coach's words. "Thank you so much, coach."

"There's no need to thank me," Wiebe says easily. There's a pause as he waits for Shane to meet his eyes. "Can I be a little nosy?" Shane considers the question before nodding briefly. "I'm not usually involved in my team's personal life. I couldn't care less about any of that, but you... you're very private, kid. I didn't even know you were... *involved* with anyone, so, I guess I'm just curious about, you know." He tilts his chin down at where Shane's hands are clasped right beneath his navel. "Who you decided to have a kid with."

"It wasn't much of a *choice*," Shane blurts before he can stop himself, clamping his mouth shut when Wiebe's eyebrows shoot up in surprise.

"Shane," Wiebe says slowly, pressing the tips of his fingers onto the surface on the desk, "you know you have options, right?"

"Yes!" Shane says quickly, earning a less than convinced look. "Yeah, of course, I already went through all of the possibilities and stuff," he explains. "Which, like, I know that um. The obvious choice would be termination, I get it, but I just—I can't... I don't think it's the right choice for me, that's all."

"You don't need to explain yourself to me, kid."

Shane nods clumsily, cheeks puffing as he exhales, falling back against the seat. "Right."

"But you didn't really answer my question."

Shane wants to point out that it technically wasn't a question, but he finds himself with a twitching mouth as all the different potential responses roll around in his head. He doesn't want to throw Rozanov under the bus, they hadn't really talked about the possibility of his name coming up in this conversation. "It's... um he's a friend. Not a close friend, but he's been there for me and really supportive so far, so." Shane pauses, the corner of his mouth tilting up absentmindedly. "He'll be a great dad. I'm not worried about that."

Wiebe nods. "That's good, then. If you have a support system, then good. Maybe I can meet him when you bring the baby around."

Shane laughs out loud. It's all sort of funny, really. He can't imagine what the response will be when Rozanov pulls up to practice with a baby carrier hanging from his chest. "Oh yeah, for sure." His laughter dies down, followed by a wave of silence only broken when he clears his throat. "Can I just ask that, um. This stays between us? Obviously the guys have to know that I'll be out for the season but I'd rather the details not be shared."

Coach Wiebe gives him a thumbs up. "You have my word, Hollander. But I can't stop them from asking you."

"Yeah, I know," Shane sighs.

He's already expecting the confused messages, the chance of calls. Maybe even a teammate or two showing up at his apartment. He already talked to his guidance counselor, and when the new semester starts, he'll be fully online. It'll be easier to keep a low profile like that, to

not draw so much attention to himself, especially as he starts to get rounder. He doesn't want to think about that right now.

With that, he's leaving Wiebe's office. The guys should be gone now, practice ended over an hour and a half ago, and he made sure to slip through while everyone was busy. Though, he can hear rustling down the hallway and the hissing whisper of *Hollander!* letting him know that someone stayed behind. He doesn't have to look when the source of the noise falls into step with him.

Rozanov's hair is still somewhat damp from his shower, slicked back and away from his face. He's wearing a black hoodie with a Bruins logo on it (probably stolen from Cliff Marlow, Bostonian through and through) and a duffel bag hangs from his shoulder. "Hey," he says a little breathless. "You talked to coach?"

"Yep," Shane says, taking a breath as they head out the double doors and into the cold air. "I'm officially off the team until the next season."

"Oh, he said you can come back?"

"I know, I ruined your plans to take over as captain."

"Ah, I thought my evil master plan was going to work," Rozanov tsks with the playful tilt of his head. "First, get Shane Hollander pregnant. Then, take over hockey team. Last, rule the world."

"That's a shit plan," Shane says with a laugh, bumping their shoulders together in way that's supposed to be more of a shove than anything, but falls short. From here, Shane can see Rozanov's car parked further from Shane's. Something newer than the shitty ones college kids around here tend to drive. A coupe, painted a blazing orange. Louder compared to Shane's black 1996 Jeep Cherokee he's had since high school. Ole reliable, practical.

"I forget you drive that piece of shit."

"Oh fuck off," Shane scoffs. "Not everyone likes tacky orange douche bag cars."

"Yes but I look sexy when I drive it," Rozanov smirks before taming his expression into something more neutral, genuine. "But everything went okay with Wiebe, yes?"

"Yeah everything was fine." He pretends not to notice that Rozanov walked him to his car. "He said he wouldn't tell the guys too much, only that I was out for the season for medical reasons. All that matters is that he pretty much guaranteed me a place on the team after everything is, you know. Settled."

Rozanov nods, glancing around the parking lot as he listens. "If anyone is too nosy, I will tell them to fuck off, yes? Even Pike."

Shane groans, tossing his head back toward the grey clouds at the reminder. "Fuck I forgot about Hayden."

"Yes, he is very easy to forget."

"Fuck off he's my friend," Shane defends lamely. "Jesus. He's gonna lose his mind when he finds out."

"What? He is homophobic?" Rozanov asks suddenly, although it sounds less like a question and more of an angry accusation, shoulders straightening in defense. "Because if he is I will kill—"

"No, he's not," Shane says over him. "It's just... it's a lot to take in. Especially since, you know," he gestures at Rozanov who raises a brow, his defensive expression dropping.

"Oh, so I am the problem?"

"You guys don't like each other," Shane explains, doing his best to be as neutral as he can. "He'd probably freak out finding out about us in general. But him finding out about us *and* that I'm carrying your kid—fuck. Yeah he's... he's gonna kill you."

"He should be grateful," Rozanov says simply. "He will no longer be the only dad on the team. We are taking that pressure off him, no? Now everyone will see is very cool to have a baby—"

"I don't think we should be endorsing that," Shane argues weakly.

"Yes, you are right," Rozanov sighs, pressing his lips together and shaking his head. "We cannot let Pike have more kids. He should not be, how do you say... procreating."

"Alright, be nice," Shane tells him even though he can't help but laugh. "We could probably ask him for advice, you know. I mean, him and Jackie had *twins*. They probably know a thing or two about parenting that we can learn."

"Ah, no," Rozanov says quickly. "I will not take parenting advice from fucking *Hayden Pike*."

"Well, maybe Jackie, at least."

This time, Rozanov hums in consideration. "Maybe, yes. We will see." Before Shane can reply, Rozanov's phone is buzzing in his hand. He mutters something between a curse and question, rolling his eyes when he reads the caller ID. "Fuck. I have to go—"

"Go ahead," Shane insists, waving him off.

"Tell me if you need anything," Rozanov says quickly just before he takes the call, answering in Russian and turning to tread toward his car.

And while Shane doesn't need anything, he wonders what would happen if he said he did. If Rozanov would turn around at all. The thought disappears as quickly as it had come to life, and Shane gets into the drivers side and cranks the heat up, watching as the orange car peels out of the parking lot, disappearing around the corner of the road.

It's late enough for only one person to swing by Shane's apartment with reason. When the knocking sounds, he rolls his eyes, closing his laptop, thankful he took the time to complete and submit his assignment before heading to bed. The most recent routine on the days when Rozanov comes over, he usually wastes Shane's time by chastising his empty fridge or holding his television hostage while he pretends to care about Shane's symptoms of the day.

So, when Shane swings the front door open, the annoyed expression is wiped off immediately when he realizes that this isn't Rozanov. Not even close.

"Dude," Hayden says, raising his hands and then letting them drop against his sides. "What the fuck?"

Truthfully, Shane should have expected this sooner. Rozanov has done a pretty good job at keeping him updated on the team just enough, and in the midst of those updates is always Hayden Pike, demanding that Rozanov must know something. According to Rozanov, he has an incredible poker face, so when he says he doesn't care about Shane enough to know what's going on in his personal life, Pike takes it at face value.

But of course, who would believe Ilya Rozanov? Most definitely not Hayden.

"Hayd," Shane says, doing his best to shoulder some confidence. "Um. What's up, man?"

Hayden's eyes widen almost comically, nearly too big for his head. "What's *up*? You fucking disappear for days and then coach tells us that you're out for the season due to medical reasons and all you can say is *what's up*?" He laughs, sharp and quick, hysteric. "Even J.J. said he hasn't really heard from you, so why don't you tell *me* what's up, dude?"

Shane's mouth open and closes, caught between the truth and some bullshit excuse that will save him enough time to explain everything. In his pocket, he can feel his phone vibrating every ten seconds, but it seems less important than being cornered in his own safe space. "I'm fine," is what he ends up saying. Doing his best to gauge Hayden's reaction, he knows it's probably not the best thing to say. "Well, no, um. I mean I'm not, like, dying—"

"Not dying?" Hayden repeats incredulously. "That isn't as reassuring as you think it is!"

"Well, I don't know!" Shane snaps back, stepping aside when Hayden walks through the door. He didn't even ask, Shane thinks, more than annoyed. "Listen, Hayd. I'm fine, I'm exhausted, so maybe we can do this another day—"

"Nuh uh," Hayden refuses like a fucking child. He crosses his arms too, which doesn't do much for him. "I'm not leaving until you tell me what the hell is going on."

The minutes of silence stretch as they stare at each other, neither breaking.

"I really want to sleep," Shane mutters eventually, having underestimated Hayden's stubbornness. He rubbing his hands over his face. "So, please. *Please*. I'll explain everything —"

"Hollander!" Hayden and Shane pause, snapping their attention to the front door that nearly rattles against the series of knocks that follow. *"I'm coming in, Hollander!"*

Hayden's eyebrows crease. "That sounds like—"

Rozanov is opening the door, brows drawn together, mouth tightened. The tension in his features shifts when his attention lands on Hayden. "What the fuck are you doing here, Pike?"

Hayden's neck goes pink. Somehow, his eyes bulge out of his head even more. "What am *I* doing here?! What are *you* doing here, Rozanov?!"

"Okay," Shane says, mostly to himself but it gets the other two's attention as well. "Okay. Let's... just calm down."

"How about you tell me what the fuck is going on?" Hayden snaps, looking at Shane. "Then I'll fucking calm down—"

"Watch your fucking mouth, Pike," Rozanov says over him. Then, he regards Shane, voice less firm. "You were not answering texts about... important thing. I came to check if you were okay."

"I'm fine," Shane says for the thousandth time in the last month. He makes a gesture toward Hayden. "Just got a surprise visit."

"I'm right here," Hayden pipes up unhelpfully.

"And you should not be," Rozanov shrugs. "Maybe you should leave."

"Not until—"

"He does not owe you explanation," Rozanov snaps at him before pressing his lips together, shoulders dropping slightly. "Actually, no. Is not my choice, and is definitely not your choice, Pike."

"What the fuck is going on?" Hayden mutters through a breath, pressing a palm to his forehead.

Shane groans, tossing his head back for a second before coming back up. "Go sit on the couch, Hayden." When Hayden opens his mouth to argue, Shane barks: "Sit on the fucking couch, Hayden."

It promptly shuts him up and makes him sit on the couch. Shane ignores the snort that leaves Rozanov's mouth, choosing to shove at his shoulder. Rozanov glances at him, lowering his voice for only the two of them to hear. "Are you going to tell him?"

Shane sighs before nodding. "Yeah, I think I should. He can keep a secret, so I trust him."

Rozanov's stare flickers at Hayden fidgeting on the couch before looking back at Shane with a flash of disbelief. "That idiot can keep a secret?"

"He didn't tell the team Jackie was pregnant until she was in labor," Shane points out. "I feel like this is in the same category."

"Maybe," Rozanov grunts before huffing and rolling his eyes, raising his hands in defeat. "Fine. Is your choice. But if he opens his mouth, I will break his teeth."

"Yeah, that's fair." Shane pauses. "Can you, um... stay?"

"Stay?" Rozanov repeats, eyebrows shooting up toward his hairline. "For...?"

"I don't know," Shane shrugs, refusing to meet Rozanov's intense stare. "Support, maybe. Some help. It's not, like, easy explaining all of this."

Rozanov considers it for a moment before nodding. "Okay. I will stay." With that, he straightens up, turning to Hayden and clapping his hands once loudly, getting his startled attention. "Okay, Pike. Here is what happened: Hollander has genetic mutation, I have very strong sperm. We fuck a lot and, oops. Now we are having a baby. Any questions?"

Shane nearly collapses. "Rozanov what the *fuck*—"

"What?" Rozanov asks, looking at Shane like *he's* fucking insane. "You said it's hard to explain. I made it easy."

"You're a piece of shit, Rozanov," Hayden says loudly. "Shane is going through some serious medical stuff—he can't even play hockey—and you think it's a fucking joke?"

"Hayden," Shane starts carefully after slapping a hand over Rozanov's mouth when he goes to retort. "I know how it sounds. And I know that he's annoying but—um. He's telling the truth."

Hayden's mouth falls open. He laughs, and then doesn't. He stares at them for several seconds as reality seemingly begins to collapse as he knows it. "What?" he finally says, the word nearly lost in its weakness. He sags back against the cushions. "You're... you're having a baby? With *Rozanov*?"

"Yes, I will be hottest dad on the team now," Rozanov says unhelpfully after pushing Shane's hand off his mouth.

"Fuck off," Hayden says but it comes out as more of a plead than a threat. He looks at Shane, and if he didn't know better, he'd think he was about to start crying. "So you guys are dating?"

"No," Shane says quickly. "No, just um..."

"Teammates with benefits," Rozanov finishes for him, shooting Shane a smile when he gets a nod of approval. "Sometimes people have sex for fun, Hayden. I know it's hard to believe—"

Hayden buries his face in his hands, words muffled. "Please shut the fuck up. Oh, god. I don't want to think about you guys having sex."

"Wow," Rozanov whistles. "You would hate to know how the baby got in Hollander."

Suddenly, Hayden is standing up, crowding Rozanov with a finger poking his chest. "Listen, asshole, if you're planning on being a fucking deadbeat I'll have you know that I'm completely fine with going to prison—"

"Hayden," Shane snaps, grabbing his shoulder to yank him off of Rozanov. Surprisingly, Rozanov doesn't say anything. A flash of anger flickers on his face as his jaw tightens, but he doesn't speak. Shane finds himself doing the defending instead. "He's not gonna be a deadbeat. Don't say that."

"Well how the fuck can you trust him—"

"That's enough!" Shane barks, satisfied in the way Hayden jumps. "Don't say shit like that when you don't know him, Pike. I trust him more than I trust you right now."

That seems to get through Hayden's thick skull. He blinks, eyes cast toward the floor, reminiscent of a kicked puppy. "I'm sorry, man. I didn't mean to—"

"Yes you did," Shane points out bluntly. "But you're not gonna treat him like that for no reason. He was right, I don't have to tell you anything. I don't owe you anything. You can't just come in and corner me and start demanding answers from me."

"I'm sorry," Hayden says again. Then, he looks right at Rozanov. "I shouldn't have said you'd be a deadbeat. I'm—that was fucked up. I'm sure you'll be a... great dad."

The corner of Rozanov's mouth tilts up. "Wow. Almost killed you to say that, yes?"

Hayden lets out a breath. "You have no idea."

"This stays between us," Shane says before Hayden can talk again. "I'm serious. We're trying to keep it to ourselves—"

"Forever?" Hayden interrupts, eyes widening.

"No, not forever," Rozanov answers instead. "Just until summer, maybe. When Hollander can play again."

Hayden nods, just barely. "Okay. That's—that makes sense, I guess. Your secret's safe with me, I swear."

"Thanks," Shane says sincerely. "Seriously, though, I wasn't lying. I'm tired and it's late—"

"Go home to your kids and wife, Pike," Ilya finishes for him, already walking Hayden toward the door. "Come on. Hurry up. Now who is deadbeat dad?"

Hayden scowls, barely managing a goodbye and promise to text Shane soon before Rozanov is shutting the door in his face. There's a long stretch of silence before the two of them start laughing, Shane plopping back onto the sofa while Rozanov leans against the front door, shaking with laughter.

"Fuck," Shane wheezes. "That's not how I imagined that going."

"Oh, really?" Rozanov says, sarcasm thick. "How did you imagine it, then?"

"Well. For starters, I didn't think *you* would be the one telling him."

"Sorry," Rozanov says even though he doesn't sound sorry at all. "At least it is over with, no?"

"Yeah," Shane sighs, tipping his head against the back of the sofa. He looks up at the ceiling, eyes dancing across the textured surface, a forgotten question brought forward. "Hey, what was that important thing you were gonna ask me? Before you got here?"

"Oh." Shane looks up, surprised to find Rozanov rubbing the back of his neck nervously, eyes trained on a spot on the floor instead of at Shane. "Is, um. Maybe is not so important—"

"Come on," Shane urges. He's curious now.

Rozanov says nothing before sighing. "You said before that you had, um, ultrasound, yes? Around twelve weeks?"

"Yeah," Shane nods. He remembers mentioning it once or twice, mostly to rant about how many appointments he was going to have in the near future. "Why?"

"I was thinking maybe," Rozanov starts, gesturing at nothing, mouth in a tight line as he finds his words. "Maybe I can go with you? It would be nice to see." Shane blinks. Truthfully, he hadn't expected Rozanov to want to go to the appointment, especially since it was early and on a weekday. But he guesses it does sort of make sense to want to be there. It's his kid, too. Before he can voice this, Rozanov is already backtracking. "Or maybe not if it is too much —"

"I want you there," Shane says over him, causing him to clamp his mouth shut. "It's at nine in the morning. I can drive us. Is that okay?"

Rozanov nods, throat bobbing as he swallows. "Yes. Yes, is okay. Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me," Shane tells him.

Again, Rozanov nods, rocking on his feet. "I should go. You need to sleep."

For once, Shane is grateful that he's so blunt and doesn't let any conversation drag for more than it needs to. He really is fucking tired. "Have a good night, Rozanov."

"You too, Hollander."

The door opens and closes within the second, and Shane goes to shower away the events of the day.

As winter break approaches and finals begin to take over, Shane doesn't see Rozanov as much in the following week. Well, doesn't see him as much as he normally would, all things considered. It isn't too much of a surprise, though. After all, Rozanov makes it clear that finals and studying were taking up most of his free time because, contrary to popular belief, Rozanov was a pretty fucking great student.

He let his GPA slip out once last year after a game when the guys were chirping about him probably hanging onto his academic career by the skin of his teeth. Casually, Rozanov said: "Ah, yes. four-point-oh is skin of teeth? This is a good thing, yes?" Only for J.J. to scoff out, "Bullshit, Rozanov."

What followed was Rozanov pulling out the proof on his phone, a satisfied smirk drenching his face as everyone started to realize he was probably smarter than most of them. Shane didn't have to act surprised, he had a feeling. After all, Rozanov was majoring in statistics, which Shane knows is all sorts of fucking difficult. He himself chose the sports management route instead, knowing one way or another, hockey was going to be a part of his life.

All this to say, Rozanov is busy being a good student, crossing his Ts and dotting his Is and making sure he passes his finals with flying colors. Though, he *has* been taking the time to text Shane, checking in between practice and classes. Mostly just texts that say *good?* and Shane will say yeah and Rozanov will like the message and go on about his day.

Today, after his last class, Shane gets a call from his mom, the only notification on his phone other than Hayden's link to a stroller that he says is worth the price. He ignores it and instead calls his mom back as he enters his apartment, dropping his backpack on the floor and beelining for the fridge, leaning against the door and staring at the very empty space. There's a protein shake he made this morning but couldn't stand the thought of choking it down. He can only image what Rozanov would say if he saw that the shelves were practically collecting dust.

"Hi honey," Yuna greets. "How are you feeling?"

"Fine," Shane says, ducking his head and hoping that maybe this way he'll spot something hiding in the back. There's nothing hiding back there, he finds quickly. Nothing except maybe some very dated leftovers. "Morning sickness isn't too bad anymore. But my appetite isn't really there? It comes and goes."

"I was the same way," Yuna says with a small laugh. "Just wait until your second trimester. Those cravings hit like a semi-truck."

"Can't wait," Shane deadpans. He might have cereal in the pantry. But he has no milk—*goddamn it*. "Everything okay with you and dad?"

"Oh, you know us," she sighs vaguely. "Actually, I did call to ask you about Christmas—"

"Oh, yeah," Shane nods, knowing where this conversation will go. It's been the same for the last couple years since he started college. "I'll be there."

There's a split second beat of silence before she lets out a breath close to a laugh. "No, well yes, I know that. But I was going to say that you should bring Rozanov along."

This time, it's Shane that laughs. "What? Why do you want Rozanov there?"

"Sweetie," Yuna says even though she might as well say *dumbass*. "He's the father of my grandchild."

"Well not *yet*—"

"Shane Hollander," she scolds and he feels like he's ten and trying to lie his way out of doing homework. "You liked him enough to let him get you pregnant, I think you can tolerate him for a week."

"Mom!"

"What? It's the truth!" she says over him. "I'm serious, Shane. You invite him or I will."

"He's busy," Shane tries weakly. He didn't think he'd ever live to see his own mother so hellbent on Rozanov being around their family. "I don't even know when I'm gonna see him again—"

"You have your ultrasound scheduled tomorrow morning," Yuna points out.

Shane curses. He should stop using the family Google calendar. "Yeah but he's not coming with me," he lies.

"Well, why not?"

"I don't know," Shane explains, the words cracking despite his false confidence. "It's weird."

"Oh, is it?" Yuna asks with too much patience for it to be genuine. She hums, high and blunt. "Because it says you shared the calendar to someone with the email... how do I even read this? *Ya-boi-rozzy eighty one*—"

"Okay!" Shane yelps over her, voice cracking again and the embarrassment staining his cheeks a fiery pink. "Okay, fine—I'll... I'll let him know. But I can't promise he'll say yes."

"As long as you try," Yuna chirps happily. "Alright, I gotta go, sweetie. I love you, have a good day. And call me after your appointment tomorrow!"

With that she hangs up, leaving him alone and drenched in the fridge light.

It takes him two hours to even look at his phone again and at his and Rozanov's rather dry text thread. It's not that he doesn't want Rozanov there, he doesn't mind being in the same space as him. *Obviously*. But the thought of Rozanov saying no, of him being confused or weirded out at the very sudden invitation to spend Christmas—a pretty intimate holiday, in Shane's opinion—at the Hollander residence is... It's not a good thought. It's already a lot to be thrown into parenthood with a fuck buddy but to be thrust into a fuck buddy's sort of overbearing family is a whole different thing.

After constructing and deconstructing a million scripts and possible outcomes and replies to said scripts, a headache knocks against his skull. He decides to sleep on it. If it comes up, it comes up. If it doesn't, well. He can try lying to his mom again.

⊗

Rozanov gets into Shane's Jeep, jostling the entire vehicle in his haste. The chilling air from outside bleeds into the warmth emitted from the heater for a split second until the door is slamming closed. He's got a beanie on, a sweatshirt beneath a denim jacket that matches his jeans, and bags under his eyes that make it known he's a victim of nights spent hunched over textbooks and laptops. The corners of his mouth turn down as he glances around at the interior.

"Are you sure you do not want me to drive?"

"I'm not getting in that death trap," Shane tells him bluntly, putting the car into drive and letting the GPS guide him to the OBGYN office.

Stilted silence settles as Rozanov fidgets with the radio and then the heater before sighing over the clicking blinker as Shane glances over his shoulder, merging. "So. What is the appointment like?"

Shane furrows his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"Like," Rozanov waves his hand, palm up, at nothing. "What are they going to do to you?"

The question is still so goddamn weird that Shane can't help but look at him incredulously. "I don't know, it's my first time too." Rozanov gives him an unbelieving look and Shane sighs, picked apart without so much as a word said. "Alright, I asked my mom, but I still don't know if it's, like, one hundred percent accurate."

Rozanov groans, loud and petulant. "Just tell me, Hollander. I want to be prepared."

Shane doesn't ask what on earth Rozanov needs to be prepared for. It's better to just give him some sort of answer and ease the nerves he seems to be having. "Okay, um. Let me think... There's the ultrasound. Obviously. I think they're gonna take some blood just as a precautionary thing. And they're gonna check the heartbeat to make sure it's all good, measure the, um, baby to make sure it's developing on track. And then measure me, I think, to make sure everything looks good too."

Rozanov's face scrunches in confusion. "Measure *you*? What, you are getting taller or something?"

"No," Shane says, suddenly embarrassed. It's a given that his body is changing, *growing*, but, for the most part, it's almost undetectable to anyone else. Shane's shirts tend to normally fit him looser, not hugging his frame so much. That and with the winter season, he's usually hidden beneath layers and sweatshirts and jackets. He and Rozanov haven't had sex in weeks, but maybe if they did, he would quickly notice the way the space beneath Shane's belly isn't as flat as it had been before. There's a slight curve, a slope. Almost nothing, but just enough

for Shane to notice it, and maybe, *maybe* Rozanov. "The um, my—" he swallows, choking up the word to the best of his ability despite the way it's lodged stubbornly. "My bump."

Rozanov pauses, eyes flickering toward toward Shane's stomach, even as Shane curls in on himself slightly, as much as he can given the steering wheel and seatbelt keeping him in place. "Do you... do you have one now?"

"Not really. It's just—it's not flat anymore. It looks like I ate a little too much, if that makes sense."

Rozanov says nothing, hums low in his throat before going back to flicking through the radio stations. Shane figures the silence is probably better than whatever the hell is going on up there.

An hour later they're sitting in the waiting room, awkwardly staring at the floor while women get called for their appointments, shooting odd glances at the two college kids twiddling their thumbs and pretending to look busy going through the worn magazines on the table in front of their knees. When Shane's name finally gets called the two of them bolt out of their seats, beelining to the door being held open by the nurse.

The room they wait in is stale and Shane closes his eyes, trying not to feel as panicked as his mind is trying to make him feel. The last time he was sitting on an exam table like this, his whole world shifted on its axis. It makes sense that his body is, again, in fight or flight mode. The bouncing of his knee is stopped by a warm pressure.

He snaps his eyes open and Rozanov is standing in front of him, between his spread legs, ducking his head to meet Shane's eyes. "Okay?" he asks.

Shane nods stiffly, trying to smile but falling short, giving him more of a grimace. "Yeah, just... I hate hospitals and stuff."

"Yes," Rozanov says with a small chuckle. His hand is rubbing against the top of Shane's thigh, the motion soothing. "Yes, me too."

The door clicks open and Rozanov steps back to sit in the chair tucked into the corner. A different nurse comes in, cheerily saying her hellos as she bustles around the room, informing Shane that she is there to take his blood. Shane takes his hoodie off, rolls his sleeve up so she can start tying the tourniquet around his arm, somewhat grateful that they can get this part out of the way quickly. It's only when he lets himself scan the room that he notices Rozanov stand and then sit and then stand again.

"You okay, Rozanov?" he asks just in case.

His nod is delayed, the movement quick and rigid when it comes. Concerning in more ways than one. "*Da*—yes. Is just—a little hot in here, no?"

The nurse snaps her eyes to him. "Sir, are you going to pass out?"

"No," Rozanov answers too quickly, throat bobbing as he swallows thickly. "No, Russians do not—" he stops talking and sits back down.

The nurse turns her body, directing her attention to him. "Are you going to be okay, sir?"

Rozanov waves her off, lines heavy between his brows as he refuses to look at her. "I am fine."

"Rozanov," Shane says firmly, making Rozanov look at him. "If you can't handle needles you should probably go wait in the waiting room."

"No, is fine. I can handle it," he says, and as if to try and prove it, he squares his shoulders, puts on a stupid face that is probably supposed to be bravery, and shuts his mouth.

Shane rolls his eyes but gives the nurse the go ahead, blindly trusting that Rozanov can handle himself, and the nurse continues. She misses his vein the first time, and unfortunately makes the mistake of saying that out loud. They both startle when Rozanov audibly retches, slapping a hand over his mouth.

"Sorry," he chokes out, words muffled behind his palm. "I'm sorry—"

She looks at Shane and sighs wearily. "I'm so sorry, but if he's going to be a distraction—"

"I am not a distraction!" Rozanov argues before covering his face with his hands. "Go. I am not looking—do the... the *thing*."

Thank god she manages to get the needle in the second time, keeping her mouth closed and only whispering to Shane that it's in. It's all smooth sailing, and then the vial starts to fill with blood, and Rozanov makes the mistake of looking up again. He goes pale in the chair.

"Don't pass out," Shane chastises with a sigh.

Rozanov swallows and then laughs too loudly. "I do not... pass... out... I think I am going to rest my eyes, yes? Finals were very exhausting. Maybe I will nap."

With that he's tilting his head back and closing his eyes. More limp than what is normal, but whatever. At least he's being quiet. The nurse leaves after doing a quick once over of Rozanov and deciding that he's fine, and they wait around fifteen minutes before someone else is coming in.

She's middle aged, hair neatly tucked into a braid that hangs down her back. Her scrubs are pink and her badge hangs from the pocket of her pants. The door closing snaps Rozanov awake and the color has returned to his face, which is a good sign. He seems more alert than before.

"Hello," the doctor beams, her white teeth on display. Shane smiles back, just barely, but enough that she keeps speaking brightly. "My name is Dr. Alma Yañez, I specialize in male pregnancies, but, I'll be honest, I don't see them often. However, I promise I am here for anything you might need, Mr. Hollander, as well as here to answer any questions you have."

She flips through the chart, humming kindly. "Your blood work looks great, which is to be expected. I heard you played hockey?"

"Yeah," Shane nods. "But I took the season off. So..."

"That's good," Dr. Yañez assures him. He doesn't know why the validation makes him feel better, even if it's just a little. "It seems like you're still in great shape."

"Yeah I've been going on jogs still while I can. I wanted to ask about weightlifting, is that still okay?"

"Oh, yes!" Dr. Yañez excitedly nods. "As long as you don't strain yourself and make sure to pace yourself. It's like... straining a muscle, right? You don't want to do that, so you make sure your movements are controlled and that you listen to your body. I'm sure you have experience with that. Weightlifting is actually really great during pregnancy, it can help with preparing your body mentally and physically for labor, and it'll be great for your mental health as well." She pauses, as if sensing an added presence, and looks at Rozanov, smile still plastered on her face. "And this is other dad, correct? Sorry, I got a bit ahead of myself. Dr. Yañez, and you are?"

"Yes," Rozanov nods, standing and reaching over to shake her hand. "It is nice to meet you. Ilya Rozanov."

"Ilya, beautiful name," she tells him, her nose scrunching as her smile widens. She drops his hand and turns back to Shane. "Alright, so first we'll be measuring the fundal height, which is the distance between your pubic bone and the top of the womb to make sure you and the baby are growing at the expected rate. Mr. Hollander, can you go ahead and lay back and lift your shirt for me? Thank you."

Shane does as told, staring at the ceiling with tension in his jaw and shoulders. He can hear Rozanov shift, can see him trying to peek around Dr. Yañez's shoulder when she takes the measuring tape and presses it to Shane skin. He probably doesn't have a great angle, probably can't really see Shane's stomach all that much which is sort of a relief.

"Everything looks great," she says. "Measuring as expected. Now, if you'll just sit tight and I'll be right back with the portable ultrasound machine."

For once, he's told the truth and she is back rather quickly, rolling in the said portable ultrasound machine. She sits on the stool and rolls toward Shane with the wand in her hand.

"So, typically for female pregnancies ultrasounds are only done about two to three times, but with male pregnancies it is a bit different considering there are more risks with the fetal development."

"That makes sense," Shane nods.

"If you could just lift your shirt up again, Mr. Hollander. The gel is going to be a bit cold, so I apologize for the discomfort—" she pauses, looking over her shoulder. "Oh, Mr. Rozanov, would you like to come over here and get a better look?"

Rozanov snaps his eyes to Shane, as if asking for permission. "Oh, um. I—"

"Come here," Shane tells him, cocking his head to beckon him over. It's only a matter of time before he gets a look at Shane beneath the layers of clothes hiding his belly.

Rozanov stumbles up, awkwardly shuffling until he's standing beside Shane's shoulder. His hands are glued to his sides, gaze focused on where Shane is pushing his shirt up, just beneath his pecs. The machine turns on, and Dr. Yañez's words are distant as Shane's heart hammers in his chest at the nearly unidentifiable images on the screen. Sometimes, it's easy to forget that there's a fucking baby in there. Or at least something that will become a baby in the near future. Something that will be a person, made up of him after being a part of his body for months and months and months.

"—it'll be a little difficult to make out, but if you look there, that's the start of a head and body. This is the gestational sac and this is the amniotic sac. The small curve you see here is a spine and right here is the umbilical cord."

Rozanov's hand grips the side of the exam table, where Shane's shoulder is resting, his mouth dropping as his eyes flicker across the image on the screen. "So, this is—is this...?"

"Your baby," Dr. Yañez beams.

"And it is... it is okay?" Rozanov asks. For a second, Shane is confused, but the memory of Rozanov in his living room weeks ago crashes into him. *I was not gentle with you last time, Hollander.* Quickly, Shane understands the way Rozanov's teeth are worrying at his lip, the way he can't stop shifting on his feet.

"We can move onto the heartbeat..."

A click, and then the heavy sounds of quick and rhythmic thudding. Rozanov's voice is quiet, in awe. "Good heartbeat?"

Dr. Yañez nods, smiling. "Small, but mighty. And good news, dads, everything is looking good."

A breath of relief punches out of Shane and his head drops back against the table. The tension in his body dissipates slowly but surely and Rozanov's face comes into view, eyes glistening with something unfamiliar.

When Shane lets out a small laugh, he does too.

⊗

After the appointment, Rozanov insists on stopping by one of the run down diners nearby to get a bite to eat. Shane agrees immediately, stomach rumbling as he turns into the parking lot without much convincing. They sit in a booth across from each other, their surroundings quite empty in the late morning. An elderly couple sits two booths away, sharing a stack of pancakes and drinking coffee. A waitress takes an early break, perched on a bar stool and reading a book while eating a sandwich.

Ilya orders a burger, fries, and a milkshake. The thought of red meat makes Shane sick, so he orders a grilled chicken sandwich and a side of fruit and water, giving the waitress a small smile as she pops her gum and takes the menus. She hadn't even written anything down.

"You are pregnant," Rozanov says around a mouthful of food later on, watching as Shane bites into a strawberry. "You are allowed to eat like shit for once, no?"

"No," Shane says, shaking his head. "It could lead to gestational diabetes. It's important to have a balanced diet now more than ever."

Rozanov raises an eyebrow. He tosses a fry into his mouth, chewing before asking, "You have been reading up?"

"Of course," Shane shrugs. He thought that was the obvious thing to do. "How could I not? This is, like, a big deal."

"Yes, maybe," Rozanov says. "But also... sometimes is okay to just relax."

Shane wants to roll his eyes but refrains. This isn't nagging, at least he thinks it isn't. "For *you* yeah, I'm sure. You're not the one carrying this fucking baby."

"Ah, yes, but I would carry it so well."

Shane blink slowly, unimpressed, and throws a grape at him. Annoyingly, he catches it easily and pops it into his mouth, winking at Shane smugly as the grape crunches loudly between his molars. Somehow, it's his own mother's voice that starts to chime in the back of his head, and he takes a hefty bite of his sandwich just to have something to do before covering his mouth, staring at the table as he speaks.

"So, um. My mom wanted me to ask you something—"

"Uh oh," Rozanov, dull and stretched. "What did I do?"

"It's not bad," Shane promises. "Are... are you doing anything over winter break? I know you tend to stay here in Canada, but, um. Are you going to Russia this year or...?"

Rozanov is quick to shake his head. "No. I only go when I need to," he says flat out, honest. "And I do not need to go right now and Russian Christmas is in January anyway, so. I will stay at boring house. Marlow says he is going back to Boston, and I think Connors will go home too, and Bood will be at girlfriend's parent's house, so. Will be just me." He looks up, brow line tense. "Why?"

Shane manages to gulp down a half-chewed bite, wincing as it drags down. "If you want to come, you're invited to Ottawa," he says, glancing up for a fleeting moment before looking away again. It's always a bit intimidating being on the end of such an intense stare from Rozanov himself. "To my parent's house. Christmas is usually pretty chill. We're not super close with our extended family, so it's just the three of us." He pauses. "Well, four of us if you're... you're free."

A wave of silence tumbles between the two of them. Rozanov keeps staring at him with an unreadable expression, which is new. Shane usually can gauge what he's thinking or feeling easily—the only person he can do that with. Then, Rozanov says, just barely: "Five."

Shane can't help but blink, tilting his head. "Huh?"

"Five of us," Rozanov clarifies. And if that isn't enough, his eyes flicker down, his chin tips toward Shane's abdomen. "Will be five of us, no?"

Piecing it together, a laugh flutters out of Shane's chest. He nods, pressing his lips together to dampen his bleeding smile. "Yeah, I guess so." He waits a second. "Is that a yes, then?"

Rozanov grins. "I think so."

Chapter End Notes

if i'm being honest the chapter count might go up. but also it might not. i can't promise anything.

chapter 3 is 50% written, so hopefully it'll be good to post by next friday! i will see you then!

kudos+comments always appreciated <3 i love reading ppl's fav parts or where they think it'll go, it's always so find! and thank you for being so kind on the first chapter, i really hope this second chapter held up as well <3

Chapter 3: III. Why Don't You Make Yourself at Home?

Chapter Summary

13-15 weeks.

Chapter Notes

welcome to chapter 3! this one was a lot of fun to write, i hope you enjoy too! it's a bit of a filler as i progress their relationship so we can into the good stuff in the next chapter (also, the chapters got bumped up. im so sorry. it might happen again.) hehehe anyway as always

► EXTRA NOTES

pls enjoy!

TRIGGER WARNING FOR THIS CHAPTER ilya briefly mentions abuse he endured when he lived with his father. it is in a single paragraph and not detailed, but it is still mentioned. it can be easily skipped. you can skip the paragraph starting with **He opens up about his father, how he was, for lack of better words, terrible.** and ending at **How no matter what he does, his shadow still holds the somber shape of his own father.**

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

13

The blue door swings open with enough force to pull the air from Shane's lungs. Greeting him with smiles plastered on their faces is Yuna and David. Though, their smiles are quick to drop, replaced with creased brows and wandering eyes at the sight of solely Shane standing on their porch.

"Where's Rozanov?" Yuna asks at the same time David says, "I thought you said Rozanov was coming."

Shane frowns, the strap of the duffel bag sliding off his shoulder. "What about me? Aren't you happy to see *me*?"

"Hi, honey," Yuna is quick to say, pinching his cheek with a sweet smile. "Yes, of course we missed you, but—"

"I can't believe there's even a 'but'—"

"But," David finishes for her, "we were just expecting Rozanov too. We set up the guest bedroom for him."

And, well, Shane understands their curiosity. "He's coming tomorrow," he explains. "Said he had to take care of a few things at the house he shares with some of the guys." *Take care of some things* translates to Rozanov deep cleaning the house and getting rid of perishables and fixing a leak in one of the bathroom sinks. Or at least that's what he told Shane the previous night when Shane asked him if he was packed.

"What a sweet kid," Yuna says as Shane crosses the threshold.

"Last year you said you hoped he broke his knee," Shane points out earning a scowl from his mother and a chuckle from his father.

"Oh, that was just some chirping," Yuna waves off. "He's been sending me links to alternative names for grandparents. He seems really excited to let us choose!"

David nods. "I like *Lolli* and *Pop*. Get it?"

"No, absolutely not," Shane says quickly before pausing, the realization settling on his shoulders as he looks between his parents in bewilderment. "Wait—you text Rozanov?"

"It's a groupchat," David shrugs, backtracking when Shane's eyes get wider. "We have a groupchat with you too!"

"Yeah but I'm your *son*!"

"And he's our—" Yuna cuts herself off, gesticulating wildly, "—our grandchild's other father! And he's been very helpful with updating us on you."

Shane blinks slowly, shifting his eyes to David and then Yuna and then back to David. They shift on their feet. "Updating you? On *me*?"

"You should go put your things in your room," Yuna says quickly, turning him around toward the staircase decorated with forest green garlands and Christmas lights threaded throughout, matching the tree in front of the windows near the front door with their yellow-white lights glowing. "We made lunch, it's getting cold."

As much as he'd love to know what else goes on in the groupchat he has no part in, he's pretty fucking hungry. He can hound Rozanov about it tomorrow when he arrives. For now, he treks upstairs into his childhood slash teenhood bedroom, opens the door and is greeted by navy blue walls he spent a majority of his evenings within.

There's a Sidney Crosby poster right above the dark wood headboard of his bed, alongside a puck his dad caught at a Metros game and gifted him when he was twelve, displayed in a shadow box on the wall. His desk is empty, only a lamp perched in the corner, lonely and without a bulb. His bed is neatly made, the blue and black plaid bedding stretched and tucked

in, the matching pillows assorted in a way that tells him his mom made sure to tidy this room as well.

He deposits his things at the end of the bed, deciding to wait until later to unpack his things. Downstairs, his parents are already bustling around the dining table, placing a bowl of salad in the middle and a plated meal on each dining mat. Shane takes his usual seat, right across from his parents and gives himself a hefty portion of salad, pretending to not notice the way his mom keeps inching the dressing toward him. He takes it anyway, drizzling it on top and helping himself, the twinge of hunger in his belly sated for the time being.

"Any cravings yet?" his mom asks suddenly, making him fumble his fork onto the table.

"Jesus, mom," Shane mutters, getting a grip on his utensil and himself.

"Oh, you can tell me that you got pregnant but I can't ask you about some cravings?" Yuna laughs bluntly, palm up in disbelief as she looks between Shane and David.

"Sorry," Shane sighs, knowing he's overreacting. To be fair, it's weird to talk about. He hasn't fully processed it, mostly forgets that he's carrying what will become a baby in the next several months. What he can't forget is how the fucking thing got in there—*who* put it in there. His mom acknowledging it makes him feel like she's acknowledging the process of it all as well and that's... No. No, he's not gonna think about his mom thinking about him getting fucked by Rozanov. "I don't think I've had cravings. Or, maybe I have? I don't really know—"

"Oh, you would know," Yuna says over him. "Trust me. It'll be all you can think about."

Shane hums with a nod, shoveling another bite into his mouth before asking, "What did you crave when you were pregnant with me?"

Yuna lights up, words tumbling out of her mouth in excitement. "Oh, I used to crave this dish called *nikujaga*. My grandmother used to make it for us when we visited and I would eat it so fast my mom would scold me, '*Have some manners, Yuna!*'" She laughs, light and airy and delighted. "It was so odd because I hadn't eaten it in the ten years before and all of a sudden I could not stop thinking about it."

David nods in confirmation, a sweet smile on his face. "It was all she talked about."

Again, Yuna beams. "It really was! But your father, the sweetheart he is, learned how to make it. It was almost, *almost* as perfect as my grandmother's. I cried when I took the first bite."

Shane's eyes widen and he laughs in disbelief. "Really? You *cried*?"

David's smile widens. "Don't get too judgemental. Pretty soon you're gonna be on the same boat."

Shane laughs again, shaking his head. "Yeah, no. I don't think I'll cry over food."

Yuna reaches across the table to pat his arm with a small wink. "Okay, honey. Whatever you say."

Shane spends the rest of the day wrapping his mom's presents for his dad and his dad's presents for his mom, something he's done since he was a kid and wanted to feel included in the adult stuff. It's enough to keep him busy instead of checking his phone every ten minutes to see if Rozanov has said anything. Not that there's anything to say, really, but... just in case.

Later on, his parents put on a Christmas movie to unwind for the night. Shane is tucked in the corner of the loveseat with a blanket draped over him while his dad scrolls through videos on his phone, the volume a touch too loud, and his mom sips at some red wine, a drop staining her collar. Their second Christmas tree is beside the fireplace, decorated in emerald green, deep red, and white. There's a few ornaments, handmade by Shane when he was in school, nearly falling apart with time but still perched on their branches. The lights glow warmly against the dimmed light offered by one of the lamps as well as the television. Cozy, through and through.

Shane is partially dozing off when his phone vibrates from beneath his thigh. A warmth swoops through him when he finds Rozanov's name on his screen with a simple message.

Rozanov

how are you doing?

Shane

I'm okay, just watching a movie with my parents.

Rozanov

so boring.

what movie?

Shane

It's a Wonderful Life.

Rozanov

snoooooze

Shane grins, huffing out a laugh around the drawstring of his hoodie that's caught between his teeth.

Shane

We're probably gonna watch it tomorrow night too. My dad loves it.

Rozanov

boring is genetic??

oh no. our poor mini ilya is going to be boring :(

Shane

Mini Ilya??? Hell no. Mini Shane, more like.

Rozanov

hahaha u are funny hollander.

russian genetics are very strong.

Shane

God I hope not. The world would burn with two Rozanovs running around.

Rozanov

prepare for the flames 🔥🔥🔥

Shane snorts and bites down on the fabric between his teeth. Another text comes through before he can reply.

Rozanov

i will ask david if we can watch the grinch. one with jim carrey is funny.

Shane

I've never seen it.

Rozanov

of course u have not ur taste is terrible.

Shane

Yeah. Tell me about it.

Rozanov

i feel like this is mean to me but i will ignore it.

Shane

Are you packed?

Rozanov

for the 696969 time hollander yes i am packed.

will leave around 8 tomorrow. gps says i will be there around 10:15

Shane

In the morning?

Rozanov

no i will wait all day to show up while boring hollanders are tucked into bed.

Shane

You could have just said yes.

Rozanov

but then it would not be fun :(

"Who are you texting?" Yuna asks suddenly, startling Shane into nearly dropping his phone.

Shane considers lying before remembers it's really not big a deal. He can text his... baby daddy? No, that's not right. He's allowed to text the father of his child. "Oh, just Rozanov. Making sure he's set for tomorrow, you know."

"Ah, okay," Yuna says with an unreadable expression, observing Shane carefully before averting her gaze back to the TV.

Shane doesn't have time to overthink it, his phone vibrating in his lap is enough of a distraction.

Rozanov

what did you eat today?

Shane

Weird question.

Rozanov

is really not

tell meeee

Shane

For breakfast I had some oats and fruit. My mom made salad and chicken parm for lunch. Dinner was pizza.

Rozanov

you ate pizza?

Shane

They ordered me a chickpea dough one.

Rozanov



have a slice of pizza please. the baby is crying.

Shane

It can't cry yet. It's barely even a baby.

Rozanov

you are evil.

Shane

And you're an idiot.

Rozanov

mmm yes maybe but you are still texting me.

Shane

Fuck off.

Rozanov

hahaha

almost hollanders bedtime. i will be nice and let you relax.

have a good night.

Shane

Night, Rozanov.

Rozanov

see you tomorrow :)

Shane

See you.



Rozanov texts Shane when he's five minutes away.

After rushing downstairs, Shane is closing the door of the house, dressed in thick sweatpants and a matching sweatshirt, the hood over his head, socked feet in some slides from high school as he walks down the driveway. His hands are shoved in the pocket in front and through it he can feel the swollen curve beneath his navel. He lets his hands splay on top of it for a moment, just until he catches a glimpse of an obnoxiously orange coupe turning onto the street.

He can see Rozanov's splitting and annoying grin on his face through the windshield as he revs the engine, parking alongside the curb, right behind Shane's Jeep. Shane waits for him on the driveway as Rozanov pops the trunk and takes out a backpack, slinging it over his shoulder and doing the same with a duffel.

He speaks the moment he's within Shane's reach. "Such a good host, waiting for me in the cold," he coos annoyingly, ruffling Shane's hair like he's a fucking dog or worse, a child.

"Oh, fuck off," Shane says, shoving at Rozanov's shoulder, pressing his lips together to keep the smile splitting his face when Rozanov beams at him. "How was the drive?"

"Boring," Rozanov shrugs, following Shane up the driveway and into the house. "Lots of cars driving this way. I forget it is the holidays."

"At least you made it in one piece."

"Yes, lucky for you."

They get into something of a shoving battle that is quickly broken up as they step over the threshold and Yuna and David are bombarding Rozanov with hugs while Shane tries to tell him to *please take off his shoes*.

"How was the drive?" Yuna asks just as David asks, "Do you need help with your things?"

Shane stares at the scene, somewhat appalled by their amplified hospitality. Sure, his dad helped him with his bags when he got here, but *still*. It's a petty thought that goes just as it had come when he notices Rozanov's eyes widening in surprise and delight as he takes in the questions and the fretting.

"The drive was okay, very long but I made it in one piece," he glances at Shane briefly, a smile flickering on the corner of his mouth before David asks if he needs help with his things again. "Oh, um—yes, I have bags in the backseat—presents for Christmas. Not much but—"

"You didn't have to get anything," Yuna says quickly, squeezing his arm. "But we appreciate it."

"I can go get those for you," David tells him with a smile, clapping him on the shoulder and taking the keys from Rozanov's hand without another word.

"We have the guest bedroom all ready for you," Yuna says, stealing his attention again before tilting her chin toward Shane who blinks, pointing at himself in confusion. "Shane will show you up to the bedroom and help you get settled. You can set your shoes over there."

It's not so much of a request as it is a promise, so Shane nods stiffly and obliges, waiting for Rozanov to slip his shoes off and place them in the shoe organizer flush to the wall, and then goes upstairs without checking if Rozanov is following. Judging by the footsteps trailing, he is. Admittedly, it's weird to have Rozanov here without an ulterior motive, like telling Shane's parents something life changing. Rozanov is here to simply enjoy himself, to spend the holidays with them because that's what families should do, and whether the two of them like it or agree, Rozanov is technically family now. And he will be for the rest of their lives.

When they make it up the stairs, Shane gestures to where the guest bedroom is on the other side of the hallway, across from Shane's bedroom, on the other side of the upstairs area to where his parents room is. "This is, uh, yours. For the next week and a half, I mean." He opens the door, revealing a green and beige color scheme, courtesy of Yuna Hollander and her interior decorating skills.

Rozanov whistles, a sharp sound that pitches down in a swoop as he walks in and Shane follows with some hesitance. "Wow," he says with a curt nod, eyes trailing over the painting above the bed of a willow tree. "This is nice."

Shane nods, clearing his throat and going through the mental rundown he knows his mom would approve of. "Bathroom is the door next to this one. There's extra towels in the closet in the hallway, right at the end of the hall. Extra toothbrushes are under the sink if you forgot yours, and the laundry room is near the loft. There's no door, you can't miss it."

Rozanov nods, looking around before turning to face Shane, close enough that their socked feet almost touch. "And where is your room?"

"Across the hall," Shane says before he can stop himself, heart quickening in pace when Rozanov's eyes flicker across his face. "Why?"

"Show it to me."

"Show it to you?" Shane repeats, voice nearly failing him.

"I want to see," Rozanov shrugs simply, as if it's the most casual, normal request.

And maybe to him it is. This is different to all the other times they've been in each other's company. Something uncharted, new. Another thing Shane has to learn to navigate.

Shane studies him for a second, looking for signs of Rozanov fucking with him but finds nothing, only Rozanov's steady stare. "Okay," he agrees eventually because he doesn't have a reason to say no.

He turns on his heel and treks across the hallway, hand twisting the knob and pushing the door open with less confidence than he wants. Shane doesn't look as Rozanov slowly walks around the room, eyes dancing across every minor detail like there's something interesting enough to commit to memory. Instead, Shane focuses on picking at chipping wood on the dull edge of his desk, only risking a glance up when Rozanov's pace stops.

He's smiling enough for Shane to notice. "A lot of blue," Rozanov says, amused. "A lot of hockey. I should have guessed. Very clean, too."

Shane frowns. "Is that a dig or something?"

"No," Rozanov says quickly. "Is just very... *you*. I like it."

"Thanks," Shane says, shifting on his feet awkwardly, wondering why the compliment makes him stand a little straighter albeit the silence hovering as Rozanov sits on the edge of Shane's bed.

Then, Rozanov breaks the quietness. "How are you feeling?"

"Why are you always asking me that?"

"What, I cannot be curious?"

Shane rolls his eyes when Rozanov raises his eyebrows, still expecting an answer to his first question. "I'm doing fine."

"In the morning?" Rozanov follows up. "Are you still sick?"

"Not really," Shane tells him honestly. "Just some nausea but I haven't been throwing up."

Rozanov nods contentedly. "Yes. You are in second trimester now, so it will go away soon. Maybe at fourteen weeks."

Shane blinks at him, eyebrows furrowing and mouth twitching as it drops, searching for the right words. "Are... Did you look it up?"

This time it's Rozanov rolling his eyes. "Some of us know how to research too, Hollander. Is very easy, you are not as smart as you think you are."

"I didn't mean it like that, asshole, " Shane is quick to defend. "I just meant, um... It's nice of you to do that. That's all."

Rozanov blinks back before the tension on his face dissipates. "I am just trying to be... informed. For you."

Before Shane can say anything, Yuna's voice is calling for them downstairs. Rozanov is quick to get up, brushing past, the smell of his cologne lingering in the air. Shane follows close behind.

Christmas comes with days that drag and go by so quickly Shane is caught off guard when he wakes up on Christmas Eve to his mom letting him know her and his father would be trying to get some last minute things for tomorrow's dinner.

It'll be the first time him and Rozanov are alone together. In the last few days the space between them has been filled with both Yuna and David, always there to keep conversations flowing, to keep any awkwardness from manifesting between the two of them. Rozanov has found his place quite easily—starting a puzzle with David, washing dishes in the kitchen after lunch and dinner even though Yuna insists that he should go relax. He even convinced them to watch *The Grinch*, and Shane can't help but admit that it's a pretty funny movie. Though, he spends most of the duration stealing glances at Rozanov who was on the opposite side of the loveseat, cracking up at every other scene like it's the first time he's seen it.

Stuck in the memory of Rozanov's head tilted back, every molar on display with a hand over his chest as he laughed at the Grinch being force-fed pudding, Shane is startled by Rozanov dragging his socked feet across the wood flooring as he enters the kitchen. His sleep addled body is something Shane hasn't had a chance to catch a glimpse at in the last couple of days, but now he's right there in the mid-morning sunlight bleeding through the windows. Yawning into the air, one hand scratching his sculpted abdomen, visible as his t-shirt rides up to expose his bare skin. His pajama pants (blue and grey plaid patterned) are resting low on his hips, enough for Shane to see that he isn't wearing anything underneath.

It's a sight that Shane isn't familiar with. He's seen Rozanov fully dressed and fully naked, but never in-between. Never like this.

Shane fumbles with his cup of raspberry tea, accidentally sloshing the liquid inside and spilling it on the front of his sweater, when Rozanov looks over at him, eyes widening like he hadn't expected anyone to be in the kitchen. Shane is quick to turn around, reaching for a dishrag and placing his cup down on the counter to start dabbing at the spot, exhaling gratefully when it doesn't stain at all.

"Good morning," Rozanov says, suddenly standing right beside him.

Shane looks up and then away, scrubbing at already drying fabric. "Morning."

"Where are David and Yuna?" Rozanov asks, picking up the cup of tea and sniffing it, frowning but still stealing a sip. He winks when he sees Shane's eyes stuck on the motion of his throat as it swallows. "I heard them leave, I think, but I wasn't sure. I went back to sleep."

"They said they were gonna go pick up some things for dinner tomorrow," Shane says, refusing to meet Rozanov's gaze. He pauses. "They should be back any second, so, um. Yeah."

Rozanov raises an eyebrow, leaning back against the counter and beside Shane, ducking his head slightly to try looking at him properly. "Everything okay?"

"Yeah. I'm good," Shane says. He doesn't pay attention to the fact that Rozanov's shirt is still rumpled right above his navel. The hair trails down to the lines of his pubic bone. Somehow, it looks more obscene than it does when he's stripping in front of Shane, or when he's lying back with Shane between his legs, heavy cock in his mouth—

"You are turning red," Rozanov points out, the edges of his tone softened with concern. Still, Shane jumps, especially when Rozanov turns to face him properly, eyes flickering between Shane's like he's trying to read his mind. He really, *really* hopes Rozanov can't read his fucking mind right now. "Hey—are you okay?"

"I'm fine," Shane says, throat dry as Rozanov's hand comes up to steady his face, palm against his jaw, forcing him to look him in the eye. It's too reminiscent of the way he touches Shane when he fucks into him, when he makes sure that Shane's glossy eyes are looking right into his own, when he's asking Shane if it feels good, if he wants more, if anyone else fucks him like this. "Rozanov—" he tries weakly, cut off when Rozanov clicks his tongue.

"No. No *Rozanov*," he chastises, mimicking Shane's exasperated tone. "What are you thinking, hm?" he asks instead, crowding Shane's body against the corner where the counters meet. Their noses brush, and judging by the way his grip tightens on Shane's jaw, he knows exactly what Shane's thinking. Can probably feel his erection against his thigh.

"Nothing," Shane tries again, but doesn't make the effort to move away. The warmth is nice, blanketing him. He can't help but sway into the touch, eyes fluttering shut.

"No. Tell me," Rozanov urges, brushing their noses together again.

A noise helplessly crawls from the back of Shane's throat. Needy, desperate for more contact, for the rough press of Rozanov's mouth against his. He parts his lips, the hitch of his breath catching against his unsaid words, really to spill. *Kiss me already, just fucking do it—*

The front door opens with a noise that cuts straight through the air, shattering the nonexistent space between them as they startle, and just like that Rozanov is on the other side of the kitchen as Yuna's voice calls from the front: "*Boys! Come help unload the bags!*"

It takes Shane several seconds to compose himself, only coming to when he notices Rozanov reentering the kitchen with his hands holding grocery bags as he asks Yuna where to put them. Shane kicks into gear, avoiding Rozanov's glances in a way that he knows is stupid and childish. For fucks sake, he's kissed Rozanov more times than he can count, has had his tongue in his mouth and in other places that he'd never admit to out loud.

But that's... That was all sex. Kisses that led to sex. Kisses in the middle of sex, and very rarely after. This time, there was no promise of escalation in the affection, and maybe it's because Shane likes order, likes things to make sense, but he finds himself unable to shake the moment from his head, replaying it over and over again throughout the day until he starts to wonder if his mind has rewritten it into something less or something more than what it was.

It seems like Rozanov has forgotten all about the moment, keen on slotting himself into the corners of the Hollander household, making himself useful and entertaining where he can. He

helps Yuna plate dinner, asks David about his job like it's the most interesting thing in the world only to call it boring but still somehow charm the table into laughing. Shane hides his laughter in his palm, kicking at Rozanov's ankle beneath the table and chastising him for making fun of his dad.

"Boring is not bad, Hollander," Rozanov says with a shrug. "I like boring. Obviously."

Shane finds himself blinking at the side of Rozanov's face as Yuna changes the subject, asking him about his major and sweeping his previous attention away from Shane. He doesn't mind it, not when it lets him have a second to himself, letting his brain shut off for a little as he gets a second serving of dinner.

He functions on autopilot as he helps clean up, wiping down the table while Rozanov picks up the dishes, slowing as he rounds the corner to bump his hip against Shane's. When he looks up, Rozanov raises his brows. A silent *are you okay?* that Shane is familiar with, has seen time and time again on and off the ice. It's weirdly comforting in all the unnamed and unplaced feelings and expressions he's been getting and trying to decipher since Rozanov arrived in Ottawa. He nods, letting the corner of his mouth tilt up into something of a smile. It's enough for Rozanov, and in turn enough for Shane. He's a little lighter on his feet after that.

Eventually, they all migrate into the living room and Shane ends up on the loveseat with Rozanov, sitting at the edge, their knees bumping together as they lean forward when Yuna hurries back with a photo album clutched in her hands, leather and a dark blue with *Shanebug!* written on the front in his father's messy handwriting.

Rozanov's jaw drops in delight when he reads it. "Shane-bug?" He jerks a thumb toward Shane. "This is your Shane-bug, yes?"

"Jesus Christ," Shane mumbles, rubbing a hand over his face. "Mom, really? We don't need to see this—"

"Shane," Yuna scolds. "Yes, we need to see this. You were a cute baby!"

"I will be the judge of that," Rozanov says quickly, reaching out and flexing his fingers open and close. "Give me, please. I would like to see baby Shane-bug."

Of course Yuna is thrilled to open the album up, immediately gasping with a hand over her heart and a sentimental smile. "Oh! This was when we brought him home from the hospital!"

She turns the album so they can get a good look at the photo. Baby Shane is in a onesie that looks a little too tight on his little body, his eyes closed, fists balled up beside his head, and his jet black hair flat. Though, to say he was *little* would be misleading. He was a meaty, big baby. He remembers his extended family being surprised when seeing him later on in life, asking what happened to his cheeks, his tummy, only for his mom to explain that he grew into himself quite quickly.

The next photo is of Shane at one month old. His stare unfocused, past the camera, tongue pushed between his pouting lips and one of his hands fisted beside his head while the other

stretches all his fingers. He's wearing a blue and white striped Snoopy onesie with the cuffs of the sleeves and legs patched with red, and his mom's hand is on his belly, most likely trying to get some sort of reaction out of him instead of the blank baby face he's sporting.

Rozanov chuckles softly, eyes dancing across the photos like he's trying to catch every detail. "So cute, so *small*."

"Ha! No, not at all," Yuna laughs, nudging David with her shoulder.

"He was actually almost ten pounds," David tells Rozanov, nodding when Rozanov's mouth falls open with a soft *no* of disbelief. "Oh yeah. The nurses were taking turns coming in just to pick him up—he was the biggest baby of the year! Well, it was only May so I'm sure that title only lasted for a month or two but still—"

"Alright!" Shane says over him. "Yeah, I was a big baby. There are a lot of big babies—" Rozanov starts laughing loudly, suddenly. So much so that he starts to lean into Shane. "Oh fuck off," Shane says with a huff. "I'm sure you weren't that fucking small—"

Rozanov starts shaking his head, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand as he composes himself. "No—no. That is the funny thing, I *was* a very big baby."

Shane stares at him. "Okay? So? Good for you, asshole."

"No, Hollander. You know what this means?" Rozanov asks, waiting until Shane rolls his eyes and shakes his head. "This means you will be carrying big Russian baby. Big Hollander baby, too."

The realization crashes into Shane differently than it did Rozanov. It isn't funny, actually. It's terrifying. "Oh no. Oh my god."

"It's not too bad, honey!" Yuna says quickly, doing her best to do some damage control.

"Well," David says with the tilt of his head. "You were very... irritable toward the end, honey."

"Well *you* try carrying around a nine pound baby who refused to come out and had to be induced!"

Shane sags into the sofa while his parents bicker. He barely notices when Rozanov places his hand on his leg and rubs his knee. "I am sorry," he says suddenly and Shane blinks.

"What? Sorry for what?"

Rozanov shrugs. "Maybe it's... a little scary, yes? That the baby will be big. I'm sorry you have to deal with that."

"No, don't be," Shane says quickly, shaking his head. "I should have figured. Plus, chubby babies are the cutest, right? That's like a known fact."

Rozanov's smile grows. "Yes, yes. It will be a very cute baby."

Shane smiles too, looking down and running the edge of his nail over the fabric of his sweatpants. "Do you... do you have any baby pictures? Of you?" Maybe it's a bit selfish, but he'd like to see baby Rozanov. He can already picture him—wild, untamed and golden curls; rosy, round cheeks. He wonders what parts of him will show up in their kid, if it'll be a spitting image of either of them.

"No, not with me," Rozanov answers after a second. He's looking down at his hands now, pulling at his fingers. "They are in Moscow, maybe. I do not know where they would be, though. Maybe in my father's house."

At this, Yuna and David reenter the conversation. Mostly Yuna, who starts speaking at the mention of Rozanov's father. "Oh, we wanted to ask you if you had told your parents yet. If not and you needed some support, we'd be happy to talk to them, over the phone or video call if they can't be here in person."

There's a beat of silence as Rozanov presses his lips together. Shane looks at him curiously, wondering what his answer to that will be. Again, he's met with the reminder that he doesn't know much about Rozanov's life outside of school and hockey.

"My mother is... she is dead," Rozanov finally says. The air is pulled from the room, his voice amplified in the silence that follows. "And my father is... He is very traditional. Would not be so good about... this."

He doesn't have to clarify what he means. Shane picks up on it and knows his parents do as well. His father would be livid to know that Rozanov was having a baby with another man.

"I'm so sorry," Shane whispers, only loud enough for Rozanov to hear. When Rozanov gives him a sad, tight smile, Shane reaches over to hold his wrist, rub his thumb over the thin skin and feel his steady pulse.

"Is okay," Rozanov says back just as quietly. He knocks their knees together, as if to drive his words further into Shane and reassure him like he's the one that needs it more. "I am okay, yes? It is why I left home. I am happy here, so." He pauses, eyes flickering to Shane's stomach. "And I have a lot to look forward to now."

"Well," Yuna says gently, smiling at him with shining eyes. "If it means anything, you have us. And we're so, *so* excited to have you here."

Rozanov smiles back at her, kind and genuine. "It means a lot. And I am excited, too."

Shane lets his head drop to Rozanov's shoulder for a fleeting moment, enough for him to feel it and know that even if he isn't saying it, he feels the same.



Just past midnight Shane swings his legs over the edge of his bed. Having done nothing but stare at the dark ceiling for the better part of two hours, it's somewhat of a treat when his aching bladder finally forces him to get up and take a break from the nothingness the dark has to offer.

A crack of light bleeds into the hallway once Shane exits his bedroom, met with Rozanov coming out of the bathroom at the same time. There's a pause as they make eye contact, as if running into each other wasn't a possibility at such a late hour.

It takes a few seconds, but it's Rozanov that breaks the silence. "You are awake?"

"Can't sleep," Shane admits, swaying slightly with his shrug. "I don't know."

"Me neither," Rozanov says back with the flicker of a hesitant smile.

Shane's mouth opens and closes. It shouldn't be so hard to figure out what to say next, but the more time he spends around Rozanov, the harder it is to find the right words to say, if there are any right words at all. Judging by Rozanov still standing here, maybe the feeling of uncertainty is shared. Maybe it doesn't have to be so weird. "Maybe," Shane starts, getting Rozanov's attention, backtracking beneath the steady gaze. "Do you want some company?"

Rozanov's eyebrows shoot up. "You want me to watch you pee?"

"No, freak," Shane huffs. It's sort of nice to know the fucker hasn't changed, even with this newfound shift in their lives. "I was thinking we could, I don't know. Hang out in my room or something. Unless you don't want to—"

"I want," Rozanov says over him, finally moving away from the bathroom door. "I will wait in your room, yes?"

Shane shrugs nonchalantly, pushing the bathroom door open and squinting against the lights. "Sure."

Six minutes later they're lying on Shane's bed, on their sides facing one another. The space between them is somewhere between endless and close. Like this, he can count all the angel kisses on Rozanov's face, can see the stubble above his upper lip. The dark roots of his lashes, the hair curled just beneath his ear. He wonders what he looks like to Rozanov, if he's just as hard to look away from.

"I'm sorry about earlier," Shane finds himself saying, watching as Rozanov's eyebrows crease in curiosity. "About my parents and their, um *prying*, sort of. With your family. I didn't know."

"I didn't want you to know," Rozanov says matter of factly. Not unkindly, only honest as he shrugs one shoulder. "Before, I mean. Now it is okay. I think you should know but I do not like telling people."

"Why?" Shane asks, words catching around his breath.

"Because they do this," Rozanov says, tilting his chin up, as if to gesture at Shane as a whole. "Feel sorry for me. Look at me different. I do not like the treatment—"

"I didn't mean to do that," Shane says quickly, embarrassment crawling up his neck and onto his face. "I was just—I didn't—"

"You're okay," Rozanov says over him with his mouth tilted up in amusement. "I know you would not stop being an asshole to me, so I do not mind sharing this."

"You don't have to if you don't want to," Shane tells him seriously. "I understand."

Silence bleeds between them. Rozanov's teeth tug at his lower lip in thought, his eyes cast down toward the collar of Shane's wrinkled, white t-shirt. "I think maybe I should share," he says eventually, quieter than before. "It's fair for you to know. Maybe it would explain some things."

"Things," Shane repeats, brows pinched. "What do you mean?"

Rozanov presses his lips together before inhaling and then exhaling. Then, he talks.

He opens up about his father, how he was, for lack of better words, terrible. How he used a closed and open hand to show discipline. How Rozanov only cried in front of him once and then never again because it hurt more to show the pain than to hide it. How his mother was so beautiful, so funny but so sad, her shine dimmed by his father. How after she passed, he couldn't care less about what happened to Rozanov or his brother. How his brother grew so rotten, so changed from the child he used to be, morphed into a bigger adult with every ugly trait his father showed them. How even though it pained him more than anything, Ilya Rozanov had to get out of Moscow, had to make a different life for himself. How no matter what he does, his shadow still holds the somber shape of his own father.

When there's a lapse of silence, Shane whispers, "You're nothing like your dad."

"I am not so sure," Rozanov says back, even quieter, eyes locked somewhere over Shane's shoulder. "I can be terrible, too. My family makes me terrible."

Shane shakes his head, a small *no* breathed into the air between them. He taps Rozanov's ankle with his foot, just to touch him, to let him know he's here. "I don't know that side of you at all," he says. "Neither do my parents."

The faintest smile brushes Rozanov's mouth. "That is good, then. It's not a fun side to see."

"There's nothing wrong with protecting yourself," Shane tells him.

Rozanov's eyes flicker between Shane's. "Okay," he says.

Shane hopes, somewhere between all those thoughts, Rozanov believes him, even if for a moment.

Above the sheets, Rozanov hooks his ankle over Shane's. It doesn't move, not even when they fall asleep.

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Christmas morning comes with an empty and dented space beside Shane. He blinks awake, face scrunching as he turns his body toward the sunlight filtering in through the window. Downstairs, he can hear the chime of conversation, can easily place his father's voice with the

familiar cadence of a joke, can hear Rozanov's boisterous laugh followed by his mother's high pitched laughter.

When he finishes brushing his teeth and splashing water on his face, Shane travels downstairs, sleep still clinging to his body even as he makes his way into the kitchen, yawning into the crook of his elbow.

"There he is," Yuna says brightly, still dressed in her white and red Christmas pajamas, matching with David who is at the stove, depositing a fresh pancake onto a stack of identical and steaming pancakes. "Merry Christmas, honey!"

"Merry Christmas," Shane mumbles, distracted by Rozanov looking at him from where he's leaning against the kitchen island, his eyes slowly dragging down Shane's body. It's a bit much for such an early hour, and Shane finds himself looking away, helping his mom get the toppings for the pancakes out.

When they're sat around the table, Shane is hyper aware of Rozanov watching as Shane shoves a large bite of pancakes and berries into his mouth. He risks glancing back, finding a smile tugging at the corner of Rozanov's mouth.

Through a full mouth, Shane snaps. "What?"

"Nothing," Rozanov says, grin growing. "Didn't think you liked pancakes this much."

"It's tradition," Shane mumbles, stabbing at a strawberry.

Luckily, it's enough to change the subject. Rozanov looks at Yuna and David. "Tradition?"

"Pancakes every Christmas morning before presents," David explains proudly. "We've been doing it since Shane was around two years old. It helped keep him from being focused on only presents and gave us some time to wake up before the festivities started."

"Ah," Rozanov nods, intrigued. "Are there more traditions?"

"Pancakes, presents, a nice dinner, and a movie later tonight with some hot cocoa," Yuna tells him. "We usually let Shane pick the movie, and it's almost always—"

"The Mighty Ducks," David finishes for her.

Shane groans, dropping his head down because he can practically hear Rozanov's judgment bleeding from beside him.

"The Mighty Ducks," Rozanov repeats, his mouth dropped. "You like that *shit* movie?"

"It's not a shit movie, it's a nostalgic classic about underdogs—" he cuts himself off with a huff. "You know what, I don't have to explain shit to you."

"No, no," Rozanov laughs annoyingly. "Explain, please. I would like to hear your very passionate review on Mighty Ducks."

"Whatever. We can watch something else—"

"No," Rozanov says over him. "Tradition, yes? We will watch The Mighty Ducks tonight. We cannot break tradition, Hollander."

The playfulness in his tone is dampened by the way he ducks his head, meets Shane's eyes and lets his gaze flicker between them like he's trying to make sure Shane understands. And Shane understands. "Okay," he finds himself saying, pressing his lips together to keep a smile from splitting his face. "But if you say anything annoying, you're getting kicked out of the fucking house."

Rozanov puts a hand over his chest, feigning a wound. "Oh, Hollander. I would *never*—"

Shane shoves at his face with his hand to put some distance between them, laughing through his nose. "Fuck off."

Across the table, Yuna and David exchange a look before going back to their pancakes.

Within the hour they're sitting on the floor of the living room, tucked in the corner where the Christmas tree is. Shane's already unwrapped a fair share of presents (some new socks, a blender to replace the one at his apartment already worn from use, a couple of new nonfiction books that he had his eyes on), and Rozanov is unwrapping his third present of the morning, still yet to deal with the fact that his parents are kind and generous and couldn't stand the thought of him having nothing to open on Christmas morning.

So, Shane watches in amusement as Yuna hands Rozanov another present and his cheeks go pink, light eyes widening. "Yuna, *no*—"

"Oh, stop it, it's a small one," Yuna laughs, waving her hand. "It's the last one, I promise."

"This is what you said last time," Rozanov mutters, fingers delicately picking at the seams of the wrapping paper before tearing into it. It's simple just like his first two presents (a new wallet made from real leather and a set of dry-fit shirts from some luxurious brand his mom is fond of), and he pulls it out of the box it's nestled in with a small laugh. He holds up the socks, the same brand as Shane had gotten but black instead of white. "I will make very good use of these."

Yuna beams "I even made sure to get them in a different color so you boys wouldn't mix them up!"

Shane furrows his eyebrows, about to ask her how the hell they'd get their socks mixed up, only to be cut off by Rozanov standing to gather three presents from beneath the tree, all wrapped in the same Elf wrapping paper. "My turn, yes?" he says with a grin, handing them out quickly before plopping back down in the space beside Shane.

Shane looks down at his lap where his present stares back at him. A guilt settles in his stomach. He hadn't gotten anything for Rozanov, hadn't even thought about it until now. Weakly, he says, "I can't—"

"Open it," Rozanov tells him, nudging their knees together. "Promise it's nothing special."

Shane obliges, and when he gets to the contents, he can't help but laugh, pulling the embroidered hat out. "Wow. You're an asshole."

Rozanov grins. "I got myself one too," he says. "So we match."

"I don't even want to know what yours says—"

Rozanov taps on the embroidered letters reading: **#2 Dad!** "Mine says number one dad."

"I feel like I should be number one," Shane argues even though he can't stop grinning. "It's literally growing inside me, dickhead. I'm doing most of the work."

"Eh, details," Rozanov says with the flippant wave of his hand before looking at Yuna and David. "Your turns, yes?"

Yuna is the first one to tear through the paper, cackling in glee and clutching the shirt to her chest before leaning into David, laughing again when she reads his. "Oh, it's great! I'm gonna wear this all the time!"

Much to Shane's horror, they turn the shirts at the same time, revealing the **GLAM-MA** and **G-DOG** printed on the white fabric. "No," Shane says quickly, snapping his head to look at Rozanov who is fucking beaming and taking a picture on his phone. "Glam-ma and G-Dog? What the *fuck*—what happened to just grandma and grandpa?!"

"Your parents are too cool for this," Rozanov says. "Like this people will see they are coolest grandparents."

"Guys," Shane says to his parents. "You have to throw those away."

"Absolutely not," Yuna says firmly, standing up and holding the shirt to her chest protectively. "In fact, I'm gonna go shower and get ready and wear this all day, thank you. Come on, David."

David is up and following her up the stairs before pausing. "There's another present under the tree for both of you," he says and then disappears up the stairs, leaving the two of them to regard the lonesome and still wrapped present.

Rozanov looks at him curiously. "Did you know?"

"No, I didn't," Shane answers honestly. He can tell it was wrapped by his dad, can see where he neatly folded the rough edges to create a straight seam, like how he wrapped all of Shane's gifts. "Should we just... open it at the same time?"

Rozanov nods and they pick at the paper until it tears. They make it to the box, Shane lifts the taped edges with the blunt edge of his nail, and Rozanov opens the top. Beneath the thin gift paper, white and blue and red can be seen. Shane furrows his eyebrows, and it's Rozanov who plucks the item to take it out with a small laugh.

Shane starts to smile too when he realizes what it is. "I didn't know they kept it," he says as Rozanov unfolds and holds up the Snoopy onesie, his smile somehow growing as his eyes dance across every details.

"We will take baby home from the hospital in this, yes?"

"It's probably gonna be way too big—"

"Well, it will be a big baby."

Shane can't help but snort. "Yeah, probably."

Rozanov pauses, placing the onesie in his lap and reaching back into the box. Shane blinks at the card in Rozanov's hand. What's that?"

"For us, probably," Rozanov teases and opens it so they can read it at the same time, Yuna's neat handwriting greeting them.

*We found this while cleaning out the attic in the summer and couldn't
bring ourselves to donate it. Now we know why it felt so hard to part ways with this precious
memory! It won't be easy, but it will be so rewarding. We know you both have so much love to
give, and*

*we know you both will be amazing and selfless parents. We can't wait for you both to
get to experience the beauty of watching someone you love grow and become a person,
crafted from every careful and love-driven action. We're sure you know, but remember
that we're here for you both no matter what. We love you boys! (Yes, even you Ilya.*

When we say part of the family, we mean it!)

Love, Mom & Dad

Before Shane can say anything, he hears the click of Rozanov's throat from beside him. He whips his head around only to find Rozanov already gathering himself with a tight smile.

"Your parents are very sweet, Hollander," he says. And then, because he's always been annoying: "How come you are such an asshole?"

Of course, Shane can't help but laugh, smacking Rozanov's chest. "Fuck off. I'm nice."

"Yes, very nice," Rozanov deadpans. "So nice that you *beat* me—"

"I can beat your ass right now for real if you want."

"Is not fair," Rozanov pouts. "You're pregnant, I can't fight back."

"You don't need to fight back," Shane says, no ounce of threat in his tone, only a smile as Rozanov makes a show of scooting away from him. "Get back here—"

"No, no," Rozanov says quickly, gathering his presents in his arms, still holding the Snoopy onesie as he stands. He puts a hand out, like that'll keep Shane from standing up, too. "Do not chase me—"

"Who said I was gonna chase you?" Shane asks even though he gets up, bracing his feet on the floor to get ready to dash. Rozanov seems to notice his change in stance and dashes over the wrapping paper still over the floor, letting out a strangled noise when Shane lurches for him, barely grasping the back of his shirt only to lose his grip.

Within the minute they're trampling upstairs, laughing so hard Shane thinks one of them might end up passing out. The feat comes when Ilya manages to lock himself in the guest room, shouting for help until Shane gives him some mercy.

When he turns around, Yuna is standing at the end of the hall with her arms crossed over her Glamma shirt and an amused smile on her mouth. "Are you torturing the poor boy?"

"He's not a boy, he's a man," Shane says right as Rozanov yells: "Yes! Help me, Yuna!"

She rolls her eyes fondly, mumbling, just barely loud enough for Shane to hear, "Why can't these boys flirt normally?"

Shane pretends not to hear it, turning back to his room to hide the blush burning his face.

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As tradition follows, David makes them a nice holiday meal that fills their plates easily and has them devouring the steaming portions, barely any conversation made other than the praise spilling over how well cooked everything is. It's nice, not having to find something to say, not having to push a conversation along just for the sake of being polite. It's why Shane loves being at home so much. He's surprised Rozanov is content with the simplicity of it all.

Of course, Yuna Hollander has plans other than a simple night.

"Okay," Yuna says loudly, drawing their attention away from their meals. "I know we're supposed to have a nice time and enjoy this peaceful Christmas evening, but with Rozanov going home in a couple days I think it's best if we just have this conversation now."

"Mom," Shane says with a warning tone. *Time and place*—he's pretty sure she's the one that taught him that. "It can't wait?"

"I don't think so," Yuna says bluntly. "These months are going to fly by, boys, and I think this is something we need to talk about."

Rozanov nods, nudging Shane's shoulder with his own. "She is smarter than us, maybe we should listen."

He's got a point, so Shane shuts his mouths and presses his lips together, tilting his head in a subtle gesture to wordlessly tell her to continue.

"Co-parenting," Yuna starts, stare flitting back and forth between the two. "How are you going to go about parenting when you both live in separate homes and have equal responsibilities to worry about?"

"I read up on it," Shane starts, cut off by his mom's unimpressed and look.

"Yes, sweetie," she says slowly, like if she speaks too quickly he won't understand. "But it's not easy with a newborn. I think the two of you are going to need each other in the first few months."

"I will sleep over," Rozanov says easily, punctuated with a shrug. "On the couch."

Yuna's eyebrows shoot up in disbelief. "For a year?" she asks, though it's not much of a question. More of a *are you fucking kidding me?*

Rozanov blinks in thought before nodding in confidence. "Yes. Or however long until baby is okay."

"Children will always be dependent," David chimes in. "It never stops, not even when they grow up."

Yuna agrees with a series of nods, gesturing toward her husband as if to say *see?* "So, what?" she says to Shane and Rozanov. "You're just gonna sleep on Shane's couch for a year? Two years? *Three?*"

Rozanov shrugs again, looking to Shane for a fleeting moment. "If I have to, yes."

She blinks, mouth opening and closing as she finds her words beneath the shock of the confession, of the honesty. "Well, I don't want you to have to," she says eventually. "Listen, I came up with a solution—"

Shane huffs, dropping his fork. "Mom—"

"Hear me out before you say anything," Yuna tells him, getting up and going into the living room, opening the top of their coffee table and pulling out a folder. Shane stares at her in horror, refusing to look at Rozanov's reaction to his mother over stepping many, many boundaries. She comes back to the table, opening the folder and placing some printed papers on the table. Shane refuses to look at it. "I looked into apartments around McGill, close enough for you to commute, Rozanov, but far enough that you won't be running into classmates or teammates if you wanted to take a walk or go do something, Shane. I know you told me you wanted privacy, so I found a two bedroom that is decently priced. You can have a short lease, a year, maybe. And if you want to renew it, you can, but if not then you don't have to. Shane, your lease is up soon."

She pushes the papers toward them. Shane wills himself to look, finding a printed layout of the apartment and the price detailed.

"Mom this is more than what you guys are paying right now," he says, embarrassed for a different reason altogether. He tries not to feel belittled when people called him spoiled, claimed that everything was handed to him. His parents worked hard and made sure he had what he needed, only asked for his efforts to he aimed toward his academic and hockey career, even if it wasn't grand. That wasn't to say he never worked—no, he did. He held down summer jobs, worked when he could because it made him feel useful. He tried not to feel belittled, but when his parents were *this* generous, especially in front of fucking Rozanov, it was hard not to feel like a fucking loser. "And you can't just ask Rozanov—"

"This will work," Rozanov says over him, looking at the monthly price breakdown, finger tracing the numbers.

Shane blinks, mouth dropping. "You... you can afford this?"

Rozanov shrugs nonchalantly. "Yes, I can pay. I do not mind."

Shane blinks again, coming to the realization that outside the rink, outside a bed, outside *this*, he doesn't really know anything about Rozanov. "Do you even have a job?"

"Don't need one," Rozanov says with another shrug. "My father... he makes lots of money. Percentage gets sent to me automatically for month, and as long as I leave him alone it is fine. I get paid to stay out of his life, yes? Easy money." He juts his chin toward paper. "This is less than twenty-five percent of what is given to me, so. It works fine." He looks up, eyebrows creasing when he finds all three Hollanders staring at him with gaping mouths. "What is the problem?"

"You've been rich all this time?" Shane points out bluntly, more of an observation rather than a question. He thinks he knows the answer.

Rozanov lets out a sharp cackle, shaking his head. "Rich? No, no." He pauses. "My *father* is rich."

Shane throws his hands up. "What the fuck?"

"Well," Yuna says, clearing her throat. "You have good taste, Shane."

"Oh my god, *mom*—"

"What? It's a compliment!"

"That's not—" Shane sighs, rubbing his hands over his face. "Moving in together is a big step, we can't just, like, throw ourselves into that."

"So is having a baby," Rozanov points out bluntly, way more calm than he should probably be. "But like Yuna said, it will be easier like this, no? We do not have to have two cribs, two strollers, two—well, maybe two car seats, yes, but you get it. We have the same space for the baby, but also our own rooms for ourselves." He shrugs to punctuate the end of his sentence. "I do not have lease with house I am in—it is Cliff's uncle's house, so. I just pay some of rent

and I am good, but Cliff can afford what I will not be paying anymore. And Bood has been wanting his girlfriend to move in, so. No problem. Is really good idea."

Yuna beams, obviously flattered by the praise to her plan. "Why, thank you Rozanov."

"Ilya," Rozanov corrects. "You can call me Ilya."

Yuna gives Shane a look that he nearly misses. "Okay, *Ilya*. Thank you."

Shane presses his lips together before sighing. He can't help but admit that it *is* a good plan. He can't imagine having to go back and forth between his apartment and Rozanov's place, let alone explaining it to his housemates. Having their own space together would be convenient and save the headache and hassle. "Okay, yeah," he says finally. "So, we're doing this? Moving in together?"

Rozanov grins. "You are going to be very sick of me, Hollander."

"Can't wait," Shane mutters, a flurry of butterflies shaking in his core.

"Speaking of car seats," David points out, nudging his way into the conversation. "I wanted to talk to you about that, Rozanov—sorry. Ilya."

Rozanov raises his eyebrows. "Oh?"

"Nothing bad," David assures with the lazy wave of his hand. "Just... I noticed you have that nice car out there."

"Yes," Rozanov answers proudly, a cocky smile sliding onto his face. "My baby. 2015 Jaguar F-TYPE—"

"It's a beauty," David nods before tilting his head to the side slightly, as if searching for the right words. "But it's not exactly... a great car for a car-seat."

Rozanov blinks. "What do you mean?"

"Well, it's a coupe," David explains. "Getting a car seat in and out of that thing would be a hassle. Not to mention the storage in the trunk is already cramped as it is—how would you fit a stroller? An extra diaper bag?"

"Ah, I see," Rozanov nods. "I will figure it out, yes?"

Shane rolls his eyes, knowing that the chances of him giving up that thing are slim to none. Whatever, he's got the money to figure it out. "See, that's why you need something practical."

"I will not praise your ugly Jeep," Rozanov retorts easily, and with that Yuna is veering the conversation toward move-in dates and getting the gears turning for the next steps.

Shane barely hears her, too aware of the way Rozanov's socked foot is pressing into his. If he presses back, it's only because no one can see it beneath the table.

They end the night wrapping up their Christmas day traditions. The Mighty Ducks is playing on the television while Shane tucks himself into the corner of the loveseat, letting the mug filled halfway with hot cocoa warm his hands. On the other side of the loveseat is Rozanov, his knees tucked up, the tips of his toes pressed to Shane's thigh. He's got his focus on the movie, seemingly enjoying it more than he let on this morning.

Shane doesn't realize he's staring until Rozanov's gaze breaks away from the TV, landing on Shane. The lights from the television and Christmas tree glow against his face, softening all of his features. As much as he knows he should, Shane can't look away.

Rozanov nudges him with his foot. "Okay?" he asks in a whisper.

A simple question, one that doesn't require too much thought, but Shane finds himself thinking. There's a newfound warmth settled in his chest, something between comfort and content, something additional he can't quite place. More than okay, he thinks. He's happy like this, at home, with a view like this.

He settles for a small nod, letting himself smile softly. "Yeah. You?"

Rozanov thinks for a moment before nodding. "Yes. Very okay."

@

15

On the morning of New Years Eve, Rozanov heads back to Montreal. Something about Connors's flight getting in that night and him not having a key or having forgotten his key or something along those lines. Whatever the reason, Rozanov is the only one that is close enough to make it back to the house before Connors has to be stuck waiting in the snow. He swears up and down that he's going to make Connors do suicides by himself when practice starts back up.

"That's a bit much," Shane says, walking Rozanov out and watching as Rozanov's mouth twists into annoyance.

"No, is too *little*," he huffs, unlocking his car and using the button on the key to pop the trunk. "I should just kill him."

"Jesus Christ—"

"Sorry," Rozanov says, stopping on the driveway and taking in a deep breath, closing his eyes. The heat from his nose hits the cold air, and fog billows into the space between them. "Is just... I thought maybe I would have more time to relax."

"You can still relax," Shane points out. It's not like classes are starting yet, and practice isn't due to resume until the tenth.

"Yes, but—" Rozanov cuts himself off, looking up toward the grey clouds for a moment before falling back on Shane. "Relax *here*, I mean. Where your parents are." A pause. "Where

you are."

"Oh," Shane manages to breathe. As much as he wants to be taken aback by the confession, he can't help but admit he feels the same. Admittedly, he's enjoyed Rozanov's company more than he thought he would. It's been nice waking up, finding him in the kitchen already starting his day. Making a smart ass comment, expecting one back. Fighting over puzzle pieces, arguing about which movie to watch, and at the end of the nights lying in Shane's bed to talk about everything and nothing. Private moments only for their eyes, all of a sudden coming to an end. Shane had plans for tonight, too. Figured they could get a fire going in the back and maybe watch the fireworks from the backyard. But that's not going to happen. Obviously. Maybe next year. He's certain they'll still be close next year—they'll have a six month old, for fucks sake. "I, um. I get you. It sucks that you have to go."

"Does it?" Rozanov asks dryly, raising an unconvinced brow. "I'm sure you are happy to get rid of me."

It's supposed to be funny, at least it seems that way, but it doesn't land right. It's too dry, too quick. Shane can see the way Rozanov's eyes dart away instead of staying stuck, glinting with mischief. Shane shakes his head. "No. I want you here."

Rozanov's face softens, just barely. "I am going to kill Connors."

"Go easy on him," Shane says with a small laugh, following Rozanov the rest of the way down so he can start putting his things in the trunk. "We'll see each other in a couple of days. And we'll be seeing each other a lot, so. Maybe you'll have time to get sick of me too."

"We will see," Rozanov hums.

Silence settles as Rozanov gets his things situated, closing the trunk with one arm and huffing out a breath before coming to lean against the passenger side. Shane takes a step toward him. "Try driving safe. There's a lot of black ice."

"Yes, I know," Rozanov drawls in annoyance that isn't too real judging by the way his lips start to slant. "I will text you when I am back, yes?"

"Sounds good," Shane nods. He clears his throat, unsure what to do. A hug seems like a bit much, and if Rozanov even tried to dap him up, Shane would probably punch him in the stomach. "Well. Bye."

"Bye," Rozanov says. His eyes flicker down to Shane's abdomen. "Tell this one I said bye too, yes?"

Shane blinks, only realizing what Rozanov is talking about when his hand comes out to touch his own stomach over the thick hoodie he's wearing. He knows it's faintly noticeable to himself, but he wonders if maybe Rozanov sees a difference now too. For a moment, he's tempted to say, *go ahead. You can touch me*. It never comes. Instead, he nods clumsily. "Um, yeah. For sure. I'll pass the message along."

Rozanov snorts, reaching up to cup Shane's face for a fleeting moment before his hand drops and he's pushing himself off the car. "Very generous, thank you."

"Fuck off," Shane says weakly, watching as Rozanov rounds the hood and opens the drivers side door.

"You first," Rozanov winks and then gets in.

The engine cuts on, and the rumble of the exhaust vibrates in Shane's chest. He can still feel it even as the car gets further down the road, turning a corner and then disappearing altogether.

@

That night, Yuna and David go out, leaving Shane by himself in the house. Unsure of what to do, he sprawls himself on the big couch in the living room and watches The Grinch, trying to ignore how his chuckles feel empty when there isn't an cackle to accompany them. He gets halfway through the movie when his phone vibrates against the cushions. Right beneath the text thread from hours ago reading *made it* and a simple thumbs up reaction, there's a new message.

Rozanov

five minutes until midnight

Shane

Thought you'd be taking advantage of the night.

Rozanov

am too tired

no parties for me

Shane

And you say I'm boring...

Rozanov

wooow hollander

you are supposed to cure my boredom not insult me

Shane

I can multitask.

Rozanov

so you can video call then?

Shane pauses, sitting up straighter. He doesn't get the chance to reply when an incoming call takes up the screen of his phone. He answers before he can stop himself, met with the view of Rozanov leaning back against the headboard in his room. He's shirtless, and judging by the changing and muted colors, he's watching something, too.

"You look comfy," Rozanov points out.

Shane blinks, glancing at his own image in the far left corner. Hood drawn over his head, blanket up to his chest, his head against the sofa cushions. "You do too."

"We should match," Rozanov says. "Take your shirt off."

"Oh fuck you," Shane huffs, rolling his eyes. "Did you call just to fuck with me?"

"No," Rozanov says. "I called because midnight is in one minute."

Shane furrows his brows. "Okay? Is that the only reason?"

"Maybe, yes," Rozanov shrugs, glancing up at what must be the time on his phone. "I have one thing to do before I go to sleep."

"And it has to wait until midnight?"

"Ten seconds," Rozanov says, ignoring the question. "Five, four, three, two—"

"What the hell are you—?"

"One!" Rozanov finishes. The time resets to midnight, and before Shane can accuse him of wasting his time, Rozanov is puckering his pink lips, the phone getting closer to his mouth until his lips press against the camera, plummeting the screen into darkness for a fleeting moment before he draws back with a smudged grin. "There. Happy New Year, Hollander."

He hangs up without warning. Shane stares at his phone for several seconds, his chest aching with the force of the waves of fluttering, unfamiliar but not unwelcomed. Eventually, he manages to huff out a laugh of disbelief, falling back into the sofa after he sends one last text.

Shane

Asshole.

Happy New Year.

Rozanov

So we are clear, that one was for you.



And these are for the baby. I did not forget.

Shane

How generous.

Rozanov

the streets are saying i am number 1 dad!

Shane can't find it in himself to argue. Not right now, at least.

Shane

Goodnight, Rozanov.

Rozanov

goodnight shane :)

see you soon

Chapter End Notes

thank you so much for taking the time i read! i will see you next chapter!

► SOME NOTES ABT THIS CH!

kudos + comments appreciated (i have been trying to reply to comments more now, though at times i forget! pls forgive me i shall do better now!!)

Chapter 4: IV. To the Southern Tip

Chapter Summary

17-22 weeks.

Chapter Notes

hello hello i am sorry for the wait but i hope the contents of this chapter make up for it. i'll be honest, for a moment it's sort of nothingburger and then it picks up and then it ends but. i got 2 scenes i wanted to write so bad out of the way so! we up!

also i noticed this sort of started gaining a lot of traction which i'm so excited about! however i'm even MORE terrified of people being so fond of it only to become disappointed in the next couple of chapters if they lose momentum. i hope you keep enjoying these next chapters. i am doing my best <3

► EXTRA NOTES/EXPLANATIONS/WARNINGS:

anyway, enjoy!

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

17

Rozanov moves in on a Thursday, late in the day after his classes finish and practice is out. He sends Shane a text in the morning, a simple message letting him know he'd be getting to the apartment a little after six, and if Shane can go ahead and send him the address again. Shane complies and then waits for something other than the reaction of a thumbs up, only to be met with nothing.

With his online classes starting the following week, he's been able to get his few things settled in the new apartment. Mostly the few pieces of furniture he had, courtesy of his mom—the sofa, TV, coffee table, dining table, his bed frame and mattress, some kitchen items—all brought over by his dad, so unpacking had been fairly easy. His clothes all fit in a duffel bag and a backpack, so transferring them into the empty closet of his room (larger than his previous one) and the other miscellaneous things take less than an hour to put away.

Shane can't take all the credit for the smooth transition over to the new apartment—that was mostly his mom's doing. Now, he stands in the kitchen, bigger than his previous one, going back and forth between pacing and checking his phone. Rozanov also mentioned he was

packed and ready to go the night before, and the closer it gets to six o'clock, the more Shane starts to get antsy.

All he has to do is wait. Wait for Rozanov to show up, wait for him to knock on the door, take the extra key and start getting his things settled in the room across from Shane's in the hallway, and just like that, they'll be living together. Shane stops his pacing to take deep breaths, counting each wave until he doesn't feel like dashing out the door.

To keep himself busy, he opens the fridge, slumping slightly when he finds the contents empty. Right. He had a plan to ask Rozanov if they could go grocery shopping tonight, thinking it'd be best to start from scratch instead of bringing over the sad contents of his pantry and fridge. It's not like he had much anyway—his dad's cooking over the last couple of weeks kept him (and the baby, he thinks distantly) fed well. He can barely recognize the twinge of hunger that pinches his stomach right now.

The twinge is forgotten, replaced by knocking sounding at the door. Shane stares at it for too long, can feel the vibration of his phone in his hand, most likely a message from Rozanov along the lines of *open the fucking door*. So Shane braces himself and eventually opens the door.

Rozanov stands there, in the doorway of their shared home, freshly showered, his nearly dried hair curling beneath his ear. He's wearing a denim jacket, the interior lined with wool, and a sweatshirt beneath it. There's a duffel hooked over his shoulder, a reusable grocery bag in the other hand with what looks like bathroom essentials. Like he's spending the night, only here temporarily.

As if reading Shane's thoughts, Rozanov says, "This is not everything. I have more in the car."

With that he's walking into Shane's—*their*—apartment. And just like that, a new beginning starts.

"Do you need any help?" Shane asks as Rozanov deposits his things on the coffee table in the living room. He goes between putting his hands in his pockets and dropping them to his sides, unsure of what to do with himself other than offer help. He doesn't remember ever being this lost with what to do in Rozanov's presence.

When Rozanov straightens up, he looks Shane up and down and shakes his head. "No. Some of the boxes are heavy."

Shane frowns. "So? I can lift them—"

"Ah, no," Rozanov argues back. "Is okay, I will do it."

"I'm allowed to lift things," Shane huffs, grabbing the hoodie draped over the back of the sofa and tugging it on, following Rozanov outside even as he starts to protest.

"You are so stubborn," Rozanov mutters as they begin to near the sparse crowd of parked cars with.

"Kettle meet fucking pot," Shane says back, ignoring the confused look Rozanov gives him in favor of addressing his own confusion as well as he searches for the familiar and eye sore that is Rozanov's orange coupe. He stops in his step, making a sound when Rozanov continues to walk past him with no regard.

Shane blinks, watching as Rozanov stops at a black SUV. The paint is shiny, splotch free and polished, the windows decently tinted, and a temporary plate hangs on the back. Before Shane can ask anything, the car chirps and the trunk pops open. Shane blinks again as Rozanov starts to take things out of the very spacious trunk. There's only one medium sized box, another reusable grocery bag, and one more duffel bag. More than Shane had packed, but still not much.

"What are you doing?" Shane asks eventually when it becomes evident that Rozanov isn't going to address the elephant in the room.

"You said you wanted to help, no?" Rozanov answers unhelpfully, handing Shane the reusable bag, this one containing books and miscellaneous items.

"Well yeah," Shane starts, gesturing toward the vehicle. "But... when did you get a new car?"

Without looking up from the trunk as he pulls the duffel over his shoulder, Rozanov asks, "You like it?"

Shane doesn't have to see his face to know what's on there. Probably a stupid grin, the slanted tilt of his mouth. "It's nice, I guess."

"You *guess*?" Rozanov repeats incredulously, turning to face him properly now. "Come on, Hollander. Is better than just 'nice'—look, lots of room in the trunk. Big enough for stroller, diaper bag, groceries. We can probably fit a fucking horse back here." Before Shane can say anything, Rozanov is going around, opening the back passenger door. "Leather seats so if anything like milk or crumbs spill, then it will be easy clean up. Good room for car-seat, and the crash test was very good. Very safe. So, it's better than just *nice*."

All the information thrown at him gets processed carefully, and as Shane takes it in, his eyes start to widen. "You got rid of your sports car for a fucking family car?"

"Ah, no," Rozanov says quickly. "I got rid of my sports car for a *reliable* and *expensive* family SUV." When Shane continues to stare at him, Rozanov frowns. "What? You don't like it? We can go return it, is fine. What's the problem? The color? Interior or exterior—"

"No," Shane cuts him off, unsure of what to do with all the unplaced emotions whirling around in his head. It's a sweet gesture, it's the fucking sweetest thing Rozanov could have done, but a part of Shane feels immense guilt. Like the fucking coupe was a metaphor for Rozanov's freedom, his carefree spirit he paraded around in the locker room and on the ice. All of that replaced by this. Commitment he didn't ask for. Easy to clean leather seats. Room for a fucking stroller in the trunk. "You didn't have to do that. I know you liked your car."

Rozanov shakes his head and shrugs with such nonchalance that Shane tries to search for a hidden disappointment, but finds nothing. "It was okay. Was getting bored of it anyway. This

one is newer, so. Better." With that he shuts the door, cocking his head toward the trunk. "Come on, it's fucking cold."

He manages to gather the box in his arms and hooks the bag over his shoulder while Shane holds onto the reusable bag and glances back at the SUV as its lights flash with a honk when it's locked.

Inside, Rozanov doesn't immediately set his things down. Instead he turns his head, looking around and then up like he's trying to memorize everything about the open layout. The more Shane thinks about it, the more he realizes he only saw the house in the darkness of the night, in quick flashing glances he allowed himself in the midst of his haste and anxiety. It's different than what he *does* remember about the house Rozanov lived in with the other guys. Smaller, the most noticeable difference, but also it's less... charming. More modern than the dark wood floors Shane would stare at as he gathered his things off the floor of Rozanov's bedroom, and kept his gaze on while he hurried to sneak out before anyone could catch him leaving.

He finds himself subtly apologizing before he can stop himself. "Yeah, um. It's not, like, *huge*, but. There's two rooms, like my mom showed us. There's also a park across the street, so that could be useful, I think. And it's not too far from campus, so. We'll have to share the bathroom, but the shower is pretty big—"

"Hollander," Rozanov says over him, turning to face him. "I know. Yuna texted me the listing. I read about features like you did."

"Right," Shane says with a jerky nod. He presses his lips together, eyes fixed on the honey wood floor, spotless, yet to be worn by constant foot traffic. "I can show you to your room if you want."

Rozanov makes a *go ahead* gesture with his free hand, following Shane to the second room. Smaller than the first, but Shane can't bring himself to feel bad about it. After all, he assumes the crib and baby's set up will probably be in his own room, so he deserves the bigger space. If Rozanov wants to argue about it, he can argue with Yuna who will absolutely take Shane's side.

If he notices the size, Rozanov doesn't say anything. Instead he walks into the empty room and does a quick sweep with his eyes before nodding. "This is bigger than my room at Cliff's."

Shane can't help but huff out a laugh at the reminder of Rozanov's cramped room. Always a little messy, the space nearly swallowed by his full sized bed. The laugh falters when he realizes— "So, uh. Do you have a new bed frame coming in or...?"

Rozanov blinks before saying, "Ah. This is what I forgot."

Shane blinks back. "You forgot your *bed*?"

"It came with the room," Rozanov explains with a shrug that is a bit too carefree. "I never had to worry about it." He pauses, turning to Shane with a stupid grin. "Maybe you can be a good

host and we can share your bed."

A laugh cracks out of Shane's chest. "Yeah, right. You can have the couch until you order a bed."

"Okay," Rozanov shrugs with too much indifference for Shane to trust him to actually order a fucking bed. He sets his things down and turns to look at Shane, slowly raising an eyebrow as the silence stretches between them. "You are just going to stand there while I unpack or...?"

"Oh, right. I'll just—" Shane jerks a thumb over his shoulder. "Be out there. If you need any help, just um... just shout."

"Oh, I will," Rozanov says, eyes flickering from Shane's feet up to his face, punctuating his sentence with a wink.

Shane turns on his heel and treads back to the living room, standing still for a good forty seconds, wondering if he can be useful while also staying out of the way. Eventually he sits on the sofa, turns on the TV. He turns it off after a bit, hating the noise it's making, even at the lowest volume. He stands back up, awkwardly alternating standing in different places of the living room while Rozanov bustles around, getting his things settled. He dips into the living room twice to grab the remainder of the things on the coffee table. Both times he shoots Shane these undecipherable looks that Shane blinks at until finally Rozanov comes back a third time, staring right back at Shane with the same dead eyes.

Finally, Rozanov says, "What, you never had a roommate before?"

"No, not really," Shane tells him honestly. "Only child, remember?"

"That makes sense," Rozanov says. And then, after a beat, "You are acting weird."

"I'm not acting weird—"

"You are and that's okay. But please, stop with this..." He gestures at Shane's entire being. "Nervousness. It is making me nervous also."

Shane sighs, dropping his shoulder, only realizing how heavy the tension was when his muscles twinge with a muted ache. "Sorry. I'm sorry, I just don't know how to do this," he admits. He's not used to sharing a space like this. He never had to—maybe that's a selfish thing to feel weird about. He never considered himself a spoiled brat, but right now he's starting to feel like one.

"Is very easy," Rozanov says. "We can make rules if that is easier for you."

"Rules," Shane repeats blandly, wondering if Rozanov is making fun of him.

Somehow, Rozanov is serious. He nods, the corners of his mouth pulled down in honesty. "Yes. Like... you cannot be annoying before ten in the morning. Rule one."

"I'm not," Shane tries arguing, a smile tugging at his mouth despite his attempt at being serious too.

Rozanov gives an impish wince, feigning an apologetic look. "Oh, sorry, that is rule two: You cannot argue with me."

"That's a stupid rule," Shane laughs. Then he comes back with, "Fine, how about you're not allowed to be an asshole. That's rule three."

"Ah, see, that is not fair."

Shane tilts his chin up in fake defiance. "What is fair by your standards, then? Hm?"

"Maybe it is hard to believe," Rozanov starts in whisper, tscking when Shane rolls his eyes, stepping forward and getting closer. So close Shane can make out the subtle dent of his dimple, only noticeable from this close. "But I am a very easy roommate," he continues proudly. "I do not mind sharing my things. My food is your food, your food is your food because it looks like bird food."

"Oh fuck off—"

"What? Is true, look," Rozanov says before making a show of going to the kitchen, looking over his shoulder and gesturing for Shane to follow. When he does, Rozanov opens the fridge, doing a double take when all he finds is a takeout container and a bag of strawberries. "Hollander," he says. "What the fuck is this?"

"Oh yeah, about that," Shane says awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck. He hadn't expected Rozanov to beeline toward the fridge this quickly. He thought he'd have at least a few hours before he was called out for this. "I was thinking maybe we could go grocery shopping at some point. I didn't really have much to bring over—"

"So what have you been eating?" Rozanov asks over him, face twisted in concern and maybe horror.

"My mom packed me a lot of leftovers," he explains lamely. "And then I ordered out last night. Ate some leftovers this morning."

Rozanov blinks at him, mouth slightly opened as he looks back between Shane and the empty fridge. "Hollander," he says slowly. "You know how to cook, yes?"

Shane blushes. "Uh, sort of?"

"What do you mean *sort of*?"

"I mean, like. I can heat things up," Shane admits him, eyes tracking across the kitchen, at anywhere except Rozanov. "But no one ever taught me how to, like, make a full meal."

The moment the words leave Shane's mouth, he's ready to tell Rozanov to fuck off again, expecting the laughter, the disbelief, the ridiculing that should come with that confession. But he's surprised by the way Rozanov only nods. "Okay," he says instead. Simple. Nothing more.

Shane's eyebrows crease. "Okay?"

"Yes, Hollander," Rozanov says with annoyance, rolling his eyes. "I do not mind cooking for the two of us."

"You don't have to do that."

"I know," is all Rozanov says before grabbing his keys from the coffee table. "Grocery shopping, yes? And no we are not taking your ugly Jeep so do not ask."

And with that, Shane is fumbling to follow him, throwing on a hoodie over his sweatshirt while Rozanov plucks his jacket from the back of the sofa.

The drive to the nearby grocery store is quiet, and Shane takes the silence as an opportunity to be somewhat impressed with all the fancy dials and buttons and the touch screen entertainment system of Rozanov's new vehicle.

Grocery shopping is uneventful, even with Rozanov. The lights are too bright for the time of evening, there's a pop song playing on the system overhead, and more than twice someone blocks an entire aisle with their cart. Luckily, Rozanov seems to have somewhat of an idea on how to stock a fridge and Shane follows wordlessly, only chiming in when Rozanov asks what kind of brand he likes when it comes to yogurt or milk or protein bars.

At one point when they make their way to the produce, Rozanov plucks a turnip from the pile of many and holds it up while closing one eye, attempting some sort of angle downward that Shane cannot comprehend.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Shane asks eventually.

Rozanov tosses him the turnip, grinning when Shane catches it wordlessly. "Baby is the size of a turnip," he answers and then goes back to pushing the cart toward the fruit.

Back at the apartment, Shane watches Rozanov cooking after putting the groceries away and following the system his mom has back at their house. Rozanov argues only a little, claiming that the system is fucked and only taking it back when Shane makes a point of telling him exactly who create the pantry and fridge organization system.

With that, Rozanov flits around the kitchen, telling Shane what to take out and where to leave it. Other than that, he proves to be more than capable in a kitchen without help. He's making grilled chicken and mashed potatoes and green beans after running it by Shane and making sure he wasn't going to leave half the meal uneaten due to his picky diet. When Shane assures him that he hasn't been too caught up in the same seasonal diet he follows while playing, Rozanov is all go go go.

An hour later, he's checking on the pre-made biscuits in the oven while Shane leans back against one of the counters away from all the commotion, already having been scolded for getting in the way. He watches with a dry throat and lingering eyes when Rozanov dips his pinky into the bowl of freshly mashed potatoes, the delicate pink skin of his lips vibrant as they wrap around the digit, licking it off. He hums contentedly at the taste and turns around, offering some to Shane like he didn't just accidentally give him an erection that he tries hiding behind his clasped hands.

Shane says he's okay only so he can hide the heat crawling up his neck. Luckily Rozanov doesn't think anything of it, simply moves onto getting the biscuits out of the oven as it chimes and then starts plating their food shortly after clapping his hands and rubbing them together, like he's about to do something more grand than serve dinner.

"Only compliments," he jokes as he sets Shane's plate in front of him and onto the dining table. "I do not take criticism."

"Better get used to it," Shane teases halfheartedly, mouth watering at the smell. He takes his first bite, aware of the fact that Rozanov is watching him carefully. It's good, almost comparable to his dad's homemade meals.

"So?" Rozanov pushes, eyebrow raised and elbows on the table as he leans in. "You like it?"

"It's alright." Shane says as coolly as he can, punctuating it with a lazy shrug that makes Rozanov grin. "What?"

He shakes his head. "Nothing." A pause. "If you did not like it, you would have probably said something nice."

Shane presses his lips together to keep himself from smiling, knowing that it's somewhat true. "Fuck off."

"Ah, so I am right."

"Fuck off," Shane says again, ducking his head to eat the rest of his meal, only kicking Rozanov when he won't stop laughing.

⊗

19

While they're technically roommates, the first couple weeks pass with only glimpses at one another throughout the days as Rozanov pops in and out for classes and practice, or just meeting up with his friends in general. There's conversations here and there, but nothing more than Rozanov's typical check ins and Shane's mundane answers. In the mornings, Rozanov is already awake and the only trace of him left in the apartment is the indent in the sofa and a washed bowl and spoon on the drying rack.

Shane dives head first into his online classes, eager to have something to do instead of jog around the park nearby or head to the complimentary gym. He hasn't heard much from anyone on the team except for Hayden who sends him Instagram reels about stuff that doesn't even make sense. J.J. texts him to check up on him, but other than that the rest of the team seems content with the little updates Rozanov offers when anyone asks. No one seems to wonder why it's *Rozanov* updating them, but maybe it's because he's stepped up as captain and in that way he's sort of important.

Whatever the reason being, Shane is nearly a ghost, and he sort of prefers it that way. Like this, there's no pressure to talk, to explain this already complicated situation. In time he

knows he'll get less antsy about it, but for now he's content with the solitude and Rozanov's added presence to keep him from going insane.

Change comes in many ways, he finds. He's showing now, more noticeable than before. He realizes in the morning after his jog when he strips in the bathroom and gets a look at himself in the mirror, doing a double take and twisting his body to get a better angle. The ridges of his abdomen are softer, no longer as tight. The slight curve from above his navel down to above his pubic bone looks less like a heavy meal and more like a... bump. It's an odd feeling. Not a terrible one, but one that he keeps coming back to as he realizes that this is happening. He's growing a child inside of him, and soon, he'll be a dad.

With that comes his obsessive nature to be informed. He spends his nights before falling asleep on parenting forums, ingesting all the information he can. If the baby was the size of a turnip last week, this week it'll be the size of a bell pepper. And next week the size of a pomegranate. Not only that, but it can hear now. so, he incorporates that into his everyday activities. He starts reading out loud to the baby, passages from his class, power points even if they're boring and lacking any sort of imagination. It's probably good to expose it to all sorts of different genres and topics. So, he reads hockey books, some children's books his mom and dad sent over, and plays classical music because he read that it's good for development.

(His nights look like this: lying with his back against the headboard, shirtless, and with one of the many books now occupying space on top of his dresser. He usually starts with something along the lines of, "Uh. Hey, it's me again. Your dad. We're gonna read some more, so if you think that's boring, I'm sorry. But it's kind of for your own good." And he does his best even though he's never been fond of reading out loud, but it's a sacrifice he knows he can make in the quiet comfort of his bedroom.)

He finds that it's nice in a way, this quality time he's slowly building up. Not only does it ease some of the nerves that come with the looming future of parenthood, but it helps him develop a weird sort of peace with his body and what it's doing. It doesn't feel useless without hockey to keep it pushing. It feels just as purposeful, like there's something else he can be good at instead of just the one thing.

Of course, he doesn't say it out loud, knowing that it would sound like a bit much to anyone willing to listen. So, he slots his pride in his pocket and enjoys the routine he's forming slowly but surely.

Ⓢ

20

"Did you get the other package I sent you, honey? Not the books, it should be from—"

"Yeah," Shane tells his mom, staring down at the oil slash serum concoction that came in the mail yesterday. She had told him to call when he woke up, but she beat him to it just as he got back from his jog, sneaking past Rozanov sleeping in on the sofa and celebrating a cancelled class. Now, wearing only his boxers and holding the phone up to his ear with one hand and trying to decipher the Japanese texts on the bottle, Shane stands in the bathroom more than confused. "What is it supposed to be?"

"Stretch marks, Shane," Yuna says like that explains everything. "It's oil to help your stretch marks."

Shane blinks, chin nearly to his chest as he looks down at his rounded stomach. "I have to worry about those?"

At this, she laughs. Cackles, more like, the sound loud against Shane's ear. "Oh, yes. Do you think you're safe just because you're a man? Yours will probably be worse than mine were."

"Fantastic," Shane deadpans, sighing and closing his eyes. He doesn't know how to tell her he really doesn't care about added stretch marks. He already has some on his ass, the side of his thigh, and his lower back from the added muscle and weight he's gained in the last few years. What's some more on his stomach? But he knows she's trying to help, so he humors her while he can. "Alright, then. How do I use this?"

After giving him a brief run down, they say their goodbyes and Shane is left to dump some of the oil on his palm, glancing at his reflection before deciding *fuck it* and smearing it across his abdomen. The texture is abysmal and he nearly gags, but he does his best to rub it into the skin in circular motions just like his mom told him, apologizing to the baby just in case it can feel it too and—

The bathroom door creaks open, and on the other end Rozanov is sleepily rubbing one of his eyes with the palm of his hand. Shane startles, whipping around and dropping the stupid bottle, making enough noise for Rozanov to properly open his eyes and take in the sight of Shane bare chested and practically oiled up. His eyes flicker down to Shane's stomach, mouth dropping slightly.

It's only then that Shane is hit with the reminder that this is the first time Rozanov has seen this much of his body since before he knew he knocked Shane up. With that thought, Shane is scrambling for the door handle, slamming the door shut and locking it for good measure.

The seconds seem to stretch infinitely as his chest rises and falls with his panicked breaths. He stares at the door, half expecting Rozanov to call him fucking dramatic or point out that he, in fact, is more than aware of Shane's pregnancy. But nothing comes, and Shane is left to step into the shower and scrub the oil off his skin with Rozanov's expression playing on a loop in his mind.

The silence that followed is probably the worst part, or at least that's what Shane keeps coming back to. If Rozanov had been fucking normal, had said something along the lines of *do not worry I did not see your dick* or even *let me see your dick*, then Shane could have told him to fuck off and shut the door and it would've been fine. But instead Rozanov stared. Wordless, distracted. Like the sight was something... unnerving.

In all the time they've known each other, Shane has never had to wonder if Rozanov finds him attractive. He had known the moment Rozanov called him *pretty boy* for the first time, even if it was a chirp. He had known when Rozanov made a move in the showers, followed through with his suggestive gaze in the backseat of his coupe soon after. He had known in every moment after, when Rozanov's wandering palms heated every inch of his skin, when

his mouth dragged up his neck and onto his mouth, when he was fucking Shane and telling him that he looked good taking his cock.

The thought of no longer meeting Rozanov's standards is vein and fucking terrifying. Shane hates himself for it more than he can explain.

When he gets out of the shower, Rozanov is in his room, rummaging through his closet if the sound of grating hangers against the metal closet rack is any indication. Shane is quick to lock himself in his own room, only sagging with a breath when he can hear the shower cut on.



In the following days, Rozanov doesn't bring it up. In turn, Shane doesn't either. A mutual and silent agreement that whatever happened that morning never happened in the first place. They move on, and while Shane comes back to it despite trying to shove the memory away, he lets himself be distracted by his new routine.

On his morning jog, he spots a coffee shop that calls to him. There's a picture of a chocolate croissant on the window that he can't stop thinking about even as he jogs right past it.

The image keeps flashing in his mind, making his mouth water so much so that he turns around and finds himself standing in line, ordering two because he already knows one isn't going to be enough. Part of him feels some sort of guilt, knowing that sugar is definitely not something he should be consuming in large amounts, but *fuck*—the chocolate oozes out when he splits it in half, sitting by himself in the corner of the cafe, and every logical thought goes out the window.

The first bite is heaven sent, and the second bite is even better. Before he knows it, he's licking the crumbs and smear of chocolate off his fingers and reaching for the second one.

He stops when someone sits across from him.

"Hollander," J.J. grins, the plastic straw of his iced coffee wedged between his molars. "I did not expect to see you here."

Shane blinks at him before schooling his expression with a small laugh. "Uh, yeah. Yeah, I was just—" he looks down at the croissant and J.J.'s eyebrows raise in amusement. "Getting some breakfast."

"Looks very different than a protein shake," J.J. jokes with a laugh that Shane tries to mimic.

"Yeah, no. I just thought I would, um. Change it up."

It sounds like a lie because it *is* a lie, but J.J. seems none the wiser. "How have you been?" he asks, seemingly more concerned with the well-being of his friend instead of the chocolate croissant. "I know you are going through things, but did not want to hound you—"

"Thank you," Shane says sincerely. "I'm sorry I haven't reached out, it's just... A lot of stuff is happening and I don't—I don't know."

J.J. doesn't push it, only smiles. "Yes, I assumed. But you are okay, yes? Not dying?"

"Not dying," Shane says with a small and genuine chuckle. "I'll be back next season, don't worry. You only get Rozanov temporarily."

"He has not been so bad," J.J. tells him. "Intense, yes, but he is... I do not know how to describe it. Different, maybe. Not as crazy."

Shane tilts his head curiously at the observation. "That's interesting."

J.J. hums with a nod. "Yes, and he is very strict about people asking about you, did you know this?"

The real answer is yes, but Shane shakes his head. "I mean, he's reached out and asked if I've been okay. He's not a dickhead, it's all just an act. He's not so bad when you get to talk to him outside of the rink."

"Hey, I do not doubt it," J.J. says, raising his hands in defense. "If he is nice to you during these times, then that's good."

Shane presses his lips together, thoughts racing. He could tell J.J. He trusts J.J. more than he trusts anyone else on the team. He wouldn't tell anyone, would probably help Rozanov and Hayden in telling the guys to fuck off if they ask about Shane more than they need to. Still, he asks, "Can you keep a secret?"

J.J. perks up in curiosity, putting his drink on the table and leaning forward. "*Oui*. Of course, what is it?"

"It has to do with my, um, *absence*," Shane explains, face already burning with a cross between embarrassment and nerves. "But you have to get cool about a bunch of stuff really quick."

"I am cool with everything," J.J. says with a lazy wave. "Come on, tell me."

Shane pauses. "I'm, um. Pregnant." He shoves a piece of croissant in his mouth and waits for the Hayden-level blow up.

Instead, J.J. blinks, eyes flitting across Shane's face like he's looking for a punchline. When it doesn't come, he nods. "That explains the croissant." When Shane simply nods, he adds: "How do *you* feel about this?"

"I'm fine," Shane shrugs. "I'm, uh, keeping it, if that's what you're asking. Don't worry, I know I have choices, but I've had some good support, so. Yeah, it's—uh. Sorry, it's just... you're not freaking out like I thought you would."

"My girlfriend's brother has this too," J.J. explains. "He has two children with his husband, a very beautiful family."

"Oh, that's nice."

J.J. nods again before furrowing his eyebrows and frowning, acceptance morphing into confusion. "Wait—you have a boyfriend?"

Shane laughs bluntly. "What? No—that's not—" he pauses, piecing J.J.'s thought process together. "I, uh. Didn't really plan this."

"Well obviously not," J.J. says with a huff close to a laugh. "So, who do I have to congratulate as well? Unless... ah, *mon ami*," he says, concern starting to lace his tone. "The father... you know who it is?"

"Oh god—*yeah*, of course I do," Shane says quickly and mortified. "I'm not just sleeping around, J.J., Jesus Christ—"

"I needed to make sure!" J.J. says over him in defense. "But he is not your boyfriend?"

"Friend with benefits," Shane explains lamely. "But he's been supportive, so."

J.J. narrows his gaze playfully. "Do I know him?"

Shane can't help the way he starts to smile. He hides it with another bite to his croissant as he nods. "Yeah."

"Let me guess," J.J. says, looking up in thought with a hum. "Okay, he goes to McGill?"

"Well, yeah."

"He is in one of your classes?"

Shane shakes his head. He doesn't think he's ever had a class with Rozanov. "No."

"Huh," J.J. huffs, drumming his fingers on the table. "Does he know *me*?"

"Yeah."

J.J.'s eyes widen. "Oh shit—is he on the team?"

Shane nods again. "Getting warmer."

J.J. is silent for nearly a minute, mumbling to himself in French under his breath. "I cannot think of anyone you would want to sleep with," he admits. "Marlow?"

Shane snorts at the mental image of Marlow and him together. "Fuck no. Try again, you're almost there."

"Bood?"

"No—he has a girlfriend, J.J."

"I do not know if that is something you are into," J.J. defends, laughing when Shane shoots him a glare. The mini game picks back up a second later with J.J. stumped. "Hm. I cannot think of anyone who maybe you would—" He stops. Shane stares, refusing to laugh. "No."

Shane already knows what he's thinking. After all, J.J. was right, there is no one he can think of that he would willingly sleep with on the team. No one single and attractive enough that also likes men. There's only one stupidly hot (and out) bisexual on the team. Shane nods slowly. "Yeah."

"No," J.J. says again, slumping in his seat. "Shane, *mon ami*, no. Really?"

"Unfortunately, I think you're guessing correctly."

"Rozanov?" J.J. finally says. "Him? *Rozanov*?"

"Hey," Shane says, slightly offended on Rozanov's behalf. "It's not super surprising if you guessed it this fast."

"Well, it does make sense," J.J. says eventually, hitting the stage of acceptance a whole lot faster than Hayden did. "There is tension there."

Shane blinks. "What? There is?"

"Yes," J.J. says but doesn't follow up. "And I have eyes. He is very attractive, you could have done worse."

Shane blushes despite himself. "Yeah. That's... yeah."

J.J. laughs, reaching across the table to tap Shane's hand. "What, you are a shy blushing virgin now? I think it is too late for that."

"Oh fuck off," Shane tells him but smiles anyway. He pauses, picking at the flaking crust of the pastry. "Thanks for being, um. Cool about it, I guess."

"There is no reason to add more stress," J.J. says easily. "Are you happy?"

It's a question no one's asked him yet. Shane finds himself nodding before his thoughts can catch up. "I think so, yeah."

"Then everything is okay," J.J. says, simply and truthfully.

⊗

More often than not these days, Shane finds himself taking an afternoon nap that stretches into the evening. He wakes up at six, disgruntled and disoriented, dragging himself up from the wrinkled comforter to go to the bathroom and relieve the pressure on his bladder. That's new, too. He has to pee a little all the fucking time.

He finds Rozanov in the kitchen, in the middle of finishing up dinner. He's wearing a university sweatshirt and Adidas track pants, oblivious to the fact that Shane is within earshot.

His phone is on the counter, on speaker, and Cliff Marlow is bitching about: "Come on, Roz. You gotta go out with us after the game—"

"Do not be so confident that we will win," Rozanov says, popping a roasted carrot into his mouth while he flips a piece of salmon on the stove.

That's right, Shane remembers. They have an away game tomorrow, which means they'll be leaving on a bus tonight. Tomorrow and Saturday, they'll play back-to-back games, and then return before Monday. It's not the first weekend Rozanov has been gone—the days have been passing quickly. It's been a little over a month of them... cohabiting? Being roommates? And, unfortunately, the team hasn't been doing great. Not that it's Rozanov's fault—they started the season on a weak note too, even with Shane there. It's only a matter of time before their season is over.

"You're really saying no again?" Marlow says, cutting off Shane's thoughts. "Why the hell are you being so secretive, man? You haven't gone out with us in months!"

"I am just getting my shit together unlike the rest of you," Rozanov quips back easily. "Some of us want to play good hockey instead of get drunk."

"Fuck off, Rozy," Marlow says with a laugh. "You're so fucking boring now, dude."

"Boring is fun, you should try," Rozanov says, laughing when Marlow groans. "Go fuck yourself. I have to go—"

"What are you, fucking Batman or something? First you move out and don't tell me where you live and now you're disappearing mid-call like there's a goddamn signal in the air," Marlow says before giving in and letting Rozanov hang up.

Shane waits, letting the seconds pass before he walks into the kitchen with an exaggerated yawn, drawing Rozanov's attention easily.

He looks up from where he's plating their food. "Good morning."

Shane frowns and glances at the clock to be sure. "It's half past six."

Rozanov ignores his observation and slides a piece of salmon onto one of the plates. "Good nap?"

"It was alright," Shane says, taking the plates to the dining table while Rozanov grabs utensils and a glass of water for Shane and a Coke for himself.

They eat in silence for a few minutes before Shane finds himself fidgeting against the silence. "So," he starts with less confidence than he wants. "The away game..."

"Ah, I should have known you'd find a way to bring up hockey," Rozanov teases around a mouthful.

"Shut up," Shane says easily. "I was just wondering if you were excited, that's all."

Rozanov shrugs. "Not the first away game, so it's whatever. I have never really cared for them anyway."

"Really?" Shane asks in disbelief. Though, he doesn't remember too much of Rozanov during away games. He was there, he played well (like he always does) and then he'd go out with the guys for the night. Their paths rarely crossed even though they were on the same team. Different lifestyles, only intersecting for sex and not much else. Shane liked to stay in with Hayden, either playing whatever video game Hayden brought along or catching up on homework or reading. He assumed Rozanov liked the time away from their normal, every day lives.

Again, Rozanov answers with a shrug first. "I would rather be here. Traveling gets... annoying."

Shane can't help but say with a playful bitterness, "Well, we can trade places if you want. I wouldn't mind it."

Rozanov snorts. "Of course you would say this. You will get your time back, Hollander. You do not need to rush."

Shane is quiet for a moment, rolling the same thought over and over in his head. He can practically hear Marlow's voice calling Rozanov boring on a loop, and guilt settles in his stomach, weighing him down. "Hey, you know, um... You can, like, do stuff still. If you want."

Rozanov raises a brow, tonguing his molar as he stares at Shane with question. "Do stuff?" he repeats bluntly. "What stuff?"

"You know," Shane says vaguely, refusing to look at him. "Go out. Pick up... people. Just, like, don't knock anyone else up."

It's meant to be a joke but it falls flat, he can tell it does by the way Rozanov is staring at him with a dropped mouth and furrowed brows. "What the fuck are you talking about, Hollander?"

Shane swallows down the half chewed forkful of salmon. "You can still have a life," he explains. "Just because I'm sort of stuck doesn't mean you have to be too—"

"No," Rozanov says over him. "What do you mean stuck? Do you feel like this?"

Shane shakes his head quickly, wishing he could swallow his own tongue and just shut the fuck up. "No—*no*. That's—fuck, that came out wrong. I don't feel stuck, that's not—I made a choice and I stand by it, alright? I just meant my lifestyle hasn't been, like, drastically changed by this. But yours," He tilts his head as he tries to find his words. "You used to do

fun things, that's all. But now you're—you stay in, you don't go out with the guys anymore, you—you fucking gave up your sports car, Rozanov. I just don't want you to—" *to hate me*. Shane pauses, mouth twitching as he finds the right words. "I don't want you to feel trapped."

Rozanov is quiet for several dragging seconds. For a moment, Shane is sure he's going to say *you're right*. Shane stares at him across the table, jaw tight, lip trembling as he does his best to choke down the anxiety crawling up his body.

Finally, Rozanov's voice cuts carefully through the heavy quietness. "I could go out, yes. Maybe pick someone up. Maybe *two* people—"

"Okay, so go do that," Shane nearly snaps, hating himself for bringing it up in the first place and digging his own grave.

Rozanov raises a hand gently, coaxing him into silence. "No, listen. I *could* go do that. Maybe it would be easy, maybe it will feel nice for an hour or two, but after it would mean nothing. It would not make me feel good inside. Just because we are in this situation does not mean that I am... missing what I used to do. I do not miss it, I cannot miss it. I have no reason to. Instead, I am excited to cook stupid dinner because I want to. Because I know if you are eating and growing well, then the baby is eating well and growing well. I give up my sexy sports car because now I do not care about how fast I can go, I care about fucking safety crash tests and if we can take car seat out easily. I do not want to go out with my friends because if you need me, I want to be here."

He stops, sighing and running a hand through his hair, before looking at Shane directly, leaning forward to be heard clearly. "I do not feel trapped, Hollander. This is... I want this. I have always wanted this, I think."

Shane can't help the weight lifted off his shoulders. "To be a dad?"

Rozanov hesitates before nodding. "That too, yes."

"You really don't miss any of it?" Shane asks, to be sure. To give Rozanov another chance to tell the truth. "Going out? Getting to... to fuck around?"

Rozanov shakes his head quickly. "No. I have not done that in a long time Hollander, you have probably heard. I stopped doing that before you were even pregnant." He pauses and then shrugs with a smirk. "And if I miss touching you, I just jerk off in the shower. Problem solved."

Shane short circuits, nearly missing the last half of the sentence. "You miss touching me?" he asks, just to be sure.

"Ah," Rozanov starts with a sigh, a lazy smile playing on his lips as he looks down at the table. "Do not act stupid, Hollander. Is not a good look."

"No—I'm just... You don't have to miss it," Shane explains, willing himself to look at Rozanov despite the hammering in his chest and dry *want* in his throat. "You can touch me."

Rozanov's eyes flicker across Shane's face. His chest rises and falls with a deep breath. "You do not understand," he says after a moment. "I would touch you a lot. I do not think you would be comfortable with this—"

"Why not?" Shane asks, voice faltering.

Rozanov pauses before leaning back in the chair. "You have been trying to hide your stomach, but it is getting more difficult, yes?"

Shane's eyes widen at the observation. "It's not like that—"

"No, is okay. I understand," Rozanov says calmly, shrugging like he isn't giving Shane whiplash. "Big change. Maybe it's... weird? To see yourself so different."

Shane shakes his head, groaning into his palm before coming back, trying to find his words carefully. He knows how it looks—remembers the panic when Rozanov got a glimpse at him shirtless in the bathroom for the first time in months. "It's not—I don't hate how I look. It's not that at all, I—I don't look bad. It's just... I didn't know if *you* would..." he trails off, hoping Rozanov can pick up what he's trying to say.

Rozanov stares at him, expression unreadable. "You do not think I would like what I see?"

Shane hesitates before nodding. "I don't look how I did before. You sort of saw that."

"Hollander," Rozanov says slowly, leaning forward, pressing his fingertips to the table as he speaks. "The thought of fucking a baby into you has almost fucking *killed me*. Did you know when I saw you in the bathroom, I did not stop thinking about it all day? Do you also know that this morning, I saw your shirt come up, just a little, when you were reaching for your stupid granola cereal." Shane swallows, shakes his head slightly, body ablaze beneath Rozanov's hungry eyes. He missed this, the feeling of being so openly wanted, even if just for a moment.

"I saw enough, the bottom of your stomach," Rozanov continues. "And I thought, that's because of me. *Fuck—I* did this to him, put my baby in him and—"

"Did you touch yourself?" Shane asks, voice barely above a whisper his dick twitching beneath his sweatpants. He has to know. Rozanov answers with a nod, and Shane's breath catches in his throat. "Fuck."

"Are you hard right now?" Rozanov asks, eyes set on Shane's.

Shane nearly laughs. "Take a fucking guess."

"Jesus Christ," Rozanov whispers with a hitch before he's standing, his haste enough to make the table clatter and the legs of the chair scrap against the floor.

Shane is already up, already meeting him halfway.

Their dinner is half eaten and forgotten as Rozanov holds his face in his hands, pulling him into a filthy kiss, their tongues gliding against each other. Shane is hit with the realization that

it's been so long—so fucking long since they touched like this. He ruts against Rozanov, moaning when Rozanov drops a hand to grip his ass.

"Touch me," he begs against Rozanov's mouth. "Fuck—fuck me, please. *Please—*"

Rozanov shakes his head and Shane whines but is hushed and kissed again into silence. "I want to—fuck. I want to, but—"

Shane nearly lets out an annoyed groan. "Don't fucking say *but* right now—

"But I want to make sure it is safe," Rozanov continues, pulling back to make sure their eyes meet. "Before I fuck you, I need to know this."

"Jesus Christ, just fucking Google it, Rozanov—"

"No," Rozanov says quickly, firmly, holding Shane's chin between his pointer finger and thumb to keep their eyes lock, to keep Shane from looking away. "I do not trust that. You have appointment next week, yes? Twenty two weeks?" Shane nods, wordless and stupidly turned on at the thought of Rozanov being so fucking up to date and informed on all this. "Ask if it is safe, and if it is I will fuck you anywhere you want." He starts to kiss Shane's cheek, then his neck, nipping on the skin while he talks. "I will fuck you on the table, in the kitchen, in the shower. Wherever you want, *zaychik*. I will make it so good for you. I will make it up to you."

Shane is drunk on the sound of Rozanov's voice, on all his stupid hormones that he's been trying to ignore and the snippet of Russian that left his tongue. He's leaking through his sweatpants, helplessly rutting up against Rozanov's thigh in hopes for *something*.

"Okay," he chokes out eventually. But he isn't giving up that easily. "But can you—can you at least—"

Rozanov swallows his mouth in a heated kiss, pulling back and nodding. "I will touch you, right now, yes. I would not just leave you like this."

Time is distant as Rozanov moves them over to the sofa, mouth yet to leave Shane's, hands keeping him close, every inch of their bodies pressed together. He finds himself on Rozanov's lap, grinding their clothed erections together in hopes for some sort of friction. It works the first few times, barely sating the heated hunger flaring in his belly before it's not enough.

As if reading his mind, Rozanov is pulling the waistband to his sweatpants down, jostling Shane on his lap slightly with the sudden movement. Before Shane can do the same for himself, Rozanov is copying the motion, pulling the waistband of Shane's cotton shorts, cursing beneath his breath when he realizes he's bare beneath the thin fabric. He doesn't waste any more time, whether it be because of his own impatience or the way Shane keeps bucking his hips and whimpering, wordlessly begging for *something*.

Rozanov lifts his hands, cups it right beneath Shane's lips and says: "Spit."

Shane's body shudders, but he complies, eyes locked on Rozanov as he gathers saliva on his tongue, lets it drip down onto Rozanov's palm. He's rewarded by Rozanov's hand on both of their cocks, the heat bleeding throughout their bodies as he starts to work his fist over the both of them.

It's been so long—too fucking long—since he's had Rozanov's hands on him. Every motion feels amplified, more than it ever had before right now. He can't help the way his breathing quickens by the second, the moan that comes out of his throat when Rozanov thumbs at the head of his cock just right.

It's been so long he forgets how much Rozanov *talks*. "Fuck—you are so wet for me. You have waited for this, yes? My hands on your cock again—*ah*. Look at you. So fucking pretty and needy."

Shane forces his eyes open, mouth dropping with a breath when he sees Rozanov already looking at him, his head tilted up enough to properly take in every single one of Shane's expressions. A fiery blush paints his cheeks and his neck, the color disappearing beneath the collar of his shirt. Selfishly, Shane reaches down for the hem, pushing his hands under to feel the tensing of Rozanov's abdomen, all the ridges of muscle. Taking the hint, Rozanov is quick to pull his shirt off, holding the back of Shane's neck and pulling him in to lick into his mouth at the same time he gets his hand back on them, getting them off once again.

"Fuck, *Rozanov*," Shane moans, rolling his forehead against Rozanov's, squeezing his eyes shut to keep himself from coming too quickly when Rozanov bucks up into him.

Then, Rozanov's pace slows. His other hand rubs up Shane's thigh and to his waist. He pulls on the hem of his shirt slightly, mouths at Shane's jawline and then neck, nipping at his pulse and then licking up to his ear. "I want to see you," he whispers against his skin. "Let me see."

Shane's thighs tremble as Rozanov's strokes found a mind numbing rhythm. Through the bliss, Shane listens, and pulls his shirt over his head, tossing it aside and sparing a hesitant glance.

Immediately, Rozanov's eyes are on his stomach. His mouth parts with a wet sound, followed by a shaky exhale. His grip on their cocks tightens and stills for a second before continuing as he speaks. "Fuck—*fuck*," he chokes out, and without warning, spurts onto his stomach, hips stuttering as a string of Russian words trip over his tongue.

The sight of his orgasm is almost enough for Shane to follow close behind. He watches, dick twitching, as Rozanov's come slides onto his own erection, making it easier for Rozanov to jerk them off. "Oh my god," Shane breathes, fucking his hips forward in hopes that Rozanov's pace will quicken and help him finish, too.

What he gets is better than that. Without warning, Rozanov licks into his mouth, rearranges them with his hands on the back of Shane's thigh to move him so he is lying on the sofa cushions. He kisses Shane's cheek, trailing his mouth down his neck, chest, and pausing at his stomach before nosing at the smooth skin and scraping his teeth over the bump. Shane gasps, hands flying to grip Rozanov's curls, head falling back against the armrest when Rozanov does it again, coming back up to lick over his nipple while holding his hips down.

Near frantic, Rozanov pries Shane's legs apart, gets himself settled between his legs, and then licks up his cock before taking him in his mouth. The sudden wetness and heat enveloping him is enough to make Shane moan, eyebrows pinches and mouth slack and open as he does his best to dampen the sounds but finding it difficult to as Rozanov sucks his dick like he has something to prove.

It doesn't take long before Shane's fingers tighten in Rozanov's hair and his knees bend, thighs nearly crushing Rozanov's bobbing head. "Fuck—I'm close—Rozanov, I'm gonna come—I'm gonna come—"

He doesn't let up, digging his grip into Shane's thigh and flattening his tongue against the head of Shane's cock, coaxing him into his orgasm. Shane's back arches from the cushions, his head tossed back, neck bared as he comes into Rozanov's mouth, vision blotted with all sorts of colors behind his eyelids.

After, even in his haze, Shane expects the smack of a flat palm against his stomach. Almost says something as his eyes flutter open, but goes quiet when he sees Rozanov place a kiss to the area instead. A revised punctuation to the end of this activity.

"Fuck," Rozanov breathes through a laugh, dropping his forehead against Shane's navel for a second before looking back up. "I will go get a rag, yes? Stay there."

Shane makes a sound that could pass as an *okay*. He's too exhausted, bones melted against the cushions. He closes his eyes again, drapes his arm over his face, and lets Rozanov wordlessly clean him and himself up. It's only when Rozanov says something about having to shower and get ready to leave soon that Shane wills himself to get up and redressed.

When it's finally time for him to go, Shane finds himself under a newfound affection, one that he doesn't mind all that much. After all, he told Rozanov it was okay if he touched him. He just didn't expect it to be like *this*.

With his duffel dropped by the front door, Rozanov is in Shane's space, pulling him in by the back of his neck. He kisses him thoroughly, tongue teasing at the seam of his mouth until Shane parts his lips and lets him in while he sways into the kiss, lightheaded. From there, Rozanov moves onto his cheek, nosing at the skin and then rubbing his hands over Shane's stomach.

"I cannot believe you do this to me when I have to go," he mumbles, the words nearly lost as he goes back to slotting his mouth against Shane's.

Shane is smiling into every kiss, managing to break apart for a moment just to say, "I didn't even do anything."

"You are making me crazy," Rozanov argues, hands moving under Shane's shirt, dragging across the skin of his waist, to his lower back, up and over his shoulders before coming back down, meeting at his belly. He kisses Shane one more time, firmly, nearly tipping him back with the weight.

"You're gonna be late," Shane tells him even though he doesn't mind it, hopes that he's reckless with his time and stays for a little longer. Selfishly, he tightens his grip on Rozanov's nape and drags their mouths back together.

They break with a loud sound after a make out session that is sloppier than it should be for a simple goodbye. They've never really done goodbyes before, but they've also never lived together, so. Things are different, it makes sense in a way, Shane thinks.

Suddenly, Rozanov is bending down, lifting Shane's shirt again to kiss his stomach once and then twice. He says something in Russian, unknown to Shane's eager ears, his lips moving against Shane's skin and the punctuating his sentence with another kiss. Shane waits for a translation that never comes.

"What was that?" he risks asking, knowing the chances of Rozanov letting him in on that are slim to none.

"Saying goodbye," Rozanov says simply. He straightens up and kisses Shane again, this time softer, and then he steps back, creating some distance. "I will let you know when we leave and get to the hotel."

Shane shakes his head. "Focus on getting some rest and winning."

"It will be hard without you there."

A smile twitches at Shane's lips. "Well, you've managed fine."

"Yes, because I am better captain," Rozanov says, with the teasing tilt of his head. "I was just trying to be nice."

Shane shoves him with a laugh. "Fuck off."

"You first," Rozanov winks, finally making his way to the door, leaning over to grab his duffel and hike it over his shoulder. He gives Shane a once over, eyebrows raising slightly. "Bye."

"Bye," Shane says back, staring at the door with a stupid grin even when Rozanov is gone.

@

The next appointment falls on a weekday. And unfortunately (or, fortunately, maybe) for Rozanov, it falls on a day with a mandatory practice. So, Shane heads out after his last class late in the afternoon, knowing Rozanov will be home by the time he gets back. At least, he fucking hopes so. He was promised something last week, and he'll be damned if Rozanov doesn't keep his word.

It's a lot all at once the moment he gets to the appointment. He's forced (kindly encourage) to drink a sugary concoction that nearly makes him vomit and then he waits an hour for his blood to be drawn. He's a little grateful Rozanov isn't here to witness him retch over the

trashcan sympathetically offered by the nurse when he makes it to the last gulp of the drink. It's worth it, he supposes, to make sure that everything is going smoothly.

Dr. Yañez greets him cheerily after his blood is drawn by one of the nurses. Her smile is beaming and kind as he lays back on the bed when she instructs him to do so, letting him know that she'll be measuring his abdomen again.

"Everything's looking perfect, perfect, perfect," she tells him, rolling back in her chair to jot something down on his chart. "Okay, so we'll go ahead and administer your Tdap vaccine and do your ultrasound while we wait for the results of your diabetes test. Can you go ahead and lift up your sleeve for me?"

Shane complies, staring at the floor while the needle pricks him. It doesn't take long until the portable machine is wheeled in and he's lying back against the bed with his shirt pushed up. He blushes when he looks down, mind flashing back to Rozanov between his legs only a week ago. He snaps his eyes away and toward the ceiling, vaguely listening as Dr. Yañez warns him about the cold gel.

He only looks back up when she turns the screen toward him, showing him the black and white image of what looks more like an actual baby this time. The slope of a nose, the roundness of a head, the curve of a belly. He can't help but blink, a small laugh fluttering from his throat. "Holy shit," he says without thinking, earning a laugh from Dr. Yañez.

"It's very different from the first ultrasound, isn't it?" she smiles. "Ready for the heartbeat?"

Shane nods, and then thumping sounds. He lets out a breath of relief. "That's good, right?"

"Healthy heartbeat," Dr. Yañez nods. "Have you had any concerns?"

Shane stops and thinks, running back through the list of questions he came up with the night before. "I know that typically there should be movement by now, but I haven't really felt anything? Or at least I haven't noticed, but I don't know. Is that normal?"

"It's different for everyone," she explains calmly, adding another sense of relief. "Movement is typically noticeable between sixteen and twenty-five weeks, so your little one might just be a bit shy."

He finds himself wishing Rozanov was here to hear this and see the image on the screen. "Would it be possible to get, like, photos?"

"Of course!" Dr. Yañez says and then tilts her head. "I know your partner isn't here, but are you interested in finding out the gender today?"

"Oh, um," Shane starts, caught off guard by the word *partner* and also by the question. He almost says no, but stops himself as he thinks of Rozanov, wondering if he'd prefer to keep it a surprise until the birth or not. Realistically, he'd probably want whatever Shane wants, but it wouldn't hurt to at least have a conversation about. "We haven't really talked about that, but, um... maybe next time?"

"Whatever you're comfortable with," she assures him. "We can always do it next time. You'll have plenty more appointments for your third trimester. For now, we can get those ultrasound photos printed for you."

Shane nods. "That'd be cool, thanks."

By the time he's sitting up with his shirt back over his stomach, Dr. Yañez is delivering the good news of his clear blood results. No gestational diabetes, which is a relief and the main thing he had been concerned about. As the appointment wraps up and he has the two copies of the ultrasound folded and tucked in his back pocket, Shane's leg is bouncing and his hands are wringing together, searching for the right time.

"Before I go, do you have any questions or concerns, Shane?"

"Uh," he says dumbly, words caught in his throat and a sudden wave of mortification traveling up his body. He pushes it down at the memory of Rozanov's words. *I will make it up to you*. His shame goes out the window. "Yeah, I was wondering if sexual activity is safe at this point?"

If she's surprised, she doesn't show it. Very professional, this doctor. "I would say from what I've observed today, you're perfectly safe to have sex. I would avoid any positions on your back, seeing as that could constrict your blood vessels. Also, cramps are normal following an orgasm, but if there is any bleeding or prolonged pain, please come see me."

Shane nods, typing the information into the notes app on his phone. "Okay, cool. Is there any way I can get that in writing?"

Ⓢ

As expected, Rozanov is in the kitchen when Shane gets back, sweatpants low, shirtless, drinking orange juice, and freshly showered.

There was some sort of concept of a plan Shane had. Talk about the appointment, give Rozanov the ultrasound and let him know that the baby was looking healthy and on track, and then discuss the possibility of having sex. But the moment Rozanov turns to look at him, raising an eyebrow as a drop of juice slides out of the corner of his mouth, heat pools in Shane's gut and his dick twitches and any idea of a plan is out the fucking window.

Shane treads toward him and slams the paper into his bare chest.

Rozanov swallows the juice and grabs the paper with his brows creased in confusion. "What is this?"

"Permission to finally fuck me, what the fuck do you think it is?" Shane snaps, barely getting the words out before Rozanov is picking him up, hands on the back of Shane's thighs and hoisting him up like he isn't mostly made of muscle.

The paper floats through the air, landing somewhere on the kitchen floor, long forgotten as their mouths clash messily. Shane's hands are in Rozanov's hair, tugging at the dirty blond curls and reveling in the way Rozanov moans into his mouth, sliding his tongue against Shane's.

"Fuck," Rozanov hisses against his mouth, "where do you want it?"

"My room," Shane manages to say coherently.

Luckily, Rozanov doesn't ask again and makes good on his task at getting them across the apartment and into Shane's room. He lowers Shane on the neatly made bed, ridding him of his shirt and then sweatpants, tossing them aside and straightening up to start stripping his own clothes off.

Distracted by Rozanov's hard on, Shane nearly forgets to tell him, "Not on my back—I can't on my back. Pressure on my blood vessels or something."

"Okay," Rozanov nods easily, holding Shane by his wrists and helping him sit at the edge of the bed. "For now, stay like this, yes?"

"For now?" Shane parrots, the curiosity lost when Rozanov drops to his knees between Shane's legs and takes his cock into his mouth. "Holy shit—oh *fuck*."

It's like he's making up for lost time, trying to tear Shane apart and put him back together again. He takes Shane down his throat, pulls away to suck at the tip before licking at the sensitive skin and swallowing him down again. Shane's core and thighs tremble as he does his best to keep himself upright.

Rozanov must sense his discomfort. He lets Shane fall out of his mouth, presses a kiss to his inner thigh and then his stomach and then tilts his chin up to meet his mouth in a kiss. He pats Shane's outer thigh. "Get up."

Shane listens, standing as Rozanov gets settled against the headboard, legs spread. He pats his lap twice and Shane's mouth waters. "You want me to...?"

"You're going to ride me," Rozanov tells him. If it wasn't for the way his cock twitches against his stomach, he would seem cool and calm and collected. "And get yourself off on me. However feels best for you, yes? Get the lube."

Shane nods clumsily, doing as he's told and tossing the half full bottle onto the pillow beside Rozanov before swinging his leg over, straddling him and shuddering when their cocks brush together. Rozanov is already slicking his fingers, reaching back and pressing a finger into Shane.

He pauses, eyebrows raising when there's hardly any resistance. "Hollander—"

"I—I prepped myself before my appointment," Shane admits, face burning with embarrassment and arousal as Rozanov pushes a second finger in him, like he's testing his claim. "I wanted to be ready when I came back. Ready for you."

Rozanov hisses out a curse, using his free hand to pull Shane in by his neck and lick into his mouth. "Fuck—you are so perfect for me, *zaychik*. So good for me."

Shane nods eagerly, mouth dropping as Rozanov fucks his fingers into him, curving them just enough to make him fall forward and into Rozanov's chest. He mouths at the hinge of Rozanov's jaw, moving his hips back to match the rhythm, desperate for more. "Please—*please*," he chokes, moan muffled into Rozanov's skin when he adds a third finger. "Oh fuck—oh my *god*—"

"You can come like this for me," Rozanov tells him, kissing at Shane's sweaty temple. "Is what you deserve, you have been so patient. Fuck yourself on my fingers first and then I will give you my cock."

At the promise of Rozanov inside of him fully, Shane works his hips back, helped by Rozanov's other hand coming down around his dick to get him off. It doesn't take long for Shane to choke out a moan, coming into Rozanov's fist and stomach.

He doesn't get a chance to beg again. Rozanov is cursing, fingers already out and guiding the tip of his cock into Shane, pushing it in and moaning when it slides in.

The feeling is amplified, every part of Shane heated and sensitive from his orgasm. Even then, he can feel himself getting hard again and starts to rock his hips back, breath catching in his throat at the heat simmering in his gut again.

Before he can speed up, Rozanov is threading his fingers through the hair on the back of Shane's head, guiding him to lean back with his hands on top of Rozanov's thighs. It isn't until he sees Rozanov's eyes trail down to his stomach that Shane realizes what he's doing: Getting a better view.

Shane sighs contentedly at the new angle, less intense than the previous one and with a good view even for himself, right at Rozanov and his heavy eyelids, his mouth hanging open as he tracks every single one of Shane's movements, as if dazed.

It's not the first time he's looked at Shane with such want, but it's the first time Shane can place exactly what's making him fall apart. Maybe it's cruel to use it to his advantage. "You want another one?" he finds himself asking through his breath.

Rozanov's eyes flicker up to meet his, body moving with every roll of Shane's steady hips. "Want another what?"

"You know," Shane says, blushing despite being the one to bring it up.

"Tell me," Rozanov urges, moving his hands to hold Shane's hips, slowing his rhythm.

Shane swallows. "You wanna fuck another baby into me, Rozanov?"

A low sound clicks in Rozanov's throat, something between a hum and a trembling breath. Shane can feel him throb inside before he's rushing forward to push his tongue between Shane's lips. It lasts only a few seconds before he's manhandling Shane like he weighs

nothing, still careful but firm as he gets Shane on his knees, pushing his chest down into the bed and fucking back into him all within a few seconds.

Shane gasps at the new angle, face flush against the mattress and hands gripping the sheets. The lewd sound of skin slapping against skin fills his senses, accompanied by Rozanov's indecipherable, Russian babbles. His hand cracks against Shane's ass cheek before soothing the skin with his palm and kneading the flesh. He leans forward, draping himself over Shane's back and grinding against him in slow, dragging thrusts.

Shane's mouth hangs open, every moan coaxed out until there's nothing more than punctuated *ah, ah, ahs* leaving his throat. He can hear Rozanov talking, can make out the way his thrusts are starting to get sloppier by the second and knows that they're both barreling toward the edge.

"Want you to come in me," Shane manages to get out between his moans. "Oh my god—*fuck. Fuck*, want you to come in me—come in me, Ilya, please—"

"Fuck—fuck, *Shane*," Rozanov groans, gripping Shane's ass and fucking into him once and then twice before he's choking on a moan and spilling into him.

It's enough for Shane to come again, staining a small part of the comforter below him. He can't bring himself to care, not when Ilya pulls out and is licking into him, cleaning his mess.

Time seems to be nonexistent as Shane loses himself in Ilya's tongue, more relaxed than anything at this point. When he's finally satisfied, Ilya moves him to a more comfortable position on his side. He slots himself behind Shane, hooking his chin over his shoulder and pressing soft kisses to the sweaty skin there until Shane is twisting his upper body to look at him.

They say nothing for several minutes as they come back down. Ilya doesn't stop touching him, rubbing a flat hand over his ribs, down to his stomach, thumb brushing over the skin just below his belly button and keeping his hand there even as he mouths at Shane's shoulder.

"Worth the wait?" Ilya asks eventually and Shane smiles, craning his neck to kiss him. Ilya grins, brushing their noses together before sighing. "I will get up in a little. Give me some time to feel my legs again, yes?"

Shane blinks at the reminder that he'll eventually have to go back to the sofa. He doesn't think twice when he asks, "Why don't you just sleep in here?"

Rozanov adjusts himself to get a better look at Shane's face. "Are you sure?"

"Yeah," Shane says with a small shrug. It wouldn't be that weird, not anymore at least. "It's probably more comfortable here than on the sofa."

"Mm. Yes, probably," Ilya says and then kisses Shane again. "Okay. I will stay."

"Cool," Shane agrees. A beat passes before he scrunches his nose. "The bed's all dirty now."

Ilya groans, loud and annoyed but starts to get up anyway. "I will go get new sheets and a rag. Need anything else?"

"Water, please," Shane requests, fully expecting a *fuck off* but getting nothing except a nod. "And can you put the clothes on the floor in my laundry basket?"

"You are so annoying," Ilya says but starts to pick the clothes up. He pauses when he picks up Shane's pants, furrowing his eyebrows as he plucks the folded photos from the pocket. "What is this?"

"Oh," Shane blinks, sitting up. "I had them print the ultrasound pictures. I thought maybe you'd want to see them. It's crazy, it actually looks like a baby now."

The photos unfold and Ilya's mouth starts to tilt into a fascinated smile, his eyes dancing across the pictures with a gleam of excitement. He lets out a small laugh. "It does look like a baby. This is definitely my nose, no?"

"No," Shane says back quickly. "It's definitely mine."

Ilya's smile softens. "I hope so." Before Shane can question it, Ilya asks, "Is it boy or a girl?"

"Oh, I don't know," Shane answers honestly. "We didn't really talk about, like, wanting to find out or not, so I just told them not to say."

Ilya looks up at him, expression neutral despite Shane's need to know what he's thinking. "What do you want? Be honest, Shane. Do not just say what you think I want to hear."

"I wasn't," Shane lies even though he was sort of thinking about it. "Maybe... maybe we keep it a surprise until the baby's here? I don't know, I just think it would be better if I didn't know. I think I'd think about it too much."

"Ah," Ilya nods. "This is surprising, I thought you would want to know since you are very uptight."

He says it as a joke, but Shane knows there's some truth to it. And truthfully, at first he did want to just know, but the more he thought about it, the more it started sounding better to wait until birth to find out. Something else to look forward to. "Yeah, I get that. But if you wanna know, we can call Dr. Yañez tomorrow—"

"No," Ilya says over him. "Is okay, I like surprises. Maybe we can have a bet, yes? Loser has to change the diapers always and forever no take backs."

"Fuck off," Shane says with a laugh before pausing. "It'll be a boy—"

"A girl," Ilya says over him. "Bets are placed, are you ready to lose, Hollander?"

"Go fuck yourself."

"Ah, but you already did," Ilya winks, dodging the pillow Shane lodges toward him with impressive strength. He backtracks into the room, grabbing one of the ultrasound photos and

holding it up. "This will go on the fridge," he says and then is gone.

Shane settles back onto his side, looking forward to the rest of the night.

Chapter End Notes

"and there was only one bed" trope except ilya 100% had no intentions of buying a bed because he was playing the long game and new eventually he'd find his way into shane's bed indefinitely one way or another #WorkSmarterNotHarder #WorthTheBackAche

Chapter 5: V. You Open Up, You Close Me In

Chapter Summary

24-26 weeks.

Chapter Notes

hello hello welcome back i am sorry for the wait! but we persist!

thank you so much to tosh for looking over the russian bits!! i appreciate you <3

as you can see i bumped the chapters up to 7.... idk what's going on either but we're both gonna have to trust me okay

anyway!

► EXTRA NOTES!

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

24

"Svetlana would like to meet you."

Shane looks up from his laptop, illuminated with an assignment he's been putting off for the last couple of days. Ilya is in the kitchen, making some sort of soup he swore Shane would enjoy because there's vegetables and all other "healthy bullshit" as he so eloquently put it. Admittedly, it does smell good and anything savory has been making Shane's mouth water for the last couple of days. It's nice that Ilya has picked up on the trivial shift in his cravings.

The silence settles as Shane keeps staring at Ilya, hoping that maybe he'll fill in the empty air with some sort of an explanation. However, he's not looking at Shane at all, instead his focus is on the soup like it's the most interesting thing going on.

Shane wracks his brain because the name *does* sound familiar. When nothing is said, he says, "Oh, really?"

Ilya glances up, his eyebrow twitching subtly. "You do not remember Svetlana."

The way he says it makes it sound more important than it is. Shane frowns, annoyance starting to prickle at his skin. "I know you've mentioned her before, but I don't really

remember the context." Again, he's met with silence and he rolls his eyes. "Well, are you gonna tell me who she is or not?"

Ilya straightens with a sigh, finally placing the wooden spatula down on a paper towel laid out on the counter, stained with broth. He shifts, leans back against the inner corner of the counter and crosses his arms over his broad chest, right over the university logo of his sweatshirt. "She is old friend I used to fuck."

"How nice," Shane snaps, submitting his assignment with a rather aggressive jab of his finger against the mouse pad of his laptop. He keeps the device open, aimlessly scrolling through one of the textbook pages he had downloaded, avoiding looking up, knowing Ilya is staring at him now. He can't help the mumbled bitterness. "What, did you get her pregnant too?"

"No, she would have killed me," Ilya says easily with a shrug. Shane bites his tongue. It's a good idea. He should have killed Rozanov when he had the fucking chance. When Shane says nothing, only stares at Ilya with a look that could kill, Ilya tsks. "Ah, do not get upset—"

"I'm not," Shane snaps, tone laced with anger. He shuts his mouth and closes his eyes, inhaling through his nose and counting to ten. Still, the agitated heat crawls up his neck. The last thing he wants to hear about right now is Rozanov's past hook-ups who lucked out on not getting knocked up. He doesn't want to think about how easy it would have been for anyone else to be in this situation with Rozanov. The thought of him standing in someone else's kitchen like this, ruffled with comfort and making a home-cooked meal, is nearly enough to make Shane get up and refuse to leave his room for the rest of the night.

"Shane," Ilya says, this time softer. It's enough for Shane to finally glance up, met with a look he's never seen before. A gentle smile tugs at the corner of Ilya's mouth, his face youthful, without any of the tense lines he usually carries. "I can talk, yes?" Shane throws his hand out in a gesture he hopes says *get the fuck on with it*. Luckily, Ilya has had some practice in deciphering his wordless actions. "She is old friend I used to fuck, it was nothing more than that. Well, I should not say *old friend*, she is my best friend, but we have not done that in years, okay? It is... platonic. Strictly."

"Okay," Shane says, the annoyance yet to simmer. "Why are you telling me this, Rozanov?"

"Back to last names? I thought I fucked that out of you," Ilya says with his eyebrows raised teasingly. When Shane doesn't answer, he continues. "I mentioned a few months ago when we told your parents that I had a friend who owned a daycare. This is her. Svetlana."

It doesn't take long for the annoyance to burn into embarrassment. Shane shuts his eyes. "Jesus Christ. I'm sorry. Fuck—I'm sorry."

"Is okay," Rozanov says easily. "But she would like to give us tour of the daycare soon so we can see if we like it. She says she will save us enrollment spot—"

"That's really nice of her," Shane says, only to be stopped by Ilya holding up a palm.

"*But*," he continues, "she would like to meet you first. She says it is very important to know the other parent of her niece or nephew."

Shane's eyebrows shoot up. "Niece or nephew, huh? You guys are that close?"

"I would say she is like a sister but that would not sound right," Ilya says with the quick tilt of his head. He pauses for a few seconds, as if searching for the right words. "She is the only person I have here from Russia, so. She is very important."

Shane softens, all the tension in his body easing. It makes sense for him to want Shane to meet the closest person in his life. After all, he met Shane's parents, let himself be integrated into the Hollander household. The least Shane can do is the same, even if it's one person. If they're the most important person in Ilya's life, it matters. "Okay," Shane tells him with a small smile. "I'd love to meet her. Did she say when?"

Ilya brightens up, pushing off the counter and grabbing his phone from where it's face down on the dining table, right next to Shane's laptop. "She said maybe next week if that works for us. I have no class on Wednesday, and I know you only have your online class at five, so I think maybe morning would be good? She said there are two tours available, one at eight and one at ten, so. Is up to you."

"Wednesday works. The earlier the better, right?" Shane says, pulling up the Google calendar on the laptop and typing up *Daycare Tour/Meet Svetlana* in the 8am slot.

Ilya's phone chimes with the calendar notification and he hums. "Ah, good thinking. I will let Svetlana know."

With that, Ilya is dialing a number, pressing the phone to his ear and getting up. When he walks past Shane, he leans down to press a quick and chaste kiss to his mouth before saying *Allo? Sveta!* into the receiver and heading back into the kitchen to check on the soup, leaving Shane to replay the moment until dinner is served.



Nighttime settles with a routine slowly becoming familiar. The faucet runs in the bathroom as Ilya brushes his teeth. Shane is restless, pacing, doing his best to adjust with the added week of a shift to his familiar motions.

He hasn't read to the baby in a week and with his schedule disrupted, it's been getting to him more than he'd like to admit. It's not a secret that he likes routine. He's thrived off knowing what comes next, what to expect when it's in his control. This is starting to feel a little bit out of his control, but rather than complicating it, he's pushed it down. But right now, he can feel it in his throat, desperate to come up.

So woven in his own thoughts, Shane doesn't register Ilya come back into the room. He doesn't even register, the way Ilya does a double take at him, eyebrows creasing.

"Why are you not laying down?" he asks and Shane startles in his step.

"What?" Shane manages to say, his voice cracking on the vowel, giving his nonchalance away more than the tension in his body could.

Ilya stares at him with his eyebrows still raised. He jabs his pointer finger into the center of his bare chest. "*Me* what? No, *you* what."

Shane's mouth opens and closes as his mind goes blank, unable to scrounge up an excuse. "It's nothing," he says eventually, thinking Ilya will leave it at that and lay down. When Ilya stares at him unconvinced, Shane breaks. "It's just—um. Reading is good for the baby. It can hear now, you know, so I've been reading to it—them—every night and I don't know." He inhales, eyes yet to meet Ilya's. "It's just, um. It's been a routine and—and now..."

"Ah," Ilya nods as he trails off. It's nice that he can get where Shane's going with this without forcing him to choke out the rest of his thoughts. "Now you cannot do it because I am here."

Shane's nose scrunches. "Well when you say it like that it sounds mean."

"Shane," Ilya says bluntly. "You are allowed to exist in front of me."

"It's not that—"

"I should go back to sleeping on the sofa, yes?" Ilya says over him.

"No!" Shane says back quickly. "It's not that—"

"Okay, so no problem," Ilya shrugs, pulling the comforter back and getting settled, sitting up and gesturing toward Shane's side of the bed. When Shane doesn't move, Ilya gives a dramatic groan, rolling his eyes. "Hollander, come read your boring books to the baby. But you have to let me talk to them too so they know that the world is much more entertaining than boring Canadian."

"You're an asshole," Shane says but is grateful to go ahead and relieve the itch beneath his skin. He grabs his book from the nightstand and lays on the bed and pulls his shirt up, blushing when Ilya scoots closer to him, hooks his chin on his shoulder. "Um. Hello. It's me again. Your dad—"

Ilya snorts and Shane shoots him a glare. "What? Why are you being so formal with them?"

"It's not like we really know each other," Shane argues, ignoring the incredulous look Ilya shoots him. "Stop—you know what I mean."

"I do not," Ilya says, swatting back when Shane smacks his chest. "Wow, you are making the baby listen to violence. What happens when it comes out swinging?"

"We start looking at hockey scholarships."

Ilya laughs, bright and loud, head tilted back. A spark of pride flickers in Shane's chest, a smile softening the edges of his mouth when Ilya comes back with, "You are already expecting too much of *bukashka*. We cannot put unrealistic expectations this soon, you will be disappointed when they hate hockey and then you will blame me somehow."

"It'll be your fault somehow," Shane snipes back playfully, pausing when his brain goes back to the untranslated word. "What does that mean?"

"That you hate me?"

"I don't hate you," Shane says without thinking. "I meant the Russian thing you said. Buk—bako..?"

"Ah," Ilya smiles, saying it slowly, careful with his pronunciation to make sure Shane understands, "*bukashka*. It means little bug, I think."

"Little bug," Shane repeats softly. "Why'd you pick that?"

Ilya shrugs, eyes flickering to look at something other than Shane. Almost nonchalance, but not quite. "You are Shane-bug, you carry a little bug." He pauses, stealing a glance. "If you do not like it, I will not say it anymore—"

"No," Shane says over him, shaking his head. "I like it. It's really cute."

"Okay," Ilya says after a second. If it wasn't for the smile tilting at the corner of his mouth, Shane would think he was truly indifferent. He tilts his head to the book on Shane's lap. "Go ahead. I will listen with *bukashka* so they will not be miserable alone."

"Oh fuck off," Shane huffs but opens the book to the bookmarked page. He reaches over to the nightstand, uncomfortably winded by the motions by the time he is unfolding his glasses and sliding them onto his face. He starts reading easily, paying more attention to the words rather than Rozanov's growing warmth at his side. When he does spare a glance, he finds Ilya's intense stare right on his face. Shane furrows his eyebrows. "Everything okay?"

"You did not tell me you wore glasses," Ilya answers back without missing a beat.

Shane blinks. "I didn't think it was important? They're mostly for reading small text but I think my vision's been getting worse since, you know," he juts his chin down at his bump. "So, yeah. Is that a problem or...?"

"A little bit of a problem," Ilya says, his hand disappearing beneath the sheets, the warmth of his fingertips caressing Shane's inner thigh. It's the hormones, it's got to be the fucking hormones, that make Shane's dick start to swell at the simple touch. "You can keep reading if you want."

Shane swallows, distracted and restless as Ilya keeps stroking his thumb at the most sensitive part of his skin. He shifts, clears his throat, does anything he can to get himself back on track but finds himself with an erection that is almost painful. "Fuck, Ilya," he breathes only to be pulled onto Ilya's lap, the book clattering onto the floor as his grip favors the back of Ilya's curls instead.

Tomorrow, Shane thinks distantly as Ilya's touch wraps around him. He'll read tomorrow.

Shane spends the morning before meeting Svetlana with nerves pinching at him beneath his skin. It doesn't help that he hardly slept the night before, tossing and turning in hopes of finding a comfortable position, naturally wanting to gravitate onto his stomach or back but not being able to anymore. It's the first time he becomes aggravatingly aware of his size and how much he's grown. He doesn't hate how he looks (definitely doesn't hate the way Ilya's gaze sticks to him more often than not, after a shower when he's shirtless and searching for a shirt baggy enough to wear) but *fuck*, he hates the inconveniences that are starting to be apparent.

Not only to him, but to Ilya. Shane's own discomfort wakes Ilya up more than once nowadays, and while he doesn't seem as annoyed as Shane is, it fucking sucks. Though, the annoyance is soothed when Ilya asks what he needs and Shane begrudgingly mumbles that he's sort of a little hungry and can't sleep, and in turn Ilya is rolling off the bed, bare except for his briefs, and disappearing out of the room. He comes back with a glass of water, a bag of unopened ketchup chips that Shane stared at for too long to be ignored the last time they went grocery shopping, and a half-eaten pint of oat-milk ice cream.

Shane feeds Ilya a bite of ice cream for every one he takes, and keeps the chips to himself because he knows Ilya prefers the barbecue ones. When he's done, Ilya wordlessly returns all the items to their respective spaces, and then lays on his back, raising his arm wordlessly, already falling asleep. Shane takes the hint and settles into his side, hooking his leg over Ilya's waist and reveling in the comfort.

Still, they lost a good two hours of sleep on that. And now, Shane is exhausted yet restless, searching his closet and drawers for a shirt that fits decently only to find fucking nothing. Everything hugs him a bit too much, and if it is sort of loose on him, it's too fucking thick. It's warmed up outside, spring creeping in through the bitter breezes, and with that his wardrobe is even more limited. He refuses to get men's maternity stuff—it's a waste of money and half the time too tight fitting from what he's seen on the sketchy websites that offer them. But with his stubbornness comes the consequence.

He's on the brink of a meltdown between his clothing crisis and the anxiety of meeting Svetlana that he doesn't notice Ilya standing behind him until he hears his voice.

"Everything okay?"

Shane startles, whipping around and arms hurriedly wrapping around himself instinctively. He drops his arms at his sides when Ilya raises an eyebrow, knowing that they're past the point of Shane hiding. "I'm fine," Shane answers with a clip in his tone that contradicts him immediately.

Again, Ilya raises his brow. "That is why you are standing shirtless and talking to yourself?"

"Fuck off," Shane snaps before stopping himself from barrelling on in a string of curses. He closes his eyes, breathes out his nose, and gives himself a second. "I can't find anything to wear that'll cover," he gestures down his body, "all this." Ilya's expression turns neutral as he listens and doesn't say anything. Shane shifts on his feet nervously as the silence stretches between them. "Why the fuck are you looking at me like that?"

"I am just thinking," Ilya says simply. "I do not want to say the wrong thing."

That's a first, Shane thinks vaguely. He can't remember Rozanov ever caring about saying the right thing at all. But he guesses that things have already changed so much in these last six months. Neither of them are really the same people from before this. "Is there even a wrong thing to say? I just want to find a shirt that isn't going to cling to me or make me overheat."

Ilya hums in his throat, nodding slightly as his eyes flit behind Shane, toward the closet of shirts neatly placed on their hangers. After a moment, he speaks. "You do not have many options," he starts carefully, "and you will start to have less options in the next few months, yes?"

Shane blinks. "I mean... I guess?"

"Do you not like this because people will be able to see that you're...?"

Shane blinks before shaking his head. "No—I mean... Maybe?" He huffs, suddenly stripped down into nothing but his insecurities, all for Ilya's viewing. "Fuck. Okay, yeah. Fine—*yes*. It's just... I don't want people to fucking stare at me and if they see *this*, then—"

"They will see you," Ilya finishes for him with an understanding nod. "If you do not want to go, you don't have to—"

"No, I wanna meet Svetlana," Shane says over him. Staying home isn't even an option he considered, he needs Ilya to know that. "I'm going, even if I have to feel uncomfortable for a little. It's fine, I'll be fine."

"You can wear one of my shirts, yes? I have bigger shoulders, it will be big on you. It will not hide everything, but it will have some breathing room."

"That works," Shane sighs in relief. "Thanks."

Ilya nods, a silent *you're welcome* as he goes to leave the room to get a shirt. He pauses right as he's halfway out, turning his body and leaning against the doorframe. "Maybe it does not help, but you look good like this."

"I already know you have a breeding kink, Rozanov," Shane partially jokes, trapped beneath the way Ilya is looking at him. Different from the usual lust that fills his gaze nowadays.

"No, not like that," Ilya says. "Just... *you*. You are very beautiful."

Shane finds himself without words, cheeks flaring in heat as Ilya leaves the room.



Svetlana is tall and easy to spot, not only because of her height, but because she's probably the most beautiful woman Shane has seen in his life. She's put together, standing at the entrance of the daycare building that sits in a community that looks stupidly wealthy, and wearing brown fitted and flared trousers and a simple white t-shirt, her gold jewelry glinting in the sun as she tilts her head to smile at them. Her auburn curls are bright against the sun, and

her skin is flawless and naturally sun kissed directly from the lips of Helios if Shane had to guess.

He feels stupidly under-dressed in his black cotton shorts (chosen for the elasticity of the waistband, thanks) and Ilya's Adidas t-shirt that is slightly large on him, but doesn't hide his bump all the way. He tries not to think about it too much but he can see the way Svetlana's eyes flicker down for a fleeting moment as they approach her and his insecurities are back tenfold. Especially when Ilya's touch breaks away from his lower back to scoop her into a hug, their arms wrapped around each other, bodies swaying with smiles while he stands there awkwardly, wondering what the polite thing to do is in the midst of his... envy? Annoyance? He can't even properly place the swoop of bitterness that falls through his chest and into his stomach.

He's half checked out when they break away and Ilya is gesturing toward Shane, urging him closer. Shane complies with some hesitance, giving what he hopes looks like a genuine smile as Ilya says, "Shane, this is Svetlana. Svetlana, Shane."

Svetlana accepts the handshake Shane offers. "Hello, Shane. I have heard so much about you, it's nice to finally meet you."

"Likewise," Shane says with another stiff smile, letting his hand drop heavily at his side when their grips part. He doesn't say anything else, suddenly aware of the way Ilya is beaming, looking between the two like there couldn't be a better sight.

Luckily, Svetlana seems to be all business, tilting her head toward the double doors and starting her tour. "If you'd both follow me inside, I thought it would be best to give you a tour and feel of the daycare and then sit in my office and discuss details after."

"That sounds great," Shane agrees, tension dropping from his bones as they start to move into the building.

"Feel free to ask any and all questions," Svetlana tells them as she holds the door open for them. They pass the threshold and into a foyer, separated from the rest of the building by a heavy door. There's seating, a couple of single chairs against a wall as well as a table with children's books and magazines. A fake plant is nestled in the corner, right beneath a security system and a camera mounted above. "This is the waiting area. The door is locked always, and only staff have access to unlock it and allow parents and visitors through. We take our security and safety of our students and staff very seriously."

Shane hums, eyes dancing across the room to take in all the details. The posters on the walls, the plaque awarding the daycare for something that is probably outstanding. The door clicks as it unlocks, and Ilya gestures for Shane to walk through first. The hallway stretches down with doors along the walls, each with their own respective room numbers and large windows giving a glimpse inside the classrooms.

"We'll start with our infants room," Svetlana informs them, walking backwards to face them. "This is where your child will be starting if you choose to enroll. Typically, average daycares will have infants as one classroom, ranging from six weeks to twelve months, but we find it better to split the infants into two classrooms since there are so many large milestones that

happen in the first year. This age group is six weeks to six months, and after six months they move onto our second infant room, which is six months to one year. That'll be the next class we see—please, feel free to observe and take a look."

She stops at the first window where the lights inside the room are dimmer than the ones in the hallway. The room is decorated with a birthday chart on the wall, art made with small hand and footprints of ladybugs and bees to welcome the spring season, and origami birds hanging from fishing-line from the ceiling. There are six cribs spaced evenly on one side of the room, the designated sleeping area, Shane assumes. The other side of the room has baskets of toys organized on shelves mounted to the wall. There's sensory toys, rattles, fabric and board books, stuffed animals, and a lot of other things Shane should probably know about at this point.

Within the room are two staff members, each of them occupied in their own tasks. One is sitting on the floor with two babies on their respected sensory mats, amazed by the reflection of water and light bouncing off the object. Shane recognizes it as *tummy time*—he read about that in the first trimester, and the importance of it when it comes to gross motor skills and development. The other staff is on the side with the cribs where there's already one baby sleeping in a sleep sack. The other is in her arms, eyelids slowly fluttering as she rocks them to sleep. It seems... peaceful. Calming, and not at all the havoc Shane had been partially expecting.

As if reading his mind, Svetlana lets out a small laugh. "It is usually not so quiet. Babies are loud—you caught us at a good time."

"I bet," Shane says with his own chuckle.

Surprisingly, it's Ilya who is asking a question first instead of adding to the small bit of conversation. "So, it will not be exactly like this all the time?"

"Every day is different," Svetlana explains with a professional smile.

Ilya rolls his eyes, mumbling something in Russian that makes Svetlana's eyebrows shoot up, and then switching back to English within the second. "Yes, I *know*, but isn't this sort of false advertising?"

"*Rozanov*," Shane snaps, gaping at him, sort of mortified that he's accusing his supposed best friend of that in the first place. "What the hell?"

"What? She said ask any question," Ilya defends with a shrug before looking back at Svetlana who looks more amused now than anything. After all, she probably knows him better, knows not to take him so serious. Again, Shane feels a twinge of bitterness at the thought, but pushes it back in favor of listening to Ilya explain himself. "I am just curious at how a normal day will look, yes? It is good to know if this will be the right choice for our child."

"I understand," Svetlana nods. "A normal day varies, like I told you. Every day is different, but for the most part the schedule will stay the same. We try not to have more than five infants at a time to lessen the stress, and as you can see the classroom has some adjustments to make it a little more... welcoming. Lowered lights, calming music."

"What does the schedule look like?" Shane asks, before Ilya can say anything else.

"Six-thirty to seven-thirty is the hand-offs. Around seven thirty, we start breakfast—infants typically have milk or snacks provided by the parents that our teachers will feed them. After that is done, they move on to group activities like the sensory mats or toys. Of course, it depends on what the baby wants, as you can see there is one sleeping and another one that is being rocked, so it will depend on what the infant needs in the moment.

"Outdoor play is around nine-thirty, there are double strollers we have so they can be taken outside without hassle. After is music time which transitions into play time again, usually as a group so they can socialize. Eleven thirty to twelve thirty is lunch time, which transitions into nap and quiet time. This will last until the last baby wakes up which is usually around two to three. They have outdoor play once again at three thirty, and the rest of the day will consist of a mixture of music time, sensory time, or play time. Of course, that is if the child stays the full day. If they are half-day, they will leave at twelve-thirty."

Shane takes in all the information spit-fired at them as best as he can. When Svetlana finishes, he lets out a breath. "Wow, that's... more than I thought it would be."

"Yes, we are very detailed," Svetlana smiles. She glances at Ilya and tilts her head. "Any more questions, Ilyusha?"

Ilya's tightened mouth loosens as he shakes his head. His eyes are stuck in the classroom, flitting around as he shakes his head. "Mm. No, no questions."

Shane gives him a curious look only to be distracted when Svetlana starts to take them down to the next classroom. For the most part, it's the same schedule as the previous one, nearly the same layout of the classroom as well with the exception of more toys given the age's developmental milestones. The one year old room is slightly larger with a few more children, all in the middle of what looks like morning snack. The two year old room is filled with more children, all finishing up their snacks and zooming around the room with their teachers doing their best to wrangle them to clean their faces or take them potty (prime potty training age, Svetlana tells them).

The three year olds are a little more civilized, sitting on the carpet and fidgeting as they try to stay still as they're read a story while another teacher wipes down the crumb covered tables. The four and five year old classrooms are the most organized. All the children are cleaning their respective areas, washing their hands at the two mini sinks provided, and then proceeding to either sit on the carpet where large styrofoam shapes are laying, building intricate towers, or at a table where crayons, markers, and papers are offered for free drawing.

Of course, it's only the morning, the tour finishing up just after nine after they take a walk outside and survey both the toddler and pre-k playgrounds. Svetlana makes a point to let them know that the day is only beginning, and that what they saw was only a glimpse at how much is learned and how much fun is had. All in all, Shane is impressed with the amount of effort put in by all the staff, at how much of the day only functions because of their dedication. Ilya is quieter, not voicing his opinions much even as Svetlana takes them to her office to start talking about the enrollment process.

"So," she smiles as she rolls her chair closer to her desk, clasping her hands on top of the white surface as she looks back and forth between Shane and Ilya sitting across from her. "What are your thoughts? Shall we start getting the enrollment process going?"

Shane blinks, taken aback by how fast it seems to be rolling. "Oh—I'm not due until the end of June."

Svetlana nods. "Yes, Ilya told me. June twenty-seventh, correct?" When Shane nods back, she gives him another smile. "We can still save you a spot in the classroom, and get your information so that when the time comes, your child can begin right away. I did have some scholarships and grants available so you do not have to pay anything—"

"I am okay with paying," Ilya says, waving his hand dismissively. "But I am just... I am not sure. Maybe we will have to think about it more. Talk it over, yes?" He looks at Shane as he finishes his sentence.

Shane finds himself nodding after a second. "Oh, um. Yeah, for sure. Good idea."

Svetlana leans back, raising an eyebrow. Her professionalism drops, and then she's looking right at Ilya. "I thought you wanted to do this right away, Ilya. That is what we talked about, remember?"

Shane frowns, the bitterness stark on his tongue. "Well, it kind of doesn't matter what only *he* wants, does it?" he nearly snaps. "We sort of have to agree considering this is both of our kid, not just his."

"Yes, I'm aware," Svetlana answers, straightening up, eyes boring into Shane's. "I did not mean it to offend, Shane. I was just under the impression from Ilya that the two of you already spoke about this and had made a decision. That's why I was confused."

"No, she is right," Ilya sighs, rubbing a hand over his face. "Sorry—I'm sorry, Sveta. This is more than I thought it would be."

Shane sags, letting out a breath. He understands where Ilya is coming from—it's overwhelming to so suddenly be making future decisions. For things so suddenly to be set in stone, to be presented to them as a reminder that soon, they'll have another life to care for. To make the right decisions for. It's a lot easier said than done, and they're slowly starting to find out how true that is. "No, he's right. Everything is sort of starting to, like, hit us I think? Sorry, Svetlana."

"Do not be sorry," Svetlana tells them. "Ah, it's sort of crazy to think of... you are both so young and handling this all at once, yes? It's a very drastic change to how you were living before, especially for you, Ilyusha."

Ilya huffs out a laugh and shrugs. "Yeah, no shit."

Svetlana drums her fingers on the table and lets out a breathy laugh. "You know, I always tell people you should not put your blind trust in condoms."

"Right," Shane croaks. "*Condoms*. Yeah."

Svetlana's eyes widen, flicking to Ilya who laughs and then coughs into his fist, quickly changing the subject. "Where is the bathroom, Sveta?"

"Down that hall, to the right. There will be a sign," she tells him, gesturing with the jut of her chin. When he leaves, closing the office door behind him, Svetlana's eyes find Shane's, firm and steady. A predator locking in on their already lifeless prey. "So what is your game here? You baby-trap him because his father is rich? You think you can get some money out of him because you're going to have his child?"

Shane gawks, mouth opening and closing in shock as he tries his best to find words other than *what the actual fuck*? "No! No—what the *hell*? How are you even asking me that? No, I had no clue he even came from money until *after* I told him he fucking knocked me up. I barely even knew anything about him before all of this happened!"

"Oh," she laughs, the sound humorless and dry. "So you were just foregoing protection because you're stupid?"

Shane blushes and shrugs. "Well, yeah. Pretty much."

She stares at him, eyes narrowing before she shrugs. "Well, can't say I'm too surprised. Ilya has never been immune to pretty boys. Has always thought with his dick first before anything else." Shane frowns, hating where his mind goes. Straight to Ilya slotted against nameless faces. People that could have easily been in this position too. Svetlana lets out an amused laugh, propping her chin onto her hand. "Huh. You do not look so happy to hear that, Shane."

"I don't like thinking about that sort of stuff," Shane finds himself admitting, uncaring if that makes him pathetic or a fucking loser. He wishes he was sort of special to Ilya, and for a moment, he was starting to think that maybe he was. After all, he's giving him his first kid. That counts for something, even if it isn't much. Even if Ilya will find himself with someone else in the future. "I know it's not convenient, I know it's probably stupid to be going through with all of this, but I don't want you thinking I fucking—I *trapped* him or something. I gave him an out as soon as I told him. I was never gonna force him to stay if he didn't want to but he... he wanted to. And I'm happy that he did because I can't imagine doing this with anyone else."

Svetlana softens, all the hard edges of her face smoothing out. The corner of her mouth tilts up slightly. "You know, he told me we couldn't sleep together anymore back before summer started."

Shane swallows, blinking back his annoyance. He wishes he would stop being reminded that Rozanov had a hefty roster. "Um. I'm sorry, I guess."

Svetlana shakes her head with a laugh. "No, no don't be. Of course, I was disappointed because he was a good and reliable fuck, but I was never upset. I just thought it was... a little weird for Ilya, no? And then he started talking about Hollander from his team. Hollander who was so boring, who was such an incredible player it pissed him off. Hollander who had to

know how pretty he was and how much he had an effect on him—you must know this Hollander, right?"

Shane can't help the way his mouth twitches. He shrugs, feigning his nonchalance. "I'm familiar with him."

Svetlana hums and then continues. "And then, suddenly, he's calling me late at night. *Sveta, what do you know about babies? Tell me everything.* I nearly fainted. *Ilyusha, you got someone pregnant?* He wasn't as panicked as I thought he should have been. He was... determined. Like he knew he could not mess this up, like it was a chance at something like a future, maybe. He has never been one to think about the future, not for himself." She smiles. "He is annoying and he hides behind his stupid ego and big mouth, but he is so filled with love, Shane. He has so much to give. You need to know this."

"I know it," Shane nods. He's never doubted for a second that Ilya would be a good father. "But why are you telling me all this?"

"I just think you need to know," Svetlana whispers.

And before Shane can ask what *that* means, her office door is creaking open and Ilya is coming back, frowning at Svetlana. "Sveta, I just watched a small child bite one of your teachers."

Svetlana sighs, dropping her head for a second before standing up and giving them a tight smile. "That is my cue to go. Boys, let me know if and when you make a decision. I will keep that spot open just in case, *da?*" With that, she is rounding the desk, hugging Ilya and then pulling Shane in for a hug and kissing his cheek. She looks down at his stomach and beams. "This is a very cute look on you, yes? I hope everyone tells you this."

"That is enough," Ilya says, pulling her back by her arm and scowling when she cackles and swats at his shoulder. Then, she's gone, hurrying down the hall and toward where Ilya said the commotion was happening. With that, Ilya is letting out a heavy breath. "Let's go?"

Shane nods, grateful to not have to be the one to suggest it. "Fuck yeah, let's go."

The drive home is silent except for the gentle hum of the radio. It's only when an ad for some coffee chain comes up that Shane's interest is piqued at the mention of a donut. But it's not so much a *donut* that makes his mouth water, but the idea of anything warm and soft and sweet. He rolls it over in his head, tries pushing it down for a fleeting moment before coming to terms that it's not really *him* asking for it. That's a valid excuse.

"I swear, it's like the baby gets in my head sometimes," he says after a bit, tacking it on with a small chuckle. Some nonchalance that he hopes comes across as uncaring and casual as he wants it to. He's rewarded by Ilya's attention in the subtle form of a raised brow. So, he continues. "I can't stop thinking about, like, pastries."

Within fifteen minutes they're pulling into the parking lot of a bakery. Shane doesn't even feel bad about their detour, not when they walk in and the sweetness hits his senses. He beelines

toward the display, but his eyes lock on the loaf being sliced by one of the bakers. At the sight of the cinnamon bread, his mouth waters instantly.

Beside him, Ilya lets out a small laugh, bumping their shoulders together. "You want this one?"

Shane is nodding before the sentence is even finished.

They leave with a bag of sliced cinnamon bread and some freshly baked white chocolate and raspberry cookies, as well a slice of chocolate cake Ilya chose for himself. The drive back to the apartment seems endless as Shane controls himself, not picking at the sweets even though he can't stop thinking about them.

In the kitchen, Ilya leans back against the counter, watching in amusement when Shane takes a bite out of the cinnamon bread. "So," he drawls. "What is the verdict?"

Shane presses his lips together, the flavors sitting on his tongue with the aftertaste of what he can only describe as *disappointment*. The sweetness is there, sure. But the cinnamon doesn't coat his tongue, there's barely any hint of vanilla. It's not really all that warm anymore, and he knows that popping it in the microwave wouldn't help all that much. It doesn't taste how he had been imagining at all.

Ilya's amused expression falters. He pushes off the counter, ducking his head slightly to meet Shane's eyes. "Oh no. You are disappointed."

It's not a question. Not even a guess—it's a fact, a blatant observation. Shane sighs when he sees Ilya's face fall like it's him that's being betrayed. "It's just... I don't know. I think I was expecting it to taste familiar, that's all."

Ilya blinks at him. "You have been to that bakery before?"

"No, not familiar like that," Shane does his best to explain. "More like... My mom used to make this cinnamon bread when I was a kid that I used to love. It wasn't even a family recipe or anything—I'm pretty sure she got the recipe from the back of some pre-made dough. I don't even remember the name of it but, yeah. Sorry, I know that's probably stupid."

"Is not stupid," Ilya is quick to say, bringing his hand up to rub at the back of Shane's neck in a way that is comforting. He lets his eyes flutter shut, sways into the touch and is pulled into Ilya's embrace. "I am sorry it was not what you wanted."

"It's not me you should be apologizing to," Shane partially jokes, hoping to ease some of the attention off himself.

It works easily. Ilya is quick to press a kiss to Shane's neck before stepping back and then leaning down. He puts his hands on Shane's stomach, the curve of it beneath his shirt, and bumps his forehead against the space above his belly button. "I am sorry, *moy bukashka*. Papa will do better next time, yes? No more disappointment."

Shane can't help but smile, his eyebrows raising teasingly. "Papa, huh?"

"Yes, this is how language works, Hollander," Ilya says, straightening up but not moving his hands. "I am *papa*, very fun word. You will be simple and boring *dad*. Not so fun. Makes sense for us, yes?"

Shane shoves his chest, just enough for Ilya's body to sway back. "You're an asshole."

"Ah, no," Ilya says, reaching out, hands on Shane's elbows to draw their bodies back together. He leans in, brushes their noses lightly and Shane is trapped beneath the way his light eyes flicker between Shane's and then down to his mouth. "Swear only in Russian in front of the baby, yes? You say it like this: *mudak*."

Shane's mouth moves around the unsaid syllables before his lips are melting into a smile and he shakes his head, Ilya following the motions absentmindedly. "Not happening, *asshole*."

Ilya clicks his tongue, but says nothing else, dipping to slot his mouth against Shane's instead.

It almost makes up for the disappointment of the cinnamon bread.



With the twenty sixth week approaching, Shane's muted anxiousness starts to take the front of most of his thoughts.

He hasn't felt much from the baby. Well, no, that's not entirely true. Every now and then he feels something that's probably a shift, maybe even a tap or two, but no outright kick like all of the stuff he's been reading have said should be happening right now. He knows that every pregnancy is different, but he's pretty sure he should have felt something by now. And with the days passing by both slowly and quickly, desperation is in full swing.

He's tried pushing at his stomach, has tried playing music with the speaker of his phone directly against the skin, even asking kindly and out loud when he's alone if he can get some sort of sign that everything is right in there. But without fail, every single time, nothing. Or at least, not much.

He's in his head about it for most of the day, talking as much as he can in the silence with Ilya out of the apartment and at one of his classes. "I really hope you're just shy," he says as he comes back from the gym, cutting his session short in favor of eating a bowl of some chocolate cereal Ilya is usually the one frequenting.

When he's sitting on the sofa with the bowl balanced on his rounded stomach, he keeps trying. "Maybe you'll move for chocolate? Or, no. No I would have noticed by now... Do you *not like* chocolate? If that's the case, I'm sorry. It's been, like, thing number two I've been craving." He pauses. "Number one thing is cinnamon bread, if you're wondering. But specifically the one my mom used to make. My mom is your grandma. *Grandma*, alright? Not Glamma. Don't let them try convincing you, no matter how persuasive your... your papa might be."

The word sits weirdly on his tongue, awkward in its syllables and hardly able to ring against his ear in a pleasant chime. Not because he hates it, no. It's not that. Maybe he likes it a bit

more than he should, but thinking about that right now doesn't seem like the best idea, so he pushes it back and keeps mindlessly talking and talking and talking in hopes of getting *something* back.

Nothing comes of it. The day passes and the worry slowly fizzles out as it does most nights as he settles into the routine he and Ilya have built up in the couple of months living together. With the team out of the play-offs, Ilya gets home earlier. If he has assignments, he throws himself headfirst into them. The two of them sit at the dining table with their laptops, working in silence, their socked feet pressed against each other beneath the surface absentmindedly, a habit accidentally formed out of proximity.

After their tasks are complete, Ilya will get started on dinner (if he's not in the mood, they'll order out) and they'll eat together, talk about all things interesting and uninteresting. Then, Shane will wash the dishes while Ilya dries them, and more often than not they end up on the sofa, Shane's legs in Ilya's lap while he tries to pretend like he's not asking for a massage. Of course, Ilya can read him easily, so he rubs at Shane's ankles and calves until Shane is melting against the cushions and fighting sleep.

They end the night after showering and brushing their teeth, lying in bed with either Shane reading out loud or Ilya saying some bullshit with the excuse of "teaching the baby Russian" when Shane can tell it's mostly just swear words.

Tonight it's no different, and Shane swats at the back of Ilya's head when he leans over to chant *blyat blyat blyat* into the stretched skin of his stomach. "Quit it, asshole. Be serious."

"I am very serious," Ilya says back in the most unserious cadence possible, voice pitched higher for the sole purpose of mocking. He's lying on his stomach, body lower on the bed so that his head is at level with Shane's torso. He inhales, and then very loudly says: "*Blyat—!*"

"Ilya," Shane scolds, doing his best to keep his voice firm and steady. It earns him a look, so he rolls with it. "I keep reading that dual language is really important, so maybe instead of just cussing all the time, you should do something productive. Like read a Russian kids book or talk to it as much as you can in Russian, not just with like," he gestures vaguely, "all of your normal bullshit."

Ilya's eyebrows raise at the same time his mouth drops to speak. "I thought you said the baby is not speaking Russian."

Shane rolls his eyes. "Obviously I didn't mean that."

"Obviously," Ilya mocks. He pauses when Shane doesn't laugh, and then huffs out a stubborn breath, rolling his eyes. "Okay, fine. Singing is the same?"

Shane furrows his eyebrows, the question catching him off guard. "I would assume so?"

"Close your eyes," Ilya tells him suddenly. When all Shane does is stare at him in further confusion, he groans. "Hollander, close your eyes. It is already embarrassing that you will hear me—"

"Alright fine," Shane says quickly, knowing that the best way to get Ilya to get on with it is to just shut up and comply. So, Shane closes his eyes, feels Ilya press his cheek to the highest point of his stomach. After a few seconds, he hears Ilya singing, his voice pitched a little higher, the notes not perfect, but still steady.

Bozh'ja korovka, uleti na nebo, prinesi mne hleba. Chernogo i belogo tol'ko ne gorelogo.

The melody repeats but with different words, once and then twice before Ilya starts to taper off. Shane opens his eyes after several seconds of silence. "What was that?" he asks gently, careful not to disturb the calmness that has settled.

"A song my mother used to sing," Ilya answers after a beat, his cheek still against Shane, making his smile all the more slanted. "Is about a ladybug that will bring you bread. Black and white, but not burnt."

Shane snorts. "What does that even mean?"

"What does 'hot cross buns' mean?" Ilya retorts. "No one knows, is just a song, Shane."

Shane runs his hand through Ilya's curls, smiling at him and earning a soft smile back. "Sing it again."

Ilya blinks at him. "Again?"

Shane nods. "I want to learn it."

Maybe it's because Shane has always been committed to perfection, but he learns the first few lines quickly. It takes some repetition, some kind corrections on his pronunciation, but eventually he feels confident enough to try it along side Ilya.

He's in the middle of his careful pronunciation of *chernogo* when he feels the sudden movement. The unmistakable sensation of a firm kick, right to the area where Ilya is still resting.

Ilya seems to notice it at the same time, snapping his head up with wide eyes locking right on Shane's. "Was that...?"

"Oh my god," Shane manages to get out through the combination of the gasp and laugh that settles in his throat. "Oh my *god*—thank fuck. Holy shit—" Again, another kick. He laughs properly this time, hands pressing against his stomach in gratitude and earning another movement.

Ilya scrambles to sit up, hands hovering over Shane, like he isn't sure if he's allowed such a privilege. "Can I—is it okay if I—?"

Shane grabs his wrist and pulls his hand until his palm is flat on the surface. He pushes it down with added pressure. "Ah, come on. Don't get all shy now—here, Ilya, sing again."

Immediately, Ilya complies. He's rewarded with a kick of his own, and he stumbles over the melody, mouth opening and closing around unsaid words. Before Shane can give him shit for

freaking out, he finds the lamplight hitting Ilya's face just enough to get a glimpse at the wetness in his eyes, and he can't bring himself to tease him. Not when his eyes start to burn too.

Luckily, neither of them are forced to deal with the mortifying thought of being perceived in the midst of their emotions. Ilya is draping himself over Shane, slotting their mouths together in a wet kiss and silent celebration.



"Ow—Jesus, kid. I'm starting to wish you didn't move so much," Shane huffs, wincing when again there's an uncomfortable pressure right beneath his rib. As much as he's grateful that there's signs of life now, it comes with a cost. The cost being that every time he even tries to relax, the baby thinks it's time to move as much as it can. He wouldn't be surprised if there was an elbow right against his bladder right now.

He's coming back from his third trip to the bathroom in an hour when his phone starts to vibrate against the coffee table. When he sees Hayden's contact name taking up his screen, he answers quickly.

"Hey, buddy."

"Oh good, you're still alive," Hayden answers. "Rozanov's mutant baby hasn't killed you yet."

"It's half my baby too," Shane points out right as Ilya comes out of their bedroom and down the hall, hair still damp from his shower. Shane cut short due to his squished bladder. He's shirtless, sporting only some Adidas track pants.

He does a double take when he hears Shane and mouths *who is it?* To which Shane mouths back *Hayden* prompting Ilya to make a face and then loudly say, "Hang up!"

Shane shoos him off and catches the tail end of Hayden's sentence. "—he with you right now?"

"We're sort of... living together," Shane answers, already expecting the sputtering from the other end. "Don't be an asshole. It's convenient and we won't have to—why am I explaining myself to you?"

"Because I'm your best friend that you love so much," Hayden answers back. Then he tacks on, "Which is why I need a huge favor from you."

Shane blinks, looking down at his abdomen. The shirt he's wearing does nothing to hide it. He's pretty sure the bottom of his navel is peeking out. "Uh, alright, but I'm sort of limited to what I can and can't do at the moment."

Rozanov makes a face. "Is not true—you are still weightlifting!"

Shane hushes him with a hand swatting the air, hoping that Hayden didn't hear that. What he actually means is that he's limited to what he wants to do, and his temper is only getting shorter the farther along he gets. The last thing he wants is to be asked a favor, but he can't say that out loud.

Luckily, Hayden doesn't catch on to any of the background or unsaid words. "I promise it's not, like, anything crazy," Hayden says quickly. "Jackie and I were just wondering if you were free on Friday and could watch the twins. We're overdue on a date night, dude. Please. I can beg if you want!"

"I don't know, Hayd," Shane sighs. Maybe it's because he's tired right now, but the thought of having to scramble after two twin toddlers sounds like a fucking nightmare. Especially considering he's fucking pregnant.

"You've babysat them before!" Hayden points out like that will make a difference.

"Yeah, when they were like one," Shane says with a blunt laugh. "And I wasn't fucking *pregnant*, dude. There's no way I can do that by myself right now. I'm really sorry. You can't ask any of the other guys?"

"I don't *trust* any of the other guys," Hayden whines. "Well, I can trust J.J. but he already said fuck no, so. Come on. You're my only option!"

"Hayden—"

"I can't believe I'm resorting to this," he starts before letting out a heavy sigh. Shane can practically see him rubbing a hand over his face. "But you can bring Rozanov if it helps."

Shane blinks, eyes flitting over to Ilya in the kitchen, leaning back against the counter and scrolling through his phone with one hand and holding a carton of orange juice with the other. "Rozanov?" he repeats, earning Ilya's attention in the form of a furrowed brows and the curious tilt of his head.

"Yes. It'll be, like, a free parenting trial run or something. Is he good with kids?"

"I think he can manage," Shane says, ignoring the way Ilya hisses his name, trying to get his attention to seemingly ask what the *fuck* he's getting signed up for. "We'll be there. You said Friday?"

Once Hayden confirms the date and time and they hang up, Ilya is standing in front of Shane, his orange juice abandoned on the countertop. "Why the fuck was Pike talking about me?"

"We was asking us for a favor," Shane explains with a shrug. "Well, he was asking *me*, but he said I could bring you along, so. Friday we'll be babysitting his twins."

Ilya blinks at him, mouth twitching in silence for a good several seconds. "Babysit? *Babysit*? Why the hell are we babysitting? Pike cannot watch his own kids?"

"Him and Jackie haven't had a night to themselves in a while," Shane tells him, rolling his eyes when Rozanov makes a noise of protest. "Besides, I think it'll be a good idea. I don't

know, maybe we'll learn a thing or two about how we work together as... as parents."

At this, the annoyance in Ilya's face dissipates. He nods simply, understandingly. "Okay, yes. You are right." A pause. "You will see that I will be the favorite, yes?"

"Oh fuck off," Shane scoffs, pushing down the way his chest flutters. The baby kicks at the same time, nearly winding him, so much so he has to press his palm to the space beneath his ribs with a wince. "It's not a competition. And even if it was I would fucking win."

Ilya doesn't argue. Instead he tilts his chin at Shane's hand. "Uncomfortable?"

Shane shrugs. "A little."

Without saying anything else, Ilya sits beside him, putting his hand where Shane's was and pressing just enough to ease some of the discomfort. Then, he rubs small circles into the skin, speaking in Russian so quickly that Shane couldn't even make out the sounds if he tried. He doesn't have to ask for Ilya to say, "Was just telling *bukashka* to maybe be more gentle with dad, yes?" He shrugs nonchalantly, like he isn't pulling Shane's heart strings every which way. Stupid fucking hormones. "Or else he is very mean to me. We cannot have that."

"Shut the fuck up," Shane says even though it comes out more breathless than anything. The motions from Ilya are actually helping so much. He lets out a satisfied groan and tilts his head back against the sofa, eyes fluttering shut. "Where the fuck did you learn this?"

"A lot of research," Ilya says. Nothing about it comes across as a joke. He leans his body against Shane's, propping his chin on Shane's shoulder. "This good?"

"s great," Shane says, already dozing off.



Hayden and Jackie's apartment is cluttered with all sorts of toys, board books, and child-safe art supplies. Even then, it's the most tidy Shane has ever seen it with the two girls running around like little natural disasters.

Speaking of the twins, they're on the sofa, too occupied in the princess movie playing on the TV to notice the added presence of Shane and Ilya awkwardly standing by the door as Jackie and Hayden get themselves together, spit-firing all sort of information to help them with a seamless and stress-free night.

"—and no milk for Ruby after seven or she'll throw up right after you put her to bed," Jackie tells them. "What else? I'm forgetting something..."

"Jade will probably need to be cuddled to sleep," Hayden continues, earning a nod from Jackie. "Not for long, just enough for her to get sleepy. You can transfer her onto her bed—don't give me that fucking look, Rozanov. She's two, she can still be rocked to sleep if she wants."

Ilya raises his hands in defense. "I did not say anything." Then, he leans over and mutters to Shane, "But that is a little too old for this, no?"

Shane elbows him and gives Jackie and Hayden a tight smile. "We should be good."

"Thank you guys so much," Jackie says, giving Shane a one armed hug and then doing the same to Rozanov who fumbles to reciprocate, not having expected it. "Seriously, we owe you one when your little one gets here! If you ever want a night to yourselves, let us know—"

"Thank you," Shane says over her quickly. It's a bit odd, feeling like she's speaking about the two of them as a couple instead of co-parents. He doubts they'll need a night to themselves at all. Even if they did, what would they do? Go on a *date*? He nearly laughs at the thought, but instead nods at Hayden. "Go enjoy yourselves."

"But do not have too much fun," Rozanov says, jerking a finger toward Shane. "Look what can happen."

Shane shoves him and can barely make out the laughter as the blood rushes to his face. Soon, Hayden and Jackie are gone and he's left with Ilya's stupid ass smug face. "You're an asshole," Shane tells him and Ilya gawks.

"In front of the Pike children, Shane? Wow. Is low, even for you."

Shane rolls his eyes again, swatting Ilya's hands away from him in favor of cleaning up some of the stuff scattered around the apartment. Quickly, Ilya is following his motions. They work in a comfortable silence until the movie ends and the spell of silence is broke. Within the minute, they're being hounded by two two year olds with curious hands and eyes.

"Where mama go?" the one with pigtails asks. Shane thinks it's Ruby, but isn't totally sure.

"Uh. Her and your dad went to the movies," he explains the best he can, met with a blink and then a tug to his hand. He follows and ends up plopped on the floor with a wooden puzzle, it's pieces oversize and containing fragments of farm animals.

He nods with some words of encouragement as her small hands grasp the pieces and she says the name of the animal followed by the noise they make before arranging them pretty impressively into the correct picture.

He glances up as she becomes more focused on pushing her stray hairs out of her face, and finds Ilya roped into stacking building blocks only for Jade to knock them over once they get up to a certain point. But instead of being even the slightest bit fazed, Ilya is laughing, head tossed back toward the ceiling, prompting Jade to giggle with him too, her hands covering her mouth and her shoulders nearly up to her ears in amusement.

"Again! You are very sneaky," Ilya says, gathering the blocks and sighing loudly, still grinning. "Let me try this again..."

Ruby is suddenly paying attention to the fun being had over there, so she tugs on Shane's hand and points. "We go play," she tells him. It's a demand and he knows better than to try

and suggest anything else, so he gets himself up, a little winded as he moves over and sits himself across from Ilya.

The tower is nearing toppling height. Ilya glances up, catching Shane's eye and then winking before he says loudly. "Ah, I love my tower! I hope it does not fall—" and on cue, both Ruby and Jade swing their hands, knocking over the blocks onto Ilya's lap and surrounding him. Their laughter is high pitched, only growing when Ilya makes a show of devastation. Even Shane finds himself unable to keep a smile from splitting his face.

It goes on like this for twenty minutes before the twins decide they want to color, only communicated by Jade saying, "Wanna color," which prompts Ilya to bolt up and ask them where they keep all their crayons. He's led by two toddlers to a basket tucked beneath the entertainment center, and soon enough the four of them are at the dining table with crayons and coloring sheets torn from a Disney coloring book.

Shane and Ilya work silently, taking peeks at each other's papers and adding better shading, some more details here and there. A silent competition that they'll never admit to out loud. Meanwhile, Ruby and Jade scribble inside and outside the lines, taking pauses to hold up their works while Shane and Ilya say things like: *Wow! So beautiful!*

The next spontaneous activity they end up roped into is something that is probably supposed to be a tea party, but is more of Ruby and Jade scurrying around picking up all sorts of mini pots, pans, spoons, and cups along with fake plastic fruit they pretend to cut up and cook.

It's then that Ilya goes quiet, staring off into a part of the carpet that doesn't seem all that interesting. When he has yet to say anything, Shane is the one who breaks the silence.

"Everything alright?" he tries, hiding his concern behind the blandness of his tone. "You look really pensive."

He expects Ilya to play dumb, to say something along the lines of *big word for me*, but instead he gets a blink, then some silence. Eventually, Ilya says, "I have been thinking..." When Shane's eyes widen, he clicks his teeth. "Don't freak out, is not bad. I was just thinking about the whole daycare thing. That is all."

Shane pauses to think back to the tour they had with Svetlana. In retrospect, Ilya had been a little off. Nothing too concerning in the moment, though. For the most part, Shane chalked it up to be what Ilya had brought up, which is that they wouldn't make a decision until they talked about it.

So, now they're talking about it.

"Okay," he says slowly. "What have you been thinking about?"

Ilya's teeth worry at his bottom lip in thought. "Maybe... maybe I am not sure about having the baby at daycare for the whole day while we are in classes and practice." Shane says nothing, waiting for him to continue. "I was thinking maybe we can only a few days a week, but not until the baby is older. Two or three, I don't know. And if we do, it will be half-day

instead. I will take online classes so I can be more flexible and have the baby at home with me. I... I do not want to miss out on everything."

"I don't think we would be missing out on too much," Shane assures him. "At the end of the day, we'll still be raising our kid, just with some... added help, you know? There's nothing wrong with that."

"Yes, I know," Ilya says and then sighs. "But it is... I think it would be good. I want to do this. I would like to be there as much as I can." He pauses, eyes fixed on his fidgeting hands. "I would like to be a better father than what I had."

Shane's face falls in understanding. "Okay," he says. "I think it's a good idea. Especially if it's something you really want to do."

The smile Ilya gives him is small, but grateful nevertheless.

As it nears bedtime, they decide to put on another movie. It's Ilya that chooses *Finding Nemo*, convincing the girls by holding up the DVD case and simply saying: "Look, is a baby fish and his papa." With that, the twins are completely on board with plopping on the sofa between Shane and Ilya.

Not for the first time, Shane steals a glance at Ilya twenty minutes into the movie. Ilya looks back, raising an eyebrow in curiosity but still smiling at him anyway. A sense of ease settles over Shane, nudging itself alongside the exhaustion of keeping two kids entertained. It's welcomed, so welcomed that he relaxes back into the sofa, even as the baby kicks at his stomach, only stopping when he shifts a little this way and that way until the kicks settle.

"You have a baby?" Ruby asks, patting Shane's stomach where his loose shirt is hanging over.

He blinks, caught off guard by the question, but nodding after a second. "Oh, um. Yeah. There's a baby in there."

Jade perks up, sitting on her knees and pointing at him. "You eat him?"

Ilya snorts out a laugh. "Yes, he loves to eat babies. They taste like candy—"

"Rozanov," Shane scolds before addressing Jade. "No, I didn't eat the baby. It's just... growing in there."

"Grow—ing," Ruby repeats, spacing the syllables out. Then she hums, her small hand staying there, patting occasionally before she slumps into his side, her other hand twisting her pigtail as she gets lost in the movie.

Jade, too, is preoccupied by something far more entertaining, which in her eyes is clambering off the couch to grab a plastic toy brush and hand it to Ilya. Then she climbs back on, kneeling and taking the toy back to brush Ilya's curls. He winces when she yanks too hard, gently stopping her with his fingers encircling her wrist. "Softer, yes? Like this," he guides her hands so as to not completely dig the hard bristles into his scalp. "Perfect. You can make me beautiful now, yes?"

The thing is, he already looks so beautiful like this. Against the blue glow of the television as Nemo swims out toward the forbidden boat. As he puts a hand on Jade's small back to steady her when she loses her balance in her complete focus on brushing his hair. With his gold curls, frizzy and even more tangled than before, and his loose smile when Jade announces that she's all done.

Shane can't look away. He isn't sure he ever wants to.

The night starts to come to an end as the twins start to yawn multiple times in a row. Shane remembers the bedtime routine, getting up and holding his hand out for Ruby to take as she sleepily rubs her eyes. "Let's brush our teeth, yeah? And then we can sleep."

Instead of taking his hand, Ruby raises her arms, a silent request that Shane listens to after he decodes it. He picks her up, slotting her against his side carefully. One of her legs rests on tops of the curve of his stomach, and the other hangs at his back. Her arms wrap around his neck and she tucks her face into his neck, her soft breaths hitting his skin and letting him know that it's only a matter of time before she falls asleep.

Ilya is in the same position, carrying Jade on his hip and raising his eyebrows in amusement as he follows Shane out of the living room and down the short hallway to the bathroom. There's two step stools—green and pink—that the girls stand on, barely reaching the sink, as they use princess toothbrushes that sing to brush their teeth. They do somewhat of a decent job, but Jackie had told them to take over after ten seconds of independence. In unison, Shane and Ilya carefully coax the toothbrushes from the death grip of the toddlers and brush their small teeth to the best of their abilities.

Despite Hayden's warnings, there is little defiance, and before they know it, they're taking the girls to their shared bedrooms and getting them into their respective beds. Shane picks a random book, something about a pigeon driving a bus, and reads it to Ruby who is already halfway asleep the moment her head hits the pillow. When she finally knocks out, Shane looks over his shoulder and finds Ilya pacing the room carefully.

In his arms is Jade, cradled in his arms like she's a baby instead of a whole toddler. She looks small against his broad and muscled frame, and she fits decently. Her eyes start to droop as he rocks her with care, humming an unfamiliar tune under his breath until her eyes slip shut. Then, with slow steps, he makes his way to her bed on the other side of the wall from Ruby's. With one arm he pulls back the blanket and deposits her on the mattress, readjusting the blanket so that it drapes over her.

When he straightens up, Ilya lets out a heavy breath and a small chuckle, meeting Shane's eyes and tilting his head to the side playfully. They step out of the room, making sure the nightlight is plugged up before leaving the door cracked open just in case.

It's only when they're in the silence of the hallway that the two of them let out the tension in their bodies with careful laughter. Ilya stretches his arms over his head, rolls his neck.

"Was not so bad," he says after a moment. "Not easy, but also... not bad."

"No, it really wasn't," Shane agrees, pressing his lips together to keep himself from smiling too hard. It really wasn't so bad. Not easy, as Ilya had said, but not bad at all. He wasn't sure what he was expecting. Maybe them stumbling their way through the night. A lot of bickering. A handful of arguments on what to do and how to do it. But instead, everything was natural in a funny sort of way. Like they've done this before. Like they'll do it again and again and again.

Ilya smiles at him. "What is that look on your face?"

Shane shoves at his chest. "Nothing."

"Ah, no. Is something," Ilya pushes, grabbing Shane's wrist when he goes to push him again, and pulls him into his body. "Tell me."

They're close now, noses brushing as Shane shakes his head despite the smile bleeding onto his mouth. The words are rolling off his tongue with ease. "You're gonna be a really great dad," he whispers.

Ilya's eyes widen slightly, dancing between Shane's. Then, he's pressing his lips together, closing his eyes, and swallowing shakily. He drops his forehead against Shane's, nuzzles into the touch. "Do you really think this?"

Shane's heart breaks for a moment at the genuine question in Ilya's tone. So desperate to know, but also so hopeful, like he can't fathom how Shane could think such a thing, but wants it to be true more than he's wanted anything before. Again, the fluttering feeling nestled in his chest is unleashed, tumbling up to his throat and down into his stomach. He catches himself before any unfiltered thoughts can slip out. Instead he nods, tilting his chin enough for their lips to graze as he speaks. "I know it."

The exhale that leaves Ilya's nose is quick weighted. He kisses Shane softly, the touch fleeting before he's wrapping him in his arms the best he can. His words are muffled into Shane's hair, punctuated with a kiss to his temple. "Thank you."

Shane curls his fingers in the back of Ilya's shirt, letting his eyes flutter shut as he basks in the warmth of the affection and the tumbling kicks between them.

Chapter End Notes

is it so sort of obvious now that i was a pre-k teacher for almost 5 years lol. i was getting ptsd flashbacks during the tour of svetlana's daycare but it was fun to think back on and also give it some qualities that i wished my school had when i was working there (aka a non stressful environment without having a thousand kids jam packed into a class and always being right at ratio with only one other person to help the shit show that would ensue... Anyway)

► EXTRA NOTES:

Chapter 6: VI. Close as a Kiss

Chapter Summary

27-31 weeks.

Chapter Notes

spring break is going to be so inaccurate for the purpose of the story like. i don't care truly. we are already doing the unthinkable with male pregnancy, i think this universe can handle a late spring break.

as always thank you dear lizzie for beta'ing this! ilysmmmm <3

► MORE NOTES!

enjoy!! have fun!! it's all fictional! nothing is real!

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

27

The time on Shane's phone stares back at him, letting him know that it's definitely not an hour he should be awake—2AM. It's definitely not an hour Ilya should be awake either, but this is of the utmost importance. Dire, even, if Shane had to put a word to it.

"Ilya," he whispers, sitting against the headboard, glasses perched on his nose. Maybe he knows what he's doing using them as leverage to get what he wants, but he figures it's only fair considering he's carrying Rozanov's fucking restless baby in his body. The least Ilya can do is *wake the fuck up*. "Ilya," he whispers again, louder, jostling his bare shoulder. Eventually, he gives up on the politeness and fully shakes him while he loudly says, "Ilya, wake up."

Ilya inhales sharply, opening his eyes and turning to look at Shane. He blinks, eyelids heavy with sleep as he rubs them with the back of his knuckles. He looks cute when he's disoriented, but Shane keeps that to himself. "Huh? Shane? What is... what happened? You are okay?"

"I'm fine," Shane says, splaying his hand over Ilya's chest, curling his fingers and then tapping them on the skin to emphasize his words. "I just got an ad about a twenty-four hour

bakery thirty minutes from us. They have cinnamon bread and those jelly-filled donuts that you like."

Ilya blinks at him slowly. "Hollander," he says, voice thick and addled with sleep. "Are you waking me up so we can drive to random bakery in random town at—what? Two in the fucking morning?"

Shane blinks back at him, face neutral as he goes through his options. The glasses aren't distracting Ilya's disbelief, which means he's gotta use the best excuse in the book. A low blow, maybe, but whatever. He thinks he might lose his mind if he doesn't get some bread in his mouth within the next hour. "Not me," he says simply. "The baby."

It takes less than a second. Ilya is sighing, rubbing a hand over his face and nodding. "Okay. Okay, for *bukashka*."

And with that he's rolling off the bed while Shane hides his smug smile as he follows to pull on a pair of what used to be loose sweatpants that now hug just below his navel, the elastic nearly taut, letting him know that he may no longer fit in them within the next month or two.

Being seven months along is starting to catch up to him, evident in the tighter clothes, the stretched skin, his struggle to bend over and slide his shoes on. Ilya never asks if he needs help, only lingers beside him until he's huffing with strained breaths, and gesturing for him to help. Right now, Ilya is squatted on the floor while Shane sits on the sofa, letting Ilya put shoes on him and trying not to look as embarrassed as he feels. The mortification is dampened by the chaste kiss Ilya places to his shin and then over his cotton covered stomach right before he gets up, offering Shane his hands and pulling him up and off the sofa.

Shane is mindful in his movements as they leave the apartment, knowing that if he isn't careful he sort of starts to waddle. Meanwhile, Ilya keeps his pace slowed so he isn't walking ahead of Shane, and he even opens the car door and grins when Shane tells him not to fucking do that again. Unfortunately, he's melting within the second when Ilya is sure to dip in and kiss him, licking into Shane's mouth for a split second before pulling back with a smile reeking of satisfaction when all Shane can do is sputter a *fuck off* as the car door shuts.

The headlights are bright against the dead of night, or early morning. The GPS takes them on a route to the bakery—twenty-eight minutes away and nearly a straight shot.

"This was the closest bakery open?" Ilya asks, not unkindly, more curious than anything.

"It was the only one with cinnamon bread," Shane says, hoping that explains enough.

"Ah," Ilya nods. "You are still craving this?"

Shane leans his head against the window and nods back. "Yeah. Hopefully this one is good enough to make me happy." He pauses. "The *baby* happy, I mean."

The corner of Ilya's mouth tilts up, his glance at Shane fleeting before he's looking back at the stretched and empty road. "Yes, of course. I do this for the baby."

There's a tone laced between his words that Shane can't place, but nothing else is said and the rest of the drive continues in silence, the sound of the tires rolling over asphalt humming in the empty air. It's easy to spot the bakery in the cramped parking lot it resides in. Its neon sign blinks in red and blue, the glow of the colors melting together as it lets them know that they are, in fact, open.

A woman is standing at the register with a book propped open, glancing up as the bell chimes, alerting her of their arrival. She barely looks up as she says *welcome in* and then points to a pair of tongs on top of the display case alongside a stack of plastic trays. "It opens in the front. Help yourself and I'll put them in a box for you."

The both of them hesitate, looking at each other before Ilya is shrugging and following her instructions, grabbing the tongs and sliding open the front of the display case. "Okay," he says, plucking two slices of cinnamon bread and placing them on the tray Shane is holding. "This is good or you want more?"

"That should be good," Shane tells him. It's probably best not to get so much just in case it ends in disappointment again. "Don't forget your donuts. Look—strawberry filled. You like that."

"I do, yes," Ilya smiles, placing three on the tray. "What else looks good, hm? This one? You have not had croissants in a while."

He's right, so Shane asks for two of each of the flavors offered, and soon they're leaving with a box full of sweets. This time, Shane is digging in before they even pull out of the parking lot, biting into a slice of cinnamon bread and leaning back against the seat as the flavors sit on his tongue.

Ilya watches with his eyebrows slowly lifting in anticipation. "Good?"

Shane presses his lips together, swallowing the dry bread down. He sighs heavily, tries to keep his face from falling in the utter disappointment flooding his chest. "It's alright."

"Ah, *solnyshko*," Ilya mutters sympathetically, hand coming up to cup Shane's face even as he tries to turn away.

"It's fine," Shane says. His voice cracks just barely, but enough for his eyes to water, a cross between embarrassment and a sadness he can't even fucking place if he wanted to. He's starting to get real tired of blaming everything on his hormones, but what the fuck else could it be? He doesn't want to find the answer to that. "Fuck—sorry. It's so dumb—"

"No," Ilya tells him simply, firmly. The corners of his mouth tilt down briefly as he shakes his head, rubs his thumb over the space beneath Shane's eyes, right where his freckles are. "Do not say that. It is not dumb to want something."

Shane swallows shakily, leaning into the touch and letting his eyes flutter shut, mostly to keep himself from crying but also because the affection is nice. He wants to bask in it before it disappears. "Sorry I woke you up for this."

"I am not even tired," Ilya says with a shrug, making Shane huff out a laugh. There's a moment of silence as Ilya gives him a soft smile, moving his hand to trail his fingers against Shane's jawline. Then, he holds his chin with his pointer finger and thumb, pulling him closer until they're both leaning over the center console. "You can wake me up whenever you want, for whatever you want. I would do this for you always, yes?"

Shane finds himself believing him, nodding automatically. When Ilya kisses him, he swears the lingering taste of disappointment becomes sweeter.



Spring break comes with last minute plans made by Ilya and Yuna, catching Shane off guard when Ilya saunters into the living room, already typing away on his phone.

Without looking up, he simply says, "Your mother would like us to come for spring break. I will put it in the Google calendar—"

"My mom?" Shane says over him, shuffling around into a more comfortable position on the sofa, wincing when he feels a kick to his side that leaves him somewhat winded. "When did you talk to my mom?"

Ilya pauses with a blink too quick to be inconspicuous. "I talk to her all the time."

"But *when*?" Shane asks. He's pretty sure he'd notice an increase in their communication, and it's seemed steady for the most part. Then again, his parents have a separate group chat with Ilya that he's still a little bitter about.

"When I am coming home from my classes," Ilya explains too quickly, then tsks when Shane opens his mouth to try and question him again. "Does not matter. We will be going to Ottawa on Monday, yes?"

"Fucking bossy," Shane mumbles, reaching an arm out that Ilya immediately responds to by getting closer and helping him off the sofa.

"Now who is bossy?" Ilya grins, the stretch of his mouth widening when Shane kicks at his shin only to stumble, still getting used to the shift in his balance.

"Fuck off," Shane tells him, swatting behind himself when Ilya goes to smack his ass.

The drive to Ottawa on Monday passes in a breeze. Shane falls asleep on the drive, always a little uncomfortable and exhausted. It doesn't help that he can't sleep for more than two hours without being woken up by a full bladder or uncomfortable kick to his ribs or one of his organs. Even during his nap, he finds himself only partially dozing off, comforted by Ilya's hand on his thigh and his thumb tracing circles into the skin just above the hem of his shorts. The blue door of the Hollander household stands out in the suburban street, vibrant against the leaves of the trees and all the flowers blooming with the arrival of spring. They're

welcomed with the brightness of Yuna and David's affection, wrapping the two of them in warm hugs and greetings.

Yuna beams as Shane's stomach bumps against her, looking down with a stretched smile as she puts a hand on him. "Oh, you're growing so fast! I think you're bigger than I was around this time—what is it now? Twenty six weeks?"

"Twenty eight," Ilya answers with an expression teetering between soft and proud.

Shane doesn't have time to linger on it before his mom is gasping loudly. He doesn't have to question why—he can fucking feel it. The kick knocks the breath out of him and he can feel the motion of shifting right inside of him. Admittedly, that freaks him out more than the kicking does, and he can't help the way he winces.

"Sorry," he says when both his parents and Ilya give him looks of concern. "The moving is weird. I can feel everything and it's... gross."

David nods sympathetically. "Can't imagine how that feels. Come on, take a seat. We have dinner ready to go—how do you feel about some ribs? I even made those mashed potatoes you used to like, the ones with the garlic."

It sounds fucking *great*. When he voices it he's met with a chorus of laughter and Ilya's hand on his lower back as they all filter into the kitchen where the table is already set and ready for company. The conversation settles into nothing more than praises for the food as well as Shane catching up with his parents and their lives. Same old, same old, he's told by the both of them. Nothing tends to change at this age, which his mom swears is a blessing and a curse. Shane finds himself thinking how the domesticity of settling down seems like the closest thing to peace he can think of. Safety, security. The promise that things won't change all too much.

Beside him, Ilya answers the questions thrown at him. He's doing well in his classes, has never had to worry about his performance dipping. He's careful like that, knowing he has a future he can't jeopardize. His answer is punctuated with a glance to Shane who looks away, smiling down at his half-full plate and pushing his ankle into Ilya's beneath the table.

It doesn't take long before his mom is throwing a curveball question at them. "So," she starts with a sip to her white wine, "how's the prep coming along?"

Shane blinks, swallowing down his partially chewed food before staring at his parents across from him. He rolls the question around in his head, tries to find an answer hiding somewhere in between his already racing thoughts and the swelling panic starting to crawl through him the thicker the silence gets. He clears his throat even though it does nothing for the way his voice cracks when he asks, "Um. Prep? What do you mean?"

"Shane, you're seven months along," Yuna says with a laugh on the edge of disbelief as she glances between Shane and Ilya. "I mean, surely you've started buying things. A crib—" When Shane and Ilya both look at each other with panic, she pauses, mouth gaped. "Boys," she says slowly. "Please tell me you have *something* for the baby."

"Yes," Ilya nods easily. "Snoopy clothes you gave to us."

Yuna falls back against the chair, letting out an *oh my god* while David rubs her back comfortingly. "That is nowhere near enough," David tells them, much calmer than Yuna looks.

Shane is usually a good planner. He takes after his mom in his own ways after all, so he isn't sure why the fuck he hasn't even thought about any of this before. He should have been ten steps ahead of everything, should have already assembled a fucking crib and gotten at least something of a wardrobe started for the first few months. But there's nothing to show for the fact that in two months, they're going to dive head first into parenthood. They're nowhere near ready to do this.

There's so many things that are left to do and somehow, they all slipped his mind. Aren't parents supposed to have some sort of sixth sense? Some natural, paternal instinct to just fucking *do better* even if it's not at the forefront of their mind, because in a way it should be wired to be at the forefront of their fucking mind?

But Shane's wires have all been crossed since he could remember. After all, this was never supposed to happen, was it? He was never supposed to be a dad—maybe that's what he's failed to realize all this time. How can he be a dad if he can't even *buy a fucking crib*?

The rapid and punctuated breathing flooding Shane's ears and head is grating and loud against the blurring surroundings, only amplified by every thought crashing over one another.

He can hear Ilya's voice, the sound of his name pressed against an accent. "Shane, *zaychik*. Breathe, yes? In for five, out for five."

His eyes flutter open, locking with Ilya's. He follows the exaggerated breaths coming from him until the burning in his lungs isn't so sharp and everything feels less muddled.

"There you go," Ilya says, in Shane's space to place a chaste kiss to his mouth to pull him back just enough. "We are okay, yes? We will go buy a crib when we get back to Montreal. Sveta already said she has lots of clothes she bought when she was drunk, so we have this too, yes? We are okay. You are okay."

"Okay," Shane swallows, the corners of his eyes prickling with tears. "Okay. Yeah."

It's barely convincing. He can feel the dishonesty dripping from his mouth, can see it staining Ilya's careful expression as his mouth tightens and his eyebrows pinch together. He doesn't say anything for a moment, instead lets his eyes flicker between Shane's in mindful observation. He sits up, keeping a hand between Shane's shoulders as he regards Yuna and David with their concern plastered on their faces. "We will go outside for a little, yes? Maybe fresh air will help."

"Yes—of course," Yuna says, nodding and letting them leave the dining table without question.

It's much easier to breathe outside. There are birds chirping in the surrounding trees, both close and distant. Some of them sing in notes of threes, others a flutter of different chirps that make more of a careless melody than anything. Shane closes his eyes, lets himself fall into all the natural sounds until he can get a grip on himself.

Ilya doesn't push, only waits until Shane is finally turning to face him, inhaling slowly to keep himself from breaking down again. "I'm sorry—"

"No," Ilya says over him, stepping closer and putting his hands on Shane's elbows. "You do not have to be sorry."

"I'm freaking out," Shane admits with a dry laugh, tilting his head back to look at the sky. "I'm fucking freaking out—*fuck*. I don't think—how am I supposed to be a fucking dad if I can't keep it together?"

"You will be a good dad," Ilya tells him. "So maybe we did not plan like we should have, is okay. We are doing that now—"

"But I should have thought of that before!" Shane says over him, the panic prickling beneath his skin again. "I should have thought of a lot of things—what does that say about me? I'm—I'm not a great fucking planner like my mom, and I'm not the calm in the storm like my dad so—so what am I, then?" He pauses, swallowing back the thickness in his throat, glancing away when his vision starts to blur around the edges. "What kind of fucking parent am I gonna be if I can't—if I'm not like them?"

He isn't sure what he expects from Ilya. An empty apology, maybe. Something to fill in the silence and all the anxiety. Maybe even a hug to keep him from completely unraveling. Instead, the silence settles long enough for the bird to keep singing, for a breeze to tousle golden curls and tufts of black hair.

Then, Ilya speaks over the birds and their song. "You do not have to be like them."

A bitter laugh cracks from Shane's chest. "What the fuck are you talking about—"

"Your parents are very great," Ilya continues, not lifting a brow at Shane's defense. "But they are not the only parents. If we ask them, they will say the same things you are saying. They have mistakes and maybe some regrets, and maybe they wish they did better, too, but they still did good, yes?"

Shane shrugs when Ilya stares at him expecting an answer. "Yeah, they're the best. But that doesn't mean—"

"It doesn't mean that you will be a shitty parent for forgetting to get a crib," Ilya says over him. "This would mean I am going to be a shitty parent too because this is also my responsibility, yes? So does this mean I am going to be a fuck up like my father—"

"No! No, of course not—"

Ilya closes the growing distance between them, drags his hands up Shane's arms and between his shoulder blades to ease the tension stuck beneath. "Then why does it mean *you* will be a fuck up?" Shane sways into the affection, letting his eyes flutter shut. "We are both scared. Is all so fucking scary, but I think... I think if we are this scared, maybe this means we are already doing something right. It means we care, and caring is a lot better than not caring."

Shane snorts, unable to keep a smile from tugging at the corner of his mouth, even if it's quickly wiped away by his racing thoughts. "Do... do you think we're making a mistake?"

"No," Ilya answers without missing a beat. "Do *you* think this?"

Shane's answer is automatic, leaving his mouth without a second thought. He hasn't thought anything other than the future when it's come to everything thrown their way. There's been no desperation to turn things back, to do things differently. He doesn't think he could even think about a different timeline if he tried. "No."

Ilya smiles gently, tilting his chin for a kiss Shane meets him halfway to. "Okay?"

"Yeah," Shane nods, exhaling a small laugh. "I'm still fucking scared."

"Me too," Ilya says. "But I think we are very brave."

As much as Shane wants to tell him to shut up, he can't. "The second we get back to Montreal we're buying a fucking crib."

Ilya's agreement is quick. "We are buying entire baby store."



Night comes with the tension eased as the sun sets and is replaced by the moon. As much as Shane notices his parents hovering after dinner and their constant and quick glances at him, he takes it for what it is, which is them caring in their own way. He's sure in time, he'll be doing the same, even if it's not in the same situation.

By the time he's lying in his bedroom, staring up at the ceiling and trying to ignore the Sidney Crosby poster looking down at him, the exhaustion that's been trying to catch up to him all day is suddenly gone. He can feel it still clinging to him, but no matter how he positions himself, how many pillows he adjusts alongside his body so he can swing his leg and arm over, he can't fall asleep.

Across the hall, he hears the pattering of footsteps, the flicking of the bathroom light switch. After the toilet flushes, the groan of the guest bedroom door seems amplified and Shane is up and moving before he can think twice. He doesn't bother knocking when he reaches the guest bedroom door. It creaks open on its hinges and he makes out the blue glow of Ilya's phone illuminating his face from where he's sitting up against the headboard.

Even though he had just heard him leave the bathroom, he's still surprised to see him fully awake. "Oh. You're up."

Ilya raises an eyebrow at him before leaning over to turn on the lamp perched on the nightstand. "So are you."

Shane nods, rocking on his feet slightly. "Yeah. Can't sleep."

Ilya hums, his eyes dragging down Shane's body and back up. "Me neither." There's a beat as Shane nods, glancing around the room with some semblance of nonchalance before Ilya is letting out a heavy and impish sigh and then lifting his left arm. "Come here."

Quickly, Shane is slotting himself into Ilya's side and getting adjusted until Ilya is locking his phone and putting it beneath a pillow and they're lying on their sides facing each other. Without saying anything, Ilya reaches down to grab the back of Shane's thigh, hoisting it up to hook over his waist in the way he usually does when he's trying to find a comfortable position.

There's a lot of things Shane can blame the pooling heat in his gut to. Hormones, the fact that it's been days since they've last touched in any way more than kissing, or the simple fact that getting manhandled has always been a *thing* for him. Whatever it is, Shane finds himself getting hard at an alarming speed, his erection fattening beneath his boxers.

Instead of ignoring it, he gives into the little selfish voice in the back of his mind. He knows if Ilya notices, he won't let it go neglected. So, Shane lets out a hitched breath, shifts his hips just enough so the heat of him ruts against Ilya's thigh, even if slightly interrupted by his bump.

Ever so observant, Ilya's hand is cupping him through the fabric. "Ah, is this why you came to me? Hm?"

"N-no," Shane breathes, baring his neck when Ilya noses at his pulse point, places a wet kiss there. "Just wanted to see if—if you were awake."

"Mm, no," Ilya whispers against his skin. "I do not think so. I think maybe you were a little desperate for this, yes? Could not go one night without me."

"Ah fuck," Shane gasps as Ilya's hand reaches into his boxers and palms at him. He's already leaking, the wetness dripping down and making it easier for Ilya's hand to slide over his heated skin. "Please—*fuck*. Please touch me."

"I want to hear you say it," Ilya urges. He nips at Shane's collarbone, drags his mouth up to his jawline to place a sloppy kiss that trails up until their mouths are hovering over each other. "Tell me why you came to me. I want to hear it, *zaychik*."

Even when Shane chases the ghost of a kiss, Ilya pulls his face away, his hooded eyes looking right into Shane's and waiting for an answer. So, he gives it to him. "I wanted you to touch me," he says, a pleading lilt to his voice. "I wanted *you*."

The pleased hum in the back of Ilya's mouth crackles and Shane is rewarded with their mouths slotting together, tongues sliding against each other. Then, Ilya is patting the side of his thigh. "On my lap."

Shane's melted attention barely sticks to the demand, but he's helped by Ilya manhandling him into the desired position. His back against the headboard, Shane in his lap with his boxers discarded, tossed somewhere left to be found in the morning. The sight of Ilya with his flushed cheeks, pupils blown, and mouth dropped as he rakes his gaze over Shane hungrily is enough for Shane to whine in the back of his throat, grinding the best he can to get some sort of friction.

Ilya tuts, a quick sound coming from his mouth and ringing in the air between them. "You cannot be patient?"

"You haven't touched me in a fucking week," Shane snaps before he can think.

"Ah," Ilya nods, a teasing lilt to his voice and smile curving up as his fingers drag up Shane's inner thigh, pressing into the sensitive skin. "You think you deserve to be touched?" Shane's eyes flutter, thoughts nearly failing him as he nods and wills himself to hold eye contact as he nods, unable to string his words together. Again, Ilya hums in the back of his throat. "You are right. You deserve this, yes? Have been so good for me, even like this."

Shane exhales, the breath shaky and hitching when Ilya's hand wraps around him, thumbs at the slit of his cock leaking. "*Fuck—*"

Ilya's rambles are low, every syllable rumbling in Shane's chest as he loses himself in the tug of Ilya's hand, in all his words he whispers into Shane's ear as he gets him off. "So good for me—always, *zaychik*. Giving me everything I want like this—no, let me hear you, sweetheart."

Shane shakes his head where it's tucked into Ilya's neck, the heat making his hair stick to his forehead. His lips drag against Ilya's pulse as he speaks, words nearly slurred in his arousal. "We can't be loud," he manages to get out.

"They will not hear," Ilya assures him, reaching around with his free hand to push at Shane's lower back, encouraging him to fuck into his fist. "They already know I have fucked you. That I put this baby in you—they know it's only me that makes you feel like this." He kisses the shell of Shane's ear, drags his lips down until his teeth are scraping at the tendons of his neck and then over to his chin that he licks up to slot their mouths together sloppily. A moan flutters from Shane's mouth, jaw slack as Ilya grins against his lips. "They should know that it's only me that makes you sound like this, too."

An choked moan tumbles out of Shane's mouth when Ilya's fist drags up and down his cock, slower than before and intentional with every movement. Before Shane can tell him to go faster, Ilya is pushing his shirt up, flat palm touching his stomach as he dips his head to close his mouth around Shane's nipple.

It yanks a tangled gasp and moan from Shane's mouth, the sound ringing in the room around them, surely bleeding through the walls and apparent to anyone straining an ear to hear. The panic doesn't get a chance to settle, not when Ilya dedicates his mouth to licking and sucking at Shane's chest, leaving him nearly trembling above him.

"Ilya," he breathes, every other word lost on him as he clutches the back of Ilya's neck, keeping him there against his chest. Everything starts to become blurred and amplified all at once. His head is tossed back, mouth wet and hanging open as he fucks his hips up into Ilya's fist, every one of his motions becoming sloppier and more desperate by the second. "Ilya," he moans up toward the ceiling with his eyes shutting. "Fuck—*fuck—I'm gonna come—*"

It's Ilya's free hand on his ass cheek, the tip of his finger dipping in-between to press against his hole that makes Shane's core tighten, white lightning blazing down his spine as he comes into Ilya's fist and onto his stomach curved above his pelvis. The aftershocks are sudden, leaving his body completely slack against Ilya as he comes down with his lungs aching as they hoard all the air they can.

His surroundings straighten out after several stretched minutes. He can feel the soft caress of Ilya's fingers tracing lines up and down his spine and the gentle kisses placed to his cheek and neck, patient and steady.

He can also feel the come drying uncomfortably on his skin. "Oh, *ew—*"

"Ah, there you are," Ilya says, leaning back to meet Shane's eye, a glint of affection mirrored in them. "Was good? Think they heard?"

"Oh fuck off," Shane says with a huff, going to push at Ilya's chest only for his hand to linger in the space between his pecs. "Did you...?"

Ilya swoops forward to press their lips together. When they part, Shane is nearly dazed. "I will be okay," he says simply. Frankly, Shane is too tired to argue. He slots it into the back of his head for later: *wake Ilya up with a blowjob or something*. His nod trails off into a heavy yawn. Ilya smiles again. "We should sleep, yes?"

"Clean me up first," Shane reminds him and Ilya groans dramatically before patting Shane's thigh, signaling for him to get up. "Fuck off, this is your fault. You started touching me first."

"No, is *your* fault," Ilya retorts, glancing over his shoulder right before he leaves the room to get a damp rag from the bathroom. "You look like this and make me want to touch you. Very terrible for me. Is how you got pregnant."

He doesn't give Shane a chance to do anything other than sputter and blush.



They spend their free days relaxing in the living room; a puzzle on the coffee table that David and Ilya work on with the television playing in the background while Shane dozes off on the sofa, watching the corners of Ilya's mouth curve down in concentration, the flitting of his light eyes as he scans the pile of pieces.

With spring in full swing, they also spend a lot of the afternoons outside while David grills. In the meantime, Ilya and Shane kick a soccer ball in the grass, their bare feet sinking into the plush surface, their hands grasping shirts and arms as they fumble for the ball between their ankles. All Shane has to do is fake exhaustion for Ilya to give up, going easy on him only to

scowl when Shane maneuvers the ball away from him and kicks it across the yard, making him go get it.

Yuna sits at the outdoor table with a glass of wine, watching with a small smile, her eyes curved behind the tinted lenses of her sunglasses. When Ilya excuses himself to the bathroom and Shane sits beside his mom, she places a hand on his stomach with a close mouthed and gleeful smile.

Shane wrinkles his nose when she keeps rubbing at his stomach like it's some sort of crystal ball that grants wishes or something. "This is kind of weird."

Yuna's eyebrows shoot up as she looks at him incredulously. "Oh, so it's weird when *I* do it but not when Ilya does it?"

It catches him off guard enough for Shane to exhale something close to a scoff. "Well, it's different!"

"Oh, really?" Yuna laughs, leaning back and crossing her legs before gesturing for him to continue. "How?"

"Well, because he—I mean, we're... It's—" Shane's mouth opens and closes, every word failing him as he scrambles for some sort of train of thought. He doesn't even understand himself, why it's so natural for Ilya's affection to land on him without his usual distaste for lingering touch. It had never really been a problem with Ilya in the first place. All Shane wanted was to touch him, even when they met and Ilya's mouth seemed bigger than his ego. Any sort of contact seemed desirable—a fist to flesh, the brush of their hands, their bare skin stuck together with sweat. It was never too much, never too little. Always just enough.

The blush on his face burns as Yuna's expression of disbelief softens into gently raised brows and a parting mouth. "Oh," she says. "Okay."

"I didn't even say anything," Shane tries defending still, even if he doesn't know what else to say. "I'm sorry. You can—"

"It's okay," Yuna tells him with a close mouthed smile, genuine and soft. She reaches over and pats his thigh comfortingly. "I understand, sweetie."

Understand what? Shane wants to ask, but his attention is drawn to the sliding glass door that clicks as it closes. Ilya steps down onto the deck, leaning over David's shoulder to comment on how great everything looks, eyes widening in excitement when David offers to show him the secret to making the perfect burger. He looks over his shoulder quickly meeting Shane's waiting eyes, like there's some unspoken permission he needs. Shane only nods, amusement tilting up the corner of his mouth when Ilya beams and goes back to giving David his undivided attention.

Lost in a passing breeze, Shane can barely make out the ghost of Yuna's chuckle.

The staleness of waiting rooms never gets less repetitive or easier to sit in. Fluorescent lights are too jarring, though the dust particles dancing in the air beneath the gust of an air duct, only made known by the stream of sunlight filtering in through the windows, do offer some entertainment. More so than the same four episodes of a competitive cooking show that always seem to be playing when Shane is here, which according to Dr. Yañez, should be at least once every two weeks once the third trimester starts.

That's starting today, actually, Shane realizes as he glances at his phone and reading over the article his mom sent him about the importance of choosing a name for the baby before birth. Another thing he has to worry about after they finally get a crib and some other essentials on the never ending list, which should be today, after the appointment. Or at least that's what Ilya promised.

The steady weight of touch warms the top of Shane's thigh, stilling it from its restless bouncing and pulling his attention to the seat beside him where Ilya is ducking his head just enough to make their eyes meet. Concern is drawn between his brows as his eyes flicker between Shane's. "What is it?" he asks, completely skipping over the *are you okay*, already knowing something is, in fact, not okay.

"Nothing," Shane tries anyway. The last thing he needs is to voice his thoughts. Though, the alternative is to let them spiral until he's so dizzy with trying to wrangle them he's left with nothing but panic in his body. Ilya raises his eyebrows, unimpressed, most likely knowing where this will go if unaddressed. Shane sighs, opening back up the article and tilting his phone screen until Ilya is reading over the bold title. "My mom sent me this."

Ilya nods curtly. "Okay," he says simply. "We will start making list when we get home from buying the crib."

Shane lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding, the tightness in his chest loosening. "Cool."

His name is called only a few seconds later, and he's bracing himself before he's standing with the help of Ilya who looks a little too smug at the way Shane gets to his feet with a wince, stretching his lower back with his hand placed there. He only realizes how he looks when Ilya's grin widens and he scowls, swatting at him and hurrying to follow the nurse holding the door open for them.

Everything follows the same routine as before. Weight checked (he's stopped dreading seeing the scale go up—he knows there's a pretty damn good explanation for that), blood pressure checked, and a urine sample he's able to complete easily considering it's like he has to pee all the fucking time now.

Dr. Yañez comes in shortly after, the same kind smile on her face as the door closes behind her. When she spots Ilya, she brightens even more. "Oh, Ilya! It's so good to see you!"

"Hello," Ilya waves back cutely, almost shy. Shane hides his smile by looking at one of the posters behind him. "Sorry for not being here more. Hockey season is over, so. There is more

free time."

"I understand," she winks before directing her attention to Shane. "Third trimester, congratulations! You're almost at the finish line! How have you been feeling?"

"Thank you," Shane smiles, laying back as she directs him to. He lifts his shirt, already somewhat used to the motions, staring at the ceiling as she starts to measure his belly. "And I've been good for the most part. Just more tired than normal. It's been a little more of an effort to work out since my movement is starting to be a bit... limited? Is that normal?"

"Completely normal," she nods, the measuring tape pressed to his skin. "It's a bit of an obstacle, having a belly. Believe me, when I was pregnant with my daughter I could barely put my shoes on."

Ilya lets out a laugh. "Yes, he is like this too."

"Ilya," Shane warns, knowing it's no use.

"What?" Ilya says back. "I help you! I am allowed to poke a little fun, no?"

"Like I said," Dr. Yañez smiles. "Completely normal. And it's helpful to have a partner that is *willing* to help." Before Shane can stammer out an explanation that is probably not relevant or needed, she's pressing her fingertips into his stomach carefully and asking, "How often are you feeling movement from your baby?"

As if on cue, there's a kick in the area near where her hands are. Shane huffs out a laugh. "It seems like all the time. There's always a little kick *somewhere*."

"Love to hear it," Dr. Yañez sings in a light and playful tone. "Your fundal height is on track—let me tell you, this is a big baby! Estimated to be ten pounds by birth, last that I checked."

Shane drops his head back with a sigh. Stupid fucking Russian genetics. "Yeah, I sort of figured."

When Dr. Yañez excuses herself to grab the portable ultrasound machine and fill out his chart, the subtle scrape of a chair nearing sounds, and Shane turns his head to find Ilya beside him, reaching out to hold Shane hand in his. His smile is apologetic, almost funny if Shane had a word for it. "I'm sorry."

"I was a big baby too," Shane assures him even though he sort of wants to blame Ilya for this. He's answered with another smile, this one more genuine and less guilt stained.

Dr. Yañez returns and begins to set up, squeezing the cold gel onto Shane's skin and saying a quick sorry that doesn't sound all too sorry. Through it, Ilya's hand never leaves his. It's a nice thing, feeling so grounded, knowing that despite it all, he still hasn't up and ran.

The black and white image of a curled baby stares back at them along with the rhythm of their heartbeat. Dr. Yañez moves around until they see the perfect silhouette of the baby's face, it's nose and curve of it's head, the curling of their fingers and movement of their feet. Still so surreal.

Ilya doesn't say much, only presses his lips to the back of Shane's hand as his eyes glimmer with wetness, unmoving from the image.

"Like I said, everything is looking great," Dr. Yañez says. "Typically, we would ask about contractions and check for dilation, but that's not necessary in male pregnancies seeing as you'll experience labor a bit differently since your reproductive system doesn't include the cervix or vagina."

Ilya blinks as if only realizing that Shane does, in fact, lack those two things. "So... what will he expect, then?"

Dr. Yañez glances at Shane, her eyes widening. "Is this something you've discussed?"

Shane blushes, coughing to clear his already clear throat, suddenly under the stare of two people who seem less than impressed by his shrug. "It's, um. Never come up?" When Rozanov lets out a sharp laugh, Shane scowls and drops his hand. "Oh fuck off. It's fucking weird to talk about, Rozanov."

"I thought we were done with this 'oh it's weird' thing since, I don't know, I got you fucking pregnant," Ilya answers back, his tone of annoyance matching Shane's perfectly.

Luckily, Dr. Yañez is a professional and steps in with her calmness and kindness. "At times it's uncomfortable to talk about our own bodies. I can happily explain it to you, Mr. Rozanov." When Ilya breaks his irritated stare from Shane, he nods, and she continues. "As I mentioned, the male reproductive system is not made to carry out a pregnancy, which is why this genetic mutation and its documentation and studies are far more present in modern medicine. The earliest documented male pregnancies, which were in ancient Greece much to no one's surprise, often ended in death seeing as there was no way for male birth to occur without a cesarean section, which was typically only performed when a mother was already dead or actively dying during birth—ah, I'm getting off track," she chuckles, shaking her head.

"My point is, labor for men is different. There is no dilation because there is no cervix, but the uterus will still contract because it is getting ready for birth. But with no birth canal to push the fetus through, there is a window where we have to perform the cesarean section before there's a rupture or complication that can be fatal for the father or the baby," she explains.

"What is the window?" Ilya asks without missing a beat.

"Ideally we'd like to get the c-section rolling within three hours of the contractions," she tells them. Shane nods, mentally scrolling through the countless articles and online brochures he read about the worse case scenarios. "This is why the entire labor and delivery process in men is quite... tedious. And why if there *are* complications, the additional reproductive system will get removed to lower the risk of complications that may lead to death in the days following recovery."

"But that is only if things go wrong," Ilya says, not much of a question or a statement.

"Correct," Dr. Yañez says. "If it's smooth sailing, then the additional system can remain in place. Of course, every pregnancy is different, so we can't guarantee that the next pregnancy will be just as easy."

"Of course," Shane nods. He read about that too. Families that were able to try again for another, only for their hopes to get shattered the second time around. It's something he isn't even sure he can think about. He just wants this one to be happy and healthy. He wants *himself* to make it out alive, too. That's all he can really ask for.

Ilya nods, mostly to himself. "Thank you for explaining."

"Thank you for letting me," Dr. Yañez beams. "Now... are we still keeping the gender a secret?"

"Where is the fun in knowing so soon?" Ilya winks, earning a delighted laugh in return. When he meets Shane's eye, he winks again.



Options, options.

Way too many fucking options.

Oak wood? Cherry? Mahogany? *Birch*? Or, maybe even *no* wood. Maybe something... plastic? That can't be good. Babies like to chew on fucking everything the moment they start to get teeth. He's read about the importance of choosing a crib that is sturdy, built well. Even better if it can be converted into a toddler bed for efficiency as the baby grows quickly into toddlerhood (some would describe this as the "dark ages", but they'll cross that bridge when they get to it), but as long as it doesn't come with a complicated set of instructions making the conversion more hellish than it should be.

Ilya groans, tilting his head back toward the warm lights shining above them. "God, I can hear you thinking from here, Hollander."

Shane doesn't break his line of sight from the display of cribs they're standing in front. He pulls his bottom lip between his teeth, pinching the soft skin in thought as he goes back and forth between an oak crib and a mahogany one. Both are decorated different; the oak one is yellow and duck themed, completed with a stuffy and a mobile. The mahogany one has a tractor themed sheet stretched over the mattress and a bear plush nestled in the corner. Theme... Should they have chosen a theme? Maybe it's better to just know the gender so they can make some sort of a choice—

"Hollander," Ilya says again, this time with a bit more patience. "I cannot read minds. What are you thinking?"

Shane breathes out through his nose, scratches a particularly itchy spot at the bottom of his belly beneath the taut fabric of one of Ilya's t-shirts. "How are we supposed to pick a crib if we don't have a theme for the nursery picked out? And how are we supposed to pick a theme if we don't know the gender?"

He doesn't look at Ilya, expecting another groan at his inability to simply make a decision. He can only blame being Yuna Hollander's son on so many things before his traits start to become annoying. There's no doubt Ilya is starting to realize this now.

But his expectations are not met. Instead, Ilya's bottom lip juts out in thought. He nods slowly, eyes dancing across their options until finally he's saying: "What about bug theme?"

Shane blinks, finally looking at him. "Bug theme?"

"Yes, for *bukashka*," Ilya says. "Bug room for little bug. We can make it fun." He points to a crib with darker wood. "That one is the color of dirt. I think I see ladybug and caterpillar sheets over there. There is even spinney thing—what is it called? Mobile with caterpillar and fruit, like the book you read—"

"A *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* baby mobile," Shane finishes for him, the vision starting to come together. There's a kick to his ribs which he takes as a nod of approval. "That would be cute. And it's pretty gender neutral. That's a really good idea, Ilya."

This time, it's Ilya caught off guard, answering with a blink first and the subtle widening of his eyes before he straightens himself out with a shrug and smug smile. "Yes, I am the smarter one, you know."

"Fuck off," Shane laughs. But takes a picture of the tag on the crib Ilya pointed out. He pauses, humming. "We should probably look for a bassinet too."

This time, Ilya does groan again.



What was supposed to be Ilya's room becomes the nursery within ten minutes of them getting home with a crib and several other things that caught their eye while browsing. Among those things are insect themed sheets for the crib, a lady bug nightlight, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* mobile with a matching baby blanket, and an off-white rug with all sorts of beetles and butterflies and bugs on it. They even found a decent rocking chair that Ilya assembled right when they got home, having spent over an hour and a half on it.

It'll look great once it comes together, Shane is sure. For now, he takes comfort on the rocking chair, going through the top baby names list he found on his phone while Ilya turns the instructions to the crib upside down and then right side up again, mumbling a curse under his breath in Russian and then again in English when it still doesn't seem to make sense.

"What the fuck is *dowel*? Why are they giving me fucking riddles?"

Shane hums out something that is supposed to sound sympathetic but falls flat as he looks over names. "What do you think about Theodore?"

"We are naming old man?" Ilya says without missing a beat or looking up from the instructions. He's holding a dowel now, so he's making some improvement. "And this is too hard to say. Theo...dore... No. Theo maybe is not so bad."

"Theo isn't bad," Shane says, although not fully on board with it. "How about, um... William?"

Ilya blows a raspberry, quick and sharp. "Boring. Next one."

"There's nothing wrong with a classic name."

"What about something cool," Ilya says. "Celebrities can name their kids shit like *Apple*. What about Cucumber?"

"You're fucking annoying." When Ilya lets out a chuckle, Shane sighs. "This is harder than I thought it'd be."

"Well, it is very important," Ilya says, piecing some of the crib together, eyebrows pinched in concentration.

Shane rocks in the chair, drums his fingers on top of his rounded stomach and lets his head loll to the side, eyes tracing Ilya's features. "I like your name a lot," he says quietly after a moment, filter completely removed from his mouth. "Ilya. It's nice. Pretty, but still strong. It's a good name."

Ilya smiles a little sideways. "My mother chose my name, my father chose my brother's name."

"What's your brother's name?" Shane asks, selfishly wanting to uncover another hidden part of Ilya, even if it's only a small detail. He wants to keep it, hold it close, slot it into the back of his mind like a keepsake.

"Alexei," Ilya says after a moment, focus bolted onto his task. There's a flicker of tension in his body as he pushes two pieces together, the dowels slotting inside the holes with some force. He says nothing for a few minutes before sighing and running a hand through his gold curls with a small laugh. "I have not said his name in a long time. Is a little weird."

"Sorry," Shane says, pressing his lips together when Ilya shakes his head and waves him off like it's no big deal. "Do you—"

"I do not like to think about him," Ilya says over him firmly, but not unkindly. There's an exhaustion that weighs in his expression with notes of sadness, maybe.

Shane's never seen what that could look like on the face of Ilya Rozanov, and he quickly finds that he'd do anything to see him smile again, and takes a shot in the dark. "I'll cross Alexei off my name list, then."

Ilya laughs at that, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "Yes, good idea."

Shane lets the silence settle before asking, "Have you ever thought about naming your future kids?"

Instead of receiving a nod or a simple shake of his head, Ilya blushes, going back to his task, folding and unfolding the instructions and not meeting Shane's curious eyes. "Maybe

sometimes."

"Oh," Shane blinks, sitting up and ignoring the creaking of the rocking chair. "That's... nice."

"Do not make fun of me—"

"I wasn't! Really, it's just—I don't know. You don't seem like the type to do that."

Ilya raises his hands and then drops them with annoyance. "Hollander, I am building a fucking crib right now even though I do not know what I am doing. How is this not the type to think of names for future children?"

The thing is, this version of Rozanov is new. Maybe not to Ilya, but to Shane. Before this, they never spoke of anything other than sex and hockey and maybe classes if they let their conversations veer into personal lives. To think that even *that* version of Ilya had hopes for this, a family, even if it isn't in the most traditional sense, is a little shocking.

It's not a complaint. Far from it, actually, especially if it means at least one of them has thought somewhat far ahead. "Let's hear it," Shane says. Ilya snaps his head to look at him, eyebrows furrowing in confusion as Shane gestures for him to talk. "The names you've thought of, let me hear them. You've been making me do all the fucking work when you already have a list."

"They are mostly Russian names," Ilya says carefully. "You will not like them—"

"If I don't like them, I'll tell you," Shane replies bluntly.

Ilya presses his lips together for a moment before his cheeks puff out to push out air and he curses under his breath, shifting to grab his phone from where it's tucked beneath his thigh. Shane catches a glimpse of the side of his screen and the notes app being opened. "Boy or girl first?" When Shane answers *boy*, Ilya waits a few seconds. "First one I have is Sergey."

Shane wrinkles his nose, earning a scoff. "It sounds a little too... old?"

"Oh, but *Theodore* doesn't sound old?" Ilya is quick to retort.

"Fuck off," Shane says even though he knows he's right. "What's the next one?"

Ilya glares at him and then continues. "Next one is Nikolai. Smaller name could be just Niko."

"I like that one," Shane finds himself admitting. "Niko. Nikolai. It's nice."

"Yes, I think so too," Ilya smiles, just barely. "Last one I have is Aleksandr."

"Alek would be a good nickname," Shane nods. "Okay, it's not as bad as I was expecting."

"Fuck you, Hollander—"

"So, for a boy it's between Nikolai and Aleksandr," Shane says over him. "Can we agree on that?"

Ilya nods. "I like Niko more, I think."

"Yeah, me too," Shane smiles. "Okay, what about girl names?"

"Is more traditional, but *Olga*."

"No," Shane says immediately, rolling his eyes when Ilya has the audacity to gasp. "What? I said I was gonna be honest."

"Olga is name of my very important family member I love very much—"

"No it's not."

Ilya shuts his mouth. "Okay, fine. Next name is Adelina. Not traditional, but I like this one very much."

"Adelina," Shane repeats. It doesn't sound as full without the inflections of Ilya's accents. "Would it be Addie for short?"

"For English, yes maybe," Ilya shrugs. "I think for me it would be *Delya*. But Addie is nice too."

"I like that one," Shane nods. "Alright, last one?"

"Yelena," Ilya tells him, reading off the list before his eyes flick up to meet Shane's. "Is just okay, but still a good name."

Shane hums in thought, leaning back in the chair, letting it rock as he puts a hand on his stomach. "I think I like Adelina the most."

Ilya smiles at him. "Good. I do too."

Before Shane can get too excited about deciding on some names, he sighs. "Now we have to think of middle names."

A bark of pain comes from Ilya as he yanks his hand away from where his finger was smashed beneath one of the heavier pieces. "Fuck this shit—"

That's a task for another day, they decide quickly.

⊗

Light knocking on the front door pulls Shane from his task of dipping his finger into an already half-eaten jar of Nutella he's been chipping away at for the better part of the week. He knows it's not Ilya—Ilya has a key, and if he forgot it, he'd make it Shane's problem, too and

blow up his phone until Shane contemplated blocking his number. Not only that, but Ilya is finishing up one of his classes and isn't set to be home for another two hours.

So, when Shane goes to open the door he's fully expecting J.J. or Hayden to be standing on the other side in an attempt to weasel their way into hanging out, no longer content with the text threads and phone calls Shane has been trying hard to keep up with for the sake of being a good friend. What he finds isn't either of them. Instead, it's Svetlana.

She's carrying a comically large tote bag over one shoulder and a normal sized purse on the other, and beams when the door creaks open. The warm spring air tousles her curls into her face and she moves them delicately, all of her movements so graceful and natural. "Shane!"

"Svetlana," he says back, trying to match her level of enthusiasm but falling short with the confusion laced in the syllables. "Hey, um. What are you... doing here?"

"Ilya said it would be okay for me to stop by," she says before her smile falls and her eyes narrow. "That fucker did not tell you, did he?"

Shane shakes his head. "Yeah, no. He didn't mention it."

"I'm sorry," she says quickly, giving him a bashful smile and letting the tote bag slip off her shoulder. She extends it out. "I will let you rest, but I did bring lots of clothes. I washed it all with hypoallergenic detergent and it is all gender neutral, of course. Ilya told me it was going to be a surprise, but if there are some girl things in there it is only because I was very drunk on stupid, cheap American wine when I ordered—"

"Why don't you come in?" Shane offers. "It gets kind of boring, so. The company would be nice."

Svetlana blinks, her eyes scanning Shane's face carefully. "Are you sure? I don't want to intrude—"

Shane waves her worries off and steps aside to let her in. "No, you're fine. Honestly. We didn't really get a chance to get to know each other last time and I know you're, like, the most important person in Ilya's life."

"I am *one* of the most important people in his life," Svetlana corrects with a grin, eyes flickering down to Shane's stomach and then back up to his face. "I am very quickly being replaced."

Shane lets out an awkward laugh. "Oh, uh. Maybe, yeah." He points to the tote bag. "You can put that in the nursery for now if you want."

Svetlana gasps, hand coming up to her chest, her eyes brightening in delight. "The nursery! Yes, I would like to see it."

"It's, um. Sort of a mess," Shane tells her as she follows him down the hallway. "We have the crib, changing table, and a rocking chair, but the dresser is supposed to be delivered

tomorrow. They didn't have the color in stock at the store when we checked, so, uh. Yeah, it's..." he trails off as he opens the door.

Admittedly, it's sort of a fucking mess. He's sworn up and down that he'd get around to organizing it but it's easier to think about being productive nowadays than it is to actually do something. He knows Ilya has come in to clean up some of the mess still left from building the crib and rocking chair, but he's usually always swept up in another task, whether it be making dinner or rubbing Shane's back when he calls for him in the bedroom. They're both sort of at fault here and victims of their own choices.

Somehow, the sight of the mess makes Svetlana beam. She points to a floating shelf they bought to mount over the changing table. "Do you have tools for this?"

Shane blinks. "Yeah, they're in the closet. Why...?"

She's making her way to grab everything from where it's lazily thrown in the empty closet. The only item hanging is the Snoopy onesie from Yuna as well as several small and bare hangers waiting to be occupied. "Do you mind if I—" she gestures toward the entire room. "—make this a little more... presentable? Please, consider it another gift. I love making a space come together—I decorated and built most of what you saw in the classrooms at the daycare."

"Oh shit, really?" Shane says, more than impressed. He can't help but nod eagerly at the offered help. "If you don't mind, that would be great."

"I do not mind at all," she assures him, already getting started on taking the shelf out of the packaging and unfolding the instructions. When she catches Shane standing there awkwardly, she raises an amused brow. "You do not like doing nothing."

Shane rubs the back of his neck bashfully. "Can you tell?"

Svetlana laughs, head tilted back with humor before she regards him again with a fond expression. "You are too cute, it is no wonder Ilyusha is obsessed. Why don't you start hanging some of the clothes? There are sized up until twenty four months, I believe. You will have to organize them."

"Oh, thank god," Shane mumbles to himself, already getting settled on the rocking chair to rummage through the tote bag.

Like Svetlana mentioned, every size up to twenty four months was purchased. There's so much clothes, Shane is sure that they probably won't have to shop for any more until after the twenty four months is up. Everything is also, as promised, gender neutral. Shades of white, beige, green, yellow. Even some tasteful purple and red tossed in there, their graphics of cartoon and movie characters carefully chosen to teeter between girly and boyish. Of course, it doesn't matter if it leans one way or the other. If their kid wants to be interested in princesses or monster trucks, they'll be supported despite the gender. Unless they like the Teletubbies. Those things kind of freak Shane out a little bit.

Conversation between them comes easily. Shane learns more about Svetlana than he had a chance to the last time they met. He knows small things about her already, gathering up details that Ilya has dropped here and there like the fact that she grew up between Russia and America, and she hates the winter months. But directly from Svetlana's mouth, he learns that she's quick witted and funny in an effortless way. Shane finds himself laughing at most of her punchlines that seem to come naturally.

In turn, he opens up about himself a little more. His parents, how his interests have always been the same things since he could remember. She listens intently, like she's trying to absorb as much information as she can. Her questions are always direct and clear, letting him answer them without having to overthink. It must be nice having a friend like Svetlana, he finds himself thinking. Ilya is lucky.

As the conversation dwindles and the mounted shelf sits perfectly leveled above the changing table with wipes and diapers neatly arranged on top peering over them, she finishes pushing a hanger through the neckline of a green and purple striped shirt made for six month olds and turns to Shane who stands beside her, stretching out his lower back.

"I didn't get the chance to apologize for how I spoke to you at the daycare."

It catches Shane off guard, so much so that he stares at her for several stretched seconds. "Apologize?"

"I accused you of doing something very terrible," she explains, glancing away to look inside the neatly organized closet and baby clothes.

"You were being protective," Shane shrugs, remembering the conversation. As much as it had annoyed him, he knows that it came from a place of love and protectiveness, not of nastiness. He may miss some social cues here and there, but he's not stupid enough to think she was trying to hurt him intentionally. He's glad Ilya has someone in his corner, steadfast in their loyalty and love.

"Yes, maybe," she continues. "But I did not handle it well. I was very... shocked after hearing you were not using protection. Ilya has always been very careful, so it made me think that maybe he was being pressured." She meets Shane's eyes properly. "But I didn't think about how maybe he made that choice because he *wanted* to. It is very rare you find someone you care about enough to be reckless with."

Shane's eyes widen slightly. "I don't think it's *that*—"

"You do not think he cares about you?" she asks, though it doesn't sound like much of a question.

"No—I mean, he probably cares about me because, you know," he gestures to his rounded stomach, to their child currently deadset on winding him. "But not like *that*."

"Like what?" she asks this time. Her expression is scarily neutral, and Shane wishes he could read her mind.

"Like... *that*," he tries again. "I don't know. We're co-parents, obviously he cares about me to some degree. And I care about him too, obviously."

"Obviously," she repeats, a smile starting to stretch on her face, amused. "I think it is much more than just caring at this point, Shane."

He doesn't have to ask to know what she's implying. When he opens his mouth to object, nothing comes out. His tongue is heavy in his mouth, brain faltering in its usual quick fire defense when her words melt into his skull. It's much more than just caring at this point. It's been more than caring for a while now, if he thinks back to Ilya sitting beside him, taking responsibility, stepping up where he could have easily walked away. Staying despite everything. *Wanting* to be here, with Shane, even though this was never supposed to be more than some heated fun.

"Oh no," he says.

"Ah," Svetlana grins, rocking back on her heels. "Have you finally realized?"

Shane swallows. "What the fuck do I do?"

"I do not think you have to do much," she says simply. The ringing of her phone makes her tsk and roll her eyes. "I should have cancelled that stupid appointment yesterday—ah. At least we got to make some progress, yes?"

"You're leaving?" Shane blinks. She can't leave—she just fucking planted the ever-growing seed of realization that he likes Ilya fucking Rozanov more than he probably should. "You can't—what am I supposed to do?"

Svetlana raises her hands up in defense. "I can't help you with that. I have been told I am not particularly good at... *feelings*."

"Come on," he nearly begs. "You didn't at least like him a *little*? There's no, like, advice you can give me?"

At this, Svetlana cackles. "Have a crush on *Ilya*? No, no. Never." When Shane stares at her blankly, she blinks at him. "What? He is annoying."

"I know," Shane says immediately. "Which is why I can't do *this*."

"Hey, you're okay," Svetlana says gently, putting a hand on his shoulder. "You are already doing this and you're doing very good. Ilya cares about you very much—"

"But that's not the same—"

She shakes her head, cutting him off. "He cares about you *very much*, okay? Please trust me, Shane. I know him very well."

He's not sure why, but it helps the hammering in his chest. She's right. At the very least, Ilya cares about him to some extent. Even if these feelings aren't reciprocated, he has some importance in Ilya's life. Maybe that can be enough within itself.

Unfortunately, Svetlana can't stay around for his further spiraling, and he's forced to walk her to the door with a looming dread hanging over his head despite her reassurance.

Just before she's off, she lets out a small *oh!* and unzips her purse, pulling out a floppy stuffed animal. "I almost forgot to give this to you."

Shane takes the stuffed animal, holding it upright and watching as its neck flops to the side. It's a bunny. Or, at least it *looks* like a bunny. The beige fur is matted with age, its beaded eyes are scratched at the edges. The embroidered smile is coming undone at one of the ends. "Oh," he says as politely as he can given the gift of a used toy. "Um. Thank you."

As if reading his mind, she lets out a small laugh. "It is not trash, I promise. This used to be Ilya's when he was little. He carried it around with him until he was twelve and then abandoned it when his brother made fun of him for still sleeping with it." Shane can't help but smile sadly at the thought of Ilya dragging this around with him for as long as he could. "The last time he was in Moscow, he found it and I could see him thinking about bringing it with him. He knew it was going to be his last time there, so he was very selective about what was worth bringing."

"This wasn't worth it to him?" Shane asks, the question nearly lost in the quietness of his voice as his thumb traces over the bunny's nose.

"He has always been stubborn," she says. "But I managed to sneak it into my luggage just in case he ever regretted it. It's been sitting in my storage closet collecting dust, so I thought what better way to repurpose it than to pass it down?"

"It's a great idea," Shane tells her with a hug. "Thank you."

Svetlana cups his cheek fondly and smiles. "No, thank *you*."

Ilya comes home only twenty minutes later while Shane puts together an easy dinner of leftover chicken and some pasta they had the night before. He's plating it all as Ilya drops his backpack by the front door and haphazardly toes his shoes off near the shoe rack before coming up behind Shane and kissing the back of his neck.

"Wow wow," Ilya says, pressing his lips to Shane's ear and making him squirm with a huffed laugh. "Dinner looks good."

"Well, yeah. You made it yesterday," Shane says, earning a smack to his ass. He elbows Ilya off of him, too hyper-aware of the way his heart is desperately trying to lurch from his throat and onto the floor. He shoves it down the best he can, doing his best to reason with himself. He has a stupid crush on Ilya, it's fine. It doesn't have to mean anything. He got knocked up by him, so that's some accomplishment in itself. Probably, like, the best thing that can happen with having a crush. Or, the worst thing. *God fucking damn it.*

Luckily, Ilya busies himself with setting the table and then slicing some lemon for Shane's glass of water. They eat while talking about their days, and Ilya perks up at the mention of Svetlana's visit, waving off the fact that he forgot to tell Shane about it in the first place.

Shane is only reminded of the bunny when they're getting ready for bed and Ilya is standing in front of the sink, shirtless and brushing his teeth. It must be the way he rubs at his eye with his knuckle as he stifles a yawn that makes Shane think of a younger Ilya, drifting off with a stuffed bunny tucked to his chest.

He ignores the curious sound Ilya makes when he leaves the bathroom before brushing his teeth and goes straight for the nursery across the hall. The bunny lays in the crib, right where Shane had left it earlier. When he picks it up, Ilya is already entering the room, eyebrows drawn together when Shane turns back around, hiding the object behind his back.

"You are acting weird, Hollander," Ilya says cautiously, eyes flickering to where Shane is doing a poor job at trying to hide something. "You have a gun?"

"What? No!" Shane says quickly. "Why would I shoot you?"

Ilya shrugs. "Hormones."

"You are fucking impossible," Shane scolds before sighing. "It's, um. Svetlana left something for you. Or, for the baby, I guess."

One of Ilya's eyebrows shoots up. "That is why you are acting weird?"

Instead of explaining, Shane shows him.

The confusion on Ilya's face dissipates into something softer. An amalgamation of disbelief, happiness, and sadness flash across his face until he's mumbling something in Russian with a shaky breath. He takes the stuffed animal from Shane, touching it with such delicate hands, even Shane is afraid it has the potential to shatter. "Svetlana had this?"

Shane nods. "Yeah. She said she kept it with her just in case you ever wanted it back."

"Ah, Svetlana," Ilya says with a cracking laugh. He sniffs, and it's only then that the light catches on the tear falling down from the inner corner of his eye. "Fuck. Sorry—"

"Hey, no," Shane says quickly, cupping Ilya's face in his hands. He can't help slotting their mouths together, letting Ilya's tongue dip against his for a fleeting moment until they're separating. Shane bumps their heads together.

"My mother bought this for me," Ilya says after some time of silence. "I think I was two, maybe three. I remember seeing it at the store and she put it in the cart. Maybe she winked at me, I still do not know if I made that up, but it's what I remember. She called it *Zaya*. Means little bunny, not very creative, but is okay." His mouth trembles as he presses his lips together, petting the bunny's head. "She would have been very excited to be a grandmother."

Shane smiles sadly, wipes at another one of Ilya's falling tears with his thumb. "We can keep a piece of her with the baby like this," he says. "And keep her memory alive. Tell them that their grandma named the bunny for them and that she's always with them, even if they can't see her. They'll at least know."

"Fuck, Hollander," Ilya rushes out with a choked sob, crashing their lips together and then tucking his face into Shane's neck despite the awkward space between them with Shane's bump in the way. They stay like that for minutes that seem simultaneously vast and condensed. Shane plays with the curls at the nape of Ilya's neck until he's straightening himself up, pushing their noses together. "So we cannot change the bunny's name?"

"No, of course not," Shane says with a small laugh. "What was it again?"

"Zaya," Ilya whispers with a soft smile.

Shane repeats it and then pauses. "That kind of sounds like that thing you call me in Russian."

"Ah," Ilya clears his throat. "Coincidence, probably. Do not think about it too much."

Shane furrows his eyebrows, cut off from any sort of question he had when Ilya kisses him again.



31

It's late afternoon when Shane wakes up from his post-class nap. He's disoriented beyond belief, barely aware of his surroundings of the bedroom when his eyes crack open. So much so that the smell of thick cinnamon and vanilla seems like an extension of his dreams, only becoming apparent as reality when he pushes himself to sit up at the edge of the bed and the sweetness still lingers in the air.

He comes out of the room, hair tousled and rubbing his eyes sleepily and finds Ilya standing in the kitchen, back to Shane as he works on slicing something.

"Ilya?" Shane croaks through his sleep ridden voice. "What are you—?"

Ilya spins around, eyes widening in something close to panic. "Close your eyes," he tells Shane with a stern finger pointed in his direction. "I am almost done."

Shane huffs in annoyance but closes his eyes anyway, brows furrowed. "Is this really necessary?"

"Yes," Ilya says back, not missing a beat. there's some clattering, the sound of a dish being placed in the sink, and then the scrape of a utensil. And then finally, the sound of Ilya's voice. "You can look."

Shane opens his eyes and finds Ilya leaning back against the counter, too casual for how he was acting just a moment ago. Shane's eyes are pulled away from him to what sits on the countertop on top of a plate. A single slice of cinnamon bread.

His eyes flutter as he blinks, making sure he's seeing correctly. "What is this?"

"Cinnamon bread," Ilya tells him simply.

Shane's mouth opens and closes, already salivating. "Did... did you make this?"

"I did my best," Ilya says with a quick shrug. He tilts his chin toward the bread. "Well? Try it."

Shane's feet are moving on their own accord. His stomach bumps the edge of the counter and scent hits him full force. He almost whimpers but pushes it down, knowing he won't hear the end of it if he lets the sounds he wants to make escape his mouth. So, he pinches off a piece of the bread, sniffing it before shoving it in his mouth. An exhale leaves his lungs as his eyes flutter shut. The cinnamon coats his tongue along with the sweetness, the light note of vanilla seeping into his senses. It melts in his mouth just like it used to when he was younger and starving after practice.

He can almost feel himself transported back, sitting at the dining table while his mom asks him how practice went and he tells her it was fine, too focused on scarfing down the snack. A small laugh escapes his mouth suddenly, followed by his eyes and nose burning before he can compose himself, and the tears start to spill over just as quickly.

"Shane?" Ilya asks after a beat, hesitance laced in his tone. When he turns Shane's face toward him, he lets out a sound. "Oh, *solnyshko*. What is wrong? Is terrible? I will throw it away, you do not have to eat it—" Shane cuts him off with his hands on Ilya's face, pulling him into a wet kiss, his tears smearing on Ilya's cheeks. Ilya holds him by the waist, kisses him back until Shane is sucking in a breath. He blinks with confusion still lingering between his brows. "It was okay, then?"

"It's so fucking good," Shane says through a wet laugh, dropping his forehead against Ilya's, closing his eyes because looking at him feels like too much. His chest is constricting, his stomach is flipping, and if he looks at Ilya right now he might say something he doesn't mean. Or something he *does* mean. "It tastes just like my mom's. How did you do that?"

Ilya gives him a sheepish smile. "Maybe I have been bothering Yuna for the recipe."

Shane opens his eyes, breath catching in his throat. His voice falters. "You *what*?"

"It was very hard, she did not remember what box she used to use," Ilya explains, hands absentmindedly caressing Shane's back beneath his shirt, ceaseless in their journey around to his stomach and then up to his chest and shoulders. "So we did lots of research, but the brand is, ah, discontinued, yes? So I go through too many websites to find copycat recipe and I did my best, so. Do you like it?"

Shane can't believe what he's hearing. Every beat in his chest echoes in his throat, threatens to lurch from his mouth. "I love it," he manages to say, voice cracking. "It's perfect—you're... you're so fucking incredible."

He isn't expecting the way Ilya's eyes widen, the way his cheeks start to turn a dusty pink. "Is... is just bread, Hollander."

Shane shakes his head and Ilya's face melts into something sweeter. "It's not just about the bread," Shane explains the best that he can without outright saying *I think I'm in love with*

you. "It's... you've been so great since we got thrown into this. I'm just..." Shane laughs softly, the tips of their noses touching. He lets the ghost of a confession slip through the cracks. "I'm so glad it was you."

Ilya kisses him once and then twice, dropping their foreheads together again. "I am glad, too."

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY CINNAMON BREAD COMING INTO PLAY HEHEHE

ofc i had to give svetlana her redemption and spell out why she did what she did since it was not clicking w some ppl ANYWAY BE NICEEEEE we love her in this household! also the plan wasn't for shane to realize his feelings so soon but it just felt right... get ready to meet the baby soon... hehehehe

kudos+comments appreciated!

Chapter 7: VII. If This Goes on Forever, Could You Ever Keep Me Safe?

Chapter Summary

33-38 weeks.

Chapter Notes

this is the fastest ive ever written a chapter and i barely had a fucking outline i did it out of sheer motivation for this goddamn fucking baby to finally be born. so, here is the second to last chapter that is technically the last chapter since the next chapter will be an epilogue of sorts. don't worry, you'll get a lot of hollanov dad content very soon.

► MORE NOTES!

okay let's go! I FORGOT TRIGGER WARNING FOR C-SECTION ITS NOT DETAILED BUT STILL

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

33

Sweat beads from Shane's hairline, a single drop trailing down his temple, just enough for his skin to feel cool beneath all the heat engulfing him at the moment. The heat comes in the form of Ilya, his palms mapping the skin of Shane's bare back, down to his ass, slowing his movements down just enough for him to whimper in the back of his throat, chasing the heat that's been pooling in his gut for the better part of an hour.

"Slow," Ilya says, dampening the betrayal with open mouthed kisses up Shane's neck until he reaches his mouth. With Shane's panting desperation, it's more of him letting Ilya lick into his mouth, nip at his bottom lip before trailing off to place delicate kisses to his cheek. "Slower—*da*, like that. So perfect for me, *zaychik*. Let me see you."

Shane's eyes flutter open to meet Ilya's. Light even in the dimness of the living room, looking up at Shane with a slightly craned neck, his gaze dancing across his features with parted and kiss-swollen lips. The undivided attention makes Shane moan, hips stuttering in their rhythm guided by Ilya's hands on him, the unbroken eye contact doing more for him now that all he wants is for Ilya to look at him like this, forever if he can have it.

It's a lot to feel in such a vulnerable position—riding Ilya on the sofa while the TV chimes with the laughter of a dated sitcom and his phone vibrates on the arm of the sofa—and he's closing his eyes again, scared of the way his heart is starting to crawl up his throat, weighing on his tongue. He wishes he could go back to being fucked ass up, face down like they used to do. But what used to be the norm no longer fits in the life they've been molding together, unintentionally or not, *this* is what he's used to now. Bodies pressed together, panting into each other's mouths without an ounce of space between them, and the lingering fact that there is no going back even if either of them wanted to. And Shane doesn't want to.

The clicking of Ilya's tongue sounds. He moves a hand to hold Shane's face, angling him closer and then thrusting up into him as he speaks. "Open your eyes, I want to see you."

"Fuck," Shane breathes but complies despite himself. Everything is blurred at the edges, his eyes glassy as they find Ilya's again. It earns him a soft groan from Ilya, the noise zipping down Shane's spine and making his cock twitch. "Jesus—*fuck*."

Always so generous, Ilya's hand is wrapping around Shane, thumb pressing just beneath the head of his cock and making him exhale another curse, the rhythm of his hips faltering again. The corner of Ilya's mouth twitches in approval and with his other hand he pushes at Shane's lower back. "Get yourself off on me."

Shane nods brokenly, hands finding their way to Ilya's shoulders to brace himself, using his knees pressed into the cushions for leverage to lift himself up and fuck back down, angling himself just right so that every repeated motion brings nothing but white heat through every part of him. It's dizzying, nearly intoxicating, getting to use Ilya like this, getting to fuck himself on his cock while Ilya spills praises into his ear, grips his skin with enough force to leave bruises.

"Fuck, *Shane*," Ilya moans, head tilting back for a fleeting moment before he straightens up. "Just like that, fuck you are so fucking good for me, *zaychik*, so *good*." Shane curses, his mouth watering right before Ilya is licking into it, tongues sliding against each other. When they part, a mixture of their saliva hangs out the corner of Shane's mouth. "Want to hear you say it—tell me, Shane."

Shane knows what he wants, what he likes to hear when Shane is so fucked out like this, nearly delirious with the need for release. "Want you to—to fuck another baby into me—"

Again, Ilya's phone vibrates on the arm of the sofa. Ilya's focus shifts momentarily, eyes glancing over to the caller ID before making an annoyed sound and turning his attention back on Shane, fucking up into him to match the pace already set. "Say it again."

Shane repeats it through a hitched breath, brows knitting together as he gets closer to the edge, fingers digging into the muscle of Ilya's shoulders. "Fuck—*fuck*. Just like that—"

The vibrating only seems to get louder. Ilya groans, looking up at the ceiling with some mumbled Russian curses. "Fucking Marlow. He will not stop calling until I answer—"

Shane's hand shoots up to clutch the back of Ilya's curls, forcing him to stop talking. "You're not answering that fucking phone until you make me come," he finds himself snapping before

he can stop.

He doesn't have time to regret it or feel embarrassed, not when Ilya's cock twitches inside of him and he looks up at Shane like he's something straight out of a divine intervention. "Fuck—yes. Yes, I will," Ilya promises, lurching forward to slot their mouths together, hands coming beneath the back of Shane's thighs to lift him slightly before fucking him within an inch of his life.

Every sound that leaves Shane's mouth is unintentional, pulled from his lungs as he clings onto Ilya. The sound of their skin slapping together nearly mutes the television and the constant vibrating of Ilya's phone. He's choking out Ilya's name more times than he can count, clinging onto every single one of the *good boys* that stumble out of Ilya's mouth and right into Shane's gut that burns him to his core. He comes with a choked sound, teeth sinking into the junction of Ilya's neck and shoulder, muffling what would have probably turned into a shout carrying over through their poor neighbor's walls. He can just barely make out the string of Russian words spit-firing from Ilya's mouth, the way he holds Shane's hips down against his lap as he comes in him.

What follows is Shane's boneless body splayed on the sofa, gently placed there by Ilya, and a cold rag to clean up the come on his stomach. Ilya is draping himself over Shane's side the best he can given the obstacle of the bump and the limited space, nuzzling into his neck and kissing whatever piece of skin he can reach as they both come down from their highs. Shane nearly falls asleep as he twists one of Ilya's curls dampened with sweat, only to wake up to the sound of his phone vibrating again.

"Fucking *Marlow*," Ilya hisses again, his face planted in Shane's side, the entirety of his body squeezed between Shane and the back of the sofa. "I am *busy*, does he not know this?"

"Probably not," Shane points out before sighing and pushing himself up despite Ilya's protests. "We're all gross—"

"Yes, this happens every time we have sex," Ilya tells him unhelpfully. "You should not be surprised."

"Fuck off. I'm gonna shower," Shane says and then points to Ilya's still vibrating phone. "You should answer that."

Ilya flips him off but goes to grab his phone anyway, answering with *what the fuck do you want?* just as Shane turns on the shower, leaving the bathroom door cracked so Ilya can follow when he's done.

Muted by the spray of the shower, he catches Ilya's voice as he paces the hallway while he talks to Marlow. After several minutes he's coming in, stripping and joining Shane beneath the steaming water, holding onto Shane's waist as he dips his curls into the water and then accepts the shampoo bottle he's handed.

It doesn't take long for Ilya's mouth to press against Shane's or for some heavy petting to follow, not making it further than a sloppy make out session and Shane half-hard but too prune-y to want to do anything about it. Once they get out of the shower, they get dressed in

the room wordlessly. Shane doesn't look up at Ilya, doing his best to feign some nonchalance as he stares at the shirt in his hands, examining the tag like its washing instructions and 100% cotton material is important in this moment.

"So, uh," he starts, clearing his throat when Ilya looks over at him, pulling a muscle shirt on. "What did Marlow want?"

"To see me," Ilya says after a moment. "He wanted to come over but..."

Shane nods as he trails off, understanding the unspoken words. They agreed to keep it between them and the two friends that know. Marlow wasn't part of the plan. "You can go see him still," Shane shrugs. It's still early in the day. with summer just around the corner, the sun has yet to set. He has time to hang out with his friends if he chooses.

Ilya makes a noise, something between a groan and a huff. "I do not want to leave—"

"You'd only be hanging out for a little," Shane tells him. "Even if it's just to, like, I don't know. Be a good friend."

"I *am* a good friend," Ilya says quickly.

"Well, yeah. I know," Shane says back with another shrug. "But you haven't really seen him much since the season ended. He probably misses you."

"I have other things to focus on," Ilya says, gesturing to Shane. "And I would rather be here sometimes than at a fucking bar or club. That is usually where Marlow wants to go, Hollander. Is just not... I am not interested in that stuff anymore."

Shane stares at Ilya, all the gears turning in his head until his mouth catches up. "Then you should tell him that."

Ilya rolls his eyes. "He will have questions if I—"

"I know," Shane says over him. "So, tell him. About... about this."

Ilya pauses, eyes widening slightly in disbelief as he stares back at Shane. "You want this?"

"I wouldn't mind it," Shane admits. "It seems pretty fair. I mean, Hayden knows. J.J. knows. Svetlana knows. And maybe... maybe you can tell the team, too."

This time, Ilya doesn't hide the shock that flickers across his face. "The whole team?" When Shane nods simply, Ilya lets out a laugh teetering the edge of hysterical and amused. "Are you okay, Hollander? I thought you did not want anyone knowing—"

"That was before," Shane explains, doing his best to gather the thoughts that have been creeping up. It wouldn't be the worst thing in the world to fill the guys in. After all, they were understanding of Shane stepping away from the team for about a year. They were going to have questions when he came back not only in good health, but with a whole fucking kid he's sure would come up in conversation, especially with Ilya's big mouth. Might as well just get

it over with now instead of later and avoid the stress of stepping into parenthood *and* having to explain all of... this.

When he voices this, Rozanov's face softens into something closer to understanding. "Okay," he says eventually. "So... I will tell Marlow first, then? And then maybe I will meet with the guys—Wyatt is having a party this weekend, that would probably be the best time to tell them about the baby. So you do not feel put on the spot the next time they see you. I will tell them not to ask you any questions if it makes you uncomfortable."

"I don't think I would be uncomfortable," Shane tells him, although grateful he won't have to face his teammates and explain that Ilya Rozanov got him pregnant despite their constant bickering and what seemed like distaste toward one another. "But thanks for, um, taking the brunt of the reactions, I guess."

Ilya makes a show of flexing his biceps, grinning when Shane rolls his eyes and throws the now wadded up t-shirt at him. "It will be fun to tell them that I am *so* irresistible not even Shane Hollander could say no—"

"Not what fucking happened," Shane corrects over him. "I'm pretty sure it was *you* that started jerking off in front of me—"

"Details," Ilya waves off, meeting Shane halfway across the room, leaning down to bring their faces close. "And I did not hear you complaining after. *I* am pretty sure you were saying... ah, what as it? Oh, yes. *Fuck Rozanov, fuck me, fuck me—*"

Shane cuts him off by shoving his face away with his palm, managing to get out an *oh fuck off* to hide the way he's blushing.

⊙

"—did you get that, sweetie? I can say it again—"

"I got it mom," Shane tells her, raising his voice enough so the device propped up on the changing table can hear his voice as he rummages through the closet until he finds the still packaged bottles she sent them a few weeks ago. "I think I gotta wash these first."

"They're dishwasher safe," Yuna says. When Ilya comes in holding a freshly washed baby blanket and bunny stuffie, she waves at him. "Hi, Ilya. Did you need me to run through the list again?"

"Hello," Ilya greets with a wave before he goes to the blue diaper bag on the rocking chair, shoving the items inside. "No, I think we have everything you said. Diapers for baby, change of clothes for Shane, extra clothes for me, toothbrush, toothpaste—"

"Travel shampoo," Shane says over him. "Did you pack that?"

"And conditioner, yes," Ilya nods. "Overnight bag should be good to go, Yuna."

"I can text you the list," she says, already picking up the phone, the image of her paused as she types away. "Oh! Your father just finished dinner, I'll call you boys tomorrow. Love you!"

"Love you," Shane calls back as Ilya says his goodbyes to her. When she hangs up he lets out a breath trapped in his chest, the tension in his back dissipating slightly. He rubs at his eye with the heel of his palm. "God. Sorry. I didn't think she'd call and force us to start packing an overnight bag right now."

"Is probably good that she did," Ilya says with a shrug, not at all bothered by Yuna Hollander's need to insert herself wherever she can. "Who knows when we would have gotten to it?"

"I would have gotten to it," Shane says even though he barely believes himself. He's more than a little tired all the fucking time. He barely sleeps at night, too uncomfortable no matter the position he tries. Sometimes, he dozes off standing up while waiting for his smoothie to finish blending, but Ilya doesn't have to know that. "I mean, I would have gotten to it *eventually*."

"Well it is done now," Ilya tells him, swooping past to give him a chaste kiss before bee-lining to the closet. "But you are forgetting the most important thing."

"I already told you you're not bringing your fucking gaming thing—" Ilya turns holding the Snoopy onesie, cutting Shane off very quickly. "Oh."

"See, you should not be so mean to me," Ilya teases. "Sometimes I am smarter than you."

"Sometimes," Shane parrots. "Not all the time."

Ilya presses a hand over his chest, wincing impishly. "Hollander. Shane. You hurt me."

Shane takes the onesie, ignoring the demand for justice from Ilya. He pauses, thumbs running over the seams and the Snoopy image on the front. "Weird," he starts. "There's gonna be a baby in this soon."

"Nervous?" Ilya asks, moving closer to Shane until his chin is hooked over his shoulder, staring down at the onesie too.

"Yeah, obviously," Shane says with a small laugh. "But also, like... I don't know. Excited, I think."

"Yes," Ilya nods, kissing the side of Shane's jaw. "Me too."

⊗

Bood hosts a barbecue at Marlow's place to celebrate the end of classes. It's a good time to see the guys, Shane figures. Better to just get it over with, throw himself into it headfirst before he can overthink it or make up scenarios that are borderline evil.

Their teammates have always been kind above anything else. All the assholes were weeded out early on, kicked off the team due to low academic performances or suspensions or simply quitting. What they were left with was the best of the bunch, and though they can be dumbasses at times, they mean well. So, Shane's nerves really aren't necessary. He'll be *fine*.

"Hollander," Ilya tells him as they stand on Marlow's porch and Shane alternates between holding the soda case they brought (and he refused to let Ilya carry) in front of his stomach or at his side. "You are going to be fine."

Shane swallows, getting a glimpse at his reflection in the window on the door and his very round and prominent bump straining against the extra large Voyageurs t-shirt he found shoved at the bottom of his dresser. "I look so fucking pregnant—Jesus *fuck*."

"Maybe because you are very fucking pregnant," Ilya points out unhelpfully. Then, in a lower, syrupy voice: "And you look very, *very* fucking *hot*—"

The door swings open and they're met with Marlow's tall frame. He beams and his eyes immediately go to Shane's stomach. "Damn, I still can't believe you let Roz touch you."

"Me neither," Shane mumbles but accepts the slap on the back from Marlow as they cross the threshold.

The house is empty except for the bags of chips on the island in the kitchen as well as several empty cans and bottles of beer. It doesn't take long to see that everyone is already in the backyard, sitting at the folding tables and chairs placed in the grass. Bood is at the grill, flipping a row of hot dogs and looking up when he hears the back door slide open and Marlow's loud announcement that *Roz and Hollzy are here!*

"Hey! It's good to see you guys," Bood says, politely not acknowledging the elephant in the room.

"Whoa! Rozanov wasn't kidding!" Wyatt says, as he barrels over to them, slinging his arm over Ilya's shoulder and forgoing any attempt at subtlety as he looks Shane up and down in... amazement, maybe. "Damn, you're like. *Pregnant*."

"Yep," Shane nods lamely, cut off by Troy coming into view, looking him up and down as well.

"You look good, Hollander," he says, tipping his beer bottle at him. "Glowing. Can I say that?"

"Fucking watch it, Barrett," Ilya warns through gritted teeth, keeping his hand on Shane's lower back and then speaking loudly, ignoring Shane's confused look and stopping the rest of the guys in their tracks as they start to crowd around the two of them. "Alright, listen the fuck up! I already told you guys not to be fucking weird—so sit the fuck down. Yes, he is pregnant. Yes, I am the father, I know, too bad so sad you are all too slow, I win again. Any other questions?"

There's a pause before every hand shoots up. Shane sighs and finds himself a seat before letting the Q&A take place, happy that at the very least no one seems disgusted by him. He'll count it as a win. "Alright. Dykstra?"

Dykstra clears his throat before putting on a serious face. "Uh. How is it gonna, you know... come out if you don't have a...?"

"C-section," Shane says quickly. He looks for the right words before just settling on, "That's, uh. That's the only way for it to come out. Alright, next question. Marlow."

"So... you got milk?" Marlow asks, earning some nods of curiosity from J.J. and Connors only to be smacked upside the head by Bood.

"That's not a question you should be asking, dude!"

"It's fine," Shane says, cheeks pink. This could be considered sex education in a way, so it's almost like he's doing some sort of community service. "Uh, so, *no*. But we've already been given the list of the best formulas, so. Yeah that's not gonna be a problem. Okay, um... fuck. Fine. Hayden?"

"Are you sure it's Rozanov's?"

Shane narrows his eyes. "Yes, asshole. Okay next one. Troy?"

Troy blinks like he hadn't expected to get called in the first place. "Oh, um... are you and Rozanov *really*—"

"Going to be parents? Yes we are," Ilya says over him, clapping his hands together. "Okay enough questions, I'm fucking starving."

Grateful for the attention shifted elsewhere, Shane lets Ilya help him up and get in line for burgers and hotdogs. There's very little conversation as the group of them stuff their faces, only interrupting their tasks to make smart ass remarks about one another or bring up a forgotten story that makes them bow over in laughter.

By the time the plates are cleared, Marlow is standing up and clearing his throat. "Alright, boys," he says, aimed toward Ilya and Shane. "We should probably let you guys know that you're in the middle of your baby shower. Congrats, fellas."

Shand and Ilya snap their heads to look at one another in confusion. It's Bood that speaks after. "We sort of figured you two dumbasses wouldn't plan one, so," he shrugs. "Hey, it was mostly Jackie and Cassie's idea. And before you ask, Cassie wanted to come but she couldn't get the day off."

"Jackie's excuse is that we don't have a babysitter," Hayden chimes in.

"Wow. Deadbeat," Ilya is quick to say, earning a scowl that goes ignored.

"Anyway," Bood says loudly with a smile. "Consider it a guys night slash baby shower. Because you guys deserve at least *something*, you know?"

Shane blinks. He hadn't thought of it, but he sort of expected his mom to maybe plan something. He isn't even sure if he would have *wanted* her to, so maybe that was her reason. He glances at Ilya who is looking at him now, only him, eyes flickering across his face like he's trying to gauge his reaction.

"Is okay?" he asks, voice low, so none of the others can hear him. "If not, we can go. I will make up excuse—"

"It's okay," Shane tells him quickly, giving him a smile. He turns to look at the rest of the guys, all focused on him. "That's really nice. Just... no games. I fucking hate those baby shower games."

Marlow laughs, clapping him on the back as he walks behind him, a beer clutched in his opposite hand. "Yeah, we figured. But hey, maybe with the next baby you'll warm up to the idea and we can have your families here!"

Shane ignores the first part of that last sentence, avoiding Ilya's eyes as the guys start to speak over each other, arguing about whether or not they should allow at least *one game*. The conclusion is that they can play games but Shane doesn't have to partake if he doesn't want to, thus prompting a game of beer pong that definitely has nothing to do with the themes of a baby shower.

Some time later, right as the sun begins to kiss the horizon, Wyatt rolls out a large whiteboard on wheels with all of the guy's names on it.

A betting pool, Shane realizes immediately. "What the hell is this?" he asks anyway, just in case his eyes are fucking deceiving him.

"Oh, Rozanov told us you guys were keeping the gender a secret," Hayden explains way too calmly. "So we have a betting pool going on the gender—"

Shane's eyes nearly bulge out of his head. "And *weight*? What the fuck?"

"I think you're gonna give birth to the biggest baby in the world," Wyatt nods. "I'm talking eleven pounder. Boy, future star defenseman."

Shane blinks, finding Wyatt's name on the board. "You put \$100 on that?"

Wyatt shrugs with a loose smile. "I'm confident, baby!"

J.J. points to his name. "I think you will have a girl. Average weight, because I do not want you to suffer, *mon ami*."

"Thanks, J.J.," Shane says, oddly touched.

Hayden points at his name. "I'm saying twins! Boy *and* a girl. Both ten pounds."

Ilya snorts. "Might as well give up your money now, idiot. It is only one baby."

Hayden's shoulders drop. "Aw man. What the hell?"

"This is kind of fucked," Shane says, pausing when he sees Ilya grab one of the markers taped to the board. He starts to write his name write under Dykstra's guess of an eight pound boy. "Are you fucking kidding me, Rozanov?"

"What?" Ilya says blandly, the cap of the marker between his teeth as he writes in neat handwriting *Rozzy—girl, ten pounds*. "I will win so we will get the money."

"We should be getting the money no matter what," Shane snaps. He pauses before sighing and getting up. "Give me the fucking marker."

While he's jotting down *Shane—boy, ten pounds*, he barely notices the several bags of gifts and boxes of diapers and wipes being placed on one of the folding tables. He turns to find a mountain of things waiting to be acknowledged.

"Did you clear out the fucking store?" Ilya asks as the last box is stacked on top of the ten of twenty four that are sitting on the deck now, no room to fit on the table anymore.

"No," Marlow says, wiping sweat off his brow with the hem of his shirt. "We cleared two stores, I think."

"We got you guys a bunch of shit from the thrift store," Wyatt tells them. "Mostly the clothes, I mean. Not the diapers. That'd be gross."

"All gender neutral," Troy tacks on with a glance at Shane. "Rozanov said you guys were getting gender neutral things, so."

"We can't take all this," Shane starts only to be cut off by a chorus of protests telling him to just accept the gifts. So, he shuts his mouth and lets the gratefulness settle. He doesn't let himself get emotional, even if he really wants to.

When they leave, the guys take turns bumping their knuckles against his stomach in a fist-bump of sorts, each of them disappointed when they don't get a kick in return.

"Hey," Bood calls right as they're about to leave through the front door. "Make sure you bring the baby around when it's here!"

"Or we'll storm your house," Wyatt threatens with a teasing lilt.

"We promised we would not introduce the baby to idiots," Ilya calls as they walk toward the car, grinning when he receives all sorts of *boos* and *fuck off Rozanovs* in return. In a way, it feels like they're back in the locker room and Shane finds himself chuckling.

As soon as they're in the car, Ilya is apologizing. "I am sorry if that was a lot. I did not know about the baby shower thing, I promise—"

"No," Shane says over him. "It wasn't a lot. It... it was actually really nice. I missed them."

Ilya smiles, the worry melting off his face. "They missed you too."

Going to the gym seems like more of a chore instead of a fun activity the further along Shane gets. It nearly kills him to think of giving up on exercise altogether, but he's so fucking tired and everything aches more and more every day. He almost punches Rozanov the first time he brings up maybe doing something active that *isn't* the gym, but the more he thinks about it the more sense it makes.

So, they start taking walks to the park near the apartment, looping around it on the dirt trail offered for joggers and daily walkers before heading home. Admittedly, it makes Shane feel a whole lot better about skipping the gym, especially when he doesn't have to push himself as hard.

The sun is starting to set as they finish their first lap. Shane's water bottle hangs from where it's clasped between his fingertips, swinging with every step he takes. He listens as Ilya talks about a childhood memory about parks. How his mom used to take him and his brother on the slides when it was snowing and it felt like something straight out of a fantasy movie.

"There is a movie with a lion and children," Ilya explains, putting a hand on Shane's lower back when he nearly stumbles over a dip in the trail. "I forget what it is called, but that is how Moscow looked. Was so beautiful. The snow was up to your ankles."

"Chronicles of Narnia?" Shane tries, earning an excited nod followed by a *da! Yes, that one!* "That movie used to freak me out."

"Shane," Ilya deadpans, "the fucking *Teletubbies* scare you."

"Yeah," Shane admits sheepishly. "That's definitely a me problem."

Before Ilya can reply, his attention is moved elsewhere and what was an amused expression is replaced by sheer horror. Shane follows his line of sight and finds a child, probably four years old, shoving dirt into his mouth by the fist-full. "What the *fuck*? Where is their parent?"

"I think it's that mom over there," Shane points out, nodding toward where a poor mom is struggling to wrangle a two year old having a tantrum. "He'll be fine. I think a little dirt is probably okay for kids."

Ilya turns his head slowly to look at Shane. If he were an animatronic, his neck would be creaking. "You would let our kid eat dirt?"

"I used to eat dirt and I'm fine," Shane shrugs. "I'm sure it's probably good for their immune system."

"Hollander," Ilya says almost desperately, sighing and stopping in his tracks altogether. He rubs a hand over his mouth, curses under his breath in Russian, and then looks at him. "That is probably why you are scared of the Teletubbies. You ate too much dirt and now you are," he gestures to the entirety of Shane, "like this."

Shane frowns. "Is... there a problem with me?"

"Yes," Ilya says immediately. "But I still like you so there is probably something wrong with me too."

Shane can barely focus on what he's saying, wincing when the baby starts to shift uncomfortably, pressing a limb to his bladder in an almost painful way. "Fuck. I have to fucking pee. Tell your child to get off my fucking bladder."

"*Bukashka*," he scolds, bending over as if that'll help him be heard, and following it up with several other Russian words Shane wishes he understood. Ilya translates immediately. "I said if *bukashka* makes you pee yourself I will laugh very hard."

"You're a fucking asshole," Shane grumbles.

"I'm kidding!" Ilya is quick to say, grabbing Shane's hand and intertwining their fingers before he can walk away. "I told them to be nice to you, okay?"

"Alright, sure," Shane says, making a mental note to start learning Russian. He can only rely on Ilya's translations for so long before he's outnumbered by two Russian speakers.

Ilya swings their hands between them, a small smile on his face as he looks over at Shane. "Back to the apartment?"

Shane nods, looking away just as quickly to focus down at the trail beneath them, mostly covered by the view of his rounded stomach. Even as they're sleeping beside each other that night, his chest still flutters at the thought of them holding hands the entire way back.



"Is it me or are they always playing this stupid show?"

Shane looks up from his phone at the television mounted in the corner of the waiting room. Again, he's met with an episode of a competitive cooking show he's seen before. "No, yeah. I noticed that like a month ago."

Ilya's cheeks puff out as he exhales. He presses his lips together and then looks over at the receptionist who is reading a book, her attention elsewhere. "You think she will give me the remote if I ask?"

He never gets his answer—they're called back into one of the rooms right before Shane can tell him no. The routine is mundane at this point. He gets weighed, gets his blood pressure checked, assures Ilya for the nth time that there are gonna be no needles that he's aware of, and waits for Dr. Yañez to come.

She greets them as brightly as always and then measures the fundal height right before rolling in the ultrasound machine and pouring the cold goop on Shane's belly that is, again, bigger than the last time.

"Everything is looking great," Dr. Yañez tells them as she moves the wand around. "It really could be any day now, so it's important that you listen to your body, Shane. If there's any pain that feels unlike the discomfort you've already been experiencing, give me a call. Chances are that'll be your window to get to the hospital and get the ball rolling."

Shane nods, a heat of excitement and anxiety flashing in his chest. He doesn't have to ask to know that Ilya is on the same boat, he can tell by the way he threads their fingers together, scooting his chair closer to Shane's side. "And you said it's a three hour window?"

"Yes, so the sooner you notice any changes in your discomfort or pain, the better it is that you inform me," Dr. Yañez nods. "I know you mentioned you've cut your exercise significantly the last time we saw each other, is that still the case?"

"We've started doing evening walks instead of full blown workouts," Shane tells her. "It's helped me feel a little productive without pushing myself."

"Love to hear it," she nods, writing on his chart. "Well, your next appointment is scheduled for two weeks from now, but even then, this might be our last hurrah before the baby is here. Of course, I'll still continue to see you postpartum, Shane, but it's been such a pleasure being able to help you through your journey, Shane and Ilya. I know it's a little selfish, but I always like to ask my patients to bring their little ones when they arrive! I'd love to meet them outside of an ultrasound."

"Oh, definitely," Shane nods, a bit winded at the realization that the next time he's here, he might have a whole baby in his arms accompanying him. "Thank you for everything, really. You've been so great."

"Yes, thank you," Ilya tells her too. "We will make sure to bring the baby next time we see you."

Shane tries not to focus on the *we* of it all, of how much he wishes it meant just as much to Ilya as it does to him.



The condensation from their shower drips down the foggy glass of the mirror. Shane wipes it with his palm, enough to clear a portion to see his face as he brushes his teeth. The exhaustion is more evident now than it had been in the previous weeks. There are bags under his eyes—not terribly noticeable, but enough for anyone to know that he hasn't been sleeping great lately.

Other than that, he can admit that his skin is the clearest it's been in his life. His hair is longer than it's ever been, too. Just long enough to fall in his face when he isn't pushing it back, the ends tickling his eyelids if he lets it sit there. More often than not, he's running his hand through his black hair, annoyed with the length and constantly making a note to get it cut after the baby is here. Maybe even a few months after. He can't imagine having the energy to do it right away.

Ilya's reflection joins him. Maybe it's because Shane's feelings have only become stronger over the last several months, but he looks good, too. The best he's looked since Shane's known him. His curls are damp, pushed back like he had spent time styling it that way instead of just hopping out the shower and brushing it back, leaving it to dry in the same style he left it in. He's broader, thicker in every muscle like he's gained some weight with Shane too. Admittedly, it does something for Shane, which has led to lazy sex right before bed more often than not nowadays.

Instead of making a smart ass comment about Shane openly ogling, Ilya's hands wrap around him, hands cupping beneath Shane's stomach and lifting, immediately relieving a majority of the weight of the bump off his spine. He's been doing it more and more in the last month, and it's Shane's favorite thing in the world right next to the cinnamon bread baked at the beginning of the last few weeks.

"Fuuuck," Shane groans with a heavy sigh, leaning his head back to sit on Ilya's shoulder.

"Is good?" Ilya asks, his words muffled as he noses at Shane's temple and then kisses his cheek the best he can given their position.

"It's great," Shane practically slurs, letting his weight fall back against Ilya. He didn't think something as simple as this could feel this euphoric, but a comforting warmth trails through his body. If he really wanted to, he could probably fall asleep like this. "Where'd you learn this from again?"

Ilya kisses his ear again and then hooks his chin over Shane's shoulder, making eye contact with him in the mirror. "I do my own research," he winks.

They stay like that for too long and not enough. When Shane starts to doze off, Ilya suggests laying down and as much as Shane wants to punch him in the stomach, he knows it's probably for the best. With that, they continue their routine with the gentle glow of the lamp on Ilya's side of the bed.

Shane reads an old book he found, something by David Foster Wallace from his freshman year that he wrote a half-assed essay on. It's just as confusing as it had been then (which, really wasn't so long ago the more he thinks about it) and he's putting the book down before he can even make it to page twenty.

After, Ilya lays on his back, legs hanging off the bed as he positions his head to rest right beside Shane's belly. He talks to the baby in Russian about what seems like everything and nothing. Then, he sings a few nursery rhymes that Shane has learned as well, joining in where he can and being rewarded by a kick to his ribs that leaves him winded and slightly annoyed.

Soon, Ilya turns the lamp off, kisses Shane once and then twice before falling asleep within the minute while Shane slings a leg over him and tucks a pillow between his legs and right under his lower back in an attempt to create some comfort for himself. It works for about two hours before he's waking up with a full bladder and walking (waddling) to the bathroom.

By the time he makes it back into bed, he's fully awake. Unfortunately, Ilya seems hardwired to be awake when he is too now, and he wakes up with a heavy inhale.

"Sorry," Shane says automatically, guilt nipping at him when Ilya yawns and rubs a hand over his face. "Go back to sleep—"

"You know I cannot sleep without you next to me anymore," Ilya points out, having no clue what type of fire that ignites beneath Shane's skin. He checks the time on his phone and then says, "That ice cream place you like is still open."

Fuck. Shane likes him so fucking much.

⊙

38

While it's not legally required to have a middle name, a lot of studies show that they're something of importance.

Shane doesn't have a middle name. Up until now, he didn't really think about it all that much. It was just one less name to have on his ID, his passport, all his legal documents. It was convenient, up until now.

"Why didn't you give me a middle name?"

There's a pause and then a sigh on the other line. "What, no hello?"

"Hi mom," Shane says before getting back on track. "Why didn't you give me a middle name?"

"Well, *I* don't have a middle name," Yuna says simply. "It isn't traditional in Japan, honey. You get one given name and that's it, so it didn't really make sense to give you one."

"Oh," Shane says, after a second, slumping back against the kitchen counter. Ilya raises an eyebrow at him from where he's chopping up some vegetables, only looking away when Shane waves him off. "I guess that makes sense."

"That doesn't mean you have to do the same," Yuna says. "Your father has a middle name."

"Yeah, I know *that*. It's James."

"I'm just saying!" Yuna defends.

Shane chews on the corner of his thumb, eyes flitting around the kitchen in thought. "If you had to choose a middle name, what would it be?"

"Well, I wouldn't *want* one," Yuna starts, "but, if I had to choose... Maybe *Mai*. That was my great aunt's name and she was so great. You know, she was the one that sent you those panda cookies when you were younger."

"Aw. I loved those," Shane smiles. "Mai. I like that."

Later, when him and Ilya are eating dinner, the names roll around in his head, over and over again until he's barely touching his food.

"You are thinking very hard," Ilya observes, raising an eyebrow when Shane finally meets his eye. "Does this have to do with your phone call with Yuna?"

"I, um. Yeah," Shane admits, sitting up straight. "I thought of some middle names. Or, well, I guess I didn't really *think* of them. I sort of stole them from my parents, but—"

"What are they?" Ilya is quick to ask, all ears.

"Nikolai James," Shane says. "And Adelina Mai. James from my dad and Mai from my mom's side." He shrugs, poking at his food. "It's just an idea—"

"They are perfect," Ilya says, matching Shane's growing smile. "They are good names, Hollander."

Shane nods. "Cool. I was, um. Also thinking that we should use both of our last names. Like, hyphenate them instead of just choosing one. So it'd be Nikolai James Hollander-Rozanov, or Adelina Mai Hollander-Rozanov. Hollander first because it's alphabetical. It's just an idea—"

He's cut off by Ilya's utensil clattering onto the plate, his head in his hands. Before Shane can panic, he's speaking, words muffled by his palms. "Fuck. Do not make me fucking cry Hollander—*fuck*."

Shane is quick to get up, rounding the table to plop himself onto Ilya's lap, ignoring the way the chair groans beneath their weight. He pulls Ilya's hand from his face and angles his head up to meet his eyes. "Hey. Why are you crying?"

"You really want to use Rozanov too?" Ilya asks so suddenly that Shane blinks.

"Of course," he says easily. "You're their dad too, Ilya."

Ilya is hugging him so tightly it feels like he may go into labor. "Thank you," he says after a minute, the words whispered so softly Shane almost misses it.

Instead of answering back, Shane kisses him, hoping Ilya can taste everything he's too scared to say.

©

Everything is fine.

Sweat beads from Shane's hairline, the sudden coolness on his skin waking him up before he registers the jolt of pain zipping across his abdomen and lower back. He sucks in a breath, eyes snapping open and staring at Ilya's sleeping silhouette.

Everything is fucking *fine*.

He sits up the best he can without outright jostling Ilya. Breathing—he remembers how to do that, remembers the videos he watched about the importance of it and how pain is nothing more than a mental thing at a certain point. The minutes seem to stretch before another sharp pain slices through him, and this time he can't help the way his eyes squeeze shut, the way his mouth falls open and a grunt escapes from his throat.

He gets up, goes to the bathroom just to have some sort of movement in hopes that maybe he's imagining the amount of pain that is flooding him. He knows what it means, but it all seems too soon. There's no fucking way this is happening right now.

Ilya is awake within the second, his curls wild on one side of his head and flat on the other. Across the hallway, the room floods with warm light as the bedside lamp is turned on. Ilya is stumbling into the bathroom, sleep addled eyes falling on Shane. "Shane? What is wrong?"

Shane inhales through his nose, exhales through clenched teeth. Fuck. This is really happening right now. "Fuck. Fuck, *fuck*."

He doesn't have to say anything else for it to click. "Oh, shit. The baby?"

"I think so," Shane manages through another wave of pain.

Ilya snaps into action quickly, bending over to pull on a shirt discarded on the floor and yanking it on. He treks back to the room and the sound of him fumbling through the dresser for sweatpants is loud as he nearly loses his balance as he hurriedly gets dressed before coming back into the bathroom with neatly folded clothes, right from Shane's side of the dresser. He's quick as he helps Shane get into a similar outfit. "Okay," Ilya says out loud, hands on Shane's shoulders, face contorting into a cross between sympathy and a flinch when Shane lets out a gritted huff of pain. "Okay, we are fine, yes?"

"Overnight bag," Shane reminds him, fingers curling into Ilya's arm to steady himself. Everything is *fine*. They have a vague outline of a plan even if it feels fucking useless right now. "Call—call my parents. And then Dr. Yañez."

Ilya nods, sprinting across the hall, plucking his phone from the nightstand and tapping away and then leaving the room. When he comes back he has one of the straps over his shoulder, the bag swinging as he uses a hand on the small of Shane's back to guide him out of the bathroom. Shane can make out the sound of his mom's tired voice on the other end of the line once it connects. "Yuna, I think the baby is coming tonight." There's a gasp and then some commotion and then Ilya's voice again. "Yes, Sainte Joseph Hospital. I will send you the address." He hangs up at looks at Shane, cups his face with his hand. "Your parents are on their way."

It's a little over a two hour drive, maybe less without traffic. They only have a three hour window before he's going to have the c-section—that's *if* they fully use that window. For all he knows, it'll be in less time than that that he'll be wheeled into an operation room. "They're gonna miss it—"

"No," Ilya says over him, calm and quickly. "They will be there. It will be okay."

All Shane can do is nod, panic starting to web through his veins as they leave the apartment, met with the darkness of an early moment, the world at a standstill. Ilya speaks with Dr. Yañez on the phone, thanks her about thirty times before hanging up and letting Shane know that she is informing the hospital of their arrival and that things are okay.

The panic manifests itself as silence. Shane is stuck in his head, everything sort of a fucking hazy blur, so distant from reality that he can barely make out Ilya's encouraging words, his hand sticking to the back of Shane's head as he drives one handed to pet him like a spooked animal. He's not far from it, and he probably looks just as terrified.

"Sweetheart," Ilya says loudly, pulling Shane from where he's staring out the windshield, doing his best to breathe through another sharp wave of pain. "I need you to talk to me, okay? What is going on in your head, *lyubov moya*? I need to know."

"I don't know," Shane manages to say. "I'm freaking out."

"That's okay," Ilya is quick to assure, face bathed by a green light. "I am freaking out too, yes? This is... fucking crazy."

It makes Shane laugh, even if it's nothing more than a huff of air cut off by a particularly strong stretch of pain. When he says nothing, Ilya moves the hand on the back of his head down, holding Shane's hand and bringing it up to kiss at his knuckles. It's enough of a distraction for Shane to close his eyes, waiting for the next wave of nearly crippling pain.

He's not sure how he does it, whether it's simply instinct or his mind blacking out in hopes to spare him from some stress, but eventually he's in a hospital gown, lying on a reclined bed with the stale sanitary smell of a hospital room suffocating his senses and a million patches and wires taped to his belly. It brings him back to the present, blinking as a nurse kindly explains that she's going to hook him up to some IVs, and that they'll continue with the epidural in about fifty to sixty minutes, about an hour and a half before he's due for his c-section.

At the mention of needles, Ilya stands up from where he was sitting, crammed beside Shane on the bed. "IVs?"

"He's not good with needles," Shane explains to the nurse before lolling his head to look at Ilya. "If you pass out I'm gonna fucking kill you."

Ilya's mouth opens to argue before he's nodding, giving up altogether. "I will go stand in the corner."

"Good choice," Shane says, rolling his eyes when Ilya does in fact go stand in the corner like Blair Witch, only moving when the nurse loudly announces that she's done.

The pain medication takes way too fucking long to kick in. Every part of Shane's back, abdomen, spine, entire being feels like it's being ripped at the fucking seams. He manages to lay on his side, eyes squeezed shut as the contractions get closer together.

Ilya sits at the side of the bed, having pulled a chair closer to be able to hold Shane's hand, his lips pressed to his knuckles and his eyebrows knitted in concern as Shane lets out another noise of pain muffled as he turns his face into the pillow. "I am sorry—"

"You fucking should be," Shane snaps, the pain now manifesting itself in anger instead of silence. "God—*fuck*. Fuck, you're never fucking me again. I'm never letting you fucking touch me again—" he's cut off by another contraction, the breath punched out of his lungs as he crushes Ilya's hand in his own to ground himself.

"Ow—ow," Ilya practically whimpers, face pinched in pain, matching Shane's expression. "Okay, okay! I will never touch you again—"

"Fuck you fuck you *fuck you*," Shane nearly shouts, only dampened by his gritted teeth. "I fucking hate you—I hate you so much—" For a moment, the pain subsides and he can catch his breath again, sagging into the bed with guilt, easing his hold on Ilya's hand. His mouth is dry, voice cracking as he talks again. "I don't hate you, I'm sorry. I like you a lot—too much, I think. I didn't mean that."

Ilya gives him a small smile, wincing when Shane's hand tightens again. He reaches up with his other hand to move Shane's hair out of his face, trails his touch down to thumb at his freckles. "I know. You can hate me for a little bit, yes? I think you are allowed to right now."

Another contraction seizes Shane and he's cussing Ilya out before he can stop himself. Luckily, the pain medication starts to do it's fucking job after an almost endless cycle of Shane berating Ilya, swearing that he's never going to have sex again, and then the guilt that takes place when Ilya keeps kissing him, telling him that he understands.

Slowly, the pain subsides into something still painful, but more bearable. Shane is able to lay back with the bed reclined, dozing off while Ilya flips through the few TV channels offered before settling on a movie. He laughs out loud, tapping his thumb against Shane's where their hands are intertwined on top of the small space of the bed between them.

"Shane," he says, pointing at the TV with the remote. "The Mighty Ducks!"

Shane cracks an eye open only to find his comfort movie playing. They've missed the first fifteen minutes, but it's still early enough that they can enjoy it. For the first time that night, he smiles, barely the corner of his mouth tilting up, but enough for Ilya to notice and turn the volume up.

The combination of Ilya's comfort as well as the movie playing is just enough for the epidural to not send him into a full fledged panic. A nurse comes in with a careful smile and announces that she will be performing the epidural. The moment Ilya sees the thick needle, his eyes widen.

Before Shane can tell him he can go stand in the corner again, Ilya is slouching over until his chin is touching the bed, his face close to Shane's that's resting against the pillow, on his side as the nurse works on getting him prepped for the injection.

It's a funny angle, seeing Ilya so close like this. Shane smiles lazily, exhaustion creeping up on him. "Hey," he says.

Ilya laughs softly, his breath hitting Shane's face. "Hello. Do you come here often?"

"Oh, we're doing pick up lines now, Rozanov?" Shane teases, tensing up slightly when he can hear the cap of the needle coming off.

Ilya shrugs, the back of his knuckles caressing Shane's cheek. "I am, how do they say... shooting my shot?"

Shane laughs out loud, pressing his lips together when the nurse tells him to please hold still. His eyes dance across Ilya's face and he knows he probably looks as love sick as he feels. He doesn't care, not right now. "Think you shot your shot pretty well. I'm literally about to have your baby."

Ilya shrugs, a loose smile tilting the corner of his mouth up. "Or maybe I am just lucky."

The nurse counts down from five and Shane holds his breath, closes his eyes and focuses on the way Ilya is telling him that he's doing a great job. The pain is fleeting and then muted, and he's being told it's done just as quickly as it had began.

After that, he's completely numb from his abdomen down. It's a weird feeling, but he's mostly grateful to no longer be completely undone by the nearly excruciating pain that was coursing through him. Ilya seems somewhat grateful too, no longer being Shane's stress toy during particularly painful waves.

Shane dozes off for what seems like an hour but can only be at most ten minutes before the door is opening and then he hears the familiar gasp he's grown up listening to. "Mom," he says before he can even open his eyes.

"Oh, sweetie," Yuna says, voice thick as she hurries to hug him the best she can given his position. She places a kiss to his forehead, and holds his face in her hands. "How are you feeling?"

"Just got the epidural," Shane tells her. "I feel fine, I think. You guys got here fast."

"I let your mom drive," David says, jerking his thumb at Yuna. "I'm pretty sure she broke every traffic law."

"But we got here, didn't we?" she defends before pausing, her eyes landing on Ilya. "How are *you* feeling?"

Ilya blinks, pointing at himself. "*Me?* I am fine. Your son almost broke my hand, but is okay. It was for good reason."

David laughs, clapping Ilya on the back. "The grip strength on them is unreal. I think Yuna actually dislocated my thumb when she was having contractions."

It isn't until his mom gives him some space that Shane's eyes widen in horror. "Mom, what the *hell*?"

Yuna looks down at her t-shirt with the large **GLAM-MA** printed on it, no longer covered by her cardigan. "What? It was a gift!"

When Shane desperately looks at his dad, he's mortified to find **G-DOG** staring back at him in big and bold letters. "Really? You too?"

"It seemed on theme," David explains with a shrug.

"I think they look very nice," Ilya beams. "Like true grandparents. Like a *true* Glamma and G-dog."

The argument on the tip of Shane's tongue doesn't get a chance to come out before a doctor is coming in and the ball really starts to get rolling.

And everything is *fine*.



The only thing distracting Shane is how stupid Ilya looks with a hair net over his curls and the other sanitary garments they made him put on before coming into the operating room. He looks out of place, squatting beside Shane to keep their eyes locked. It doesn't feel like much as they work on him, the scene completely blocked off by a light blue sheet. He doesn't *want* to know what they're doing to him down there—he's perfectly happy with the way Ilya is looking at him like he's the only thing left on earth.

"You are incredible," Ilya whispers, lips moving against the back of Shane's hand clutched in his. His other hand cups Shane's face, thumb tracing circles into his temple. "And you are so brave."

Shane nearly says *shut up*, but he can't find it in himself to banter with Ilya staring at him, eyes glistening more than normal. Surrounded by medical professionals and being split open, Shane can't help but think about how in love he is, and how much he wants to be loved just as much.

He never gets a chance to say what he's thinking, what he wants to let slip. The muted sensation of tugging at his abdomen is constant, and then gone.

A high pitched cry sounds, and all the love feels so much heavier.



Stitched up and nearly delirious with exhaustion even after a six hour nap, Shane can't help but feel like maybe this is some extension of a dream. Sitting on a hospital bed, holding something—*someone*—that used to be nestled inside him only hours ago. Dark, nearly full head of hair, the color matching his own. Rosy cheeks, a toothless mouth that stretches open as they yawn. The fingernails on their small hands even smaller than he thought was possible.

Eyes that seem to be on the lighter side—maybe the same color as Ilya's, if they don't change in the next couple of months.

Beside him, Ilya is slotted into the limited space of the hospital bed. His head is leaning on Shane's shoulder, his eyes yet to leave the baby. When Shane had woken up, he wondered if Ilya had slept at all. He had been holding the baby, pacing the room carefully as he rocked it in his arms, and had been in nearly the same position when Shane opened his eyes again.

He gets it, though. The slight disbelief, the inability to look away from something created between the two of them.

The click of a photo being taken forces Shane's attention away from Ilya's profile, and he turns to find his mom and dad coming back from the sandwich shop across the street. His mom bashfully smiles, lowering her phone.

"Sorry, it was a good photo opportunity!" she explains like she hadn't already taken a thousand photos of the baby and Ilya and Shane. Her face softens as she takes in the sight and Shane goes back to pressing his finger against the small palm, smiling when the fingers wrap around him. "Tell us the name again."

"Mom," Shane whines, earning a chuckle from Ilya beside him. "We already told you like four times—"

"I want to hear it again!" she insists.

This time, it's Ilya that answers. "Adelina Mai Hollander-Rozanov."

Yuna's smile tightens as she dabs at the inner corner of her eyes, doing nothing to hide the tear that slips down anyway. "So beautiful. Oh, boys, she's *so beautiful*."

Shane can excuse their horrendous shirts for the time being. He tilts his chin toward the sink on the opposite wall. "Go wash your hands and you can hold her while we eat." Yuna is quick on her feet, shoving the sleeves of her cardigan past her elbow and scrubbing away at her hands. "Twenty seconds, warm water," he reminds her.

"And you think it is okay for kids to eat dirt," Ilya mumbles under his breath, raising his eyebrows when Shane kicks him the best he can. "Wow. And you are hitting me while I hold our daughter. You have no shame, Hollander."

Yuna swoops in quickly, fanning her hands dry and reaching out for the baby—*Adelina*. Ilya hesitates slightly before adjusting her, one hand on the back of her neck and the entirety of his other hand taking up her back as he hands her over. "Make sure you are holding her neck," he says.

Yuna gives him an amused smile before taking Adelina in her arms, her eyes widening. "Oh, wow. She's heavy."

"Ten pounds," Shane tells her, leaning back as Ilya hooks an arm around his shoulder, bringing him closer. "Which, I mean, we sort of figured she'd be pretty big, but she's actually

pretty—" he's about to say *small* until he gets a good look at his mom holding her. He blinks once and then twice. "Holy shit. I thought she was small."

"What? She is very small," Ilya is quick to say, gesturing to Yuna and then pausing too. "Yuna. You are making our baby girl look big."

"Well, she's pretty big, honey," Yuna says with a small laugh, adjusting Adelina in her arms. "Oh, Shane. I know I already said it but she looks so much like you did when you were born..." She trails off, her smile soft as she looks down at the baby. "Has she eaten?"

"Ilya did skin-to-skin and fed her a little bit ago," Shane tells her as David hands them over their sandwiches. "They gave us a bunch of formula and a rundown on how to make it."

"We also brought you some more essentials," David says, moving over to the sink to wash his hands. "We dropped them off at the apartment and we cleaned up a bit so you two didn't have to worry about that stuff when you go back home."

"And we booked a hotel nearby just in case you need anything from us," Yuna informs them as she hands over Adelina to David who beams, cradling her and bouncing her.

As much as Shane wants to say it's not necessary, he won't deny the extra help offered. So, he thanks them after Ilya does and fucks up his sandwich, having missed the taste of deli meat more than he thought he would.

Eventually, Adelina starts crying, a lower pitched whine that Ilya immediately jumps into action upon hearing, bee-lining to the sink and counting out loud to twenty as he washes his hands. David is already handing her over by the time Ilya is in his space, pausing before glancing between Yuna and David and Shane.

"Ehm," he says, his cheeks turning a rosy pink that matches their daughter's flushed face. "I think I will do skin-to-skin right now if that is okay."

Yuna blinks before jumping slightly. "Oh! Yeah, of course! We should probably stop at the hotel anyway and get some sleep."

With that, her and David are giving Ilya a hug the best they can with the baby in the way, and petting Adelina's head fondly before hugging and kissing Shane goodbye. They're alone again, but this time Shane is awake to watch as Ilya holds Adelina in one arm (sort of like a football) and maneuvers to take off his shirt very skillfully with the other hand.

He sits on the wooden and padded bench offered beneath the window overlooking the streets of the city, leaning back against the wall and adjusting Adelina against his bare chest. Soon, her cries quiet down, and with her cheek mashed into his skin, she falls asleep.

Ilya is quiet as he looks down at her, the corner of his mouth tilted up slightly. His hand pats her back in a steady rhythm before faltering, his face slowly pinching in thought.

"What's on your mind?" Shane asks after a bit.

Ilya's mouth tightens, his chest rising and falling as he inhales. "I am thinking about my father."

"Oh," Shane blinks. "Do... do you want to tell him—?"

"No," Ilya is quick to say, shaking his head. "I do not want him to know. Ever, maybe. He does not deserve to see her." He's quiet for nearly a minute. "I used to make a lot of excuses for him, but... I don't know. I cannot understand how he could put his hands on his own children." He places a kiss to the crown of Adelina's head, her dark hair brushing against his mouth. "I will not let him ruin another beautiful thing."

Shane nods, understanding. He doesn't say anything, content with letting Ilya have his space and his moment, stepping into fatherhood headfirst and steadfast. Again, he's hit with the swell of love, only love.



A day and a half later, the three of them are released from the hospital with a list of self-care instructions and the good news that Shane is healthy and, if he ever wants to again, he'll be able to carry a pregnancy again at some point in the future. That's a thought for some other day, though.

Shane is wheeled out by a nurse while Ilya walks alongside, holding the car seat in one hand with Adelina strapped in, sleeping in her Snoopy onesie that fits her a little loose considering she doesn't have as much chub as Shane did when he was born. Still, she's got some rolls on her arms and legs, so she's by no means a small baby. In fact, she was sort of a bit of a spectacle in the time they were still admitted.

Returning to the apartment feels otherworldly. Everything is the same, the only difference being the empty sink and cleaned up living room thanks to Shane's parents, but it feels so, *so* different. There's a wave of silence as the front door closes and Ilya places the car seat on the dining table. Adelina blinks, her eyes focused on nothing. Ilya and Shane blink back at her.

"So," Ilya drawls. "What do we do?"

"I don't know," Shane says back. "We don't really, like... *know* her, do we?"

Ilya opens his mouth to protest before shutting it. "Well, fuck. We brought a stranger into our home."

There's a pause before they're laughing, leaning into each other. Shane flinches, the staples of the incision pulling against his skin and making him wince with a sharp breath. "Fuck—don't make me laugh, asshole."

"Sorry," Ilya says, actually sounding sort of apologetic. He clears his throat, pressing a hand to his chest and speaking loudly. "Hello, Adelina. I am your papa, that is your dad. You are stuck with us now, *da?*"

"We're sort of new at this," Shane tells her. "And, uh, you were sort of not planned. Like, at *all*—"

"Do not tell her that, Hollander!"

"What, it's true," Shane shrugs only to be elbowed. "Um, anyway. This sort of wasn't part of the plan at all, but we're gonna do our best."

"Yes," Ilya agrees, bumping his shoulder against Shane's. "We will."

No one talks about how weird it is to bring a baby home. Three hours later and they're still trying to figure out what to do other than watch her sleep. Shane is sitting on the sofa, holding her in one arm while he scrolls through his phone in the other. Ilya comes back from the bathroom, tugging something on top of Shane's head and startling him.

"What the fuck?" Shane says, reaching up to grab whatever object was placed on him and blinking when he finds a familiar hat with words embroidered onto it. "You *asshole*—"

Ilya beams down at him, wearing his own. **#1 Dad.** "I did not forget about this, do not worry."

"I wasn't worried at all," Shane mumbles, swatting Ilya's hand when he goes to put the hat on him again. "I'm not wearing that shit, quit it."

"But I was going to send a picture to the guys," Ilya explains with a pout that he is too goddamn old to be sporting. "This will be funny—*please*, Shane. Just one picture."

Shane grumbles, only complying because Adelina starts to squirm, alerting that they only have a matter of time before she wakes up and starts fussing for a bottle. "Fine. Hurry up."

He plops the hat on his head as Ilya sits beside him, angling the camera up to get the three of them into frame. Shane gives a closed mouth smile at the camera and a thumbs up while Ilya smiles, all teeth and dimples.

Ilya

[Image Attached]

we have new teammate! adelina mai holland-rosanov. she is very needy but be nice to her we would like her to stick around, fuckers.

Bood

Congrats guys!

J.J.

Wow! So beautiful! Congrats Shane and Rosanov!

Cliff

nooo she's coming 4 my position hahahahahahaha

im screwed hahaha

congrats!

Wyatt

Rozzy you're looking very daddy-esque

Dykstra

nooo i lost the fucking bet

Hayden

Fuuuuck.

I think Rozanov won.

©

The first week passes slowly, sleep deprivation making reality seem like its bleeding into some other completely fabricated world. But it's all real, Shane knows it's all real. He can very clearly hear that it is real as Adelina wakes them up at two in the morning even though she had already woken them up at midnight for a diaper change.

Shane blinks away the heavy exhaustion, sitting up carefully to keep himself from opening the incision. Ilya is doing the same, turning on the light and sitting up to reach over into the bassinet that tends to stay on his side of the bed. He takes Adelina out and hushes her, Russian heavy on his tongue through his tone laced with sleepiness.

"I think she is hungry," he says, handing her over when Shane gestures for him to do so. "I will go make her a bottle."

Shane makes a noise that he hopes Ilya takes as *alright* instead of *whatever*. It all probably sounds the same and Ilya probably doesn't even care. He talks to Adelina while Ilya is in the kitchen, mostly about nothing or whatever comes to his mind first. Right now, it's the rules of overtime for the NHL specifically.

Ilya comes back, shaking the bottle and then dripping some milk on the back of his hand before nodding. He sits at the edge of the bed and holds his free hand out. "Here, I will feed her."

"It's alright, I got it," Shane tells him, getting adjusted with his back against the headboard before taking the bottle. She latches easily, gulping down the milk without hesitation, her fussing immediately soothed. "Try getting some sleep."

Ilya hums but doesn't oblige. Instead, he settles beside Shane, pressing a kiss to his bare shoulder and watching Adelina eat. After a stretched silence, he says, "I was thinking maybe

I am done with hockey."

Shane nearly drops the bottle, snapping his head to look at Ilya with wide eyes. "What? What do you mean? Why?"

Instead of saying *just kidding*, Ilya laughs. "What? It is not a big deal—"

"But you love hockey," Shane says over him. "You don't have to, like, quit."

"Shane," Ilya says slowly. "I like hockey, yes. But it is... it was never more than something I was good at. Something that made my father pay a little more attention to me. I have things that are more important now." He glances at Adelina, touching her ear with the tip of his finger. "Things that I love more."

Shane presses his lips together, guilt starting to prickle beneath his skin. He knows they talked about him going back to playing for the next academic year. They also talked about Ilya staying at home with the baby, taking classes so he could make the time work. He didn't realize that would mean hockey would have to be given up as well. "I can't ask you to do that."

"You are not asking me," Ilya tells him. "It is something that I want. But if you did ask me, I would do it, too."

"I wouldn't ask you to," Shane says quickly and Ilya smiles.

"Yes, I know. You would like to play hard with me on the ice as long as you can, no?"

Shane ignores the innuendo. "Well, yeah. I'd want to do anything with you as long as I can."

Ilya blinks. "Do you mean this?"

"Yeah, of course," Shane nods, looking at Adelina as she starts to slow down her feeding, nearly full and content. "If I can have you in my life forever, I'd be happy."

For a moment, nothing is said. Shane doesn't look up, too nervous to gauge Ilya's reaction to the closest to a confession Shane can get without outright just saying it.

"Ya tebya lyublyu."

Shane hums in curiosity. "What does that mean?"

A beat of silence fills the little space between them. Then, Ilya's voice bleeds into the gaps. "I love you."

"You hear that?" Shane whispers, running a finger down Adelina's small nose, smiling when she scrunches at the affection. "Papa says he loves you."

"No, Hollander," Ilya says, voice cracking. "I love *you*."

Shane turns his head, eyes finding Ilya's, the wetness bright even with the little light offered. His mouth falls open, heart caught in his throat. "Holy shit."

"I mean—"

"I love you too," Shane says before Ilya can do something stupid take it back.

Ilya lets out a wet laugh, his head falling against Shane's shoulder, mouth pressing against his skin. "Fuck—*fuck*. I love you so much." He straightens up, careful as he slots their mouths together, kissing Shane until their parting for air.

"We're doing this all backwards," Shane whispers with a slanted smile.

Ilya shrugs and then shakes his head. "Maybe. Or maybe this is the right way for us."

Shane's chest twists with affection, every part of him filled to the brim with love he didn't know was possible. It nearly chokes him as he looks at Ilya who is staring at him with just as much adoration. "You really love me?"

"Don't remind me," Ilya teases, his smile soft. "It is a little embarrassing."

"Yeah, well. We can share the embarrassment."

"Because you love me too," Ilya finishes with a bright grin.

Shane huffs out a laugh even though his exhaustion is gone and forgotten as he nods. "Yeah, I do."

Chapter End Notes

no one better get upset at ilya for choosing his baby over hockey bc u know damn well he'd do it in a heartbeat!! EVERYONE BE NICE TO ME AND SHANE AND ILYA 🤝🤝

► MORE NOTES

kudos + comments appreciated!! i will see you for the epilogue in the foreseeable(?) future

Chapter 8: Epilogue. Spring, Summer, Fall (You Were Standing Tall)

Chapter Summary

3-12 months.

Chapter Notes

wow. so, this is the end of cinnamon bread! how crazy, it's been such a fun journey writing this and receiving so much love and support. mpreg has never really been my cup of tea but i've grown so fond of it as i've written this. i hope everyone has enjoyed it and enjoys this last chapter too! endings are never easy, but i do think this one is sweet :)

thank you so much to my dear beta lizzie that has taken the time to read over and be so kind about all my spelling errors and confusing sentences. u are the wheels that keep me turning <3

and special thank you to tosh who has been so, so kind in answering my questions about the russian language and translating for me, you are so appreciated! P.S you can click on the longer russian phrases and there will be translations BUT U NEED TO HAVE UR WORK SKINS ON! thank you to everyone on twt who was kind enough to provide me with some coding help/links!

these will be like little vignettes as we follow them along for the first year of parenthood. just a lot of slice of life and fluff :)

► [CLICK HERE FOR MORE NOTES](#)

enjoy! :)

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

3 Months

The reflection of water bounces across Adelina's face, her eyes going wide in wonder and amazement and her legs kicking out behind her in excitement. Shane can't help but laugh under his breath, poking at the sensory mat where there's a plastic fish trapped beneath the surface, swirling with his prodding touch. It gets her attention and she coos, a strand of drool hanging from her bottom lip as her eyes lock on the new curiosity.

Shane's mouth is tilted up in an absent smile, watching her with both adoration and amusement. Her hair is dark, the color of Shane's, and wavy. Ilya says his hair used to be like that too, so it's only a matter of time before her curls matching her father's start to come through. She has Ilya's eye color too, so light they're almost green. Though, the rest of her features resemble more of Shane, or at least that's what they're told by every single one of their friends.

Shane adjusts himself to keep his neck from straining as it's propped up on his hand. He's lying on the floor on his side—the best position for joining tummy time, or at least that's what he thinks. Ilya usually argues that the best position is on his own belly so he can understand what she's seeing better.

"You'd probably like aquariums," Shane tells her.

"Aaaahh," Addie coos.

"Right?" he nods, glad that she agrees. "I'll tell Papa."

"Tell Papa what?" Ilya asks, pushing his curls out of his face, slicking the hair damp from his shower back as he comes into the living room, shirtless and wearing only sweatpants. When he catches Shane boldly checking him out, he winks. His attention is quickly stolen when Addie starts to kick her legs more excitedly, her gummy mouth opening as she squeals—the reaction usually given when Ilya is back in her sight. Object permanence is a pretty interesting thing. "*Ah, moy pomidor! Ya tozhe po tebe skuchal!*" Ah, my tomato! I missed you too!

While he barely started catching onto some words in the last few months, Shane's Russian is nowhere near fluent. He knows some things though, mostly because Ilya chooses to quiz him on the most random words he can think of. For the most part Shane relies on learning alongside Adelina. Though, after reading up on dual language and the importance of each parent speaking in their favored language, he knows she's not really *learning* so much as being exposed to it and developing it as a secondary language.

Anyway, he tries his best. "Tomato?"

"*Da*," Ilya nods proudly, sitting on the other side of the sensory mat and giving in when Addie coos at him again, picking her up and kissing her chubby cheek with enough force to make her lips squish together. "What about the rest, hm?"

"No fucking clue," Shane admits, ignoring Ilya's glare. He knows he's gotta start working on his cursing habits.

"I said I missed her too," Ilya says, letting her grasp at his curls. "You said 'I'll tell Papa', what were you going to tell me?"

"You think she'd like the aquarium?" Shane asks, pushing himself up with ease. With the staples out and the incision already healed, it's been easier to go about his motions like he used to before Addie was in the picture. He's back to weightlifting, back on the ice, back to

sprinting on the treadmill without feeling like he might die of heat exhaustion. Admittedly, life has been good. *So fucking good.*

Ilya's eyebrows crease, making a face that says *fucking duh*. "She would *love* the aquarium, why have we not thought of this before? Find tickets, Hollander. We should go tomorrow."

As good as an idea as that sounds, Shane knows that's not convenient. His latest class runs until five, and he knows Ilya has a paper due that is probably going to take up the majority of his evening. "How about Friday? Your class got canceled, right? I only have my 8AM class, and I'm free after, like, ten. We could go in the afternoon."

"That is a better idea," Ilya nods, wincing when Addie grabs a chunk of his hair just above his ear and yanks. "*Oy! Ostorozhney, Delya.*" Ouch! Gentle/careful

"Hm. Careful?" Shane tries. That one sounds familiar. Ilya's usually saying it after he gets a smack to the face or nearly scalped.

"*Da,*" Ilya nods, rubbing at the sore spot on his head and redirecting Addie's hand when she goes to grab his hair again, but not before planting a kiss to the center of her small palm. "Maybe we should not reward her with the aquarium."

Addie presses her lips together, blowing something of a raspberry, coating Ilya's face in droplets of spit. Shane doesn't even try hiding his grin. "I think that means *fuck off.*"



They make good on their plans, and that Friday they drive to the aquarium in Shane's Jeep despite Ilya's constant berating of the vehicle. And with both of them being stubborn at heart, the argument lasts nearly an hour until Addie starts to get fussy and they're forced to compromise. The car-seat is still in Shane's car, and they have yet to buy a second one, so it's more convenient to choose the Jeep. Though, Ilya makes it a point to order an additional car-seat when he's sitting in the passenger seat grumbling about something while Shane gets Addie all buckled in.

The parking lot isn't too packed when they arrive. Shane manages to find a parking spot near the middle and soon he's getting the stroller out of the back while Ilya gets Addie out of her car-seat. It's a bit of a hassle, getting the stroller out and unfolded, and soon Ilya is hovering at his side, Addie seated in the baby carrier strapped to his chest, her dark and wavy hair covered by the small bucket hat with Miffy on it and a streak of sunscreen lingering on her chubby cheek.

His nose is scrunched as he squints against the sun even behind his sunglasses, his hand coming up to cover Addie's face like she isn't wearing a hat to already shield her from the brightness. Shane doesn't point out that if Ilya wore his hat the right instead of backwards way he wouldn't have to be squinting, mostly because he's also sporting a backwards cap and doesn't want to be called a hypocrite. Not that Ilya would outright say it—it would most likely come in the form of his eyebrows raised with a very unimpressed look.

"Do you need help?" he asks after Shane manages to wrangle the stroller out of the trunk.

"I got it, baby," Shane says absentmindedly, lips tight as he unfolds it and locks it into place before it can collapse in on itself. He makes a mental note to look up the best strollers for convenience—he's getting tired of having to do all of these extra steps when he knows there are better options out there. When he looks up, Ilya is staring at him with an unreadable expression. Shane furrows his eyebrows. "What? Should I put the stroller back?"

"No," Ilya says after a moment. "She will probably want to nap in a little bit."

Shane nods and pushes it along, smiling to himself when Ilya lets him walk in front only to smack his ass a second later.

Children under the age of five get in free, so they only pay for two. Ilya doesn't even try pretending like he isn't delighted by this, telling Shane they should see where else she can get in for free as if it's something dire that needs to be taken advantage of immediately.

As much as Shane wants to tease him about being stingy, he knows that it's with good reason. After Addie was born, he had sat down with Shane and admitted that he was putting aside a hefty amount of money his father was sending to him. All the extra money has been going into a savings account with a stupid amount of interest, and after graduation, he has plans to cut his family off for good.

He would have done it sooner, he claims, but he's "being smart about it" and bleeding his father dry while he can. Shane can't even pretend like it isn't a decent idea, especially when Ilya mentions that he opened a savings for Addie as well, something she could have once she turned eighteen and got to choose what she wanted to do with her life. He isn't too prideful to pretend like the planning hadn't turned him on and he was on his knees within the second to let Ilya know that it was a very, *very* good and appreciated plan.

With this comes Ilya budgeting more than he ever has in his life. Thus, being thrilled about their daughter getting into places for free, like she isn't already costing them thousands a month. Though, Shane is sure they can agree that it's the best money they've spent in their lives, and worth every penny.

The thought comes to him tenfold as they enter the aquarium, the light coming in from above the water around them drenching them in blue hues, the gleam of white light rippling across their faces and the floor as creatures swim above and around them. Addie's eyes widen more than Shane knew was possible and her mouth drops, the corner of her mouth tilting up in a gummy smile as she starts to kick her legs in excitement, the heels of her socked feet hitting Ilya in his abdomen.

"Super cool, right?" Shane says, walking beside Ilya as they get closer to one of the walls where a school of fish is lingering. "Kind of like your sensory mat but, like... real, you know?"

Addie makes a sound between a coo and a grunt, leaning forward the best she can despite the restraint of her carrier. Her hands come up, opening and closing until Ilya is getting closer, letting her press her palm to the clear wall. She kicks again, a series of excited noises coming out so rapidly, she knocks her hat off.

Shane is quick to bend over to retrieve it, tossing it into the basket at the bottom of the stroller and leaning against the handle as he watches her watch the fish in amazement. He glances up and finds Ilya looking down at her too, his dimple visible as he smiles at her.

"*Da, eto rybki. Oni zhivut v vode i plavayut, ochen' zdorovo,*" Yes, those are fish. They live in the water and swim, very cool. Ilya says, voice gentle as he speaks to her. Her palm hits the glass again and Ilya takes it in his own, engulfing her small fist. "*Ostorozhney.*" Careful/gentle

Again, Shane can recognize *careful* but other than that, he's content with talking to Addie in his own way. Showing her how to touch the glass gently, pointing out what fish he knows and can name and listening intently as Ilya translates them into Russian. She's completely enamored by all the things there are to look at, and they take their time showing her every square inch offered.

They pause their wandering about halfway through when Ilya has to go to the bathroom, taking Addie with him to change her diaper and kill two birds with one stone. Shane waits outside the bathroom, texting his mom and sending her some photos he took of Addie staring up in amazement or blinking when Shane tried to get her attention from behind the camera.

When Ilya comes back out, Addie is out of the carrier and being held in his arms instead. He tosses the carrier in the stroller and gestures toward where people are gathering to look at a passing by shark. "I can take her and the stroller over there so she does not miss the sharks and stingray."

"Cool," Shane nods, squeezing Ilya's bicep in appreciation as he heads for the bathroom. "I'll meet you over there when I'm done."

It's easy to spot Ilya and Addie when he gets out of the restroom. His eyes fall on them immediately, an instinct or habit, he's not too sure, but he finds himself smiling at the sheer sight of them. That same smile falters only a second later when he takes in the tight smile on Ilya's face and the woman talking to him.

Shane hesitates, walking slowly to catch the conversation to be sure that this is really what's happening. The closer Shane gets, the more certain he is that she's flirting with Ilya. Or, at least doing her best to flirt with him while he holds a baby that is more focused on trying to shove his sunglasses hanging from the collar of his shirt into her mouth.

"She has so much hair!" the woman says, her smile wide and beaming, her hand reaching out to touch Ilya's wrist. He shifts, moving Addie to hold her with both arms occupied, one hand under her bottom and the other across her back in something of an attempt to shield her from whatever is going on. "And she got your curls!"

"Ah, yes," Ilya chuckles awkwardly, reaching to swiftly grab his sunglasses from Addie's grasp before she can drool all over them.

"And your eyes," the woman continues, tilting her head to the side. She's pretty, Shane can admit that. It makes his stomach feel hollow and aflame. "Wow, if she looks anything like you when she grows up she's going to be so beautiful."

Before Shane can swoop in and do something stupid, Ilya is quickly saying: "She looks like my boyfriend very much, so yes, she is very beautiful."

The lady blinks, her mouth gaping and quickly shutting into a tight smile as she composes herself. "O-oh. Is that so?"

Shane takes it as his cue to cut in, smiling when Addie spots him and starts to make delighted noises, nearly throwing herself away from Ilya and reaching out for Shane with her chubby fists opening and closing. He tries not to look as smug as he feels when Ilya hands him Addie with a grin, glancing at the woman as he says, "Ah, there he is! I was just telling this nice woman that Adelina gets her look from you."

"Half of them," Shane says, a blush burning his cheeks. He looks at the lady and gives her a small smile, feeling sort of bad, knowing she's probably mortified. He hadn't meant to embarrass her, but this is *his*... boyfriend. And their daughter. And their life—no one else's. He isn't willing to share something so precious.

"Well," she says with a small laugh. "You two have a beautiful family."

"Thank you," Shane tells her sincerely, and with that she's off and Addie is reaching for Ilya again. "Here, baby. I think she wants you again." And if he says it a little louder than normal, he won't admit it. Ilya raises an eyebrow like he knows but Shane ignores him in favor of some teasing of his own. "Boyfriend, huh? Is that what we are?"

Ilya blinks at him, mouth hanging open as his eyes flicker to Shane and then Addie and then back. He points at her. "We have a baby together. We share a bed every night—I kiss you, I fuck you, I tell you I love you. You call me *baby*, let me fuck you, and tell me you love me, too. What the fuck did you think we were doing?"

"Co-parenting," Shane teases even though his chest is fluttering. Of course he had known they were something more, something serious, but hearing *boyfriend* for the first time coming right out of Ilya Rozanov's mouth (not known for doing anything close to committing), is a bit fucking surreal. "It was just, um. It was nice to hear, that's all."

Ilya's face softens, his eyes dancing across Shane's face before closing the space between them and pressing a firm but quick kiss to his mouth. "It was nice to say." He pauses before he starts to grin. "It was nice to hear *baby* too."

Shane smiles back. "Yeah, well. It was nice to say."



Between the hockey season starting and Shane adjusting to his time back on the ice, it really doesn't cross his mind that technically, *technically*, Shane and Ilya still have one more person to tell about their child.

Well, that's not all that true. Coach Wiebe knows about Shane's pregnancy. He even asked Shane how the baby was when Shane was back in his office, hoping that he meant it when he said he wanted Shane back for the season as soon as he was cleared to be on the ice. It was a

simple conversation, Wiebe being a man of privacy and respect. He had asked how the baby was and Shane told him she was great and healthy and Wiebe asked how him and his partner were adjusting and Shane said they were actually adjusting pretty well and that was that.

Wiebe hadn't mentioned his partner again, not when he had bigger things to worry about, like the fact that Rozanov would not be returning for what was technically his last season of hockey. This, he *did* ask Shane about, his curiosity getting the best of him as he pulled Shane into his office right before their first scheduled practice and asked if he, by chance, knew what "personal obligations" Rozanov had that made him step away from the sport entirely.

And really, it wasn't Shane's place to give up Ilya's personal information like that, even if that personal information had everything to do with him and their whole daughter carved from each of their ribs, DNA, fiber of their beings. So, he had said he didn't know and again, that was that and nothing more.

Realistically, he knew the time would come eventually to let Wiebe know. He just didn't think it'd be *now*, right in the middle of practice.

"Hollzy," Wyatt whistles from his post, pointing a gloved hand toward the boards and the shielding. "Your boy's here!"

Before Shane can turn his head, he hears Coach Wiebe's voice drenched in confusion booming throughout the ice. "*Rozanov?* What the hell—who's goddamn baby is that?!"

Across the ice, Ilya is standing on the other side of the boards, Adelina against his chest in the baby carrier, her cheek pressed against his sternum as she blinks, eyes flitting around the guys starting to whizz toward her with excitement at her first time near the rink.

Ilya's smile is slanted and sheepish as he raises a hand in a lame wave as Coach Wiebe approaches him, seemingly realizing at the same time as Shane what is about to happen. "Hello, coach—"

"Don't *hello* me, son," Wiebe says. "Whose goddamn baby is this?"

Ilya glances at Shane and then Addie and then at Wiebe. "Yes, ah... this goddamn baby is mine."

Wiebe blinks, his eyes widening as the gears start to turn. After a good several seconds of silence, Shane is nervous that smoke may start billowing from his ears. "*Rozanov,*" Wiebe says, stern and blunt. "Is this why you're not on my goddamn roster this year?"

"No more cursing around my baby," Ilya says with a slight crease in his brow and his hands coming up to cover Addie's ears even as she turns her head in protest. When Wiebe's face hardens, he actually answers. "Yes. This is why I could not join the team for my last year."

Wiebe is silent again. Then, he sighs and nods, his face softening the slightest bit. "Well, I can't say I don't understand. It's a lot of responsibility being a new parent, so you gotta do what you gotta do." Ilya gives him a close mouthed smile that says *thanks* without really saying it. Then, Wiebe is asking, "So, do we get to meet mom?"

At this Ilya laughs, head tossed back toward the ceiling, nearly every single one of his teeth on display. Addie smiles, a small *haaa* coming from her mouth like she's trying to mimic Ilya's laughter. Shane chooses this moment to actually approach them, skating the rest of the way to weasel between the guys and try to explain all of this the best he can.

What he doesn't count for is the burst of excitement from Addie the moment he's within view. Her eyes lock in on him and the smile on her face widens when Shane's own smile creeps onto his face, a habit formed out of shared unconditional love. Her legs start to kick almost frantically while she does her best to reach out toward him and he can't help but meet Ilya at the boards, leaning over it to press a quick kiss to her cheek the best he can manage given the wonky angle.

Behind him, Coach Wiebe's voice is flat and distant. "Well, I'll be damned."



4 Months

Already halfway asleep through the seemingly never ending lecture, Shane startles awake when he hears the whine of a baby. He blinks, eyes glancing around the students in front of him only to find a woman—around thirty, if he remembers correctly from one of the only ice breakers they did when the semester started—getting up and holding a car-seat with a newborn baby in it. She's excusing herself while the professor tells her it's really okay and then continues like there was no interruption in the first place.

The woman comes back with her baby only ten minutes later and no one pays her much attention. Except for Shane.

It's all he can think about, every topic being covered completely going over his head as his thoughts trek back to: *you can do that?*

When class is dismissed, Shane lingers in his seats, watching everyone file out hastily, eager to get to their next location. He chews on the corner of his nail until the professor is gathering her things, then he's shooting up and hurrying down to catch her before she's gone.

She smiles when she looks up, hand stilling as she puts a folder in her bag. "Hello. Is there something you need?"

"Yeah, uh," Shane starts rather ungracefully, clearing his throat. "I was just wondering, um... Could—are babies able to attend class with us?" He pauses and then backtracks. "I mean, if I wanted to bring my daughter, could I do that? She's four months old and not super fussy—"

"I encourage all students to do what they can to ensure they're here on time," she says over him kindly. "If that means bringing your child, then by all means, feel free. I know what it's like to balance being a parent and getting an education."

"Cool," Shane nods. "I'll probably bring her tomorrow. Just a heads up."

"As long as you make it," she tells him, giving him one last polite smile before gathering the rest of her things.

With that, Shane is out of the lecture hall, backpack hanging from his shoulder while he makes his way to his car. He's in the midst of unlocking it when he gets a call, answering it as he opens the passenger door to drop his bag on the seat.

Ilya's voice floods his ear immediately. "How much do I have to pay you to pick up pizza on your way home?"

"Hm," Shane pretends to think, mouth tilting up into a smile. "Might cost you a hand-job."

There's a pause on the other line like Ilya is actually considering his options. "What if I want breadsticks too?"

"That's gonna bump it up to a blow-job."

"Small price to pay," Ilya teases and Shane can practically see his stupidly endearing grin. "Thank you, *moy lyubimyy*."

"Of course. I'll see you soon."

"Love you," Ilya says right before there's a garbled coo speaking over him. "Adelina says she would like stuffed crust."

"Tell her she doesn't have teeth," Shane says back, ignoring Ilya's squawk of offense. "Love you both, bye."

He arrives home carrying a box of pizza and bag of breadsticks with his backpack perched on his back. He's greeted by a kiss from Ilya and an excited smack in the face from Addie who is being held by Ilya thus roped into their hug. Shane smiles, planting a big kiss on her cheek and swapping with Ilya so he can hold Addie and greet her properly.

In the kitchen, Ilya places the slices on plates—two slices for each, no breadsticks for Shane—while Addie pours her focus into grabbing at Shane's hat sitting backwards on his head. "Hey, no, that's mine," Shane tells her, redirecting her hand to press a kiss to her palm instead. "How was your day, hm? Did you give Papa a hard time?"

"No, never," Ilya answers for her while Addie makes a noise of possible agreement.

He sets the plates on the table and Shane follows, content to hold Addie in his lap while he eats one handed. It's the least he can do considering Ilya spends a majority of the day with her in his space. Not that he minds, quite the opposite, Shane has found out. If anyone in life is truly destined to be a father, it's Ilya Rozanov without a doubt. Fatherhood sits on his shoulders steadily and certainly, as if there was no other place that could hold its presence and the amount of love he carries with him.

Even then, Shane has read up about the possibility of getting burnt out as a parent, especially after the first few months after the baby is born. He knows Ilya well enough to know that if something was wrong, he would keep it to himself, hold it close to his chest so as to not

burden anyone around him. But that doesn't mean Shane can't find solutions to problems that don't quite exist yet.

So, he clears his throat after he swallows down a bite, pushing Addie's grasping hand away from the half-eaten slice on his plate as he talks. "So, uh. I was thinking—"

"Uh oh," Ilya says over him, raising an eyebrow and pointing his stuffed crust at him. "That is never good."

"Fuck off—I mean, shut up," Shane corrects, trying to tame his smile when Ilya starts to laugh. "You're the worst."

"Yes, maybe, but you love me," Ilya winks and then gestures for Shane to continue. "But you were saying...?"

"Right," Shane nods, taking a breath and then spilling his thoughts. "So, I was in class today and there was this lady—maybe, like, thirty? I don't know, she was older. But anyway, I heard this baby crying and then she gets up and she has a baby with her in its car-seat and the professor was, like, fine with it and didn't even blink—"

"Shane," Ilya says, forcing Shane to look up and away from where he was letting Addie chew on his finger with her gums. "What does random baby have to do with us?"

Shane lets out a small laugh, unsure why he feels nervous in the first place. "Sorry. I was just thinking that maybe I could, I don't know. Bring Addie to class with me, maybe." Before Ilya can say anything, Shane is continuing quickly. "Just for tomorrow, since I have one class. Like a little trial run, you know? See how it goes. I just thought that maybe you'd want some time to yourself, even if it was for a little bit. But if you wanted *more* time I could take her to the park after or the library—I think they do baby-time or something, but I can double check ___"

"*Shane*," Ilya says over him again, reaching across the table to tap on his forearm. When Shane blinks and meets his eye, Ilya's eyebrows raise softly, his light eyes dancing between Shane's. "What do you mean *time to myself*? I am okay—"

"No, I know that," Shane tells him. "But I want you to have some time to relax too. And I really don't mind taking her, it's one class and my professor already said she was okay with it."

Ilya presses his lips together, eyes narrowed suspiciously. "You know that I am very happy, yes? The most happy I have ever been, I think."

"Yeah, I know," Shane nods and then shrugs. "But still. I want to do this. And it'll be good." He bounces Addie in his lap, pulling her laser-focus attention away from reaching up to yank at the collar of his shirt. "Some father daughter bonding or something."

The corner of Ilya's mouth tilts up as he leans back in his chair. "Okay," he says. "But you will come home after and then we can go to the park together, yes?"

Shane smiles back. "If you insist."



Mostly because of Shane's stubbornness and insisting, Ilya sleeps in the next morning while Shane gets himself and Addie ready. He focuses on her first, getting her dressed in an olive green, long sleeve ruffle-trimmed romper, but only after he makes sure there's buttons on the bottom to make diaper-changing easier. Then he gets himself dressed in a navy blue McGill t-shirt and some black cotton shorts.

He steals Ilya's worn and sun-bleached hat, tugging it on backwards before double checking that he packed his backpack with not only his laptop and notes but with the diaper bag essentials (extra diapers, wipes, and extra outfit for Addie, two ready-to-go bottles, a few silicone toys to keep her hands entertained, and her bunny plushie) and then triple checks that everything is exactly where it needs to go. With ten minutes to spare, Shane scarfs down a granola bar with Addie hanging from the baby carrier on his chest and hurries to kiss a still sleeping Ilya goodbye, then heads out for his day.

He gets to class early enough to snag a seat near the back, away from where students tend to gravitate toward in hopes that he won't be too much of a distraction. Luckily, Addie fell asleep on the car ride there, and she sits in her car-seat, her cheek squished against her shoulder and her small mouth open as her chest rises and falls with every little breath. Shane smiles to himself, snapping a picture of her and sending it over to Ilya right as class begins.

Shane

[Image Attached]

Already bored out of her mind.

Ilya

my angel... you are torturing my poor baby girl

but thank you. was nice to sleep in.

i love you very much and i can't wait to see you :)

Shane

<3

I love you too. I'll see you soon :)

Unsurprisingly, Addie wakes up twenty minutes later, fussing just barely until Shane is swooping down to get her out of the car-seat to plop her on his lap. She blinks sleepily, her lips pouted as she stretches with a small noise. One handed, Shane manages to get the bottle out of his backpack, adjusting her so that she's laying back with her head on his bicep while she drinks and he types notes on his laptop with his free hand.

Every now and then he gets a few looks back in curiosity, especially when Addie is more awake and alert, letting out coos and a particularly thrilled noise when Shane reveals he brought her bunny along for the adventure. For the most part, she's content with chewing on its ear and leaning forward to smash her tiny palms on the keys of the laptop even when Shane politely asks her to stop more than once. Twice. Seven times.

By the time class is getting dismissed, Shane is blinking, looking down at Addie who looks up at him and blinks back. *Huh*. He could do this weekly, definitely. Especially for this class.

When he looks up, he finds a group of girls hovering at the end of the row, beaming at Addie who gets excited under the new attention.

"Your baby is so cute!" one of the girls says, earning several nods.

"Oh, uh, thank you," Shane says after a beat.

With that, they leave with some coos and dramatized waves to Addie who kicks her legs with a string of happy noises. Shane counts it as a win, happy in his own way as he gathers his stuff. Just as he's about to put Addie back in her car-seat, he notices a movement out of the corner of his eye. The professor smiles at him kindly.

"You know, you didn't have to banish yourself to the back," she jokes before leaning over with an open-mouthed smile. "And who might this beautiful girl be?"

"This is Adelina," Shane introduces, smiling when Addie stares up at her in something close to amazement, especially when the professor offers her a finger that she immediately grasps, attempting to pull it into her mouth.

"Adelina, so beautiful!"

"Her other dad picked it," Shane tells her proudly. "He's more creative with names. If it was only up to me I probably would have chosen something out of, like, top ten baby names of the year or something."

She laughs at that, her head tossed back for a moment before she comes back, the wrinkles at the corner of her eyes creased. "I'm the same way. My daughter's name is Emily, so you can imagine how creative I am. Will I be seeing Miss Adelina next class?"

"Oh for sure," Shane nods. "We'll be here."



There isn't anything Shane wouldn't do for Ilya and Adelina. He knows that if he was asked, he would walk through fire, glass, over cobblestone with bloody feet and aching bones if it meant making them happy and content. Before them, he hadn't known that love could be so endless, so encompassing and unquestionable. He doesn't remember what it even felt like to breathe before them, before this.

Halloween costumes, however, may be where he draws the line.

"Shane," Ilya says, although he might as well be saying *are you fucking kidding me?* "It is just a fucking costume. Not even a good costume, I bought this shit two days ago."

Shane presses his lips together, holding the said costume in his hand, the cotton black and yellow striped fabric staring back at him. He doesn't even want to look at the antennae headband that Ilya is still holding out toward him, a near pleading look on his face. "But why do I have to be a *bee*? And why do you get the cooler costume?"

Ilya groans, tilting his head back. "Because you are Shane-bug and Addie is *bukashka* and I am bug-keeper person—it's a *theme*, Hollander! I am not Ilya-bug, it would not make sense if I was a bug too!"

Again, Shane's mouth tightens. "Bees are insects."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Ilya mumbles before snatching the striped shirt. "Okay, fine. I tell Bood we will not go to his Halloween party because bees are fucking insects and not bugs."

"Hey—hey, no," Shane is quick to say, getting in front of Ilya before he can step out of their room. He wonders if this counts as their first fight, and if it does, what it says about them if all it took was a fucking half-assed bee costume to fuel it. When Ilya tries to push past him, Shane uses his strength to hold his ground, subtly reminding Ilya that they're very much matched in strength and stubbornness. "Ilya, baby, look at me, please." Ilya's jaw tightens just before his eyes flicker to meet Shane's, and the slight glimmer of wetness in them is enough for Shane to soften. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"Nothing," Ilya is quick to say, turning his face away, only brought back by Shane's hand guiding him back to meet his eyes. "I am being stupid, maybe."

"It's not nothing, and it's definitely not stupid," Shane says gently, thumb caressing right over Ilya's cheekbone, just above one of his many freckles and moles. He pauses, doing his best to string his thoughts and words together. "Talk to me, please. I want to understand and I'm just—I'm not understanding and I need you to tell me, baby. Please."

He watches the natural instinct to deflect start to rise in Ilya's face, an amalgamation of emotions flashing across his face until finally he's exhaling, all his defenses collapsing as his eyes flutter shut and he swallows, his throat bobbing harshly. "This will be our first holiday as a... a family, no? Maybe is not an important holiday, I don't know, but it is our first, so." He pauses, opening his eyes. "I would like for it to be important. To us both."

Immediately, Shane feels like the biggest fucking asshole. "Fuck. *Fuck*. I'm sorry," he says quickly, pressing their foreheads together, kissing the corner of Ilya's mouth in an additional apology. "Of course it's important. I'm sorry, I didn't think of it from that perspective."

Ilya tilts his chin to slot their mouths together properly. "Is okay," he says quietly. "If you want to be a different bug, we can find something else—"

"I'll be a bee," Shane tells him with a certain nod. "You already bought all the stuff, right? We're set. I'll even make buzzing noises all night if you want me to or whatever."

Ilya's nose scrunches between amused and hesitant. He pats Shane's cheek twice. "Maybe not that, yes? Would be very annoying."

"Alright," Shane says loudly, pushing Ilya away from him. "Fuck you."

"No, be nice to me again," Ilya whines, following Shane out of the room. "Shane! Shane-bug—where are you going?"

When Shane picks up his pace down the hallway, Ilya is chasing after him, their laughter bouncing between the walls until they're hushing each other in hopes of not waking up Addie already asleep at such a late hour.

They easily find silence against each other's lips, falling into bed together just like the night before and every night to come.



"Boys! Addie!" Marlow beams, spreading his arms making the t-shirt reading *This is My Costume* all the more visible. "Sick costumes. What are you, Rozzy? A safari dude?"

Ilya frowns, adjusting Addie in his arms, slowly getting used to holding her with her costume on. The one piece is padded, making her shape more circular than normal. To combat the air starting to cool with autumn approaching, they layered black leggings beneath white and black striped ones, and she's wearing red socks with black polka dots to match the rest of her costume. There's a hood attached to the back, sitting on her head with two antennae flopping over that bounce as Ilya adjusts her again. "I am a fucking bug catcher, idiot."

"You said no cussing around the baby," Shane points, going ignored as Marlow raises his hands in defense.

"Whoa, this is a family friendly event," he says before looking at Shane and grinning. "Ohh, like *The Bee Movie*, right?"

Shane blinks, looking down at his striped black and yellow shirt and black sweatpants. The plastic wings on his back are tight against his broad shoulders and a little lopsided, and the antennae on the headband spring back into place when he looks back up. "Yeah, sort of?"

Marlow nods proudly and then points at Addie. "And a ladybug for the lady. *Great* fucking costumes, guys."

Before Shane can thank him and Ilya can cuss him out, Marlow is moving out of the way and letting them cross the threshold. The inside is more decorated than the last time they were here in the summer. Sure, it's a bit half-assed, but it's the thought that counts. Cobwebs hang from the light fixtures in the kitchen. A jack-o-lantern garland is draped along the edge of the kitchen island, and on the surface there's bowls of candies for soon to come trick-or-treaters. Right in front of the back door, there are black paper bats hanging from the ceiling with fishing line.

One smacks Shane in the face as he opens the door for Ilya and Addie. Addie reaches her small hand up, the bats so far out of reach for her, but only for a second before Ilya is lifting her up, allowing her to yank one down. She drops it only a few seconds later once she's distracted by the scattered sound of their names being called from the backyard.

Jackie is the first up and out of her seat, dressed as Wonder Woman and giving Shane and Ilya a one sided hug before shifting her attention toward Addie. "She's getting so big, oh my god!"

Addie goes to grab a chunk of Jackie's hair, barely stopped by Shane intercepting with his own hand. "Yeah, it's crazy. Careful, she loves long hair."

Jackie waves him off. "Oh, don't worry. I had *two* babies trying to scalp me all day, I can handle it."

"Do not be so sure," Ilya warns her before his face drops into something more unimpressed as he looks over her shoulder. "Ah, Pike. I thought maybe you would be watching your children tonight."

"Fuck you, asshole," Hayden says, pointing to where Jade and Ruby (both creatively dressed in Super Girl costumes) are playing some sort of chasing game with Dykstra and Connors. "They're right over there, thank you very much."

Shane chimes in before Ilya has a chance to say something else. "Nice costume, Hayd," he says, although he should have guessed Hayden would be wearing the same, loose fitting Super-Man costume he's worn for the last two years. Though, last year he did change it up by wearing it underneath a dress shirt and trousers. He'll give him some credit where it's due.

"Do you not get tired of this?" Ilya says, voicing Shane's thoughts as he gestures toward the entirety of Hayden's being. "Every fucking year is the same thing—Jackie, blink twice if you need help."

Jackie laughs despite Hayden's protests. "To be fair, we completely forgot about Halloween this year so we had to make due with what we had."

They're interrupted by Wyatt's voice, high pitched and loud. "It's the baby Addie! Hi Addie!"

Addie jumps at the sudden noise, her mouth wobbling and eyes turning teary after a stretched moment before she starts to wail, the hood of her costume falling off her head as she throws herself forward against Ilya's chest. "Way to fucking go, Hayes," Ilya nearly growls before lowering his voice, switching to whispered Russian as he does his best to comfort her.

"I didn't mean to!" Wyatt tries, his *Where's Waldo* costume making him sort of hard to take seriously.

"It's okay," Shane assures him. "She's just not used to sudden noises."

Wyatt stares at him. "Rozanov *is* a sudden noise."

"Yeah, well, no. Not with her," Shane explains, looking over his shoulder to where Ilya has found himself on the other side of the yard with J.J. and Bood making silly faces in their attempt to stop the waterworks. It seems to be working, but only because Addie is staring at them with a sort of horrified look instead. "He's really soft with her."

Wyatt follows his gaze, turning back with an amused grin. "Wow. Roz the softie, who would have thought?"

Shane huffs out a laugh, going to join Ilya and the rest of the guys. Addie is quick to request to be held by Shane instead and an impish, wounded noise comes from Ilya's mouth when he reluctantly hands her over with one last kiss to her head.

Shane fixes the hood of her ladybug costume and her stray hairs sticking up from beneath, starting to curl more each day, and keeps her tucked against his chest while he watches Ilya, Wyatt, J.J., and Dykstra tire out the twins in a very anticlimactic game of tag.

Eventually the sun sets and trick-or-treaters start to make rounds, meaning for the first time since Shane was thirteen, he has something to do other than hand out candy.

In the front yard starting to crowd with families and children all dressed in costume, Shane and Ilya watch with impatience as Hayden maneuvers an oversized wagon out of the back of his and Jackie's beat up minivan.

Ilya groans loudly, dropping his head back in annoyance. "Hurry up, Pike. We are going to get all the shitty, small candy!"

"Hey, your kid shouldn't even be *having* candy!"

"Yes, this is why we will be the ones eating it," Ilya retorts easily. "So we need the big candy."

Either it's a good enough argument or Hayden gives up because he joins Jackie in wrangling up the twins and plopping them into the wagon the best they can given their squirmy and stubborn nature. Meanwhile, Addie is held happily in Ilya's arms, content with staring at anyone passing by in their costumes with wide and curious eyes.

With that, they start their journey weaving through the blocks flooded with children and parents filling their buckets with candy. The first house they get to has a bowl out on the porch and a sign asking to please, *please* only take one. The twins grab their own, Jackie reminding them to only take one and not an entire fistful. Ilya and Shane are right behind them, letting Addie do her best to grasp at a lollipop of her choosing before Ilya guides her hand to her pumpkin bucket that Shane is holding.

The further they go, the better the houses get. An elderly woman opens the door after they ring the doorbell and gasps in delight when she spots Addie and her ladybug costume. "Oh— isn't she *precious*!" she nearly squeals, earning a small laugh from Addie who is entertained in all the gleeful noises and attention. When the woman finally notices Ilya and Shane, she puts a hand over her heart. "A theme! So clever—I love, love, *love* it!" She nearly fills the bucket to the brim with the fistfuls of candy, and right before they thank her and turn to join

Jackie and Hayden again, she smiles warmly, glancing between Addie and then Ilya. "Did you know she has your eyes?"

Shane watches Ilya's face brighten up, taking the place of the sun already set below the horizon. "Yes, I have been told this," Ilya says proudly. "Thank you very much."

Their shoulders bump as they walk back to the wagon where Hayden and Jackie are letting the twins eat one piece of candy each. As the wagon starts to move and the three of them follow close behind, Shane steals a kiss, if not selfishly, then to at least be on the receiving end of Ilya's love soaked grin and eyes.



5 Months

The baby monitor on Ilya's side of the bed lights up with indication that there is noise coming from Addie's room. Though, Shane doesn't need to see the sudden light in the darkness of their room at two in the morning—he can hear the cries coming from across the hallway, snapping him awake more than the baby monitor does.

He leans over Ilya's snoring frame, turning the sound off of the monitor, knowing that Ilya has been asleep for less time than he has. After Addie's bath, she had been more fussy than usual, refusing to sleep even when they went about her nightly routine. Ilya had offered to stay up to help her go to sleep and exhausted from a busy day, Shane had went to sleep just after eleven. So, Shane is careful not to wake him up, slipping from the bed and tugging on the grey pajama pants lying on the floor with Batman symbols printed all over them that Ilya had been wearing earlier in the night.

Addie's been a pretty good sleeper ever since they brought her home. Sure, the newborn days were the closest to the trenches that both of them had to endure, but it wasn't *terrible*, not when they were both there for each other, taking turns with sleeping and taking care of her when she woke up at sporadic hours demanding to be fed or changed or acknowledged. But other than that she slept well, and only got better at it as the months passed. Now, she sleeps pretty much through the night and wakes up at the ass crack of dawn, which Shane happily prefers after sleepless nights.

So, Shane can't help but feel a bit worried at the sudden shift in her sleeping pattern. He knows it's normal for sleep regression to happen, but the agitating voice in the back of his head jumps to the worst case scenario before he can stop it.

With autumn in full swing, the apartment is the slightest bit colder and the skin of Shane's bare torso prickles as he goes to Addie's room, pushing the cracked door the rest of the way open. Her crying falters into whimpers when he flicks on the small lamp on the shelf above and they're drenched in its warm light.

"Oh, my baby," Shane says the moment he gets to her crib and sees her face. Wet with tears and snot and drool, her lashes clumped together. The sight makes his heart break ten times over and he hugs her to his chest, her cheek mashed against his shoulder, every one of her

inhales shaky beneath Shane's palm rubbing circles into her back as she calms down from her crying.

From there, Shane grabs a wipe from the changing table and cleans her face. He checks her diaper, tries making her a bottle and feeding her only for her to start crying all over again. He's left with pacing the room, unsure of what she wants, and starting to slowly spiral before he remembers he has resources.

Yuna answers on the second ring. "Shane? Are you alright?"

"I'm sorry," Shane says immediately, and is if on cue, Addie starts to fuss again. "Addie's been crying all night and I know sleep regression is a thing, but I don't think this is that. She won't stop crying and I don't know what to—"

Before he can finish, Yuna is saying, "Check her mouth."

Shane blinks, staring at the opposite wall as he stops his pacing. "Her... her *mouth*?"

"She's probably teething, sweetie," Yuna explains calmly. "Check her mouth, if her gums are swollen then she's got teeth coming in. Get her some teething toys and some infant pain relief medicine. There's not much you can do other than let the teeth come in and do your best to keep her somewhat comfortable."

"Alright," Shane says, nodding to himself. "I'll do that. Thank you, I'm sorry for waking you up."

"Oh, don't be sorry. This is what I'm here for."

With that, Shane hangs up and tosses his phone onto the diaper changing table, adjusting Addie so he's cradling her instead. She starts to fuss almost immediately, her mouth opening wide as she cries and—

Of course Yuna Hollander was right.

Right in the middle of her lower gums, there's two curved lumps. Small, but definitely swollen compared to the rest of her mouth. Shane presses his finger to the red and swollen area only for Addie to quickly start chewing on it, her crying forgotten. He winces when she starts to bite down more aggressively, seemingly getting some relief from the pressure on her gums.

Ilya comes into the room, curls tousled and his eyes squinting against the dim light. "Shane?"

Shane tilts his head toward Addie. "Guess who's teething."

"Teething?" Ilya repeats, rubbing at his eyes with the back of his hand before blinking against the brightness.

"Her teeth are coming in," Shane explains. "My mom said we should get her some teething toys and medicine so she isn't so miserable."

"Ah fuck," Ilya says. "We should go now then, yes?"

Shane nods, glad that he isn't the only one wanting to get to the solutions sooner rather than later. They're a bit of a mess by the time Ilya is buckling Addie into her car-seat and Shane is starting the car, not having the energy to argue when Ilya tossed him the keys to the stupidly luxurious SUV. Shane is still in the Batman pajama pants paired with a McGill sweater doing barely anything to keep him warm against the cold air. Ilya's black and red flannel pajama pants are low on his hips and he had a zip up hoodie on with nothing beneath, looking not at all bothered with the coldness. Addie is more layered in her white and yellow onesie with little cartoon suns, polka dot blue and green socks, a pink crocheted sweater, and a strawberry beanie on top of her head and over her ears.

The twenty minute drive to the closest 24 hour grocery store is mostly filled with Addie crying in the backseat while Ilya grasps Shane's hand over the center console, his thumb trailing over Shane's knuckles over and over like it's killing him to not be back there comforting her.

Luckily she's distracted the moment Ilya is taking her out of her seat and holding her while Shane picks up a shopping basket as they're greeted with the fluorescent lights and the stillness that only a 24 hour store can hold. An employee greets them in a simple nod before going back to organizing some of the candy near the produce.

Ilya distracts Addie by pointing out several items as they pass them in their search for teething things. He says them in Russian, pointing and then giving her some sort of spiel, like he's giving a dictionary definition. It keeps her from wailing in the quietness of the store, so Shane focuses on reading the signs displayed above the aisle until they find what they're looking for.

They load the basket with as much as they can—toys meant to be frozen, others meant for every day teething. Some infant ibuprofen, a numbing gel specifically made for babies under a year old. Textured teethingers, some that rattle, some that don't. Whatever fits into the basket they get, as well as some yogurt melts that Addie has been fond of recently.

By the time they get home, Shane is popping some of the teething items into the freezer and looking up the best way to sanitize new objects meant to go into his baby's mouth until, finally, he and Ilya are sitting in bed with Addie on Ilya's lap, aggressively chewing on a textured silicone rattle in the shape of a caterpillar. Exhausted beyond belief, Shane and Ilya lean back against the headboard, caught between drifting off and snapping themselves awake to make sure Addie is doing fine.

Ilya's neck lolls to the side, right on top of Shane's head resting on his shoulder, both woken up when Addie makes a high pitched noise, kicking her legs out and digging her little heels into his thigh as she does so. Ilya makes a noise in the back of his throat, something between content and a groan. "Do you think she will fall asleep soon?"

"Dunno," Shane says, closing his eyes again, nuzzling his cheek against Ilya's bare shoulder and appreciating the warmth. He feels Ilya drop a kiss to his forehead and can't help the smile. He's glad it's Ilya who gets to sit here beside him, exhausted and chasing sleep but

content to stay up if it means making sure their daughter is getting the attention and love she needs. "I like doing this with you."

Ilya noses at his hairline and then kisses him again. Shane can feel the stretch of a smile on his mouth. "Me too. So much."



6 Months

The frigid December air nips at Shane's already rosy cheeks as he opens the back door of his Jeep, ducking as he reaches in to keep from bumping his head like he's done many times before.

"Alright," he says as Addie blinks up at him sleepily, having finally woken up after her two hour on-the-road nap they managed to time perfectly. "You ready to see grandma and grandpa?"

"Glamma," Ilya corrects, voice coming from behind him, reaching out to take Addie once Shane gets her unbuckled. He adjusts the knitted beige balaclava with bear ears that Svetlana bought recently, fixing it so that her black curls aren't so messy from where they're poking out the front. Now, they're flattened against her forehead, making her look like a doll, jostled as Ilya plants a big kiss to her cheek, smiling back at her. "And G-Dog—"

"Ilya," Shane warns, poking his chest with a stiff finger. "Shut the f—*heck* up."

Ilya snorts, his grin stretching in an annoyingly attractive way. Shane pushes past him, opening the trunk and gathering their bags, determined to make it in one trip. "Need help?" Ilya offers, although it doesn't sound like he's really asking, more so confirming that he *doesn't* need help.

Shane shakes his head despite knowing that the offer is somewhat empty. He likes doing this anyway, providing for their little family in the ways that he can, even if that's hauling his body weight in bags up the driveway and to the familiar blue front door he grew up behind. Ilya holds Addie's wrists with his pointer finger and thumb, leaning forward to make her rap against the door, her soft skin and small hand making no sound whatsoever against the wood. Shane rings the doorbell while they do that, and it doesn't take long for the door to swing open, Yuna's voice high pitched and downright gleeful.

"Oh, my baby! Come here, I missed you!"

Addie squeals, practically launching herself away from Ilya and to Yuna who catches her with no struggle, hugging her close and turning right around to show her the house she's already seen a few times now. Granted, she wasn't this alert or aware of her surroundings the last time. Now, she reaches out toward the ornaments on the tree when Yuna shows her the decorated area, pointing out all the ornaments and their origins.

"Your dad made that one when he was five," Yuna tells her, bouncing her as she explains. "And when you're five, you'll make me one too."

Ilya and Shane let them enjoy each other's company, exchanging amused smiles at the complete lack of attention they're given in favor of focusing on the real star of the family now. As they trudge up the stairs with all their stuff, David makes an appearance, his hair still wet from his shower seemingly cut short by their arrival.

"Addie's with mom," Shane tells him when his dad gives him a confused look.

His dad only beams before walking right past them and the sound of Yuna saying, *look who it is! Grandpa!* and Addie's excited squeal sounding, ringing throughout the house.

"Remember last year when they were actually excited to see us?" Shane thinks out loud before backtracking. "Or, actually, they were more excited to see *you* last year."

"Is Russian genetics," Ilya shrugs smugly. "We are irresistible."

"Oh, go fuck yourself," Shane says, pushing at Ilya's chest with his free hand and turning around, leaving Ilya to grab that same hand and follow him down the hallway to Shane's bedroom to toss their things onto the floor. "We forgot her compact crib," Shane points out once he does a once over of all their items.

Ilya waves him off. "We will get it later. Let's take a nap, your parents will not let her go while we are here."

"Are you saying we should take advantage of my parent's love for our daughter?"

Ilya shrugs, bottom lip jutted out in fake thought. "Maybe, yes."

"That's exactly why I love you," Shane says and kisses him, laughing into Ilya's mouth when Ilya pushes him onto the bed and throws himself on top of his body. They make out lazily before falling asleep right on top of the neatly made bed, too exhausted to do anything else.

They wake up to David knocking on the door and letting them know that dinner is ready and that hours have passed since they knocked out. They're groggy and a bit disoriented as they roll off the mattress, blinking away the drowsiness and stretching before making their way down the stairs, following the savory smell floating through the house.

Plated and already set on the table is some roasted turkey and mashed sweet potatoes with roasted veggies. Addie is sitting in Yuna's lap, drool on her chin as she chews on one of the frozen teething toys they had packed for her while the rest of them dig in, content in the silence that settles for several minutes.

Eventually, it's Shane that breaks it. "Shit, Ilya. Remember we have to get the compact crib from the Jeep."

"No you don't," David says before Ilya can reply.

When Shane gives him a confused look, Yuna blinks at him. "Oh, we turned the guest bedroom into a guest... nursery, I guess, for the time being." She shrugs, her leg bouncing Addie. "Just until Addie gets older and then it'll just be a guest-granddaughter room. It's not like either of you two need the extra room anymore."

"Mom," Shane says slowly. "You redid a whole room for her?"

"What?" Yuna says defensively. "I want her to have a space here too!"

"Thank you, Yuna," Ilya says so sincerely that Shane smiles, willing to tread past the fact his mom is most definitely doing more than she needs to do. Who is he to determine how she measures her love?

As if contributing to the conversation, Addie shakes her toy in her fist, the babbling coming out her mouth a cross between *mmmm* and *bababa*.

Yuna beams at her. "Oh, I see those little teeth finally coming in," she notes, raising her eyebrows.

"Yes," Ilya nods. "They have been slow, but doctor says this is normal."

"Her top two teeth should be coming in soon, Shane chimes in, remembering the answers the pediatrician had given them when they asked their many, many questions. "They say usually the bottom incisors usually come in first and then the top follow."

"Hopefully she's not a biter," David says, pointing his fork at Shane. "*He* used to be a biter."

Yuna clicks her tongue dismissively. "Only for a couple of months! He grew out of it pretty quickly."

"Oh god," Shane huffs out with a small laugh, chewing on the end of a stick of asparagus. "I hope not."

From beside him, Ilya clears his throat. "Ah. I used to be this too... A biter."

Shane drops his head. "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."



On Christmas Eve night, they have Addie dressed in a red dress Yuna bought her and a big bow on her head. Shane isn't too crazy about the look but Ilya and Yuna have been taking so many pictures of her and gushing over how cute she looks that he can't bring himself to try taking the bow off discretely, but he can't help but be sort of proud when Addie ends up yanking it off.

The Mighty Ducks is playing on the TV (Ilya having insisted on it because "*We cannot break tradition, Shane*"—though Shane doesn't point out that *technically* tradition is watching it on Christmas night) but they're all distracted by Addie in the middle of the living room carpet, the coffee table pushed away to the other side of the room to make room for her to play. She's on her tummy, looking up as Yuna holds her bunny up, making it kiss her nose and she giggles, kicking her legs excitedly.

Yuna absentmindedly puts it to the side and whatever she's about to say dies down the moment Addie rolls onto her side, little grunts and coos coming from her mouth as she starts to straighten.

Ilya realizes what's happening first, shooting up into a kneeling position, knees digging into the rug as he continuously smacks Shane's chest. "Shane, Shane—*Shane*."

"Oh my god," Shane says out loud as Addie uses all her little muscles to sit upright, leaning over and grabbing her bunny, going straight to putting the ear in her mouth with content noises.

"I got that all on video!" David laughs as Ilya scoops Addie up, peppering kisses all over her face.

"You are the most powerful baby in the world!" he tells her in English and then in Russian, earning a high pitched laugh from her as she squirms in delight at the affection.

"Send me that video," Shane tells his dad as Ilya positions Addie back on the rug on her back, willing her to sit up again right as the Mighty Ducks win on screen.



The next morning Addie wakes up at six in the morning, as if sensing that today is supposed to be a magical day. Her constant babbling rings through the baby monitor sitting on the nightstand in Shane's teen bedroom, and Ilya is the first to wake up, bringing her into the room and holding her over Shane until a string of drool is dropping from her bottom lip and hitting him right in the center of his forehead, forcing him to wake up.

After that, they change her diaper, change her into a Christmas themed onesie—beige with red Santas, wreathes, and tree illustrations on it—and give her half a bottle, starting their morning with their normal routine until it's a more reasonable hour. Then, they head to Yuna and David's bedroom. Shane knocks loudly, claiming that Addie would like to open gifts now instead of later.

Of course, David and Yuna don't question it at all, happy to accept the shifting of familiar traditions to accommodate the addition to the family, and soon the five of them are going down the stairs in their pajamas and sitting around the Christmas tree piled with presents mostly for Addie.

"Spoiled," Shane tells her fondly, kissing her cheek and situating her in his lap as Yuna hands her her first present. He opens it enough for Addie to grasp at the paper, yanking it and ripping it to shreds before getting distracted by the glittery bow and Ilya jumps in to open it the rest of the way.

It's set of board books by Eric Carle, and Addie wastes no time biting at one of the corners, nearly ripping a chunk off before Shane can gently pry her off. The next gift is clothes and the next is some toys that Addie is quick to become fascinated by. Meanwhile, Shane and Ilya get a new set of pajamas, a brand new toaster (probably because Ilya mentioned that their current one burns toast too much the last time he had a chatty phone call with Yuna), and some extra pairs of socks.

Yuna and David open their simple presents of some historical books Shane knows his dad has been eyeing and a nice leather case for Yuna's laptop with her initials on the front in gold.

Soon, his parents are up, his father gathering the trash and Yuna stealing Addie from Shane's lap.

"Alright," David claps once he's gotten all the torn paper into a white garbage bag. He dips down to pluck the last preset from under the tree, handing it over to Ilya. "We'll go start on pancakes, you boys can open your last gift."

With that, his parents take Addie into the kitchen with them, leaving Shane and Ilya to look at each other and then the neatly wrapped gift.

"Your parents are very funny," Ilya says, though there is no humor in his tone. Only fondness accompanied by his soft smile as the tip of his finger traces over the neatly folded seam.

Shane bumps their shoulders together. "Should we open it together?"

Ilya nods silently, both picking at the paper, tearing it carefully. There's a flash of red beneath the wrapping paper, and when they turn it over, they find David's neat handwriting on the front reading: *Addie-bug!*

A photo album, Shane realizes. Ilya lets out a small laugh, more of a huff of air more than anything. He opens it and they're met with photos of Addie when she was born, pink and swollen and swaddled in the white and pink striped blanket from the hospital. Along with solo pictures of her are photos of her with Shane and Ilya as well. On the day she was born, sitting on the hospital bed shoulder to shoulder, looking down at her with subtle joy. Looking at the camera, heads tilted together with exhausted smiles.

They turn the pages, discovering more photos taken without their knowledge. One of Ilya and Shane sleeping on the sofa, pressed together, their hands loosely intertwined, Addie fast asleep on Ilya's chest, three weeks old. Pictures of Addie at the aquarium that Shane sent them, of her hanging from the baby carrier strapped to Ilya's chest, fast asleep while they walk around the park. Selfies that Ilya took of the three of them during their most mundane moments, in the kitchen, seated on the floor during tummy time, relaxing on the sofa while a game plays on the TV. There's even a photo Jackie took of the three of them on Halloween in the middle of trick-or-treating—Shane adjusting the hood of Addie's ladybug costume and Ilya holding her, a soft smile on his face as he looks at Shane.

And, most recently, a photo of the three of them yesterday, when Yuna had them take a picture in front of the Christmas tree after she dressed Addie and forced Ilya and Shane to put on something "a little nicer" which just ended up being a red and black flannel and jeans for Ilya and a red sweater and jeans for Shane. It's a good picture. They look like they send Christmas cards every year. They look like a *family*.

If Shane notices Ilya crying, he doesn't say anything, knowing he isn't too far behind.



On the night of New Years Eve, David and Yuna go out despite them constantly telling Shane and Ilya that they're 100% okay with staying in and watching Addie if the two of them want to go out and have a nice night.

But Shane and Ilya already spent the previous night kissing lazily and talking about starting a fire in the backyard and spending some moments of silence together as the new year comes in. So, they insist on staying in, even when Yuna tells them much to Shane's mortification to please, for the love of god, use condoms. With that, Shane is cutting the conversation off with a *god, mom!* and that's that.

They leave around eight o'clock, prompting Shane and Ilya to get going with their bedtime routine with Addie. Ilya gives her a bath while Shane sits on the toilet, rambling about everything and nothing. While Ilya gets her moisturized in her non-scented lotion and dressed in a onesie and her sleep sack, Shane warms a bottle for her—only half, she typically falls asleep right before she finishes it—and turns on their portable speaker, playing some baby sleep Mozart on YouTube.

After, he takes over on finishing the routine and getting her to sleep, which means cradling her and pacing, running the tip of his finger between the space of her brows until her eyes shut, her long lashes casting shadows on her chubby cheeks. He places her in the crib, making a note to ask his mom how much this thing ended up costing. It looks too expensive to be used once and then disposed of in the next couple of years.

Ilya is waiting downstairs, gathering things for s'mores, holding the bag of marshmallows between his teeth, graham crackers and chocolate in one hand, and a case of beers in the other hand. Shane opens the back door for him and works on getting the fire going while Ilya runs back inside for a thick blanket to drape over their laps while they watch the glow of the fire.

They take turns assembling s'mores and feeding each other. At some point, Ilya nips at the tip of Shane's finger and a seated wrestling match ensues until they hear the sound of fireworks spitting up into the air in the distance, just far enough for them to see in the sky but not loud enough for Addie to be able to hear. Even if she does wake up, they'll know with the baby monitor perched on the arm of the outdoor loveseat.

They get up for a better look at the fireworks and Ilya hooks an arm around Shane's waist, pulling him in until they're chest to chest. Shane brings his hands up to hold Ilya's neck, his cold hands seeking refuge against the heated skin. Ilya shivers against him but doesn't complain, leaning forward to brush their blushing and icy noses together, lips nearly touching as he speaks.

"Five minutes until midnight," he says, his eyes dancing between Shane's, his hands pressing further against Shane's lower back, the heat of their bodies making the frigid air nonexistent, similar to the space between them.

Shane grins, tongue darting out to lick his lips, reveling in the way Ilya's gaze follows the quick motion. "Oh, yeah? Got any big plans?"

"Maybe," Ilya says, voice lowering. "Only if you do."

"I might," Shane shrugs nonchalantly, dropping the act when Ilya smiles at him. "You know, last year, I wanted you to stay."

"You told me this," Ilya reminds him. "But I don't think I believed you. I thought that maybe you were just trying to be nice to me." He pauses, nosing at Shane's cheek, speaking into his ear. "I had big plans to kiss you. Did you know this?"

Shane shakes his head, eyes fluttering shut as he sways with every one of Ilya's words, his heart light in his chest. He wonders if the feeling will ever go away, but quickly knows that it isn't possible, not when it comes to Ilya. "You kissed me anyway," he points out. "Virtually, but, you know. It counted."

"Mm, no," Ilya whispers, coming back to meet Shane's eyes. "But is okay. It will count this time."

"Oh, will it?" Shane teases, already leaning in.

Fireworks burst and crackle in the air, the colors illuminating the dark sky and their faces as they meet in the middle, welcoming the new year together.



7 Months

Shane is finishing taping his hockey stick, thumb pressed to the stark sharpie marks where Yuna, Ilya, and Addie's names are written in bold letters on the handle. There's a movement in his peripheral that goes ignored the first two times as he focuses on his task until finally he realizes someone is talking to him.

He pulls off his headphones, looking over to find Hayden standing there like he's expecting an answer. Shane furrows his eyebrows. "Uh... What's up, Hayd?"

Hayden blinks and then looks around at the rest of the guys bustling around. "What?"

Shane blinks back. "No, *you* what? Why are you, like, hovering?"

"Oh, Jackie wanted me to ask you something," Hayden says, even more unhelpful than before. When Shane says nothing, Hayden finally says, "She said that offer to babysit Addie is valid in case you forgot. You know, since we owe you guys one for watching the twins. You can have a fucking date night or something."

Shane pauses, stopping to think about how him and Ilya haven't even had a first date. Or, not an *official* first date at least. All those night trips to random bakeries could sort of count as dates, but that doesn't sit right with him. They should probably go on a real *real* date. It's better late than never.

When he voices this, most of the guys are pausing in their pre-practice routines, whipping their heads around to look at him.

Troy, standing at Shane's other side, in the middle of taping his own stick, stares at him with confusion bleeding onto every corner of his face. "Wait, what? I thought you guys have been together for, like, over a year now."

"A year?" Shane repeats before letting out a laugh. "What? No. No, officially, it's been like seven months. We made it official right after Addie was born." When the rest of the guys turn to stare at him he's more than confused to be met with such mass confusion. "Why the fuck are you all looking at me like that?"

"Um," Bood says, glancing around before seemingly being the only one willing to bite the bullet. "Probably because Roz told us you guys were dating at the same time he told us that you guys were having a baby."

Shane's eyes nearly burst out of his head. "He *what?*"

"Yeah," Wyatt chimes in. "He said, *me and Hollander are together and we are having a baby fuck you guys—*"

"Not *exactly*," Bood interrupts and then shrugs. "But yeah, something along those lines."

"I mean, does the actual date really matter?" Marlow says over them with a loud laugh, clapping Shane on the back. "Rozzy was pretty much whipped *before* we even knew they were fucking—I mean, come on, we all sort of picked up on it!"

"I didn't!" Hayden defends, met with a sympathetic look from both Bood and Wyatt.

"To be fair, you're not the most observant," Dykstra tells him from across the locker room.

Shane shakes his head, trying to make sense of the conversation currently happening. "What the fuck are you guys talking about? It was only, like... sex before we even knew he knocked me up."

Marlow raises an eyebrow and then whistled. "Woow, brother. You might be as oblivious as Pike."

"Rozanov was always a dick to me," Shane explains helplessly. He still has the image of Ilya before all of this, before them, fresh in his mind. The way he would bare his teeth in defiance every time Shane would bite back. How he was always quick to snap back, quick to say something that would make Shane's skin prickle in anger. How he always knew exactly which words to say and which buttons to push to send him over the edge. There's no way Ilya's liked him for as long as Marlow is implying.

"Pigtail pulling," Marlow says way too casually, punctuated with a shrug. "You know how Roz is—*was*. Especially his freshman year, always trying to start shit."

"That doesn't mean anything," Shane tries again, met with a loud laugh from Connors.

"No, bro, you don't get it," he says. "We would carpool back to the house after practice and he would not shut the fuck up about you." He drops his voice, mimicking Ilya's thick accent. "*Does he have girlfriend? Boyfriend? Is he always asshole or only to me? Does he talk about me?* Could never get him to shut the fuck up."

"Figured he just had some weird competitive thing going on, but after a while it was sort of fucking obvious that he had a thing for you," Marlow says with another shrug, grinning and

then clapping Shane on the shoulder again. "But look at that! All his dreams came true."

Coach Wiebe's voice booming from across the room cuts off the conversation before Shane can try making any sense of this.



For the most part, Shane forgets about the locker room conversation in favor of trying to figure out how to ask Ilya Rozanov on a date when they've already been dating for seven months and have a child together.

There's definitely a way to do this, to make it a surprise and exciting, but they're far from the normal timeline of a relationship, and Shane is so far out of his depth for the rest of the week as he does his best to think of some way to subtly get Addie to Jackie and Hayden's apartment and get Ilya to leave her there without raising any suspicious or child neglect flags.

Luckily, Ilya is none the wiser, believing Shane's excuse that they're invited to the Pike's for dinner with the kids. Ilya emerges from their bedroom with a nice fitting shirt and a denim jacket, his hair styled so his curls are slicked back and one hangs over his forehead. Meanwhile, Shane settled for a black backwards hat on and simple white t-shirt with a thick blue and black flannel, letting Addie play with the buttons on the cuffs while Ilya slings her diaper bag over his shoulder.

Shane hopes he doesn't notice its added weight, filled with extra bottles and pajamas for Addie. Just in case they come back at a later hour than planned.

"You look pretty," Ilya tells him, his tongue rolling against the R. He's quick as he presses a quick kiss to Shane's mouth. "Ready?"

Shane nods, and with that they're heading to the Pike's apartment. Luckily, Hayden and Jackie are in on Shane's plan to woo Ilya, and when Shane mentions he forgot something in the car and beckons Ilya to follow him, they shut the door and force Ilya to actually accompany him all the way back to the parking lot.

It's not a great plan, but it's the only plan Shane has. "Uh," he says once they reach the car. "Close your eyes."

Ilya's eyebrows shoot up. "Close my eyes? What, are you going to fucking kill me, Hollander?"

"Ilya," Shane practically begs, nerves starting to get the best of him. "Just—just close them, alright?"

Ilya huffs stubbornly before complying, making a show of putting his hands over his eyes while Shane unlocks the backseat, grabbing the thing that has been hidden back there since he got home from class earlier in the day. The cellophane crinkles as his fingers grip the ends, and he takes a big breath. "Okay, uh. You can open your eyes."

Ilya drops his hands, ready to probably make a smart ass remark only to go completely silent when his eyes land on where Shane's arm is thrust toward him. He blinks, mouth opening and closing until he finally says: "Flowers?"

"Go on a date with me," Shane blurts out. "I mean—shit, sorry. I thought it would come out a little more romantic. Let me try again. Ilya, let me take you on a date. Please. I know we probably should have done this sooner, and I'm sorry that we haven't, but I wanted to make up for the lost time and also celebrate all the time gained between us, so," he smiles through his nerves. "Let's go on our first date."

There's a beat of silence that feels like it stretches for an eternity, and for a moment, Shane's terrified that he made it fucking weird. Then, Ilya is crashing into him, nearly making Shane drop the flowers as he licks into his mouth, holding onto his face with so much force that Shane almost tumbles back. "*Da*—yes, I will go on a date with you. So stupid—of course I will go on a date with you, my Shane," he mumbles between kisses and then drops their foreheads together. "You scared me. I thought maybe you were going to break up with me."

"What? No," Shane says quickly. "Never. Not unless *you* break up with me."

"That is illegal," Ilya tells him matter-of-factly. "Not allowed. They said so on the news."

Shane laughs, tilting his chin up to kiss Ilya again. Once they part again, Ilya is taking the flowers from him, appreciating the petals and beaming when Shane opens the car door for him. Shane is careful as he navigates through the streets, following the route he memorized the night before when Ilya was fast asleep.

"Where are we going?" Ilya finally asks once they've been driving for fifteen minutes.

"I found this little bar slash restaurant," Shane tells him. "Marlow said you used to like bars a lot, so I thought maybe that would be fun for us. They have billiards."

"Mm, maybe we should make a bet," Ilya nearly purrs, leaning over the center console to whisper in Shane's ear, nipping at his lobe while Shane grips onto the steering wheel with Herculean force to keep from crashing. "Winner gets to take the loser home."

"Sounds like a win-win," Shane manages to say steadily despite his heart beating like a fucking rabbit's, threatening to burst out of his chest.

"Yes," Ilya grins. "I am fair like this."

The bar is tucked between a tattoo shop and a cafe that is long closed for the day. There's several people hanging out front, two of the girls sharing a cigarette while looking less than impressed at the trio of guys trying to entertain them. Ilya and Shane linger for a second after finding parking, making sure there's nothing sketchy going on before the girls get into a ride-share and leave the guys to drunkenly roughhouse down the block and away from the bar.

The tables are made of dark wood, the lighting dim and accompanied by multicolored lights hanging from the ceiling. There's a plethora of university and team flags hanging from the top of the bar and in one corner, karaoke, and the other the billiards table. Ilya holds Shane's

waist as they make their way in, eyes scanning the dispersed crowd like he's willing for someone to say something. But everyone seems less than concerned with acknowledging them and more focused on their own group of friends. The pride flag hanging between the Oilers and Canadiens flags is enough for the both of them to relax.

"I will get us drinks," Ilya says, his mouth practically pressed to Shane's ear even though the music coming from the speakers isn't too loud.

Shane leans into the touch, nodding and then heading to the billiards table, empty and waiting to be occupied. He's in the middle of chalking his chosen cue stick when Ilya returns, holding a beer bottle in each hand. When he makes eye contact with Shane, he makes a show of checking him out.

Before Shane can accept the beer or the blatant ogling, Ilya is between him and the table, leaning back against the surface in an effortlessly attractive way. "I saw a pretty boy by himself and thought maybe I should buy him a drink," he says, the corner of his mouth slowly tilting up as he hands Shane the bottle. "I'm Ilya."

Raising an eyebrow, Shane accepts the drink. "Oh, are you?" he says, picking up on what Ilya is trying to do. "Do you pick up people like this a lot?"

Ilya shakes his head, bringing his beer up to his lips, taking a swig while his eyes flicker down Shane's body again. "Nope. You are very special."

"Am I?" Shane pushes, stepping forward, placing his beer on the green fabric of the table to bracket Ilya between his body and the surface, hands planted on the edge as he leans forward, their faces close. "Why is that?"

"Because I already know that I love you."

Shane presses his lips together to keep a smile from splitting his face. "You know, the boys were telling me you had an embarrassing crush on me. Since freshman year."

"Ah," Ilya says blandly, although Shane notes the blush starting to paint his cheeks. "Is that so?"

Shane nods. "Yeah. Connors and Marlow said you couldn't shut up about me. It's funny because I'm pretty sure you hated me."

"Maybe I hated that I did not have you," Ilya says with a grin, letting Shane chase his mouth before pushing him off. "Ready to fucking lose, Hollander?"

Shane laughs, sort of embarrassed by how fucking turned on he is. "In your goddamn dreams, Rozanov."

⊗

They're all over each other the moment they crash into their apartment, already having given Hayden and Jackie the heads up that they would be running a little late and then putting their

phones on Do Not Disturb.

The air exchanged between their lungs and the air around them is all melded together, lost on Shane as Ilya licks into his mouth, pushing him against the wall, his hands ceaseless as they push beneath the hem of his shirt, his cold hands warmed by Shane's heated skin burning like a furnace.

Somehow, they find their way to the sofa, desperation running high. The bedroom is too far, there's no way they're going to waste such precious time trying to stumble their way onto their bed. It's been so long since they've had each other like this, since they've done anything more than rushed hand-jobs or sloppy blow-jobs in the shower, doing their best to pocket what time they can.

But Shane is prepared, has been ever since planning this. There's condoms and travel packets of lube in his wallet, and he's pushing them into Ilya's palm when Ilya is on his knees, sucking at the leaking head of Shane's cock with noises that nearly make Shane unravel.

No one knows him as well as Ilya does, and he loves to be reminded in moments like this. Ilya lays him back against the cushions, licks and nips at his neck while he works two fingers into him, crooking them just right until Shane's head is falling back against the surface, his hat rolling onto the floor, forgotten.

He kisses at Shane's pulse point, moans against the skin like it's him that's feeling all the pleasure. He must be, Shane notices, feeling the way Ilya is rutting against his leg like he can't help himself. Shane curls his fingers in the back of Ilya's hair, yanking him until their mouths are sliding together and Ilya fucks him with his fingers, his rhythm faltering when Shane starts to speak with slurred and rushed words.

"Fuck me," he tells him. "Want you to fuck me—"

"Fuck," Ilya whimpers into his mouth. "Wanted to take my time with you, *zaychik*."

Shane shakes his head, reaching down to brush the tips of his fingers against the tip of Ilya's leaking cock. "Not right now. It's been too long—need to feel you. Want to feel you in me."

Ilya's breath shudders for a moment before he pulls back, grasping Shane's face in his hand. "Yeah? You miss me fucking you like a slut, Hollander?"

It's punctuated with the curve of his fingers and Shane's jaw slacks, a moan punching out of his lungs. He nods, just barely, already half-way fucked out, eyes glassy and staring up at Ilya like he's made of saturated gold.

Ilya is smooth and quick in his motions, rolling on a condom and pressing into Shane with a trembling breath, tucking his face into the crook of Shane's neck as he pushes in until they're flush together. Shane's eyes roll back, having missed this feeling—being so fucking *full*—so much.

Ilya doesn't waste any time, fucking into Shane slowly, punctuated with every one of his movements. He holds Shane's face with one hand, forces him to meet his eyes as he tells him

how good he looks taking cock, how pretty he is when he looks like he's about to fucking cry. Shane takes it all, his face and chest fiery with a blush, only heating up more when Ilya manhandles him, hands on his hips to lift him up slightly, making the angle all the more effective.

He can barely string a sentence together that isn't *fuck, oh fuck, just like that, Ilya, fuck me, fuck me*. It only gets harder to do anything other than moan and gasps when Ilya pulls out and flips him over, pushing him face down into the cushions. He arches his back, ass in the air, knowing how he looks, knowing that Ilya is more than effected as he lets out a dragged out *fuuuuck, Shane* before pushing back into him, his palm between Shane's shoulder blades, quickening his pace and fucking Shane roughly.

Shane's mouth hangs open, saliva dripping out the corner of his mouth and absorbed into the fabric. "Fuck, *fuck*," he whimpers. "I'm gonna come—fuck, baby, 'm gonna come—"

Ilya drapes himself over Shane's back, kissing at the nape of his neck and then his cheek, one of his hands sliding between Shane's chest and the cushions before he's straightening, bringing Shane with him until they're both kneeling, front to back, sweat slick against their skin. His hand moves up, fingers curling to hold Shane's chin and jaw as he speaks into Shane's ear. "So perfect for me—could give you another baby. Fuck you so good you beg for it, yes? Fuck, Shane—*fuck*—"

Shane is coming suddenly, his body tensing back against Ilya, surely staining the cushions but not caring in the moment as his vision blots with all sorts of burnt colors. He can feel Ilya follow close behind, his teeth sinking into the junction of Shane's neck and shoulder, moan muted and soaked into the heated skin.

It could be minutes, it could be hours. Neither of them are too sure if time even exists by the time they come to enough to clean up the mess they've made of their poor sofa. Ilya spends some time kissing down Shane's neck and chest before punctuating the end to their intimate time with a kiss just beneath his navel where a long, purpleish-brown scar lies.

"Good thinking on the condoms," Ilya says, smacking Shane's bare ass once they're up and function and Shane reaches down to grab his boxers and jeans. "I would have given you twins tonight."

"You're fucking terrible," Shane says, swatting Ilya's bare back with his shirt. "Why don't we focus on the one kid we have who is probably wondering where the fuck we are?"

As if barely remembering that Addie is not in the apartment with them (thank god), Ilya's eyes widen. "No, *moy bukashka!* She will think we abandoned her—hurry the fuck up, Hollander! She is probably crying!"

Addie, in fact, is *not* crying when they go to pick her up. Instead, she is very entertained by the two twins actively and successfully avoiding bedtime.

"Thank god," Hayden says the moment he opens the door, looking like he's waged several wars.

Meanwhile, Jackie is just as put together as she was earlier in the night, smiling from the sofa and raising up Addie who notices them immediately, babbling and squealing as Ilya hurries to go grab her.

"So," Hayden starts as Jackie tells Ilya what their night looked like. "How'd date night go?"

Shane nods as nonchalantly as he can. "Was nice. Thanks for watching Addie. We needed that."

Hayden scrunches his nose in disgust. "Gross. I don't need to know that you guys were fucking all night."

"What?! No, that's not—"

Hayden rolls his eyes. "Next time make sure you don't have a fucking fresh hickey, dude."

Shane slaps his hand over the spot he knows Ilya tends to favor. He motions for Ilya to *hurry the fuck up* so they can leave, relieved when Ilya picks up on it quickly and is weaseling his way out of a conversation about preferred kids clothing brands.

Shane makes a note to send the Pikes some kind of fruit basket in the near future anyway.



8 Months

Their last home game comes sooner rather than later.

Shane knew they weren't going to make it far this season. The best year they had was when both Shane and Ilya were active players, but that was two years ago when they were second years and had no clue what the future held for them, how much their lives would change in ways they never planned. Planned or not, Shane wouldn't change it, not for anything.

So, now they're playing their last home game. Bittersweet, but mostly sweet considering Ilya and Addie are in the stands, so close that all Shane has to do is look over and give a gloved wave for Ilya to catch his eye. He holds Addie up, revealing her small red and white McGill jersey with Hollander printed on the back, something Wiebe had given Shane once he got over the initial shock that it was Ilya Rozanov that got him pregnant.

"Hollander," Wiebe says, pulling Shane's attention away. He raises an eyebrow when Shane has the nerve to look sheepish at being caught looking lovesick. "It's very sweet that you've got your daughter and... Rozanov here to distract you, but please, don't get too distracted."

"Yes, coach," Shane nods, shoving his mouth guard into his mouth and ignoring the guys' teasing.

Maybe it's because he feels like he has something to prove, or because Ilya has always been his good luck charm in a weird way, but Shane plays the best he's played all season. Weaving between players, dodging checks, and falling right into place when the moment calls for it.

The rest of the guys keep up easily, as if feeding off of Shane's confidence, and Shane manages to get the puck into the net twice, getting them to tie.

He goes for a hat trick only for the goalie to somehow wake up in the last third, deflecting every puck that comes his way. Still, Shane can't get mad, not even when the other team scores their third goal.

When the final buzzer sounds, Shane selfishly skates over to where Ilya is standing, letting Addie bang on the tempered glass.

"Hey," Shane says loudly, earning a grin from Ilya and a scream from Addie who does her best to reach him even with the block between them. "Sorry for losing."

Ilya shakes his head. "No, you played beautiful. You always do."

Losing doesn't feel so bad when it already feels like he's won something more.



9 Months

The worst part of pediatric appointments is *this*, Shane thinks.

He knows Ilya would agree. Ilya would agree ten times, maybe even more. The moment he gets the Google calendar alert that the appointment is scheduled, he'll click his tongue and scowl at his phone like it's the one that's done something wrong.

"I do not like this," he says, looking comically enormous in the chair inside the room.

There are painted animals on the wall, all of their eyes seemingly staring right at Ilya and his breakdown while Addie is more focused on puckering her lips and then un-puckering them and then puckering them again. Shane makes a show of blowing a kiss at her, smiling when she blinks at him and then smacks her small hand against her mouth, throwing it out with a *mmaaahhh* sound, a nearly perfect copy of Shane's gesture. It's been her favorite thing to do lately other than drink water from her sippy cup and then spit it back out all over the front of her shirt.

Remembering Ilya's looming breakdown, Shane says, "We have to do this, like, every other month. You should be used to it."

"They are going to *stab* my baby," Ilya says, nervously twisting one of Addie's pigtails that he spent ten minutes parting and perfecting when he was getting her ready for what he claims is unjust and abusive.

"They're gonna give her her second round of one vaccine," Shane corrects. "I think some temporary pain is better than her getting some medieval disease and dying."

Ilya gasps, making Addie jump. Shane blows another kiss at her, relieved when she's distracted by returning it instead of bursting into tears at the sudden noise from her papa. "Shane—don't say that! What is wrong with you?"

"What? It's true!"

They're interrupted by a nurse coming in, holding a vial and a package with a needle and syringe. Ilya whimpers, burying his nose in the crown of Addie's head while she waves at the nice nurse who waves back with an open mouthed smile.

"There's Adelina! Our favorite baby!" Nurse Esther says before glancing at Ilya and then Shane. "Uh oh, is Papa nervous again?"

"Yes," Ilya says just as Shane says: "Yes."

"Okay," Esther says carefully. She knows the drill by now. "Dad, are you sure you don't want to hold her?"

"No, it makes him feel better if he's holding her," Shane tells her.

Ilya is already adjusting Addie, holding her calf to keep her from squirming so much when she's injected in her thigh. He squeezes his eyes shut, looking away. Shane winces as he watches Esther work quickly, giving Addie the shot. She starts to wail right away, and like clockwork, Ilya is crying too.

"All done!" the nurse announces loudly.

Ilya is quick to hold Addie to his chest, petting her head and rocking her. "My poor baby, Papa is so sorry," he apologizes in English first and then in Russian.

Luckily, Addie is soon soothed and they're gathering their things, ready to head to their next stop in the same medical complex.

The blue pamphlets are still coated in dust. Shane wonders if they've been restocked at all, but the thought is gone just as quickly as it comes when a familiar face comes out from the back.

Dr. Yañez stomps her feet giddily like a child, something she's done every time they've stopped by for a quick visit when they have the time. "Oh! She just keeps getting bigger and bigger and more beautiful! Can I—?"

"Of course," Shane says quickly, already know what she's asking. It's what she asks every time: if she can hold Addie.

Ilya hands her over with some hesitance. "She just got a shot," he explains. "Very terrible. We need to find a new method because I think I will die if I have to keep seeing this."

"You have the choice to stay home," Shane reminds him and Ilya is quick to shake his head.

"It never gets easier," Dr. Yañez whispers loudly, bouncing Addie with a laugh. "It's hard to think she used to fit in your belly, right?"

"No, yeah," Shane nods. "I think about it all the time."

"Me too," Ilya mumbles, earning an elbow in the side from Shane.

They catch up for a few minutes, Ilya showing her photos of Addie during Christmas and Shane sharing the story of her finding out she could scream at the top of her lungs resulting in some very loud wake ups in the morning. Soon, Addie is blowing Dr. Yañez a kiss and earning a chorus of fond coos from the passing by nurses and the receptionists, and they're leaving with pride stacked on their shoulders.



10 Months

Not everything has to be a competition, Shane knows this. Somehow, though, with Ilya, it always leads to some sort of bet. Like all their roads are destined to butt heads in some way, shape, or form despite all the love pouring out and between them.

"It will be Papa," Ilya says, putting more mashed sweet potatoes in Addie's silicone bowl suctioned onto the tray of her high chair.

"No way," Shane says quickly. "It'll be Dada for sure. It's easier to say. That's, like, the first word for all babies."

"Technically her first word was *baba* which is Russian," Ilya tells him. "So I win."

"That doesn't count!" Shane says over him. "She says *babababa* and she doesn't even know what it means!"

"Wow, just because her *baba* is dead—"

"Oh, fuck right off with the dead mom card."

Ilya cackles like a fucking maniac, head tilted back toward the ceiling. He comes back with a stupid grin, handing Addie her spoon and letting her shovel sweet potatoes into her mouth messily, only sort of getting the contents of the spoon into her mouth. "Say *Papa*. *Slushay—Pa-pa. Papa.*"

"Dada," Shane says louder, leaning in to get Addie's attention. "Da-da. *Daa-daa.*"

There's a pause as she looks between the two of them. Then, she smacks her lips. "Mmmmm. Mmmmm. Baaabaaaaaa."

Ilya sighs, falling back against his chair. "My mother is haunting this house."



Here is what Shane *won't* admit. Not out loud, at least.

When the sun sets and he's rocking Addie to sleep, humming along with the classical music playing, just enough to mute his words as he speaks to her right before she falls asleep, he'll say *Papa* over and over. Draw the syllables out, space them slowly and then quickly. He'll

make sure he's using the same inflections that Ilya does when he says it, because he knows that as great as it would be to hear the word *dada* come from Addie, it would feel so much better to hear the delighted laugh from Ilya, the subtle assurance that he's an even better father than he could have imagined himself being.

The pay off comes only a week later when Shane is getting ready to take her to class with him. She's been fussy all morning, her two front teeth starting to come in and her sleep often interrupted by waves of pain only soothed by frozen toys and some pain relief medication. So, when Shane is adjusting her to get her into her car-seat perched on the dining table, he's expecting the slight pushback.

What he *isn't* expecting is for her to squirm, her body lurching toward where Ilya is in the kitchen, sleepily eating a bowl of cereal. Her arms shoot out, fists opening and closing in grabby motions, beckoning him with a whine followed by a, "Mmmm *Papa!*"

Shane blinks, eyes widening as he whips his head around to look at Ilya.

Ilya stares back just as shocked, his bowl nearly falling from his grasp as he sets it down on the counter and rushes toward her, letting her practically throw herself into his arms. "Papa? Did she say—"

"Papa, *papa*," Addie repeats, reaching up to pull at his unruly curls.

Shane can't help but smile, especially when Ilya's face brightens up, eyes wet. "Well. Looks like she wants to stay with Papa today."



11 Months

One week ago today, Addie pulled herself up for the first time in her bedroom. She had been playing with Ilya, crawling around and on top of him while Shane mounted a new shelf in front of the door for her growing collection of books.

Within the second, her hands had been curling against the bars on her crib, and she was pulling herself up to full height, looking over her shoulder and beaming with all four teeth when Shane and Ilya gasped, rushing to celebrate by scooping her up and kissing her face more times than they could count.

In the moment, it had been something so amazing. Now, Shane was missing the days she couldn't do much more than stare blankly at a rattle they held over her face.

"No—*Addie*," Shane says for the nth time. He stopped keeping track, really. He takes the remote from her, earning what could be classified as the meltdown of the century. "Nuh uh, you're not gonna make me feel bad for keeping you safe, kid."

Ilya comes into the living room from the bathroom, taking one look at where Addie has thrown herself on the carpet face down, wailing like she has a reason to. "Remote?" he asks.

"Yup," Shane sighs. "And now I'm the asshole."

Ilya puts his hands on his hips in what is supposed to be an authoritative way. He points at Addie who is now sitting up, staring at him with tear stained cheeks. "Hey, *bukashka*, *ne yesh' eto*." little bug, don't eat that

There's a pause and then Addie throws herself back onto the floor and starts to cry again, this time louder, which Shane didn't know was possible. "At least we know she's gonna be fluent."



Graduation comes quickly, nearly all at once. Of course, Shane had the date saved, had told his parents about it months before because he's a decent planner like that. But now, sitting amidst students in his class, listening to speech after speech be given, he can't really believe that time has passed by so quickly. How much he's managed to grow in the course of four years.

Though, he knows a lot of that growing came within the last year. He wonders what it would have been like if things were different, but can't even begin to imagine a life without the two greatest things that could have happened to him.

His eyes scan over the heads in front of him, and then over to the other side where he knows Ilya is sitting, separated by major. He locks in on Ilya's gold curls peeking out from beneath his graduation cap. As if sensing eyes on him, Ilya turns his head, quickly winking at Shane and smirking when it ears him a blush.

It's all sort of mundane, Shane thinks as it drags on, eyes trailing to the stands where his parents are somewhere, holding Addie and probably trying to keep her from squirming away and exploring her new surroundings. By the time his name is being called and he's shaking some hands, he's ready to go home and enjoy the company of his family.

After, Shane and Ilya find each other, collapsing into an embrace and staying like that for what seems like forever.

Ilya kisses the side of his head, jostling his cap slightly. "Proud of you," he says, just low enough for only Shane to hear.

"Yeah, well. I'm proud of you too," Shane tells him, about to kiss the fond smile off his face when suddenly they're both being crushed in a hug.

"You boys are so cute!" Svetlana beams, letting them go in favor of turning her head each and every way in search of something more important. "Now, where is my angel?"

"*Your* angel?" Ilya scoffs. "Name her three favorite things right now. Quickly!"

Svetlana gives him a bored look before listing on her fingers, "Sweet potatoes, screaming, and your TV remote."

Ilya presses his lips together bitterly. "That does not count, you cheated."

"You and Shane send me updates every day!" Svetlana points out.

Shane hears Addie before he sees her. He wonders if it's like Spidey Sense in a way, if he's just programmed now to pick her out of a crowd. He turns in time to see his parents making their way toward them, Addie perched on his dad's hip and immediately reaching out for Shane once he's in her line of sight.

Shane takes her happily, kissing her cheek. "Did you see Papa and me?"

"Oh, she fell asleep," Yuna tells him honestly. "But she woke up just in time for us to come down here without making her cranky!"

Ilya makes a show of pushing Svetlana out of the way to take Addie from Shane, spinning with her and making her squeal with laughter. "Are you very proud of us, *bukashka*? Hm?"

Yuna pushes Shane toward Ilya. "Go on, I wanna get a picture! You can add it to her photo album!"

Shane and Ilya pose side by side with Addie in Ilya's arms facing forward, smiling as Svetlana makes faces at her and then blowing a kiss when David starts to do it first.

Then, Svetlana offers to take a picture of the five of them, holding up Yuna's phone as she says, "Say: cheese!"

Addie is the first one to say, "Cheeee!"

And if the picture is ruined by all of them whipping her heads to regard her third word, then it's worth it.



12 Months

Addie's first birthday comes eventually, much to Shane and Ilya's happiness and dismay. How a year can pass by so quickly, Shane doesn't know. He understands what people mean now when they say time is a thief, although, time has also gifted him so many precious things. There are a lot of mixed emotions when the day comes.

It falls on a weekday, and her birthday party has been prepped and planned for the better part of a month—all Yuna Hollander's doing—the theme being *One Cute Bug*, as per Ilya's request. It'll take place this weekend to come, out in Ottawa in the Hollander's backyard where there's more than enough space to host. A majority of their friends already RSVP'd. There's a cake getting baked by Svetlana's friend. Jackie and Hayden are expecting their third, and if her morning sickness isn't too bad, they'll come early to help decorate. It's all set, all ready to go.

But Shane and Ilya refuse to let her actual birthday pass by without any sort of celebration. So, Ilya takes it upon himself to bake her a cake, the apartment smelling like vanilla and

cinnamon as he places a 1 shaped candle on top of the white frosting.

"Cinnamon bread cake?" Shane asks, making sure Addie doesn't shove her hand into it as Ilya finishes the final touches.

Ilya smiles, sitting in the dining chair beside Shane and pressing a kiss to his temple. "Yes. I know you both love it."

Addie points to the cake, looking up at Shane. "Dada?"

"It's your cake," Shane explains. "Because it's your birthday. That means you were born a year ago."

"It means you are growing up," Ilya says with a sad noise. "And you are breaking our hearts."

Shane laughs, kicking him beneath the table and telling him to go ahead and light the candle. The flame catches on the stick and Addie's eyes widen in amazement at the sudden glowing light.

Shane and Ilya's eyes meet, each smiling slightly right before they start *Happy Birthday* together. Addie looks between the both of them, fascinated by the song as well. When it ends, Ilya claps and Addie follows along, with a beaming smile.

"Now you blow it out," Shane tells her, making a show of puffing his cheeks and exhaling sharply. "See? Your turn."

Addie blinks before turning to the cake, leaning forward and pretty much just spitting on the whole thing. It's Ilya who actually extinguishes the flame with his breath, but they give her all the credit in the world, cheering again.

They let her reach out, fingers digging into a cake, her hand coming up to offer some to Shane and then Ilya.

The sweetness coats Shane's tongue, reminding him of home, both in Ottawa and here, where Ilya's mouth is covered in white frosting as he lets Addie shove another fistful of cake against his mouth.

He thinks it all the time, but it's especially right now that he counts his lucky stars, thanks them for letting it be Ilya who he was reckless with. Ilya who he fell into fear with, who stayed with him and somehow grew to love him too.

When Ilya catches his love soaked stare, he doesn't have to ask to understand.

ADDIE LOOK BOOK! CLICK ON THE Xs!

Miffy hat at the aquarium [X](#) | Romper Shane takes her to class in [X](#) | Halloween costume [X](#) | Christmas outfit by Yuna [X](#) + [x](#) | Christmas onesie [X](#) |

the end :)

shane, ilya, and addie will return in avengers: doomsday

(hahaha just kidding... unless...?)

► SOME EXTRA HOLLANO_OV EXCLUSIVES!

kudos and comments appreciated! thank you sososo much for everyone that has come along on this journey and to everyone that has read this in it's entirety, ongoing or complete! i hope you take this piece of cinnamon bread and store it in ur heart. or stomach?

see you for my next work, whatever it may be!

End Notes

thank you for joining me in this first chapter! i have the second chapter already written and it will be out either next thursday/friday. chapter 3 is currently being written, and ch4 is outlined, so i don't think the wait between chapters will be too long! also this is mostly gonna be abt them falling in luv—little to no angst! just domestic vibes!

kudos+comments+encouragement much appreciated! follow me on [tw!](#)

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