

Almost There

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Almost There

by [Sweettree](#)

Summary

Shane had planned the pregnancy down to the week.

That was the joke everyone kept making, anyway. Not that it was inaccurate.

The third trimester was supposed to land perfectly during the off season so Shane could avoid flying, avoid media appearances, avoid unnecessary stress, and ideally spend the last stretch of pregnancy resting quietly at home with his husband.

Instead, the third trimester was destroying him.

He was tired all the time. Not regular tired either. Bone-deep, miserable exhaustion that made him want to cry if he had to walk upstairs twice in one day. His back hurt. His hips hurt. His knees hurt. His ribs hurt. Sometimes his skin hurt for reason.

Or. Pregnant Shane shorts.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Shane had planned the pregnancy down to the week.

That was the joke everyone kept making, anyway. Not that it was inaccurate.

Shane had spreadsheets. He had timelines. He had meetings with doctors and nutritionists and trainers and a frighteningly calm fertility specialist who had once looked directly at Ilya and said, “You should probably just trust your husband on this.”

The third trimester was supposed to land perfectly during the off season so Shane could avoid flying, avoid media appearances, avoid unnecessary stress, and ideally spend the last stretch of pregnancy resting quietly at home with his husband.

Instead, the third trimester was destroying him.

He was tired all the time. Not regular tired either. Bone-deep, miserable exhaustion that made him want to cry if he had to walk upstairs twice in one day. His back hurt. His hips hurt. His knees hurt. His ribs hurt. Sometimes his skin hurt for reasons nobody could explain.

Sleeping had become impossible.

He was exhausted enough to fall asleep sitting upright on the couch at two in the afternoon, but the second he climbed into bed his body forgot how to exist comfortably. He needed pillows under his stomach, behind his back, between his knees, under one arm, and occasionally beneath his feet because his ankles kept swelling.

And then he had to pee every forty-five minutes.

Ilya had stopped asking if he wanted help getting out of bed because the answer was always yes.

Shane hated that.

He hated needing help.

He hated not fitting into his clothes.

He hated the feeling of his body no longer belonging entirely to him.

Mostly he hated that he couldn’t control any of it.

The baby kicked constantly. Violently.

Apparently that was healthy.

Shane thought it felt like he was being attacked from inside.

“Your daughter is trying to escape,” he muttered one morning, glaring down at his stomach while standing in the kitchen.

“Our daughter,” Ilya corrected automatically.
Shane narrowed his eyes.

“She kicked my bladder six times last night. She’s your daughter.”

Ilya kissed the side of his head to hide his smile.

“Get away from me.” Shane said while leaning away as best he could without throwing off his center of gravity.

Shane was standing in exactly one spot in the kitchen because currently toast could only be eaten while leaning against the island near the sink. Not sitting. Not standing normally. Leaning.

Pregnancy had apparently turned him insane.

At least according to him.

Ilya personally thought Shane was handling things remarkably well considering he was growing an entire human being.

Still, the mood swings were terrifying.
Not dramatic exactly. Shane was not throwing dishes or screaming.

He just got intensely, catastrophically upset over things that normally would not matter at all.

Yesterday he had cried because the grocery store had discontinued one specific brand of strawberry yogurt.

Two days before that he had nearly had a breakdown because the fitted sheet came loose from one corner of the mattress from him turning over.

Last week he had become furious with Ilya for breathing too loudly while eating cereal.
“Sorry my lungs work, must be the lack of smoking. More, how you mean capacity.” Ilya had said.

Shane had glared at him with genuine hostility.

Now, watching Shane chew toast while looking close to punching someone Ilya decided silence was the safer option.

“You have dinner with your parents tonight,” he reminded gently.

Shane groaned. “I know.”

“You still want to go?”

“Yes.” Shane sighed heavily. “Mom already made reservations.”

“You can cancel.”

“No. They’re excited, want to see the baby. Everyone wants to see the fucking baby. Wish she would come out already so I wouldn’t have to be there.” Shane said poking at his stomach.

David and Yuna had become almost unbearably delighted about the baby. Yuna called daily. David had already assembled half the nursery furniture despite Shane insisting he and Ilya could handle it themselves.

Shane loved them dearly.

Right now he also wanted everyone to leave him alone forever.

“You okay?” Ilya asked quietly.
Shane looked at him for a long moment.

“No. Obviously not Rozanov. God.” Shane gave him a harsh side eye.

Ilya crossed the kitchen and wrapped both arms carefully around him from behind.

Shane melted immediately.

That was the other thing. He was clingier now. Not publicly. Shane Hollander would rather die than become publicly clingy.
But at home he wanted constant physical contact.

He wanted Ilya nearby all the time.
Usually one hand resting somewhere on him.

His stomach.

His hip.

The back of his neck.

Anywhere.

“You’re almost there,” Ilya murmured against his hair.

“Fuck that.”

“You’re doing amazing.”

Shane laughed weakly. “I can barely get up in the morning.”

“You are making person. I am here to make sure you get up. Is nothing.”

Shane leaned back into him harder. “I’m so fucking tired Ilya.”

“I know.”

“I slept maybe two hours today.”

“You napped this afternoon.”

“I did?”

“Very cute. All wrapped up like a little baby. My babies.”

Shane snorted softly despite himself.

Getting dressed for dinner took almost an hour.

Mostly because Shane hated everything he tried on.

The first shirt was too tight.

The second made him look “like a decorative throw pillow.”

The third apparently made his face look swollen.

Ilya did not understand how shirts affected facial appearance but wisely kept this opinion private.

By the time Shane was standing in only boxer briefs and glaring into the closet like it was withholding clothing on purpose, Ilya was beginning to worry.

“Maybe stay home,” he suggested carefully.

“No.”

“Shanya..”

“I already said we’re going.”

“You look tired.”

“I am fucking tired thanks for noticing.” Shane said while angrily searching for clothes.

Okay Ilya will admit that was probably redundant. Shane wants solutions not observations. Alright.

“You could wear sweatpants. Your parents love you no matter what.”

Shane stared at him like he had turned green. “I am not wearing sweatpants to dinner.”

“Okay.”

Eventually Shane settled on a dark navy maternity suit that had been tailored specifically for him.

It was elegant. Structured. Expensive. And very, very obvious.

The fitted jacket curved around the underside of his stomach while the matching pants stretched smoothly over his hips. There was absolutely no disguising the pregnancy anymore. Shane looked heavily pregnant.

Beautiful, Ilya thought instantly.

Shane looked unconvinced.

He emerged from the bedroom slowly, one hand pressed against his lower back.

“Well?”

Ilya looked up from his phone and forgot every language he knew.

Shane’s stomach looked enormous.

Not in a bad way. Just undeniably pregnant.

Full of him.

His hair was soft from the shower. His cheeks were flushed with irritation. The suit fit perfectly and emphasized every curve pregnancy had added to his body.

Ilya was obsessed with him.

Shane narrowed his eyes immediately. “That expression means something.”

“What expression?”

“That one.”

“You look good.”

“Good.”

“Yes.”

“Just good.”

Ilya sensed danger. “Very good. Most handsome man alive.”

Shane looked down at himself unhappily.

“I look huge.”

“You are pregnant.”

Ilya stood and crossed the room carefully.

“It is impossible for you to look bad,” he said honestly.

Shane looked unconvinced. “Ilya.”

“Yes?”

“Do I look enormous in this?”

This was obviously a trap. A deadly trap.

Shane was objectively enormous. He was carrying a nearly full-term baby. Pretending otherwise would be absurd.

But saying yes felt suicidal.

“...No.” Ilya lied immediately.

Shane squinted at him. “You hesitated.”

“I did not.”

“You absolutely fucking did.”

“I was appreciating husband.”

“You think I look fat and you’re probably getting off on it. You-you..fuck whatever let’s just go.”

Ilya helped him button the jacket because Shane could no longer comfortably see the lower buttons himself.

That seemed to annoy him all over again.

“I hate this.”

“The buttons?”

“Needing help.”

Ilya softened immediately. “Shane.”

“Shut up I take it back.”

“You are thirty-six weeks pregnant.”

“Thirty-six and two days.”

“See? Worse.”

Shane huffed out a reluctant laugh.

Then he winced and pressed a hand against the underside of his stomach.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Shane.”

“The baby shoved her foot into my ribs.”

Ilya crouched automatically, palms spreading over the curve of Shane’s stomach.

“Tiny princess.” he informed the baby sternly. “Stop assaulting daddy.”

Another kick landed beneath his hand.

“Disrespectful already,” Ilya muttered.

Shane’s expression softened despite his discomfort.

Watching Ilya with the baby still undid him completely.

It had from the beginning.

Ilya looked so naturally protective now. So attentive. Like every instinct he possessed had narrowed entirely around keeping Shane comfortable and safe.

Sometimes Shane caught him staring with open wonder.

Like he still could not believe this was real.

Honestly, neither could Shane.

“Ready?” Ilya asked.

“Mhm.”

Dinner started well.

Too well, maybe.

Yuna immediately fussed over Shane the second they arrived at the restaurant.

“You’re pale,” she said.

“Mom.”

“Are you sleeping?”

“No.”

“You need more water.”

“I’m drinking water.”

David pulled out Shane's chair before Ilya could.

"How's my favorite granddaughter?"

"She kicked me in the bladder this morning," Shane said flatly.

David grinned. "That's gonna be a strong baby."

Shane rolled his eyes but smiled.

The restaurant was quiet and upscale enough that nobody bothered them. People recognized Shane and Ilya sometimes now, especially after coming out publicly and getting married, but the novelty had faded enough that dinners were mostly peaceful again.

Still, Shane looked exhausted.

He shifted constantly trying to get comfortable in the chair.

Finally Ilya folded his own suit jacket and tucked it behind Shane's lower back. Shane practically moaned in relief.

"Better?"

"Yes."

Yuna smiled knowingly into her wineglass.

"You spoil him."

"I have earned it," Shane informed her.

Shane's appetite was ridiculous lately.

He ordered enough food for three people and still stole half of Ilya's fries afterward.

Nobody commented on it because the one time someone had jokingly said, "Eating for two?" Shane had looked ready to commit murder.

Now everyone simply watched him inhale bread with respectful silence.

Halfway through dinner Shane suddenly froze.

"What?" Ilya asked instantly.

"The baby has hiccups."

David burst out laughing. "Hiccups? Like father like daughter."

"It feels so weird."

"Can I feel?"

Shane hesitated only briefly before nodding.

David leaned over carefully, hand against Shane's stomach.

A moment later his entire face transformed.

“Oh my God.”

Yuna immediately leaned over too.

Ilya watched quietly while Shane endured being fussed over by his parents with surprising patience.

He looked tired. But happy.

There was still stress in the tightness around his eyes. Still discomfort every time he shifted positions.

But there was happiness too.

Shane caught Ilya watching him and mouthed help me while Yuna started discussing stroller options again.

Ilya grinned.

Shane glared.

Later, when dessert arrived, Shane abruptly looked horrified.

“What?”

“I forgot.”

“What?”

“I wanted cheesecake.”

“You ordered chocolate cake Дорогой.”

“I know that.” Shane glared like Ilya was an idiot.

“So order cheesecake too.”

Shane blinked at him. “Right.”

Yuna laughed softly. “Pregnancy brain?”

Shane covered his face with one hand.

He looked deeply offended.

Ilya rubbed his knee under the table.

“Cheesecake?”

“Yes,” Shane muttered.

“Okay.”

By the time they got home Shane was fading fast.

He looked exhausted.

The drive back had been mostly silent except for occasional complaints about his hips hurting.

Ilya parked in the garage and climbed out quickly to help.

Shane moved carefully getting out of the passenger seat, one hand braced on the door.

“Easy.”

“I’m fine.”

“You are about to trip here-“ Ilya moved to adjust Shane’s leg on the ground.

“I am not.” Shane swatted it away

“You can-”

“Shut up.”

Ilya kissed his temple to soften the insult.

Shane shuffled toward the front door while Ilya grabbed leftovers from the backseat. A moment later he heard an angry noise.

“What?”

Shane was glaring furiously at the front door.

“What happened?”

“The lock won’t work.” Ilya blinked.

Shane was pressing the car key fob directly against the deadbolt.

“Shane.”

“What?”

“That is car key.”

Shane stared at him blankly. Then down at the keys. Then back at the door.

For one horrible second Ilya watched realization hit.

“Oh my God.”

“It’s okay.”

“I’m trying to unlock the house with the car keys.”

“Yes.”

Shane’s face crumpled instantly.

“Hey,” Ilya said quickly.

“This is so stupid.”

“No.”

“I can’t think straight anymore.”

“You are tired.”

“I used my phone flashlight looking for my phone this morning.”

David and Yuna, still standing nearby after walking them to the door, both started laughing.

Unfortunately Shane was too emotional to appreciate it.

“It’s not funny,” he snapped.

Yuna immediately stopped laughing. “Oh honey.”

“I’m serious. I can’t remember anything. I can’t sleep. I can barely move without help and now apparently I don’t know how keys work.”

“Shane,” Ilya said gently.

“No. It’s humiliating.” His eyes filled suddenly.

Fuck.

Ilya abandoned the leftovers immediately and crossed to him.

Shane pulled away from everyone and finally unlocked the actual front door with trembling hands. Then he disappeared inside without another word.

Silence settled heavily.

Yuna sighed. “He’s overwhelmed.”

“I know.”

“Don’t take it personally,” she said softly.

“I won’t.”

David rubbed the back of his neck. “I really was not laughing at him.”

“I know.”

“He’s just always so competent,” David said. “Seeing him frazzled feels strange.”

“That is because Shane believes he must be perfect at all times,” Ilya said dryly.

Yuna smiled sadly. “That started young.”

Ilya knew.

Shane carried responsibility like religion.

If he could not do something flawlessly, he considered it failure.

Pregnancy had stripped away his control piece by piece.

No wonder he was miserable.

“I’ll take care of him,” Ilya promised.

“We know.”

Chapter End Notes

I just want to say that I appreciate every single comment and every bit of praise that I get. I want to reply to every single one of them, but it gets to the point where my inbox is kind of overwhelming me but I just want to say that I read every single comment. Like every day, I check my inbox and I read the comments. I even have favorite comments that I screenshot and I have in a folder in my phone. Like I see every single one of them I read every single one of them if you comment thinking oh they might not see it. I will see it trust me and I appreciate all of it so so much.

Chapter 2

Shane woke up uncomfortable. Again.

It was normal now.

Actually sleeping long enough to wake up naturally was the unusual part.

Tonight he surfaced slowly from a shallow half-sleep with an ache running through his lower back and hips so sharp it made his eyes sting.

For one disoriented second he just lay there breathing through it.

Dark room.

Warm blankets.

Ilya asleep beside him.

Baby pressing directly into his ribs like a tiny psychopath.

Shane swallowed a groan and shifted carefully.

Instant regret.

Something in his pelvis protested violently.

“Oh my God,” he whispered to absolutely nobody.

Beside him, Ilya made a sleepy sound but did not wake.

Shane checked the clock.

2:13 a.m. Perfect.

He closed his eyes again.

The pillow under his stomach suddenly felt way too rough on his sensitive skin.

The one behind his back too thick.

His feet were hot in these socks.

His left hip was numb from falling asleep on it.

And the baby had apparently decided now was the perfect opportunity for light stretching.

Another hard kick landed beneath his ribs.

Shane inhaled sharply.

“No,” he muttered weakly at his stomach. “Absolutely fucking not.”

The baby ignored him. Of course.

Carefully Shane tried rolling onto his other side.

The process now required planning comparable to moving heavy furniture. Halfway through the turn his back spasmed.

“Oh, fuck.”

That woke Ilya immediately.

He jerked upright, hair sticking up everywhere.

“Что?”

“Nothing.”

“Shane.”

Shane kept breathing slowly through clenched teeth.

“My back hurts.”

Ilya blinked awake properly. “How bad?”

“Everything hurts. And I think I’m stuck.”

“Ohh my Shane..”

“I’m fine.”

“You are awake at-“ Ilya glanced at the clock “-two in morning whispering profanity to baby.”

Ilya pushed himself up and immediately reached for him.

“Come here.”

Shane let himself be maneuvered carefully onto his side again.

Ilya’s hand slid beneath his sleep shirt, warm against the aching curve of his lower back.

The first slow stroke nearly made Shane cry.

“Oh.”

“Very tense,” Ilya murmured.

“I feel like I got hit by a truck.”

“Tiny truck. Full of baby.” Shane snorted tiredly.

Ilya kept rubbing slow circles into the muscles beside his spine.

Eventually the knot in Shane’s shoulders loosened slightly.

“Better?”

“A little.”

“Need more pillows?”

“Yes.”

The answer was always yes.

Ilya climbed out of bed without complaint and immediately started reorganizing the entire pillow structure surrounding Shane’s body.

One under his knees.

One tucked behind his shoulders.

Another beneath his stomach.

Shane watched him through heavy eyes.

“You’re good at this now.”

“I am very smart Hollander, is not new.”

“Shut up.”

The baby kicked again. Shane groaned.

“What now?”

“She’s moving.”

Ilya rested both hands gently over Shane’s stomach.

“Little girl” he said sternly, still half asleep.

“Daddy needs rest.”

A strong kick answered him immediately.

“Rude,” Ilya informed the baby.

Shane laughed softly despite himself.

The movement shifted something in his ribs again.

Shane had been trying so hard to enjoy this. To appreciate it. To focus on how wanted this baby was.

But thirty-six weeks pregnant at two in the morning was apparently where honesty lived.

“I can’t sleep. I can’t move properly. I can’t even breathe normally anymore.”

Ilya smoothed a hand slowly over his stomach.

“You are almost there.”

“I know.” Shane rubbed tiredly at his face. “I just want my body back.”

That one hurt to hear. Not because it was wrong. Just because Shane sounded so defeated. Ilya leaned down and kissed his forehead gently.

“You are doing amazing.”

“I’m literally lying here complaining.”

“You are growing human while complaining. Very impressive multitasking.”

A tired smile flickered briefly across Shane’s face.

Ilya kept rubbing his stomach gently.

That had become another nighttime ritual.

Slow circles over stretched skin while whispering nonsense to both Shane and the baby until one of them fell asleep first.

Usually Ilya.

Tonight Shane’s breathing finally started evening out.

His shoulders relaxed inch by inch.

Ilya brushed his fingers lightly through Shane’s hair.

“Better?”

“Mhm.”

“Think you can sleep?”

“Maybe.”

“Good.”

Shane’s eyes drifted shut. For several precious minutes everything stayed quiet.

Then Shane suddenly inhaled sharply.

Ilya froze. “What?”

“I have to pee.” Shane made a miserable sound into the pillow.

“I just got comfortable.”

“I know.”

“I don’t want to move.”

“You still have to pee.”

“I know.” Neither of them moved.

Shane looked genuinely devastated.

Finally he muttered, “This is the worst thing that’s ever happened to anyone.”

Ilya laughed softly. “Very tragic.”

“Don’t mock me.”

“Never.”

Shane stared at the ceiling like he was preparing for battle.

Then he held out one hand dramatically.

“Help.”

Getting Shane out of bed now required teamwork.

Ilya carefully peeled blankets and pillows away while Shane attempted to roll upright with all the grace of an overturned turtle.

“Wait,” Shane gasped halfway up. “Wait, wait, wait.”

“What?”

“Round ligament pain.”

Ilya paused immediately, hands steady on his hips while Shane breathed through it.

After a minute the pain eased enough for him to continue.

“Okay.”

“Sure?”

“No. But continue.”

Finally upright, Shane sat on the edge of the bed panting lightly like he had completed intense physical labor.

“Fuck my life,” he muttered again.

“I know.”

Standing was worse. Ilya braced both hands under Shane’s arms while Shane levered himself upward with a groan.

The second he stood the baby dropped heavily against his bladder.

“Hurry-fuck.” Shane began to quickly waddle towards their bathroom.

“Careful.” Ilya advised.

“Shut up Rozanov.”

The walk to the bathroom took approximately three years.

Shane waddled a little more careful while clutching Ilya’s arm.

“You are laughing at me.”

“I am smiling affectionately.”

“I could fucking kill you right now.”

Shane glared. Unfortunately the glare lost some impact when paired with exhausted bedhead and one hand supporting the underside of his stomach.

At the toilet Shane stopped moving.
Ilya blinked.

“What?”

“I can’t sit down.”

“You can.”

“No, I mean without help.”

Without a word Ilya stepped closer and helped guide him carefully downward.

Shane gripped his shoulders the entire time.

“There,” Ilya said softly once he was seated.

Shane looked deeply offended by the entire experience.

“I’m never having another kid.”

“You said that yesterday too.”

“I meant it yesterday too. Keep your dick to yourself.”

Ilya kissed the top of his head. "I wait outside."

"No." Shane caught his wrist before he could move away. "Stay."

Immediate softness hit him right in the chest.

"Okay."

So Ilya stayed.

Half asleep and leaning against the bathroom counter while Shane glared resentfully at the wall from the toilet.

Marriage was beautiful.

Eventually Shane sighed heavily.

"Okay."

"Finished?"

"Yes."

Helping him stand again was somehow even harder.

Shane made a noise halfway between a groan and a whimper as he pushed upward.

"I can't believe people do this multiple times."

"Maybe they forget."

"I will never forget this shit."

Back in bed it took another twenty minutes and six pillow adjustments before Shane settled again.

This time he fell asleep almost instantly.

Pure exhaustion finally winning.

Ilya stayed awake a little longer listening to his breathing.

Then eventually sleep dragged him under too.

The next afternoon Shane finally crashed.

Like his body had finally reached the absolute limit of functioning on almost no sleep.

He had spent the morning irritable and glassy-eyed, drifting around the house wrapped in one of Ilya's oversized hoodies while complaining about swelling.

Nothing fit today.

The baby was “sitting weird.”

By noon he was so tired he nearly cried because the sandwich place that always opened at 9...opened at 9. So he had to wait for his breakfast sandwich. Ilya was of course the first person inside though.

That helped briefly.

Finally around three Shane managed to arrange himself on the couch in what he declared was “the least horrible position.”

It involved approximately nine pillows and one folded blanket beneath his hips.

Ilya covered him carefully with a light throw blanket.

“You comfortable?”

“Don’t fucking talk to me.” Shane mumbled with eyes already closed. “If I move I’ll die.”

“Okay.”

Five minutes later Shane was asleep. Deeply asleep.

One hand resting protectively over the curve of his stomach.

Ilya watched him for a moment from the kitchen.

Poor baby.

Pregnancy really had knocked the composure out of him lately.

Not publicly, mostly. But at home Shane had become softer around the edges.

Needier.

Ilya loved taking care of him. Even when Shane got grumpy enough to threaten violence over breathing too loud.

The phone rang.

Ilya lunged for it immediately before the sound could wake Shane.

Too late.

Shane twitched awake on the couch with a distressed noise.

“Fuck,” Ilya muttered, answering quickly. “What?”

“Jesus,” Cliff Marlow said. “Good afternoon to you too.”

Ilya looked toward the couch.

Shane was blinking blearily, trying to orient himself. Already upset and starting to shift.

“You woke him up,” Ilya hissed.

“Who?”

“My pregnant husband who has not right slept in week.”

“Oh.” Brief pause. “Sorry?”

“What do you want?”

“Yuna asked if you guys had finalized the baby shower guest list because apparently nobody can agree whether old teammates count as family friends or hockey friends.”

Ilya stared at the phone. “What?”

“The baby shower.”

“What about it?”

“Do old teammates count separately from active teammates?”

Ilya closed his eyes slowly. “You called me for this?”

“I’ve been trying to get around telling her I’m transferring so sh-.”

“Cliff.”

“Yeah?”

“I swear to God if you wake Shane again over a fucking spreadsheet—”

From the couch came a miserable voice.

“Ilya?”

Immediately his attention snapped away from the phone.

“Hold on.” He lowered the phone. “Shanya?”

Shane looked wrecked. Hair flattened strangely from sleep. Eyes unfocused. One hand pressed beneath his stomach.

“I have to pee.”

Ilya sighed toward the ceiling. “Okay.”

Into the phone he said, “Figure it out yourself,” and hung up before Cliff could answer.

Shane was already trying unsuccessfully to sit up.

“Wait,” Ilya said quickly, crossing the room. “I got you.”

“I can’t get leverage.” Shane held both arms out impatiently the second Ilya reached him.
“Come on.”

“You are very bossy for someone trapped by couch.”

“Shut up and help me.”

Ilya grinned helplessly and carefully pulled him upright.

Shane immediately clung to him with a groan.

“Oh God.”

“What hurts?”

“My pelvis..”

“Right.”

Shane leaned heavily against him for a second, eyes closed.

“Tired?”

“I feel drugged.”

“You need sleep.”

“I was sleeping.”

“Until Cliff ruined everything.”

Shane opened one eye. “Was that Cliff?”

“Yes.”

“What did he want?”

“Dumb things.”

Another minute passed before Shane sighed heavily.

“Bathroom.”

“Yes, your majesty.”

Shane glared weakly at him.

Then his expression softened suddenly.

“Thanks.”

Ilya paused. “For what?”

Shane gestured vaguely at himself. “All this.”

The exhaustion in his face made him look painfully young for a second.

Ilya touched his cheek gently.

“Always.”

By Friday afternoon Shane had officially reached the stage of pregnancy where leaving the house felt like preparing for war.

Unfortunately they needed groceries.

Apparently feeding forty people at a baby shower required “supplies,” according to Yuna, who had sent them a detailed shopping list at eight that morning.

Shane had stared at the text for a full minute before groaning dramatically into his pillow.

“I can’t go outside,” he announced.

“You went outside yesterday.”

“I regretted it immediately and that was just to get the mail...”

Now, three hours later, he stood in front of the bedroom mirror looking deeply hostile toward all available clothing options.

Nothing fit.

Nothing.

At least not correctly.

The problem wasn’t just size anymore. It was texture. Tightness. Temperature. Seams. Fabric weight.

“These shorts are way too short on me now” Shane informed the room.

Ilya looked up from slipping on his socks.

“They are shorts.”

“More like a thong with how fat my ass is now.”

“Oh noo, what will I do.” Ilya said smirking up at him.

Shane glared at him.

Eventually he gave up entirely and shoved himself into a soft gray T-shirt that hardly reached the underside of his stomach.

It stretched tightly over the full curve of his belly.

Then came black athletic shorts and flip-flops because bending down far enough to deal with actual shoes was apparently impossible today.

When Shane finally turned around, Ilya blinked.

The shirt was...revealing.

Not scandalous exactly.

There was absolutely no disguising how pregnant Shane was anymore.

The stretched fabric outlined everything. The heavy curve of his stomach. The fullness of his chest. Even his belly button pushing faintly against the shirt.

Combined with the shorts riding low beneath his stomach and the flip-flops, Shane looked less like a hockey superstar and more like an aggressively exhausted suburban dad.

A very hot suburban dad.

Ilya stared too long.

Shane narrowed his eyes immediately. "What?"

"Nothing."

"That means something."

"You are showing lot of stomach."

Shane looked down briefly. "And?"

"Just saying you look amazing, like-like a model."

"It's eighty-five degrees outside Rozanov. Sorry if I don't want to be sweaty and miserable for the sake of your wierd possessiveness."

"I know. Forget I said anything."

"I'm already sweating. Fuck!"

Pregnancy had apparently transformed Shane into a human furnace.

The air conditioning ran constantly now.

At night he slept with one leg outside the blankets while complaining dramatically about living inside Satan's asshole.

"I'm not putting on more clothes," Shane informed him firmly.

“I did not say you should.”

“You were thinking it.” Shane huffed “Fucking asshole.”

Shane grabbed his wallet and sunglasses with visible irritation.

“Let’s go before I lose momentum.” The drive over was quiet.

Mostly because Shane was conserving energy like a man preparing for an expedition across Antarctica.

By the time they reached the grocery store he already looked annoyed.

Ilya had to park in the only spot that had an empty slot next to it so Shane could throw himself from the car.

Ilya got out and immediately moved around to Shane’s side.

Shane had one leg out of the and a hand on the roof of the car for leverage. Eyes closed.

“Take your time..” Ilya said while adjusting Shane’s leg.

“Too hot...”he muttered climbing carefully out of the car and letting out a deep huff.

Ilya immediately moved closer. “Okay?”

“My hips feel like shit..”

“We could-”

“Shut up.”

The automatic doors opened and cool air blasted across Shane’s face.

He nearly moaned. “Oh thank God.”

For the first twenty minutes things actually went surprisingly well.

Shane leaned heavily on the shopping cart while directing operations with military precision.

He waddled slowly through the store in flip-flops, one hand braced automatically against the underside of his stomach every few minutes. Shifting from foot to foot.

People looked sometimes.

That happened everywhere now. Mostly curious glances. Sometimes recognition.

Occasionally soft smiles from older parents.

Shane tolerated it better than expected. Probably because he was too tired to care.

At one point he stopped abruptly beside the freezer section.

“What?”

“The baby has hiccups.”

Apparently their daughter experienced hiccups twenty hours a day.

Ilya rested a hand briefly against Shane’s stomach and immediately felt the tiny rhythmic movements.

“Cute.”

“It feels weird.”

“You complain about everything.”

“Yes.”

They reached produce. Then dairy.

Then the endless nightmare section dedicated entirely to baby shower snacks.

By now Shane was fading visibly.

Sweaty and flushed.

One hand pressed into his lower back.

“You need sit?” Ilya asked quietly.

“No.”

“You are waddling.”

“I’m pregnant.”

“Well yes but-”

“Please stop talking to me for a second.”

An older man standing nearby glanced over with a warm smile.

“Almost there, huh?”

Shane managed a polite smile automatically.

“Hopefully.”

The man looked down at Shane’s stomach.

Then blinked.

“Oh wow. Twins?”

Everything stopped. Ilya felt it immediately.
The instant tension locking through Shane’s entire body.

The polite smile froze.

“No.” Shane said flatly.

The man laughed awkwardly. “Big baby then. My son was big too, nearly tore me in half.”

Shane’s jaw tightened.

Ilya stepped in immediately. “Very healthy baby we have, we cannot wait.” he said smoothly.

The older man nodded, oblivious.

“Well, good luck to you both.” Then he wandered away.

“Baby,” Ilya said carefully.

“I know he didn’t mean anything.”

Good start.

“But if one more person comments on my body I’m going to scream.”

Less good.

Ilya took the shopping list gently from his hand.

“Why don’t you wait near checkout?”

“No.”

“You look upset.”

“I am upset.”

“Sooo...”

Shane shoved the cart forward aggressively.
“I’m also fucking huge apparently.”

“You are pregnant.”

“He said twins. I’m clearly way too big right. A fucking hippo on aisle six, right?”

“N-No Shane he is blind probably. Maybe needs glasses.”

That actually earned the faintest twitch at the corner of Shane’s mouth.

But he stayed quiet the rest of the trip. By checkout he looked exhausted again. Emotionally and physically.

The cashier thankfully kept conversation minimal besides asking if they wanted paper or plastic.

Still, Shane barely spoke.

He just stood there sweating lightly through the too-tight shirt with one hand on his stomach and the other gripping the cart hard enough to whiten his knuckles.

Ilya handled the bags.

Handled payment.

Handled everything.

Because Shane looked one mildly irritating comment away from complete collapse.

Outside the heat hit immediately.

Shane made a disgusted sound. "Oh my God."

"Almost home."

"Too fucking hot for this shit."

He started toward the car at a determined pace.

Which for thirty-six weeks pregnant meant angry waddling.

Fast angry waddling.

Ilya hurried after him carrying the groceries.

"Slow down, Hollander. Car is where we left it."

"No."

"Shane."

"I want to get out today this fucking heat."

Halfway across the parking lot Shane suddenly stopped dead.

Completely still.

Ilya's stomach dropped. "What?"

Shane's eyes widened. "Oh my God."

Immediate panic hit. "What happened?"

“I think—”

Shane looked down.

Then horrified. “I think my water broke.”

Everything inside Ilya went cold.

Now? In a parking lot?

“Okay,” he said instantly, dropping the grocery bags beside the car. “Okay. Hospital.”

But Shane wasn’t moving.

Instead his entire face slowly shifted from panic into something much worse.

Mortification.

“Oh no.”

“What?”

A terrible silence.

Then Shane whispered: “I peed myself.”

Pause.

“What?”

“I didn’t—” Shane covered his face with one hand. “Oh my God.”

Relief hit first.

Overwhelming relief.

Not labor. Okay.

Then immediate sympathy.

Because Shane looked absolutely devastated.

“It’s okay,” Ilya said quickly.

“No it’s not.”

“It is little pee.”

“Ilya.”

“Tiny pee.”

“I just pissed myself in a grocery store parking lot.”

“You cannot even notice.”

“That is not comforting.”

Shane looked genuinely near tears now.
Humiliation rolling off him in waves.

“I can’t believe this.”

“Hey.” Ilya moved closer immediately. “Baby. Look at me.”

Shane refused. “I said look at me.”

Finally Shane did. Eyes shiny with exhausted embarrassment.

“You are carrying around entire human pressing on bladder all day,” Ilya said gently. “This happens. It’s fine.”

“I really wanted it to be my water.”

“I know.”

Without another word Ilya pulled his own overshirt off.

“Here.”

Shane blinked. What are you doing?”

“Sit on it.”

“Ilya—”

“So seat does not get wet.”

Shane stared at the shirt in visible horror.
“You’re taking your shirt off in the parking lot?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t have to do that.”

“Well actually I do, we don’t have time to get car cleaned.”

Carefully Ilya folded it and handed it over.

Shane took it slowly. Still flushed bright red.

“You are not allowed to tell anyone this happened,” he muttered.

“Never.”

“Not even mom.”

“Especially not Yuna.”

Because Yuna would absolutely fuss and then accidentally mention it forever.

“I smell like sweat and piss.” Shane said wrinkling his nose.

“You smell fine.”

“I smell like piss don’t lie.”

That one almost broke Ilya because Shane sounded so genuinely miserable.

Ilya cupped the back of his neck gently.

“Hey.”

Shane looked exhausted.

“You okay?”

“No.” Shane leaned briefly into the touch with a tired sigh.

Then another kick landed visibly beneath the stretched shirt.

He glared downward instantly.

“This is your fault too.”

The baby offered no apology.

The drive home stayed quiet.

Shane reclined the passenger seat slightly and stared out the window with one hand over his stomach.

Ilya kept one hand resting lightly on his thigh whenever traffic stopped.

Grounding him.

By the time they pulled into the driveway Shane looked half asleep.

“You want shower first?” Ilya asked quietly.

“Yes.”

“Then nap.”

“I can’t nap.”

“You absolutely can.”

Shane made a weak unhappy noise.

Ilya parked and climbed out quickly before circling around to help.

The second Shane stood up he groaned.

“My back.”

“I know.”

“I think walking made everything worse.”

“Probably.”

Shane leaned heavily against the car for a second to catch his breath. Then looked down at himself again.

“I seriously peed myself.”

“Tiny amount.”

“Stop saying tiny amount.”

Ilya smiled softly despite himself and wrapped an arm carefully around his waist.

“Come inside, baby.”

Chapter 3

By the time Shane woke up for the third time that morning, the house already felt like it belonged to someone else.

Voices drifted up the stairs in soft bursts of laughter, the occasional clatter of something being set down too quickly, and music someone had decided was “low enough to be background but still festive.”

Shane lay still for a moment, staring at the ceiling fan turning slowly as if it had all the time in the world.

His body felt heavy in the way that had nothing to do with sleep and everything to do with the fact that getting comfortable had become a battle with himself lately. Every position was almost right and then not quite.

He shifted carefully, already aware of the small protest in his hips and lower back, and let out a quiet exhale through his nose.

Downstairs, someone laughed loudly enough that it carried up through the vents.

Right. Today.

The baby shower.

He closed his eyes again, not because he wanted to sleep, but because for a second it was easier to pretend he could opt out of being awake.

The door creaked open.

“Hey.” Ilya said softly from the doorway.

Shane didn’t open his eyes yet. “If you say ‘good morning’ I’m going to ignore you.”

A pause, then a quiet, amused huff. “It is not morning.”

That made Shane open one eye.

Ilya was leaning against the doorframe like he had been there for a while already, like he had been keeping watch instead of just arriving. His sleeves were pushed up, hair slightly messier than usual, the expression on his face calm in that steady way that always made Shane feel like the world was being held in place by something solid.

“How long have people been here?” Shane asked.

“Two hours,” Ilya said. “You slept through most of it.”

“Good.”

“I told them to be quiet.”

“Well you’re doing great, I can only hear 80% of what’s happening downstairs.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched. “Everyone is behaving.”

“That sounds great, so happy for you guys.”

“It is fine,” Ilya said, then added after a beat, “Mostly.”

Shane stared at him for a second longer, then shifted again, immediately regretting it when his body reminded him that it was stretching to its limit. He let out a breath and pushed the blanket down a little.

“I don’t want to get up,” he said flatly.

“I know.”

“I also don’t want to be rude.”

“No one is bothered by you, pregnant privilege.”

There was a pause. Somewhere downstairs something clinked again, followed by a muffled voice that sounded like Rose telling someone to “move that closer to the window for lighting.”

Shane closed his eyes again. “Why is everyone already here.”

“Because they love you,” Ilya said simply. “And the baby.”

“I don’t feel very lovable right now.”

Ilya didn’t respond immediately. When he did, his voice was quieter.

“You don’t have to perform today. Just relax ”

Shane let out a short breath that might have been a laugh if it had more energy behind it. “It kind of feels like I already am.”

Ilya crossed the room and sat on the edge of the bed, careful not to jostle it too much. He didn’t reach for Shane right away, just stayed close enough that his presence anchored the space.

Shane rubbed a hand over his face and sat up a little, pausing halfway when his body reminded him again that it preferred lying down.

Ilya noticed without comment, just shifted slightly closer like he was ready to steady him if needed.

Downstairs, there was a burst of laughter again.

Shane exhaled slowly. "What if I just stay up here."

"You can," Ilya said. "If that is what you want."

Shane looked at him. "And miss my own baby shower."

"It is not a requirement that you enjoy it every second."

"That feels like a loophole answer."

Shane stared at the ceiling again. "I just don't want everyone looking at me."

"They are not here to look at you," Ilya said. "They are here for you."

"Not they are here for this stubborn little baby."

Ilya let out a quiet breath through his nose, almost a laugh. "You are very difficult this morning."

"I've been difficult since like, six months ago."

"That is true, my little brat.." Ilya said, entirely without offense.

A pause stretched between them. Then Ilya added, "Do you want food?"

Shane considered that like it was a philosophical question. "Maybe."

"I will bring you something."

"I can get it."

"You are not going downstairs alone."

Shane shot him a look. "I am not a child."

"I did not say you are."

"You said I'm not allowed downstairs alone."

"I said I will go with you," Ilya corrected.

Shane narrowed his eyes. "That is still controlling."

Ilya leaned in just slightly, voice mild. "You are allowed to refuse."

Shane held his gaze for a second longer, then sighed. "Fine. Food."

"Good," Ilya said, and stood.

When Shane finally got himself upright, it was slow and careful, like every movement had to be negotiated in advance. Ilya waited without rushing him, not hovering but never far enough

away to feel absent either.

Shane grabbed a hoodie from the chair by the bed and pulled it on, immediately realizing he had misjudged the temperature of the house versus his body. He tugged it tighter around himself.

Cold. Of course.

Ilya watched him adjust it, then quietly left the room first, leading the way downstairs.

It wasn't too chaotic. Familiar voices layered over each other in conversation, the soft rustle of wrapping paper, the faint clink of glasses, someone saying Shane's name in a cheerful tone that didn't demand anything in return.

Shane paused halfway down the stairs.

Ilya turned slightly, waiting.

"You okay?" Ilya asked quietly.

Shane nodded once, then kept going.

The living room had been transformed in a way that made Shane's chest tighten before he could even process why. There were pale decorations strung along the walls, a table already partially filled with gifts, another with food arranged carefully, like someone had put thought into every inch of space.

Rose spotted him first.

"There he is," she said brightly, immediately softer when she added, "Hey, Shane."

A few heads turned. Smiles followed. Not overwhelming, just...there.

"Hey.." Shane said, voice rougher than he meant it to be.

Svetlana gave him a small wave from near the kitchen. Wyatt lifted his hand in greeting. Cassie and Zane were sitting together on the couch, both smiling at him in that easy way people had when they were genuinely happy to be somewhere. Lisa Hayes stood near them, talking quietly with someone Shane didn't catch.

Ilya's hand briefly touched his back, just enough to ground him.

"Food is ready," Ilya said casually, like nothing had changed in the room at all.

That helped more than it should have.

Shane moved toward the kitchen slowly.

There was a bowl of fruit on the counter. He noticed it immediately, like his brain had been waiting for it.

“Oh thank god,” he muttered, reaching for it before anyone could redirect him.

Behind him, Yuna said something like “That was actually for the table-” but it didn’t stop him. He was already eating.

Yuna stepped closer as Shane leaned against the counter, eating like it was the first real thing he had had all morning.

“Are you feeling okay?” she asked gently.

Shane nodded, then shook his head halfway through chewing. “I’m fine. Just tired.”

“That’s understandable,” she said.

He grabbed another piece of fruit. “I just didn’t realize how hungry I was.”

“That’s good,” David said from behind Yuna. “You should eat.”

Shane nodded again, grateful for the simplicity of that.

For a moment, it was almost okay.

Then Wyatt walked in from the hallway carrying a folded jacket.

“Hey,” Wyatt said, stopping near Shane. “I grabbed this from the coat pile if you need something warmer. It’s an XL so it should fit you.”

The room shifted so subtly it almost didn’t register at first.

Shane blinked.

Then he looked at the jacket.

Then at Wyatt.

Then something in his expression changed so fast it was like a door had slammed shut.

“I didn’t say I was an XL” Shane said, voice suddenly flat.

Wyatt froze. “I just meant it’s big, like it should be—”

“I said I didn’t ask.”

The kitchen went quiet in a way that felt immediate and heavy.

Ilya was across the room in an instant, but he didn’t speak yet.

Wyatt looked like he realized halfway through the sentence that he had stepped on something invisible and sharp. “Shane, I didn’t mean anything by it.”

Shane set the fruit down too carefully.

“No no I get it.” he said, more controlled now, but tighter around the edges. “I’m obviously huge right.”

Wyatt nodded quickly. “No no, you look great. I’m sorry.”

Shane stared at the counter for a second too long.

“I’m going to go,” he added, quieter, like it was an explanation he needed to justify.

Rose moved slightly, like she wanted to intervene but wasn’t sure how.

Ilya finally spoke, calm but firm. “Wyatt, thank you. Leave it there.”

Wyatt immediately did.

Shane picked the fruit back up, but his appetite had shifted into something less stable.

He ate anyway.

A few minutes passed with people trying, carefully, to return to normal conversation. It mostly worked. Mostly.

Then Yuna stepped closer again.

“Shane,” she said softly, “do you want me to make you something else? Something more filling?”

Shane hesitated.

He opened his mouth to say yes.

But what came out instead wasn’t quite connected to the question.

“I just feel like I can’t keep up with anything,” he said, voice tightening. “Like I’m either sleeping or eating or...in the way.”

The room went still again.

Yuna’s expression softened immediately. “You are not in the way.”

Shane let out a short breath that sounded almost like disbelief.

“I look like I am,” he said, and then stopped like he hadn’t meant to say it out loud.

Shane’s eyes dropped to the counter.

“I just feel,” he started again, then stopped, swallowing. His voice cracked slightly when he continued. “I feel like I’ve let myself go completely.”

“No,” Yuna said immediately.

But Shane was already shaking his head.

“I don’t feel like myself,” he said, quieter now, more exposed than angry. “I don’t feel...put together. And I know that sounds stupid, but I just don’t.”

The last words came out sharper than he intended.

Then his face tightened like he was trying to pull it back in.

“I’m sorry,” he added quickly. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

Yuna stepped forward carefully, not touching him, just close enough that he could feel she was there.

“You don’t need to apologize,” she said. “You’re allowed to feel overwhelmed.”

Shane looked away again, jaw tight.

“I don’t want to ruin today,” he muttered.

“You are not ruining anything,” Ilya said quietly from behind him.

Yuna nodded. “Seriously, this is just a moment. It doesn’t change anything.”

Shane let out a breath that shook slightly.

“I just need a minute,” he said finally.

Ilya stepped in immediately, like the sentence had been a signal only he understood.

“Come,” Ilya said gently.

Shane didn’t argue this time.

They moved through the hallway together, away from the noise. The moment the living room sound dropped behind them, Shane exhaled like he had been holding his breath for too long.

Ilya led him into a quieter room, closing the door softly.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

Shane leaned back against the wall, eyes closed.

“I didn’t mean to do that,” he said after a while.

“I know,” Ilya said.

“I just—” Shane paused, swallowing. “Everyone is trying so hard and I feel like I can’t even...show up properly.”

Ilya didn’t rush in to fix it. He just stayed close.

“You are showing up,” he said simply.

Shane let out a short, humorless breath. “By yelling at our friends.”

“By being here,” Ilya corrected.

Shane opened his eyes.

Ilya was watching him steadily, not judging, not flinching, just there in the same way he always was when things got messy in a way that couldn’t be controlled.

“I don’t like feeling like this,” Shane admitted.

“I know.”

A pause.

Then Shane added, quieter, “I don’t want to go back out there yet.”

“You do not have to,” Ilya said.

That landed differently. Not as permission. As fact.

Shane nodded slowly, then sank down onto the edge of the couch in the room, head briefly in his hands.

Ilya sat beside him, close enough that their shoulders nearly touched, but not crowding him.

After a long while, Shane spoke again.

“Are they mad at me?”

Ilya shook his head immediately. “No.”

“Are you sure?”

“I am sure.”

Shane nodded once, then leaned back slightly, eyes closing again.

“I just need to not think for like an hour,” he muttered.

“That can be arranged,” Ilya said.

And when Shane finally drifted into a light, exhausted doze there on the couch, Ilya stayed exactly where he was, letting the noise of the celebration exist on the other side of the door without letting it touch the room they were in.

By the time Shane agreed to get dressed, the house had already started falling into full event mode.

Voices came and went in waves. More people arriving. More coats being hung up. More laughter that rose and fell, never aimed at him specifically but still impossible to completely tune out.

He sat on the edge of the bed for a long moment, staring at the garment bag Ilya had laid out earlier.

The maternity suit.

It was tailored, expensive, carefully adjusted for where his body was right now rather than where it had been six months ago. That fact alone made Shane feel something complicated, like gratitude tangled up with irritation that he even needed that kind of adjustment in the first place.

Ilya stood nearby, giving him space but not distance.

“You want water first?” Ilya asked.

Shane exhaled through his nose. “I already have water.”

“You drank it twenty minutes ago.”

“I’m aware.”

Ilya didn’t respond to the tone. He just nodded once. “Okay. I will get more.”

Shane muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like “this is so stupid” but didn’t stop him.

When Ilya left the room, Shane finally stood.

His body immediately reminded him that it had opinions about standing.

He paused, gripping the edge of the dresser for a second longer than he wanted to, waiting for the sensation to settle into something manageable. It did, eventually, in the way discomfort never really went away but could be negotiated into background noise if he focused hard enough.

He peeled off the hoodie first.

Then the shirt.

Each movement felt slightly too slow, slightly too effortful, like he was watching himself from a distance and disliking the pacing.

The suit was hanging there, waiting.

Shane stared at it for another second before muttering, “Right.”

He stepped into it carefully.

The fabric was soft, supportive in all the right places, but there was still a moment where everything felt too...clothes

“Fuck:..” he muttered quietly when he had to pause halfway through adjusting it.

From the doorway, Ilya reappeared with a fresh bottle of water.

“You okay?” Ilya asked.

“I’m fine.” Shane said immediately, too fast.

Ilya didn’t look convinced, but he didn’t challenge it. He just came closer and handed him the water.

Shane took a sip, then another, then handed it back like he was trying not to admit how much he needed it.

“I hate this part,” he said under his breath.

“The getting dressed part?” Ilya asked.

“The moving part,” Shane corrected.

Ilya gave him a faint, understanding look. “Almost done.”

Shane pulled the suit into place fully, then sat down again, just for a moment, letting himself breathe.

He closed his eyes briefly.

“Of course,” he repeated, quieter this time.

Ilya noticed the change in his expression immediately.

“What is it?” he asked.

Shane hesitated.

Then, with clear reluctance, “I need to piss.”

Ilya nodded like this was not unexpected. “Okay.”

“Cmon before I get upset.” Shane said automatically raising his hands.

“Alright,” Ilya replied calmly and lifted Shane up.

That shut down the argument before it could start.

Shane finally stood again, slower this time, and made his way toward the bathroom.

Ilya stayed close behind but didn’t crowd him.

He shut the bathroom door behind him and let out a breath.

For a minute, he just stood there.

Then he pressed his forehead briefly against the cool tile of the wall.

“Fucking perfect timing,” he muttered to himself.

He didn’t rush, but he didn’t take his time either. Everything now existed in this strange middle space where nothing was truly comfortable but everything was manageable if he didn’t think about it too much.

When he finished, he stayed still for a second longer than necessary, hands braced on the counter.

His reflection looked back at him.

Tired eyes. Slight flush in his face. Suit not fully adjusted yet, collar slightly off where he hadn’t fixed it properly.

He exhaled sharply through his nose.

“You can do this,” he said quietly, like it was an instruction rather than encouragement.

When he opened the door, Ilya was waiting in the doorway.

Shane looked at him. “I’m fine.”

“I know,” Ilya said.

Shane brushed past him anyway, heading back toward the bed.

By the time he was stood in front of the bed, there were already voices in the house that sounded closer, sharper, more immediate. The kind of voices that meant guests were no longer just arriving but actively inside the space.

“I am not doing speeches,” he said abruptly.

Ilya blinked once. “There are no speeches.”

Shane narrowed his eyes. “I swear to god if anyone makes me sit while people talk about how great this is—”

“No one will make you,” Ilya said firmly, but still calm. “I already said no speeches.”

Shane stared at him for a second longer, then nodded once, like that settled something.

“Good,” he said.

Then he sat down on the bed again, only briefly, and immediately hissed under his breath when he shifted.

Ilya watched him carefully.

“Do you need anything adjusted?” Ilya asked.

Shane hesitated.

This was the part he hated most. Not the discomfort. Not even the exhaustion. It was the need to acknowledge anything beyond what he wanted the world to see.

Still, he nodded slightly.

“I just,” he started, then stopped. “It’s fine. I just need a second.”

Ilya didn’t push. He just stepped closer.

Shane adjusted the suit himself, carefully, deliberately, like he could solve everything by making it sit correctly.

But there were layers to it that weren’t about fabric.

He let out a breath through clenched teeth.

“I fucking hate this part,” he said again.

“I know,” Ilya said.

A knock came at the door.

Then another.

“Shane?” Rose’s voice called gently. “People are starting to ask if you’re ready.”

Shane closed his eyes.

Of course.

Ilya answered immediately, stepping toward the door. “Not yet.”

Rose’s voice softened. “Okay. Just...whenever you’re ready.”

The footsteps retreated.

Shane let his head fall back against the wall for a second.

“I feel like I’m holding up the entire house,” he muttered.

“You are not,” Ilya said.

“It feels like I am.”

“Listen to me,” he said quietly. “No one is timing you. No one is waiting in anger. Everyone is here because they want to be here.”

Shane opened his eyes.

“I don’t feel like I can move fast enough for any of it,” he admitted.

“You do not have to move fast,” Ilya said.

Another knock, softer this time.

Then Yuna’s voice, cautious. “Shane? We can slow things down if you need.”

Shane swallowed.

That was the problem. They already were slowing it down. For him. Around him. Because of him.

“I’m coming!” he called back, though it came out strained.

Ilya stood immediately. “You do not have to rush.”

“I know,” Shane snapped automatically, then immediately regretted the tone.

He rubbed a hand over his face.

“I’m sorry,” he said, quieter. “I just—I can’t sit in here forever.”

“No one is asking you to,” Ilya said.

Shane stood again.

He adjusted the suit once more, then again, like repetition could guarantee control.

Ilya watched him without interrupting, then stepped in closer and fixed the collar gently, just once, precise and practiced.

Shane let him.

For a second, neither of them spoke.

Downstairs, laughter rose again.

Shane exhaled.

“Okay..” he said finally.

Ilya nodded. “Okay.”

They walked together toward the stairs.

The house felt different now. Fully awake. Fully occupied. Voices overlapping, footsteps moving between rooms, the soft chaos of people trying to be helpful and joyful at the same time.

Shane stopped at the top of the stairs.

His hand tightened slightly on the railing.

“I can’t be weird..” he muttered.

Ilya looked at him. “You are not weird.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I do.” Ilya said. “But it is still not true.”

Chapter 4

Soft white fabric hung from the fence in careful swags. String lights crisscrossed overhead even though the sun had barely started to dip. The long tables were crowded with flowers, desserts, wrapped presents, and enough food to feed an entire NHL roster twice over. Somewhere near the garden, someone had set up a mocktail bar with handwritten signs and little paper umbrellas.

And directly in the center of everything sat Shane Hollander.

Or, more accurately, reclined.

At thirty-six weeks pregnant and a baby girl measuring “enthusiastically large” according to his doctor, Shane had reached the point where standing up required planning, leverage, and often witnesses.

Yuna had apparently accepted this reality before anyone else had.

So instead of regular seating, Shane had been presented with what everyone immediately started calling “the throne.”

It was an oversized cushioned patio chair reinforced with extra pillows, a side table, a portable fan, two blankets despite the warm weather because Shane’s temperature regulation was “completely broken,” and a ridiculous handmade sign that read:

KING OF EVERYTHING

“Mom..” Shane had said weakly when he first saw it.

“You’re welcome sweetie.” she’d replied with a gentle kiss atop his head.

Now, two hours into the party, Shane had not moved from the chair once.

Not because he didn’t want to.

Mostly because every single person who arrived immediately descended on him with food, gifts, or emotional speeches.

“You need more fruit, my grandbaby is hungry.” Yuna informed him for the fourth time that afternoon, pressing another bowl into his hands.

“I physically cannot eat another strawberry.”

“Yes, you can.”

“Ilya!”

Across the yard, Ilya barely looked up from where he was arguing with Hayden over grilling technique.

“You should listen to Yuna,” he called back.

Traitor.

Shane glared while Yuna smirked and tucked another blanket around his legs despite the fact that it was nearly seventy-five degrees outside.

“You’re all insane.”

“And yet,” Yuna said, “you look so comfortable.”

Unfortunately, she was right.

The chair was incredible.

Shane shifted carefully, one hand rubbing over the underside of his stomach. The baby had spent most of the afternoon lodged directly beneath his ribs. Every movement felt enormous now. Heavy. Tight. Like his body had become too small for what it was trying to contain.

People kept stopping by to talk to him.

Lisa kissed his cheek and handed him lemonade.

Harris brought him miniature cupcakes and immediately stole three back off the plate.

Jackie quietly deposited a fresh plate of food beside him every time Shane finished half of one.

Svetlana spent twenty straight minutes fussing over whether Shane had enough lumbar support.

Rose kept taking pictures every time Shane laughed.

“I swear to God,” Shane said as Rose snapped another one, “if that ends up on Instagram—”

“You look good.”

“I look swollen.”

“You *are* pregnant so...”

“Rose.”

Rose just smiled and kissed his forehead.

Every conversation eventually circled back to the baby.

Did Shane have contractions yet?

Was the nursery done?

Did he think she'd look more like him or Ilya?

Had they picked a final name?

Shane answered the questions as patiently as possible, though by the third hour his back ached, his ankles were throbbing, and the baby had discovered what felt like a brand new organ to kick.

Still, he was happy.

Embarrassingly happy, honestly.

There had been a time when Shane genuinely believed none of this would ever happen for him. Not this life. Not openly. Not marriage and family and friends gathered casually in a backyard celebrating him and Ilya like this was normal.

Now Ilya existed across the lawn in rolled-up sleeves laughing loudly while carrying a tray of grilled vegetables toward the buffet table, and Shane felt so overwhelmed by love he almost couldn't breathe.

Then the baby headbutted his bladder.

Shane froze.

"Oh fuck."

Rose looked up from beside him. "What?"

"I have to pee."

"Okay..."

"No," Shane said grimly. "I really have to pee."

Rose stood immediately. "Okay. Come on."

Shane stared at her.

"Rose."

"What?"

"I can't get up."

"You absolutely can, the chair isn't that nice."

"No, I mean I literally cannot get up."

Her expression shifted.

“Oh.”

“Yeah.”

Shane planted both hands on the armrests and tried to push himself upright.

Nothing happened.

His center of gravity had become off over the last month. Combined with the chair’s soft cushions, he was effectively trapped in a pregnancy crater.

Rose grabbed his forearm.

“On three.”

“Okay.”

“One, two, three.”

They pulled.

Shane lifted approximately three inches before gravity yanked him back down.

“Oh my God.” he wheezed.

Rose burst out laughing.

“This isn’t funny.”

“You made a little sound!”

“I HAVE TO PEE.”

That immediately sobered her.

“Right. Right, okay.”

Svetlana appeared beside them as if summoned by maternal distress.

“What has happened?”

“He’s stuck..” Rose said.

Shane closed his eyes in humiliation.

“I am not stuck.”

“You’re stuck.”

“I prefer temporarily immobilized.”

“Mm-hm.”

Svetlana handed her drink to Rose with a wink and rolled up her sleeves.

“We lift together.”

“Please don’t announce it to the entire party.” Shane muttered.

Unfortunately, Hayden overheard immediately.

“Are we rescuing Shane?”

“No!” Shane snapped.

Shane wanted to die.

“All right,” Svetlana said briskly. “One arm each.”

They positioned themselves on either side of him while Shane braced his feet carefully beneath him.

The baby shifted heavily against his pelvis.

His bladder screamed.

“Oh my God..” he groaned. “Hurry.”

“One, two, three!”

They hauled upward.

Shane rose farther this time, nearly halfway up, before his knees wobbled and he collapsed backward into the chair again with a defeated gasp.

Rose was laughing too hard to help.

Svetlana looked horrified. “You need more momentum.”

“I need a catheter.”

“Oh, Shane..” Rosa said with her sweetest smile.

“I’m serious.”

Harris had his phone out before Rose smacked it downward.

“No pictures!” Rose warned.

“This is history!”

“This is bullying!”

Shane buried his face in his hands.

“This is the worst day of my life.”

“No, it isn’t,” Rose said.

Across the yard, Ilya finally looked over.

He narrowed his eyes immediately.

“Why everyone standing around Shane?”

“Medical emergency!” Hayden shouted helpfully.

Ilya dropped the serving tray at once.

He crossed the yard fast enough to alarm several guests.

“What happened?” he demanded, crouching beside Shane instantly.

“I can’t get up.”

Ilya blinked once.

Then he looked at the chair.

Then at Shane.

Then back at the chair.

“You are trapped?”

“Ilya.”

His husband failed completely to suppress a smile.

“You think this is funny too?”

“No,” Ilya lied terribly.

“I have to pee so bad.”

That wiped the amusement off Ilya’s face immediately.

“Oh. Okay.”

Shane grabbed his hand desperately. “If I pee myself at my own baby shower I’m killing all of you.”

“You cannot kill everyone.” Rose said from where she was leaning on Svetlana.

“No witnesses.”

Ilya kissed his forehead quickly before stepping behind the chair.

“Okay, solnyshko. Lean forward.”

Shane obeyed while Ilya slid both arms beneath his shoulders.

“Ready?”

“I guess...”

“Good.”

With alarming ease, Ilya hauled him upright in one smooth motion.

The entire party burst into applause.

“Oh, fuck all of you...” Shane groaned.

But he was standing.

Barely.

The baby immediately dropped lower against his bladder with horrifying pressure.

His eyes widened.

“Ilya.”

“Yes?”

“We need to move right now.”

Ilya took one look at his face and wrapped an arm around his waist.

“Emergency.” he announced solemnly as he guided Shane toward the house.

Everyone parted for them immediately.

“You okay?” Ilya asked quietly once they made it inside.

“No,” Shane said through clenched teeth. “I’m being punished by God.”

“You’re very dramatic pregnant person.”

“I’m carrying your giant child.”

“Our giant child.”

“She has your head size.”

Ilya laughed softly while helping him down the hallway.

By the time they reached the bathroom Shane was practically frantic.

“I swear to God if you make me laugh right now—”

“I would never.”

“You’re smiling.”

“You are so cute.”

“I’m suffering.”

“You’re so adorable when suffering.”

Shane pointed furiously at the door. “Out.”

Ilya kissed him again before retreating obediently.

Several minutes later Shane emerged looking reborn.

“Oh thank Christ.”

“You feel better?”

“So much better.”

Ilya wrapped both arms carefully around him, hands spread over the huge curve of Shane’s stomach.

The baby kicked instantly.

“There she is, my princess.” Ilya murmured.

Shane leaned back against him with a tired sigh.

“Your daughter nearly killed me.”

“Our daughter.”

“Semantics.”

Ilya rested his chin on Shane’s shoulder. “You okay to go back outside?”

“Yeah.”

Though secretly, Shane would have preferred a three-hour nap.

The rest of the party resumed around him the moment they returned.

Yuna immediately forced another drink into his hand.

“You look tired.”

“Gee thanks mom..”

“You know what I mean. You’re glowing honey..” Yuna argued while fixing his maternity slacks.

“I’m sweating.”

“Pregnancy glow.”

Ilya snorted loudly enough that Shane elbowed him.

Hayden’s kids arrived with handmade cards and approximately a million questions.

Ruby climbed directly into the empty space beside Shane’s chair and stared openly at his stomach.

“Your belly’s huge Uncle Shane..”

“Thank you sweetie.” Shane said dryly.

“Can the baby hear us?”

“Probably.”

Jade leaned forward immediately and poked Shane’s stomach carefully.

“Wake up, baby!”

Shane laughed.

“She’s already awake. She just likes kicking me internally.”

“Can we feel?”

“Sure.”

Within seconds both children had crowded close, tiny hands spread carefully over the stretched fabric of Shane’s shirt.

For several seconds nothing happened.

Then suddenly the baby rolled hard beneath Shane’s ribs.

Both kids screamed.

“Oh my God!”

“She moved!”

Another kick landed visibly enough to distort Shane’s entire stomach.

The children lost their minds.

“AGAIN!”

“She’s dancing!”

Shane couldn’t stop laughing.

“Okay, okay, be gentle.”

Jade leaned closer.

“Hi baby girl! We’re waiting for you!”

As if in response, the baby launched into a full series of movements.

Shane gasped.

“Oh wow.”

Even after weeks of this, moments like that still stunned him. His stomach shifted visibly beneath wandering little limbs and rolling pressure.

The kids were enchanted.

Ilya crouched beside the chair, smiling softly as he watched Shane watch them.

“You okay?”

“She’s really active today.”

“She likes party.”

“She likes making me uncomfortable.”

The baby kicked again directly against Ilya’s waiting hand.

His entire expression melted.

Shane felt his chest ache painfully.

God, he loved him.

Later everyone gathered around the gift table while Shane remained enthroned in the center like an exhausted monarch overseeing court proceedings.

“You don’t have to open everything now,” Rose told him.

“No, I want to.”

“You sure?”

“Absolutely.”

At first it was fun and easy.

Tiny clothes.

Blankets.

Books.

Stuffed animals.

Then they reached the handmade gifts.

Svetlana had knitted a tiny cream-colored baby blanket with delicate embroidered stars. Matching one she had seen Ilya wearing in an old photo with Irina.

Rose gave them a framed photo from their wedding with space beside it for a future baby picture.

Yuna handed over a scrapbook filled with letters from everyone at the party addressed to the baby.

That was what broke him.

“Oh my god..” Shane whispered.

Ilya looked over instantly. “What?”

Shane opened the scrapbook to the first page.

A letter from Hayden about how lucky their daughter already was.

Then one from Rose.

Then Troy and Harris.

Then Yuna and David.

Every page was full of love.

Full of people who already loved this little girl so much.

Shane's throat closed abruptly.

"Oh no.." Ilya repeated softly.

"I'm fine.." Shane said immediately, which was obviously untrue.

His eyes filled.

Then overflowed.

"Oh, Shane.." Rose murmured.

"I'm okay, i'm good." Shane insisted while actively crying.

Ilya took the scrapbook gently before Shane accidentally soaked the pages.

"It's hormones," Shane said helplessly.

"Mm-hm."

"And everyone's being so nice."

"You are crying because people love us."

"That's so embarrassing."

"It's very cute."

Unfortunately, Ilya's own eyes had gone suspiciously shiny.

Shane stared at him in horror.

"Don't you dare."

"I cannot help." Ilya said wiping his eye already.

"If you start crying I'm going to lose it."

Too late.

One tear escaped down Ilya's cheek.

Shane immediately burst into full sobbing.

"Oh my God," Hayden whispered to Jackie. "They're doing it again."

"I love you guys." Shane cried.

Ilya was openly crying now too.

"You are beautiful family to have. One I never thought I'd get." he sniffed.

“That’s not helping!”

Shane laughed mid-sob hard enough to trigger sudden nausea.

His expression changed instantly and he let out a loud retch.

“Oh no.”

Ilya straightened immediately. “What?”

“I might throw up.”

Everyone moved at once.

Rose grabbed a trash can.

Yuna shoved water into Shane’s hands.

Ilya rubbed frantic circles against his back while Shane breathed carefully through the wave of nausea.

“Okay..” Shane whispered after a minute. “Okay. I’m okay.”

“You scared me.” Ilya said.

“You cried first!”

“It was so sweet.”

Shane didn’t even care anymore.

Eventually the gifts were finished, dessert was served, and the party slowly began winding down into evening.

People lingered around the firepit while music played softly overhead.

Shane hit a wall abruptly around eight-thirty.

One moment he was talking to Evan.

The next he felt like gravity had tripled.

“I’m so tired,” he mumbled.

Ilya looked at him immediately with concern. “Do you want go inside?”

“No. Maybe. I don’t know.”

“You are fading before my eyes.”

“Everything hurts.”

Ilya crouched beside him again. “Ready to stand?”

Shane looked deeply suspicious.

“Are you going to laugh at me again?”

“Yes.”

“At least you’re honest.”

This time getting him out of the chair went slightly smoother, though Shane still made noises while Ilya hauled him upright.

“You okay?”

“Terrible.”

“Come on, Shanya.”

The name still made Shane melt every single time.

Inside the house, Shane intended to sit down only briefly while everyone cleaned up outside.

Instead he collapsed onto the couch with a groan.

“I should help...” he mumbled into the cushions.

“You should rest.”

“No, Mom did all this work.”

“She will murder you if you try lifting anything right now.”

Shane attempted to argue but lost momentum halfway through the sentence.

Ilya laughed softly.

“You are done.”

“I can still help.”

“You cannot even keep eyes open.”

Shane shifted carefully onto his side with another exhausted sound.

The baby rolled heavily beneath his ribs.

“Oh my God.”

“She tired too.”

“She better be.”

Ilya sat beside him and rubbed slow circles over his back.

Outside they could hear muffled laughter and the clatter of cleanup continuing across the yard.

Inside everything felt warm and dim and soft.

Shane blinked slowly at his husband.

“You had fun?”

Ilya looked surprised by the question.

“Best day.”

“Even with everyone watching me get stuck in a chair?”

“That was maybe favorite part.”

Shane weakly shoved at him.

“You’re awful.”

“You were cute.”

“I was humiliated.”

“You were adorable and angry.”

“I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

No.

He really didn’t.

Shane reached for him sleepily, and Ilya immediately leaned down close enough for Shane to kiss him.

“Love you,” Shane murmured.

Ilya’s expression softened instantly.

“Love you too.”

Shane meant to stay awake after that.

Really.

He meant to at least wait until cleanup was finished so he could pretend to contribute.

Instead his eyes drifted shut while Ilya kept rubbing his back.

The last thing Shane vaguely remembered was hearing the patio door slide open and David whispering:

“Oh my God. He’s dead asleep.”

“He fought bravely,” Hayden whispered back.

“Should we wake him?”

“Absolutely not.” Ilya said immediately.

Someone draped a blanket over Shane.

Someone else lowered the lights.

And while their friends quietly finished cleaning the disaster of wrapping paper and paper plates outside, Shane slept through all of it with one hand curled protectively over his stomach and a peaceful expression on his face for the first time all day

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Let's just clear the air before y'all hop in my comment section. I am not Shakespeare. I am not a professionally trained writer. I am someone who does this in my free time for free. I am someone who has engaged in literature, my entire life and has always had a passion for reading. I am someone who also has a passion for writing. Did I say a talent? No, that's subjective but a passion is what I have. So I am not claiming to have characterization down to a T. I'm not claiming to have elite writing skills and know the characters better than anyone else. To some people it will suck that's OK but please for the love of God please don't make me have to cuss you out in my comment section if you don't like it if you hate it, just go ahead and click off.

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

The condo was too quiet when Ilya came back from walking Anya.

The television was on somewhere deeper in the apartment, some low daytime cooking show host speaking in a soothing voice about reductions and fresh herbs.

Anya trotted ahead of him after he unhooked her leash, nails clicking rapidly over the hardwood before she disappeared down the hall toward the living room.

"Shane?" Ilya called, shrugging out of his jacket.

No answer.

He rounded the corner into the living room carefully.

Shane was curled on the sofa beneath a blanket, one hand resting protectively under the enormous curve of his stomach. His face was turned toward the television, but tears streamed silently down his cheeks.

Anya immediately shoved her nose against Shane's leg with concern.

"Oh no.." Ilya said softly.

Shane didn't look at him.

"Shanya?"

Nothing.

Ilya approached like he was trying not to startle a wild animal. "What happened..."

“My water bottle is empty.” Ilya blinked.

On the coffee table sat Shane’s massive water bottle.

He waited for the rest of the sentence.

None came. “And...” Ilya said carefully.

“And I wanted water.” Shane’s voice cracked miserably. “But then it was empty.”

Another tear rolled down his cheek.

Ilya bit the inside of his cheek so hard it hurt.

Do not laugh. Do not smile.

“Oh,” he said gently. “Okay. I can fill it.”

Shane finally looked at him, brown eyes wet and offended.

“I wanted to fill it myself.”

Ilya glanced toward the kitchen. Which was maybe fifteen feet away. Knowing even that would make Shane out of breath.

“Okay,” he said immediately.

Shane’s expression crumpled harder. “But my back hurts so fucking bad...”

“Yes.”

“And every time I stand up she starts kicking me in the ribs.”

Ilya crouched beside the couch carefully, rubbing a hand over Shane’s knee beneath the blanket.

“Our daughter already has excellent aim.”

Shane glared at him through tears. “This isn’t funny.”

“No,” Ilya agreed quickly. “Not funny. Very serious water bottle situation.”

Shane’s lip wobbled.

Ilya knew that look.

He reached for the bottle immediately. “I fill it. You stay here.”

“I wanted to do it.”

“I know but I want you to sit and look pretty for me.”

Shane watched him walk toward the kitchen with watery betrayal all over his face.

Ilya filled the bottle slowly, adding extra ice exactly the way Shane liked it lately. Not too much. Pregnancy had apparently made him weirdly sensitive to cold water. Too little ice and Shane said it tasted wrong.

He returned carefully and handed it over like an offering to a king.

Shane accepted it with both hands.

“Thank you...” he mumbled as he wiped his face.

“You’re welcome.”

Shane took a long drink before leaning his head back against the sofa with exhausted relief.

Fatherhood was going to kill him.

“I know I’m being crazy,” Shane whispered miserably against his shoulder.

“You are little crazy,” Ilya agreed.

Shane groaned. “But I still love you.”

“I feel like a swollen whale.”

“A beautiful whale.”

“I’m not a-a whale.”

Ilya kissed the side of his head. “You said it first Hollander, I just agree.”

Shane huffed a weak laugh despite himself.

That was the thing. Under all the hormones and exhaustion and discomfort, Shane was still Shane.

Still carrying their child with this fierce protectiveness that made Ilya’s chest ache every time he looked at him.

Even now, exhausted and uncomfortable and grumpy beyond belief, Shane rested one hand over his stomach constantly like he already loved this baby more than oxygen.

Ilya would survive anything for him.

Even this.

Probably.

Ilya woke to quiet sniffing beside him.

For one horrifying second, he thought Shane was in labor.

He pushed himself upright immediately.

“Shane?”

Shane sat against the headboard surrounded by pillows, crying into his hands.

Panic exploded through Ilya’s chest.

“What happened? Is it baby? Are contractions starting?”

Shane shook his head hard. “No.”

Ilya climbed out of bed quickly anyway. “You hurt somewhere?”

“I’m hurt everywhere.”

Ilya sat up beside him carefully. “Tell me.”

Shane scrubbed aggressively at his face. “I can’t get comfortable.”

“Okay.”

“My hips hurt.”

“Mhm.”

“My back hurts.”

“Yes.”

“My ribs hurt.”

“Yes.”

“My skin feels weird and hot.”

Ilya had no idea what that meant but nodded supportively anyway.

“And I’m so fucking tired,” Shane whispered, voice breaking again. “But I can’t sleep because I can’t get comfortable and the only way I think I could maybe be comfortable is if I slept on my stomach but I obviously can’t because there’s a whole baby there.”

Another sob escaped him.

Ilya stared at his husband.

Shane looked so genuinely devastated that something in Ilya’s brain short circuited. And unfortunately, because he had slept maybe four uninterrupted hours total in the last week, his exhausted brain interpreted this situation incorrectly.

A tiny laugh escaped him.

Just one.

Shane froze.

Ilya realized his mistake instantly.

“No,” he said immediately. “Shanya, not laughing at you. I just...”

“You think this is funny?”

“No.”

“You think it’s funny that I haven’t slept properly in weeks?”

“No, absolutely not.”

“You think it’s funny that my spine feels like it’s breaking?”

“No.”

“You laughed!”

Ilya reached for him cautiously. “Shane...”

“Get out.”

Ilya blinked. “What?”

“Get out.”

“Sweetheart.”

“Out.” Shane motioned to the door.

Ilya stared at him in disbelief.

Shane pointed toward the door with trembling fury. “I don’t want to look at you right now.”

“I say sorry.”

“I don’t care.”

Shane’s eyes filled instantly again, which somehow made him look even angrier.

“Get out of the bedroom.”

Normally, Ilya would have waited him out.

Shane got snappy sometimes lately. Ten minutes later he usually wanted cuddles and juice.

But tonight felt different.

Maybe because Shane was so exhausted.

Maybe because neither of them had slept properly in days.

Maybe because Ilya had laughed at exactly the wrong moment.

“Okay,” he said carefully, standing from the bed.

Shane folded his arms over his chest protectively.

Ilya hesitated by the doorway. “I sleep guest room.”

“No.”

Ilya stared at him.

Shane’s face was flushed with fury and humiliation.

“Get out of the house.”

“You serious?”

“Yes.”

“Shane.”

“Go stay somewhere else.”

“At two in morning?”

“I don’t care, you think I’m so pathetic and funny so.”

Ilya rubbed both hands over his face.

“You really want this?”

“Yes.” The answer came too fast.

That should have warned him.

Instead, exhausted and irritated himself now, Ilya grabbed his phone from the nightstand.

“Fine.”

Shane looked briefly startled that he obeyed so easily.

Ilya was annoyed now too.

He pulled on sweatpants and a hoodie while Shane watched stubbornly from the bed.

“You call me when contractions start.”

Shane glared at him. “Or if anything happens.”

“Okay.”

Ilya grabbed his keys.

Part of him expected Shane to stop him.

He didn't. So Ilya left.

The drive felt approximately twelve years long.

Ilya drove through empty streets muttering angrily in Russian under his breath.

He knew Shane was miserable.

He knew Shane was hormonal.

He knew pregnancy was hard.

But getting kicked out of his own house at two in the morning because of one accidental laugh felt slightly unfair.

Okay, very unfair.

He parked outside Yuna and David's house around three.

The porch light flipped on before he even reached the front steps.

David opened the door wearing plaid pajama pants and profound confusion.

“Ilya?”

“I need place to sleep.”

David blinked slowly. “Why?”

Behind him, Yuna appeared immediately. “Is Shane okay?”

“Yes.”

“Is the baby okay?”

“Yes.”

“Then why are you here?”

Ilya sighed deeply. “I laughed at him.”

David pinched the bridge of his nose immediately. “Oh my goodness..”

“I not mean to laugh.”

“What did you laugh at?” Yuna demanded.

“He say he miss sleeping on stomach.”

Yuna stared at him.

Then very deliberately smacked his shoulder.

“Ow.”

“You laughed at a pregnant man?”

“I was tired.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“I know this now.”

David stepped aside finally. “Come in before the neighbors think we’re hosting an intervention.”

Ilya shuffled inside miserably.

Yuna folded her arms. “What exactly happened after you laughed?”

“He tell me get out.”

“And you left?”

“He tell me “leave house Ilya, I can’t look at you” or something .”

David looked horrified. “You actually left?”

“What was I supposed to do?”

“Not abandon your extremely pregnant husband in the middle of the night?”

“I did not abandon him. Condo has security.”

“That’s your defense?”

Ilya groaned loudly.

Yuna sighed. “Did he cry after you left?”

“Probably.”

“Oh my God.”

“I know.”

David pointed down the hallway. "Guest room. Go to sleep before you make this worse somehow."

Shane woke up at seven in the morning feeling awful.

The other side of the bed was empty.

Anya lay curled against the mattress where Ilya should have been, watching Shane with giant concerned eyes.

"Oh no," Shane whispered.

Memory hit him immediately. He buried his face in his hands. He had kicked Ilya out. Actually kicked him out. At two in the morning.

Because he laughed one time.

Shame crawled hot through his chest.

Anya whined softly.

"I know," Shane mumbled.

His phone sat charging on the nightstand.
No missed calls.
No texts.

That made him feel like a total asshole.

He waddled carefully out of bed and down the hallway toward the kitchen, one hand pressed against his lower back.

The condo felt enormous without Ilya in it.

Shane hated it immediately.

By eight thirty he had cried twice.

Once because he missed Ilya.

And once because he imagined Ilya sadly sleeping in his car somewhere even though logically he knew that made no sense.

At nine fifteen the doorbell rang.

Shane shuffled toward the front door hopefully.

Yuna stood outside holding two coffees.
David stood beside her.

And behind them, looking deeply uncomfortable in a gray hoodie, was Ilya.

Shane's chest squeezed painfully.

"Oh.." he said quietly.

Yuna immediately pointed at him. "You."

Then she pointed at Ilya. "And you."

Neither of them spoke.

"You're both ridiculous," she announced.

David nodded. "Honestly."

Shane looked at Ilya guiltily. "You drove all the way there?"

"Yes."

"Oh my God." Shane felt tears build up in his eyes.

"You tell me leave."

"I know but I didn't think you'd actually leave!" Shane cried out.

Ilya threw both hands upward. "Then why say it?"

"Because I'm a horrible person who doesn't deserve you!" Shane sobbed into his hand.

"Shane do not think that."

David stepped between them instantly. "Nope. Absolutely not. We are not doing this out here."

Yuna shoved the coffee carrier into Ilya's hands.

"Sit down before your ankles explode."

Shane obeyed automatically.

Ilya hovered awkwardly near the doorway. He wanted to comfort Shane as he always did but a part of him was still bracing.

Still uncertain.

Yuna looked between them with exhaustion.

"Okay. Here's what's going to happen. Shane is going to apologize for banishing his husband into the night."

Shane covered his face briefly. "I'm sorry."

“And Ilya,” Yuna continued.

“Yes.”

“You are going to apologize for laughing at your heavily pregnant husband having a breakdown.”

“I already know I am an idiot.”

“Good. Say sorry anyway.”

Ilya looked at Shane immediately.

“I am sorry,” he said quietly. “I did not mean laugh at you.”

Shane’s throat tightened. “I know that now..”

Shane looked down at his coffee cup. “I was being really dramatic.”

“You are allowed dramatic.” Ilya said moving closer to Shane.

“I kicked you out.”

“Yes. Very rude.”

Despite everything, Shane laughed weakly.
Ilya’s shoulders relaxed instantly at the sound.

That familiar warmth returned to the room almost immediately after.

Like gravity pulling back into place.

David clapped his hands once. “Great. Marriage restored. I’m making pancakes.”

Three days after the middle of the night exile incident, Ilya woke up to Shane aggressively shaking his shoulder.

“I need orange juice.”

Ilya cracked one eye open blearily.
The bedroom was dark except for the faint blue glow of the digital clock.

3:14 AM.

“What?”

“Orange juice.” Shane stood beside the bed in one of Ilya’s old t shirts stretched tightly over his stomach, hair sticking up in every direction, looking genuinely distressed.

“I need orange juice right now.”

Ilya pushed himself upright slowly. “Okay.”

Shane stared at him expectantly.

Ilya waited.

Was he supposed to materialize it from thin air? They don’t keep orange juice in the house.

Finally he blinked. “We don’t have orange juice.”

Shane’s face fell instantly. “What do you mean we don’t have orange juice?”

“We never have orange juice.”

“Why not?”

“Because neither of us drink it.”

“Well I want it now.”

“I know but-.”

“Why didn’t we buy any?”

Ilya rubbed sleep from his face. “Yesterday I ask if you want anything from grocery store and you say no.”

“Because yesterday I didn’t want orange juice.”

Ilya got out of bed. “Okay. I go get some.”

Shane’s expression crumpled with immediate guilt. “No, you don’t have to.”

“You look two seconds from crying Shanya.”

“I am...” Shane scratched at the underside of his belly.

“Yes. So I go.”

Shane followed him out into the hallway while Ilya pulled on sweatpants.

“I don’t know why I want it so bad,” Shane mumbled miserably. “I can practically taste it.”

“Baby wants vitamin C.”

“Baby better appreciate this.”

Ilya snorted softly and grabbed his keys.

He returned twenty minutes later and Shane was waiting near the front door with Anya like an anxious golden retriever.

“You found some?”

“No,” Ilya deadpanned.

Shane looked horrified.

Then Ilya lifted the grocery bag. Shane snatched it from him instantly.

“Oh thank God.”

He twisted the cap off before Ilya even got his shoes off.

And then Shane drank.

Ilya watched in alarm as his husband stood in the kitchen at three forty in the morning, in nothing but a T-shirt drinking orange juice directly from the jug while groaning like a crack addict.

“Oh my God.”

Shane lowered the carton briefly, breathing hard. “This is the best thing I’ve ever tasted.”

“You say that about mozzarella sticks last week.”

“No, this is different.”

He took another massive gulp.

“I think maybe you should slow down.” Ilya moved to take the jug

Shane ignored him completely. Shrugging away and continuing.

By breakfast, nearly half the jug was gone.

The orange juice obsession only escalated from there.

Ilya bought three more cartons the next day.

By evening, Shane carried one around the condo constantly.

The entire jug.

Like it was an emotional support beverage.

Ilya walked into the nursery one afternoon to find Shane standing by the crib assembly instructions drinking directly from the carton while staring thoughtfully into space.

“You become very strange person,” Ilya observed.

Shane shrugged. “The baby really likes orange juice.”

“The baby floating in orange juice by now. Will have an orange baby.” Ilya snuck up behind Shane and squeezed his ass.

“The baby is fine.”

As if on cue, the baby kicked hard enough to visibly shift Shane’s shirt.

Shane frowned downward. “See? She’s agreeing with me.”

Ilya crouched and kissed the side of Shane’s stomach through the fabric.

“You terrorize your papa already.”

Another kick answered him. “See?” Shane said smugly.

The farther along the pregnancy got, the less patient Shane became about food.

He just reached this point where once he wanted something, he wanted it immediately.

Unfortunately for Ilya, this usually became his problem.

“I want noodles.” Shane announced one evening from the couch.

“Okay.”

“From that Thai place.”

“The one with duck mascot with creepy eyes?” Ilya shivered.

“Yes.”

Ilya checked the time. “Little busy right now probably.”

“I know.”

Stupidly confident after several relatively peaceful days, Ilya kissed the top of Shane’s head and grabbed his keys.

“I be back soon. Do not have baby without me.”

Shane caught his sleeve before he could leave.

“Can you get extra sauce?”

“Yes.”

“And spring rolls.”

“Yes.”

“And mango sticky rice.”

“You not even like mango sticky rice.”

“I do now.”

“Okay.”

“And fried duck.”

Shane shoved him weakly toward the door. “Just hurry back please..”

The restaurant was absolute chaos. Ilya realized his mistake immediately upon walking inside.

The takeout area overflowed with people waiting shoulder to shoulder near the counter while overwhelmed employees rushed back and forth carrying bags.

One exhausted looking waitress told him the wait would probably be forty five minutes.

Ilya checked his phone.

Three new texts already.

Shanya: how long

Shanya: baby is hungry

Shanya: i am also hungry

Ilya sighed and typed back.

Me: restaurant busy

The typing bubbles appeared instantly.

Shane: define busy

Ilya: many people

Shane: can they move

Ilya snorted softly.

Ten minutes later.

Shane: update?

Ilya: still waiting

Shane: this is terrible news hurry tf up. I love you so much.

Fifteen minutes after that.

Shane: the baby is kicking me aggressively because she wants noodles

Ilya: baby dramatic like papa

Shane: don't start with me right now

Ilya smiled despite himself.

Then another text came immediately after.

Shane: sorry

Shanya: i love you Shanya: please bring food home safely

Shane was so topsy turvy lately. He'd get unexplainably mad and in the moment say harsh things and then once the hormones died down and he came back into himself he'd feel immediate remorse a constant push, and pull between impulse and reason.

Thirty minutes later the line still barely moved.

Ilya approached the counter carefully.

"Excuse me. Order for Rozanov?"

The waitress looked exhausted already. "We're working on it."

"My husband pregnant."

She blinked once. "Congratulations?"

"He texting me every two minutes. I need this food, please I pay extra."

"Ah."

Sympathy crossed her face immediately.

"Okay, let me check." She disappeared into the kitchen.

Ilya's phone buzzed again.

Shane: i think i'm dying

Ilya: you wer alive five minutes ago

Shane: things change

Finally, the waitress returned carrying several takeout bags.

"Okay, we only had baked duck left instead of the fried duck so we substituted and..."

But she barely finished the sentence before Ilya grabbed the bags.

"Thank you."

"Wait sir..."

Too late. He was already halfway out the door.

Chapter End Notes

And here's the thing when I read a fact that I don't like that's what I do. I just click off. I click that back button so quickly and I leave no kudos no comment no nothing because

that's how it goes. There are plenty of fix that I have read that I didn't really like subjectively because that's just a personal preference. But it's fanfiction emphasis on fiction and emphasis on fan so for all I know this could be a 15-year-old who writes at 3 AM after school soccer practice. And it's not everyone most people know how to respect it. How to respect the writers who put themselves out here writing every day. But it's giving one bad apple spoils the bud cause every time I have to delete a comment of someone who's doing too much. It makes me not wanna hop on this stuff. Makes me not want to write again. Because it's not worth the aggravation. And I tried so hard. To get characterization as close to Canada as possible for me and still aligned with my vision. I am so scared that I am reinforcing negative stereotypes by infantilizing or misscharacterizing. I like writing about shade struggling, but the thing about struggle is that it is vulnerability. And I'm going in blind. Mrs Reid doesn't really like to show us some of Shane's deeper more emotional moments outside of his husband. I'm going off of my own experience and others experience as masking autistic individuals. Because God knows she doesn't say anything about it in the books. And then I have people in my comments, telling me that Shane would never react to this or that. That he wouldn't cry this hard. We don't know how hard he would cry we almost never see him cry. And I also sympathize with that. That being I don't try very often. But when I do, it is overwhelming and all encompassing. So when I write about Shane having a meltdown, that is how I do it. If you want to read a fact about Shane going through the worst trauma of his life and reacted to it by shedding one or two tears and then going for a workout go ahead or better yet read the actual books, but I will continue to write how I want to write. I am still open to criticism because sometimes I do listen to it. But other times it's more of a personal distaste rather than my inability to write. I don't write for one person let's get that right. You can't come into my comment section and tell me that I don't write how you want me to write. there are thousands of people on this platform and counting. There are over 1000 fics under the Shane Hollander/Ilya Rosanov tag. If my writing style or my characterization isn't what you want find something else. Someone who does write how you want to read. Someone whose entire life is devoted to writing as a skill. So please, and I cannot stress this enough please go ahead and find them.

Chapter 6

The second Ilya stepped into the condo, Shane appeared from the living room with startling speed for someone carrying a full term baby.

“Oh my God.”

The relief in his voice sounded genuine.
Ilya stared at him. “You act like I return from war.”

“You were gone forever.”

“It was one hour but sure.”

“That’s forever.”

Shane immediately took several bags from him carefully.

“Thank you,” he said earnestly. “Seriously. I know the place gets busy.”

“I survive.”

“I’m sorry I kept texting.”

“You text twenty three times.”

Shane winced. “That many?”

“Yes.”

“Sorry.” But he was already getting emotional anyway, eyes suspiciously shiny as he carried the bags toward the kitchen island.

Pregnancy had made gratitude hit him with devastating force sometimes.

“You’re very nice to me,” Shane mumbled.

Ilya softened instantly. “You carry our baby. Least I can do is buy noodles.”

“I know but still.” Shane sniffed hard. “You waited forever.”

Ilya wrapped an arm around his waist from behind carefully.

“You worth waiting for.”

Shane’s eyes filled immediately.

“I know I’ve been all over the place and really demanding...”

Ilya kissed his temple while Shane laughed wetly at himself.

“But I want you to know I love-“

Then Shane opened the takeout container.

Ilya saw the exact moment disaster struck.

Shane stared down at the duck container.

Very slowly. He looked up.

“This is baked duck.”

Ilya froze.

“The waitress maybe mention something...”

“You got baked duck?”

“They run out of fried duck.”

Shane looked devastated. Not angry yet.

“I specifically said fried duck, Ilya.”

“I know.”

“The crispy one. I wanted that crunch.”

“Yes. Am sorry.”

“This isn’t crispy.” He picked up a piece and tossed it back into the container.

“No is not...”

Shane poked suspiciously at the container like it had personally betrayed him.

“I can’t fucking believe this.”

Ilya approached carefully like someone approaching an unexploded bomb.

“Maybe still tastes good.”

“I don’t give a fuck what it tastes like.”

“Right.”

“I was thinking about fried duck for two hours.”

“I know.” Ilya’s said softly.

Shane glared at him. “Shut up.”

“Sorry.”

For one terrifying second, Ilya thought another middle of the night exile scenario might occur.

Instead Shane’s shoulders slumped.

“I know it’s not your fault..”he muttered miserably.

Relief flooded through Ilya instantly.

“Correct.”

“But I’m still upset.”

Shane stared down at the food another moment before sighing dramatically.

Then he sat heavily on the stool beside the island and started eating anyway.

Three bites later his expression softened slightly.

“Okay,” he admitted reluctantly. “It’s still good.”

Ilya smiled carefully. “Yes?”

“But I’m attached to the idea of fried duck.”

“We will reunite you two soon.”

Shane pointed his chopsticks at him. “Don’t patronize me.”

“I never.”

Shane huffed. Then abruptly his eyes filled again.

Ilya nearly dropped his drink.

“What now?”

Shane swallowed hard. “You waited in line that long and still remembered extra sauce.” He held up the container with visible emotion.

Ilya stared at him helplessly.

“You cry over sauce now?”

“It’s so thoughtful.”

“It sauce.”

Shane wiped aggressively at his face. “Shut up.”

Ilya moved around the island and kissed the top of his head gently.

At exactly forty weeks pregnant, Shane officially reached the point where every person who looked at him said the same thing.

“Wow.”

Sometimes followed by: “You haven’t had that baby yet?”

Or worse:

“You’re still pregnant?”

As if Shane somehow didn’t know.

By now he felt less like a human being and more like prison warden for his unborn child.

But really, it was him who was being held captive.

Even walking into Doctor Franko’s office exhausted him.

“I swear she got heavier overnight,” Shane muttered while slowly lowering himself into the chair in the exam room.

Ilya hovered nearby immediately in case Shane needed help standing again.

Doctor Franko smiled sympathetically as she entered. “That tends to happen at the end.”

“She’s fucking huge..” Shane complained.

“Actually,” Doctor Franko corrected gently while reviewing the chart, “your daughter is measuring perfectly healthy.”

Even after months of knowing, hearing it still made something warm bloom in Ilya’s chest. Shane softened too despite his exhaustion.

Then the baby kicked directly into his ribs.

His face flattened immediately. “She’s trying to escape through my lungs.”

Doctor Franko laughed.

The appointment itself went smoothly.

Everything looked healthy.

Everything looked ready.

“Well,” Doctor Franko said finally after the exam, “I’d say she could come any day now.”

The sentence hit both of them instantly.
Any day now.

Shane looked down at his stomach instinctively, one hand spreading protectively over the underside of it.

Ilya reached for his other hand automatically.

“You hear that?” he murmured toward Shane’s belly. “Tiny girl finally evicted soon.”

Another kick answered him.

Doctor Franko smiled. “She’s definitely active enough.”

Before they left, though, she gave Shane another recommendation.

“You need more support for your back,” she said firmly. “The strain is getting worse because of the baby’s size and positioning.”

Shane sighed dramatically from the exam table. “Everything hurts.”

“I know. I want you wearing a belly support band during the day. Especially when you’re standing.”

Ilya nodded immediately like this was military instruction.

“Done.”

“And no standing for long periods,” Doctor Franko continued.

Shane looked personally offended.

“I still have things to do.”

“You can do them sitting down.”

“I can’t cook sitting down.”

“You absolutely can Shane. And you’ll want too.”

As it turned out, Doctor Franko was right.

By the time they got home, Shane’s lower back hurt enough that even taking off his shoes made him groan.

Ilya immediately unpacked the support band from the pharmacy bag they had gotten on the way home.

The thing looked vaguely medieval.

Shane eyed it suspiciously. “That cannot possibly be comfortable.”

“It will help support weight.”

“Nothing can support this weight.” Shane lightly shook the underside of his belly.

Still, once Ilya helped him get it situated properly beneath his stomach, Shane’s expression changed immediately.

“Fuck.”

“Better?”

“A little.”

“Doctor Franko is genius.” Ilya beamed.

“I hate when she’s right.”

“You hate when anyone right except you.”

“No!” Ilya stared at him.

Shane sighed. “Okay, maybe a little.”

Over the next few days the support band became a permanent part of Shane’s body.

He wore it around the house constantly beneath oversized t shirts.

Without it, standing for more than a few minutes became hell on earth.

And standing still was bad.

Now whenever Ilya found Shane in the kitchen, one of three things was happening.

Shane sat on the little stool they’d moved in there after the appointment.

Or he leaned heavily against the counter.

Or he leaned against the wall with one hand pressed into his lower back while glaring at whatever food he was trying to make.

“Why are you cooking?” Ilya asked one afternoon after finding Shane aggressively stirring pasta sauce while braced against the counter.”

“Because I’m capable.”

“You look miserable Hollander, sit down.”

“My spine is just...being weird”

“Then sit.”

“I was just sitting.”

“Now you leaning.”

Shane glared at him over his shoulder.

Unfortunately for Shane, leaning presented Ilya with opportunities.

Specifically opportunities to walk past and smack Shane’s ass.

Just enough to annoy him.

The first time it happened, Shane jerked upright in outrage.

“Ilya!”

“What?”

“You cannot sneak attack a pregnant person.”

“You have hot ass.”

“That’s not a real sentence.”

A few hours later, while Shane stood leaning against the fridge eating grapes directly from the container, Ilya walked by again.

Smack.

Shane gasped. “Stop doing that!”

“You have an excellent ass. See real sentence.”

“Get the fuck away from me.” Shane tried to stay annoyed.

Unfortunately he started laughing halfway through his little glare.

Which immediately made him wince.

“Oh my God.”

“What now?”

“She’s sitting on my bladder again.”

“Tiny terrorist.”

“Your fucking chaos junkie genetics.”

“My genetics perfect.”

“Your genetics are harassing my organs. Move.”

Despite all the discomfort—there was still excitement threaded through everything now.

The nursery sat finished.

The hospital bag waited by the front door.

Tiny baby clothes filled drawers throughout the house.

Every movement suddenly felt important because at any moment they could become parents.

Actually parents.

To a daughter.

It terrified Shane a little.

Ilya too, though he hid it better.

Mostly.

One evening after dinner, Shane waddled slowly toward the bathroom muttering under his breath.

Ilya looked up from the couch. “You okay?”

“Fine.”

That tone usually meant not fine.

Five minutes later, strange noises drifted out of the bathroom.

Shuffling. A loud clatter.

Then:

“Oh for God’s sake.”

Ilya frowned immediately and got up. “Shane?”

No answer. More fumbling.

“I go in now.”

“No!”

That definitely meant he needed to go in.

Ilya opened the bathroom door carefully.

And stopped.

Shane sat awkwardly on the closed toilet lid naked with an expression of deep frustration.

A razor sat abandoned on the counter.

“Oh..” Ilya said slowly.

Shane looked mortified. “It’s been months,” he admitted.

Ilya blinked once. He lived the bush Shane had developed. But I guess it all had to come to an end.

“I can’t reach anything anymore,” Shane muttered miserably. “And I started trying and nearly slipped and died.”

“You what?!”

“I almost fell in the bathtub.” Shane winced

“Shane you should have gotten me.”

Shane rubbed both hands over his face. “I just realized there’s gonna be an entire room full of doctors staring at my...you know eventually.”

Ilya softened immediately. “Shanya.”

“I know it’s stupid.”

“Not stupid.”

Shane looked down at his stomach. “I just wanted to feel a little less...” He gestured vaguely downward.

Ilya stepped closer carefully. “You are still beautiful.”

Shane snorted. “I have a jungle between my legs.”

“I love a safari.”

“That line stopped working weeks ago.”

Shane looked embarrassed now more than upset.

“I can’t even shave my own legs properly anymore.”

Ilya picked up the razor from the counter.

“I help.”

“You sure you can?”

“I can line you up really good Hollander.”

“Ilya..”

“What? You do not want a fade?”

“Ilya.”

“Or maybe what is it. Landing strip.” Ilya made sure to pop the P sound.

Shane covered his face to hide his smile.

“Maybe an arrow pointing to yo-“

“Okay! Okay. Enough.”

Ilya crouched in front of him carefully.

“Shane. You grow entire human being. You think I care about shaving your legs and hole?”

Shane’s face softened reluctantly.

“I care only if you fall and crack head open.”

“That would ruin the whole week.”

“Yes. Very inconvenient.”

Ilya helped him carefully reposition onto the edge of the tub where he could sit more comfortably.

Then, with far more concentration than the task probably required, Ilya started helping shave Shane’s legs.

Shane watched him quietly for a while before speaking again.

“I used to be flexible.”

“Yes. I remember.” Ilya’s said while wiping the shaving cream off his leg.

“I could put my own socks on.”

“Tragic.”

“I’m serious.”

Shane sighed and leaned his head back against the wall. “I just miss feeling like myself.”

That made Ilya pause.

For months now Shane’s body hadn’t fully felt like his own.

Every movement revolved around the baby.

Every ache.

Every craving.

Every sleepless night.

And now he couldn't even see half of himself anymore beneath the enormous curve of his stomach.

Ilya rinsed the razor carefully before looking back up at him.

"You are still yourself."

"Debatable."

"You are still bossy." Ilya rubbed shaving cream on his nethers.

Shane rolled his eyes.

"You are still beautiful."

"You already used that one." Shane said as he leaned back while Ilya pushed his legs wider.

"You still make face like that when annoyed."

That earned him a reluctant smile.

"And," Ilya added softly, resting one hand against Shane's knee, "you give me daughter. Pretty impressive version of yourself."

"You can't say sweet things while I'm sitting in a bathtub half shaved."

"Why not?"

"Because then I fucking cry."

"Very common activity lately."

Shane laughed wetly and wiped at his face.

Ilya handled Shane's hole carefully and efficiently while Shane stared determinedly at the opposite wall in embarrassment.

"There," Ilya announced finally. "Done."

"Oh thank God."

"You feel better?"

"A little, actually."

“Good.”

Shane looked at him quietly for a second.
Then softer: “Thanks.”

Ilya leaned forward and kissed him gently.

“Always for my Shanya.”

Shane rested both hands beneath his stomach as their daughter shifted heavily again.

Immediately he grimaced. “She’s trying to descend into hell.”

“She is preparing dramatic entrance.”

“She gets that from you.”

“No,” Ilya said confidently. “That is definitely from you.”

Shane smiled despite himself.

Then with enormous effort, he started trying to stand.

Ilya grabbed both his hands immediately.

“Okay,” Shane grunted as Ilya hauled him upright. “I officially need a crane.”

“Don’t be dramatic.”

“I’m serious.”

“You make the little noises every time you stand now.”

“I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

Shane leaned heavily against him anyway while waddling slowly out of the bathroom.
And even exhausted and swollen and uncomfortable beyond belief, even with a support band strapped around his middle and his center of gravity completely destroyed, Shane still looked beautiful to Ilya.

Not despite the pregnancy. Because of it.

Because every exhausted sigh and every ache and every emotional meltdown meant they were this close to meeting their daughter.

Any day now.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

All right so I may or may not have forgotten. Anya existed for a minute, so let's just pretend she's been in the background the entire time. Also, we're getting close to the birth, you're definitely less than four chapters away but I wanted it to feel extra realistic for y'all.

Shane was stuck.

Not metaphorically.

Literally.

A heavy arm was draped over his waist. One of his legs had gone numb. His shoulder ached. His lower back felt like someone had replaced his spine with a stack of mismatched hockey pucks.

And he had to pee.

Again.

Shane opened his eyes and stared into the darkness of their bedroom.

For a moment, he considered his options.

Option one: stay where he was.

Option two: attempt the increasingly complicated process of getting out of bed while carrying what felt like an entire bowling ball inside his abdomen.

The baby kicked.

Hard.

"Okay," Shane muttered. "I get it."

Two days overdue.

Two whole days.

The baby apparently had no interest whatsoever in vacating the premises.

Shane sighed dramatically and looked beside him.

Ilya was asleep.

Deeply asleep.

The kind of sleep only possible for people who were not currently carrying a nearly nine-pound dictator beneath their ribs.

His husband was sprawled across half the mattress, one arm tangled around Shane and the giant maternity pillow Shane had become dependent on during the last trimester.

The pillow itself was huge and fluffy.

Which meant Shane was trapped.

Which meant—

"Ilya."

Nothing.

"Ilya."

A grunt.

"Rozanov."

Another grunt.

Shane poked his shoulder.

"I need you to move asshole."

One eye cracked open.

"Emergency?"

"Bathroom."

Ilya immediately sat up.

The movement was so sudden Shane nearly laughed.

Years of hockey had trained Ilya to react instantly to certain situations.

Bathroom requests apparently ranked alongside game-winning goals and house fires.

"Sorry, sorry..." Ilya mumbled.

He untangled himself from Shane and the pillow.

Then he climbed over the mattress and held out both hands.

Shane stared.

"I can do it."

"Of course."

Ilya continued holding out his hands.

Shane accepted them.

He rolled.

Paused.

Pushed himself upright.

Paused again.

Placed both feet on the floor.

Paused once more.

By the time he finally stood, he was breathing like he'd just skated three overtime periods.

"Oh my God..."

Ilya immediately frowned.

"What?"

"I'm so fucking tired."

Shane placed a hand over his stomach.

The baby shifted.

"I'm taking a break."

"You need to pee."

"I know and I need a break."

Ilya laughed softly.

Shane glared at him as if looking hard enough would transfer the baby to him.

Then he waddled toward the bathroom.

Halfway there, he stopped.

Leaning against the hallway wall.

Taking another 'break'.

Ilya walked over.

"Don't talk to me." Shane said without turning.

"I have not said anything."

"You were thinking something." Shane pointed accusingly.

Five minutes later they finally made it to the bathroom.

The overhead light came on.

Shane immediately looked into the mirror.

His hair resembled a bird's nest. There were pillow creases across his face. His tank top had ridden up during the night and he looked approximately forty-seven months pregnant.

"Good morning..Милый мальчик." Ilya said.

Shane narrowed his eyes.

"Shut the fuck up."

"Love you too Hollander.."

"Your happiness annoys me."

Ilya grinned.

Shane sat on the toilet.

The relief was immediate.

Across the room, Ilya picked up his toothbrush and started brushing his teeth.

The domesticity of it all should have been sweet.

They were gonna be a family soon. Braxton Hicks were becoming a thing in their day to day and Shane was shoving those weird fish oil pills up his—

BRAAAAAAAP.

The sound echoed.

The kind of fart that should be used in cartoons for cheap laughs.

The bathroom fell silent.

For one terrible second, neither men moved.

Then Shane slowly looked up.

His husband had toothpaste foam around his mouth.

His eyes were enormous.

Then Ilya started laughing.

He doubled over one hand braced against the sink.

Tears immediately appeared.

"Ilya—"

That only made it worse.

The laughter became wheezing.

Shane could feel his face turning bright red.

"Oh my God."

"I—"

More laughter.

"I didn't mean—"

Another wheeze.

"Ilya Rozanov."

This was apparently the funniest thing that had ever happened.

"I can't help it."

"Get out."

"Shane—"

"GET OUT."

Still laughing, Ilya stumbled from the bathroom.

Shane buried his face in his hands.

Mortifying.

Absolutely mortifying.

The baby kicked.

As if laughing too.

Traitor.

Two hours later Shane had mostly recovered.

Mostly.

He still refused to discuss it.

Ilya, to his credit, had stopped bringing it up.

Mostly.

The occasional smile was unavoidable.

But he wasn't actively teasing him.

Which Shane appreciated.

After finally showering and changing, Shane stood in front of the bedroom mirror.

The tank top no longer fit.

At all.

The hem rode several inches above the curve of his stomach.

His belly was completely visible.

The shirt stretched taught across his chest.

"I look ridiculous."

"You look cute."

Shane turned and Ilya was leaning against the doorway.

"You're biased."

"Yes." The answer came instantly.

Which was annoyingly sweet.

Shane rolled his eyes.

Then grabbed the oversized pajama pants he'd stolen from Ilya months ago.

At one point they had fit Ilya comfortably.

Now they were hanging on for dear life.

Mostly because Shane's hips and backside had apparently decided to become three times it's usual size.

He pulled them on.

Adjusted the waistband beneath his stomach.

Then looked at his reflection again.

Shane sighed. "Okay."

Time for breakfast.

Or food.

Or whatever bizarre thing his body demanded today.

He headed toward the stairs.

One hand gripped the railing. The other supported his back.

Every step felt approximately six miles tall since he couldn't see anything.

By the time he reached the bottom, he was breathing heavily again.

"Good morning."

The greeting came from the kitchen.

Anya immediately appeared.

At least until she remembered Shane moved at the speed of continental drift nowadays.

Then she settled for circling his legs.

"Hi, Anya." Shane bent down.

Regretted it instantly. Straightened back up.

Groaned.

Anya licked his hand. Worth it. As if to say ' nice try bud'

In the kitchen, Ilya looked up from making coffee.

"Morning sexy."

Instead of answering, Shane pulled out his phone.

"I need something."

"Oh no."

Shane ignored him. He opened TikTok.

Found the video.

Then shoved the screen directly into Ilya's face.

"Watch."

Ilya obediently watched.

A pregnant woman appeared on-screen.

She looked exhausted.

"The world's greediest baby wants me to eat this sandwich—"

The video continued.

Explaining an absolutely absurd pregnancy craving.

By the end, Ilya looked concerned.

"Why did you show me this?"

Shane pointed at the sandwich.

"I want one."

"That one?"

"No." Ilya relaxed slightly.

Then Shane continued. "That was sarcasm Rozanov. I want a Biscoff cheesecake sandwich."

"Okay."

"With melted chocolate."

"Okay."

"And crispy bacon."

Ilya blinked.

Shane stared back.

Neither moved.

Finally—

"Crispy bacon?"

"Very crispy."

"With cheesecake."

"Yes."

"And chocolate."

"Yes."

Ilya rubbed his face.

Shane waited.

"Anything else?"

Shane considered. Oh god what has he done. "No."

"Good."

Then he immediately added—

"Actually—"

Ilya groaned.

Shane smiled. "Just that."

"Thank God."

The baby kicked as if approving.

"See?" Shane said.

"She agrees."

"She has terrible judgment."

"Rude."

Twenty minutes later Ilya was fully committed.

If his husband wanted a Biscoff cheesecake bacon chocolate sandwich, then Shane was getting a Biscoff cheesecake bacon chocolate sandwich.

No matter how ridiculous it sounded.

The kitchen transformed into a laboratory.

Ingredients appeared everywhere.

Biscoff spread.

Cream cheese.

Cheesecake filling.

Chocolate.

Bacon.

Bread.

Several additional ingredients Shane insisted might help.

Meanwhile Shane had disappeared.

Ilya eventually found him asleep on the couch.

Anya was curled against his side.

One hand rested on his stomach.

His mouth was slightly open.

He looked utterly exhausted.

The last trimester had not been easy.

The overdue waiting certainly wasn't helping.

Ilya stood quietly for a moment.

Just watching.

Shane shifted slightly.

The baby moved beneath the stretched fabric of his tank top.

Ilya smiled.

Soon.

Hopefully very soon.

The tiny human responsible for all this chaos would finally arrive.

And their lives would change forever.

Again.

Not that either of them could wait.

The sandwich took almost an hour.

Mostly because Ilya kept second-guessing himself.

Was there enough chocolate?

Too much chocolate?

Did bacon and cheesecake belong together?

Probably not.

Would Shane care?

Definitely not.

Eventually the creation was complete.

It sat on a plate like a monument to pregnancy cravings.

Ilya carried it into the living room.

"Shanya..."

No response.

"Shanyushka.."

A sleepy noise emerged.

"I made breakfast."

One eye opened.

Then the second.

"What?"

"Breakfast."

The transformation was immediate.

Shane sat upright.

Alarmingly fast.

"Really?"

"Yes."

The plate appeared.

Shane gasped.

Actually gasped. "Oh my God."

The sandwich was presented like a sacred offering.

Shane accepted it with reverence.

He took one bite. His eyes widened.

"Oh."

Ilya waited.

"Oh."

Another bite. Then another.

Then suddenly—

Tears.

Actual tears.

Ilya immediately panicked.

"What happened?"

Shane pointed at the sandwich unable to speak.

"Oh no."

More tears.

"Shane."

"It's so fucking good."

"What?"

"It's beautiful." Ilya stared.

Shane continued crying. "It tastes exactly right."

Relief flooded through him.

"You scared me."

"I can't help it."

Shane wiped his eyes.

Then immediately took another bite.

"It's fucking perfect."

"Good."

"I love it."

"I'm glad."

"You understand me."

Ilya laughed.

Another bite. "You're the love of my life."

"Because I made breakfast?"

"Because you made this breakfast."

The distinction apparently mattered.

Ilya sat beside him.

Anya rested her head on his knee hopefully waiting for some food to lick off Shane.

Shane looked over. Chocolate on his face. Biscoff on his fingers.

Tears still drying beneath his eyes.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

Ilya smiled.

"No reason."

"You're being weird."

"I love you."

Shane's expression immediately softened.

"Oh."

Then he leaned over and kissed him.

A quick press of lips.

"I love you too."

Anya barked.

Demanding attention.

Both men laughed and Ilya picked her up to give her all the kisses she desired.

And for a little while, everything felt exactly right.

Chapter 8

The sunroom had become Shane's preferred place to nap.

Not because it was especially comfortable anymore, comfort had become a theoretical concept sometime around week thirty-eight—but because it had the best light. Soft, warm light that made everything feel slightly less *bleh*.

The circular couch had once been a design choice Ilya had been very proud of.

Now it functioned as Shane's nest.

A carefully constructed arrangement of pillows, blankets, and the maternity pillow that had long since stopped being optional to sleep with.

Shane lay on his side, one hand resting on his stomach.

The other arm dangled off the couch.

His breathing was slow, heavy, almost like a cartoon brown bear in a children's show.

Forty-one weeks.

Forty-one.

At this point, Shane was fairly certain the baby was not simply overdue but squatting.

The couch shifted slightly.

Shane's eyes snapped open. "What—"

Ilya froze mid-step.

He was halfway into sitting down beside him, one knee already on the cushion.

"I'm sorry..." Ilya said instantly.

Shane's heart was racing.

His entire body had jolted awake like getting checked into the boards from nowhere.

"I was just...I thought you were asleep."

"I was asleep."

"I didn't mean to startle you."

Shane exhaled sharply and pressed a hand to his stomach.

The baby kicked in response.

Of course.

“Don’t do that..” Shane muttered while pulling up his blanket.

“I didn’t do anything.” Ilya blinked.

Then, carefully, he removed his knee from the couch like it was a live grenade.

“I can sit somewhere else.”

Shane groaned.

“No. Just—” He waved a hand weakly. “Just warn me next time you move near me.”

Ilya nodded solemnly. “Understood.”

A beat.

Then, softer:

“You okay?”

Shane looked at him.

There were dark circles under his eyes.

His tank top was stretched tight.

Stretch marks mapped across his skin like an unwelcome tattoo.

He looked tired in a way that sleep couldn’t fix.

“I’m great..” Shane said automatically.

Ilya raised an eyebrow.

Shane corrected himself. “I’m okay...”

“That’s not the same thing.”

“I’m aware.”

Ilya finally sat, this time at a cautious distance.

Shane shifted slightly, wincing.

The couch creaked. The baby rolled.

“I want to get up,” Shane said.

“You don’t have to.”

“I do.” Shane stared at him.

“Ilya.”

“Yes?”

“I have been lying here long enough, get me the fuck up.”

“Okay.”

Shane tried to sit up.

It took longer than it should have.

It always did now.

By the time he was upright, he was breathing heavier than he wanted to admit.

Ilya immediately reached out.

Shane waved him off.

“I’ve got it.”

“You don’t have it.”

“I have it Rozanov .”

Shane glared.

Then the moment passed.

He leaned back into the pillows again anyway.

“Fine.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched like he was trying not to smile.

Anya was curled in a patch of warmth near the couch, one ear flicking whenever Shane so much as breathed too loudly.

Peace, of a sort.

Shane needed his mid day shower because he was sweating through everything no matter how cold the house was made.

he had Ilya in the shower with him, for practical purposes.

like washing his legs.

It was going really well.

Shane grumbled the entire time.

“I can do it myself,” he insisted.

“You literally asked me to help you,” Ilya said.

“I was being polite.”

“Sure Hollander...”

Shane stepped under the water with a long sigh of relief.

For a moment, he just stood there leaning against Ilya .

Eyes closed.

Shoulders dropping slightly.

“Okay..” he admitted. “This is...good.”

“I told you,” Ilya said.

“I didn’t say you were right.”

“You didn’t have to.”

Ilya picked up the soap.

Started washing carefully.

Slowly.

Like he was afraid Shane might break if he applied too much pressure.

Shane leaned slightly into it without realizing.

The exhaustion in him softened for a moment.

Then—

“I need orange juice.”

Ilya paused. Still holding Shane’s leg.

“After we finish I wil—”

“No.”

“After the shower.”

“No.”

Ilya blinked.

Shane looked at him seriously through the steam.

“I need it now.”

“I’m actively washing your legs Shane. We are naked.”

“Yes.”

Ilya stared.

Shane did not blink.

Somewhere in the background of this standoff, water continued to run.

“I’ll be two minutes,” Ilya said carefully stepping out.

Shane shook his head.

“I might die in two minutes.”

“You will not die in two minutes.” Ilya said wrapping a towel around his waist.

“You don’t know that.”

“I’m fairly confident.”

Shane narrowed his eyes.

Then sighed, “Fine.”

Ilya left the bathroom to get the precious orange juice and came back with the entire jug.

he tried not to get too worried as he saw Shane down half the thing.

whatever floats his boat.

By late afternoon, Shane had migrated to the couch again.

Different couch now.

Different position.

A bowl of spicy Cheeto puffs sat in his lap like a prize.

He was watching Netflix with the intensity of a man studying game footage.

Ilya sat nearby, laptop open, pretending to work.

Mostly watching Shane out of the corner of his eye.

“You good?” Ilya asked.

Shane nodded, mouth full.

Then he laughed at something on screen.

A sharp sound of amusement that startled even him.

“Oh my—” he started to say.

Then froze.

A beat of silence.

Shane looked down.

Then slowly looked up at Ilya.

“...Ilya.”

Ilya already knew.

“Okay.”

Shane stood up too fast.

“Bathroom.”

“I’ll—”

“NOW.” He waddled.

Fast as he could manage.

Which was not fast at all.

Ilya followed immediately, trying not to laugh, trying very hard not to be helpful in the wrong way.

Behind them, Anya barked once, confused.

Shane pointed. “Don’t look at me.”

“I’m not looking at you.”

“You are looking at me.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Fuck you.”

The door closed.

A moment later, muffled swearing.

Then silence.

Then—

“I’M FINE. It’s mostly discharge..”

Ilya leaned against the hallway wall.

Absolutely not laughing.

Not even a little.

Okay maybe a little.

—————

Later that night, the house was quiet.

Shane had fallen asleep again.

Curled on his side.

One hand under his cheek.

The other resting protectively over his stomach.

Anya was pressed against his legs.

Ilya stood in the nursery doorway for a long time.

Just looking.

The room was finished.

Soft colors.

Small clothes folded neatly.

A crib waiting.

A chair by the window where he imagined late nights would happen.

he returned to their bedroom careful not to stir.

He sat down on their bed slowly.

“I don’t know what I’m doing,” he said quietly in Russian.

A pause.

Then he smiled.

“But I think I’m ready anyway.”

He leaned forward slightly.

Rested his elbows on his knees.

“I hope you’re okay in there,” he added softly.

“I think your Daddy is doing most of the work right now.”

A beat.

As if in response, Shane shifted.

Ilya smiled again.

“Yeah,” he murmured.

“I know. We’re almost there.”

An hour later, there was a crash from the nursery.

Followed by:

“I’M STUCK.”

Ilya was up immediately.

Shane was sitting on the floor, half wedged between a pile of folded blankets and the edge of the crib.

“How did you—”

“I was getting the outfit.”

“You didn’t have to—”

“I wanted to be prepared.”

“For what?”

Shane stared at him.

“For leaving.”

Silence.

Ilya’s expression softened instantly.

He moved forward, crouching carefully.

“Okay,” he said. “Okay. I have got you.”

It took effort.

A lot of effort. Mostly because Shane would cry if he heard a grunt.

But eventually Shane was upright again, leaning heavily into him.

Breathing uneven.

“Thank you...” Shane muttered.

“Always.”

They didn’t move right away.

Then Shane stiffened slightly.

“...Ilya.”

“What?”

A beat.

Then Shane exhaled slowly.

“I think—”

He stopped.

Ilya’s posture shifted immediately.

“Shane?”

Shane swallowed.

“I think something just happened.”

Understanding settled between them in an instant.

Excitement first.

Then something deeper.

Something real.

Ilya nodded once.

“Okay.”

Shane nodded too.

A little shaky now.

“Okay.”

Then Ilya said gently:

“Do you want to sit down?”

Shane nodded.

They moved together.

Back toward the second floor common room.

Toward the couch.

Toward the space where everything had been happening.

The space where everything was about to change.

And neither of them said it out loud yet.

But they both knew.

Something had started.

Finally.

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

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

The house had gone oddly quiet after they came back in.

Not the peaceful kind of quiet.

The *watchful* kind.

Shane had that look again—the one Ilya had learned to recognize over the last few weeks. It started as stillness, then turned into focus, then inevitably into movement that made absolutely no sense for someone who was supposed to be resting.

Ilya had been downstairs for maybe five minutes.

Five.

He was putting away the last of the dishes when he heard it.

A sound from upstairs.

a thud followed by the sound of dragging wood across the floor.

Followed by a muttered, strained:

“Okay... just a little—”

Ilya froze.

Then dropped everything and bolted.

Straight into the nursery.

And there he was.

Shane.

Standing in the middle of the room, breathing slightly harder than usual, both arms wrapped around one side of the crib like he was trying to shift it across the floor by sheer determination alone.

The crib itself had barely moved an inch.

“Ilya,” Shane said without looking up. “Perfect timing. I just need to move this slightly to the left so the room is centered.”

Ilya stared.

Then slowly stepped into the room like restraint was holding him together by a string.

“Why are you moving the crib.”

Shane huffed. “It’s not centered.”

“It’s fine.”

“It’s not *visually* fine. It’s slightly left and that closes off the room.”

Ilya pointed at him. “You are not lifting anything.”

Shane finally looked up. There was a spark there.

A dangerous one.

“I’m literally just adjusting it, Rozanov relax..”

“You are not supposed to be lifting anything.”

Shane adjusted his grip.

“I can handle it.”

“I know you *think* you can handle it.”

“I *can* handle it.”

“Shane.”

A beat.

The kind of beat that meant Ilya was switching from calm to final warning.

Shane ignored it completely.

“Just help me angle it a little—”

“I said no.”

Shane pulled again.

The crib didn’t move.

Ilya moved instead.

One step forward, then both hands on the crib in a single motion.

“Stop.” Ilya said sharply.

Shane looked up, annoyed now. “I almost had it.”

“No, you didn’t.”

“I was *very close*.”

“You were straining your back like an idiot.”

“I was not straining, I hardly even picked it up, I was dragging it.”

“You are out of breath from *dragging*?”

Shane opened his mouth. Closed it.

Then tried again anyway, shifting his grip like he was going to prove a point.

That was the exact moment Ilya took the crib cleanly out of his hands.

Just lifted it—entirely—like it weighed nothing and set it gently back into place where it had been before.

Shane froze.

Ilya exhaled slowly. “There,” Ilya said. “Centered. Fixed. Done.”

Shane stared at the crib.

Then at Ilya.

Then back at the crib. “That’s not the point.”

Ilya turned slowly.

“Oh, I’m aware.”

Shane pointed weakly at it.

“It was *off by* two inches.”

“I do not care.”

Shane huffed.

Then immediately tried to step forward again.

Ilya moved first.

He caught Shane by the shoulders—not rough, but absolutely firm.

“Bed,” Ilya said.

Shane blinked.

“I don’t need—”

“Bed.”

“I’m fine.”

“Bed or I call Yuna.”

Shane opened his mouth again, clearly preparing to argue his way out of calling his mom.

Ilya didn’t give him the chance.

He simply guided him out of the nursery.

Removing him from the situation like a very determined bodyguard escorting a very stubborn VIP.

Shane protested the entire way down the hall.

“It needed to be done.”

“You were moving furniture.”

“I was improving the room for our child.”

“The child is currently not using the crib.”

“That’s not the point!”

They reached the bedroom.

Ilya opened the door.

And with a final, gentle but non-negotiable motion, sat Shane down on the bed.

Shane immediately tried to stand again.

Ilya placed a hand on his shoulder and pushed—lightly but decisively—back down.

“Stay,” Ilya said.

Shane glared up at him.

“I’m not a dog.”

“I know.”

“Then stop saying ‘stay.’”

“Then stop trying to move furniture while you are having fake contractions.”

Shane shifted, clearly still annoyed. “They’re braxt and hics and they can start days before I actually go into labor.”

Then sighed heavily, sinking back slightly into the pillows.

“...It was off-center.”

Ilya sat beside him this time, watching him carefully.

“It’s perfect.”

“It wasn’t perfect.”

“It is.”

Shane narrowed his eyes.

“You’re very controlling today.”

“I’ve always been controlling,” Ilya said calmly.

“This is stupid.”

A beat.

Then Shane’s expression softened slightly despite himself.

“I just wanted it right,” he muttered.

Ilya’s voice dropped.

“I know.”

Shane exhaled, slower this time.

The fight drained out of him in small increments.

“I get weird energy sometimes,” he admitted. “It’s like...I have to do things.”

“I noticed.”

“And then I forget I’m not supposed to do things.”

“I noticed that too, you are very obvious Hollander.”

Shane leaned back fully now, one hand resting over his stomach.

The irritation faded, replaced by exhaustion again.

“I was being helpful,” he said weakly.

Ilya smiled faintly.

“You are helpful.”

“I just can’t prove it right now.”

“That’s not true, you prove it by keeping baby safe.”

Shane closed his eyes.

“Yeah.”

Ilya leaned back against the headboard beside him.

For a moment, neither of them spoke.

The house was quiet again.

But this time, it wasn’t tense.

It was steady.

“I’ll fix the crib later,” Ilya said softly.

Shane didn’t open his eyes.

“It was about to be fixed.”

“I know.”

A pause.

Then Shane muttered:

“...Its still off by two inches.”

Ilya laughed quietly.

“All you think about is inches Shane. So slutty.”

“Shut up.”

Ilya reached over and brushed a hand lightly over Shane’s hair.

“Rest,” he said.

Shane grumbled something unintelligible.

But he didn’t move again.

And for the first time that day, he stayed still on purpose.

Chapter End Notes

All right guys get your scrubs on put some hand sanitizer on your hands grab a blanket in the hospital bag cause we are having this baby next chapter we did it!!! Yayyyyyy! Everyone put down in the comments what you're bringing to the hospital to keep you entertained.

On that note to mark nearing the end of this story. I just wanna clarify I have nothing against pregnancy. I think it is scary and difficult and traumatic and painful. And I think I would do it anyway. I know all of this about pregnancy and you might think it would determine me but no. I am myself would like to carry my own children. Because even though pregnancy is all those things, I think a baby is worth it. So I'm not here to go on pregnancy and make it sound like nobody should have a kid because pregnancy is horrible. I respect mothers and I want to be one. And I'm not going to sit here and minimize the hard work these people go through. Because it's not just simple as being achy and wanting pickles with jelly. There's some women whose livers shut down. Some women crave gasoline and bars of soap. People who are genuinely happy go lucky during pregnancy are very few and far between. And with someone as sensory sensitive as Shane, pregnancy was not gonna be a walk in the park. I wanted it to be unique to him. I wanted to take inspiration from actual pregnancy stories and Youtubers and TikTok's. Because I wanted this to feel real. I wanted it to be a perfect mix of. I love everything that's happening and I hate everything that's happening because that is what pregnancy is. There are so many different symptoms and characteristics of pregnancy for different people that I had unlimited source material essentially. I just wanna say that when writing future pregnancy fics for anybody who wants to write try and deviate from the usual formula of 'I want pickles' or 'my back hurts'. Talk to you an actual pregnant person look up a YouTube pregnancy blog to see how pregnant people actually live and move and feel. Look up pregnant TikTok skits for inspiration for shorts and drabbles. Make it real. That is how you make it real. And also for anyone picturing Shane with a cute little petite smooth skin belly bump he doesn't have that when I picture Shane he is huge. Angry stretch marks all over. His bump almost touches his knees when he sits. Perfectly perky, baby bumps are few and far between. And you may be thinking oh he's an athlete. He is really toned abs. There's no way he would get that big, him and his husband are pushing six feet. All right I'mma shut up now.

Chapter 10

The first week of June had somehow become the longest week of Shane Hollander's life.

He was four days overdue.

Four.

Days.

Not that he was counting.

Okay, he was counting.

Everybody was fucking counting.

His phone buzzed constantly with messages from teammates, family members, and friends who apparently believed labor worked like a scheduled flight departure.

Any baby news?

How are you feeling?

Still pregnant?

That last one came from Troy, accompanied by three laughing emojis.

Shane had considered blocking him.

Instead he sent back a picture of his middle finger.

The baby remained completely unimpressed.

Now, at nearly midnight, Shane sat on the edge of their bed trying to find a position that didn't make his back ache with his trusty maternity pillow.

"You okay?" Ilya asked softly.

Shane glared at him. Of course he isn't okay.

Ilya smiled. "That bad?"

"I hate everyone."

"You love me."

"I tolerate you, barely."

"Very romantic tonight Shane."

Another tightening rolled through Shane's abdomen.

The latest in a seemingly endless parade of contractions that never amounted to anything.

Braxton Hicks had been showing up for weeks.

Recently they'd become stronger.

Enough that twice Shane had become certain labor was finally starting.

Twice his body had apparently changed its mind.

The betrayal felt personal.

He breathed through the sensation until it faded.

Ilya watched carefully.

"Another one?"

"Yeah."

"Different?"

"No."

The disappointment in Ilya's voice matched his own.

They'd been playing this game for days.

Contraction.

Hope.

Waiting.

Nothing.

Repeat.

"I think this girl is comfortable."

Ilya stretched out beside him.

"Smart kid." He whispered into Shane's belly.

Shane snorted.

"She needs to smart and get out."

The baby kicked.

Ilya immediately placed a hand on Shane's stomach.

"See? Already taking my side."

"Absolutely not."

The kick came again.

Ilya looked delighted.

Shane looked exhausted.

After another half hour of attempting sleep, Shane gave up.

"I need to piss." He shoved Ilya off from where he was throwing himself over his maternity pillow.

Ilya made a sympathetic noise.

At this point bathroom trips were practically a scheduled activity.

Shane shuffled out of bed.

The bathroom door closed behind him.

A few minutes passed.

Then ten.

Then fifteen.

Ilya frowned. Usually Shane was back by now.

He sat up.

Listened.

Nothing.

No movement.

No flushing.

No sounds at all.

Concern prickled.

He climbed out of bed and crossed the room.

"Shane?"

"I'm fine." The answer came too quickly.

Definitely suspicious.

Ilya rested a hand against the door.

"You've been in there forever."

"I'm okay."

"Seriously..."

Shane sounded strange. Which immediately worried Ilya more.

"Can I come in?"

"No."

The answer was instant.

Ilya blinked. "No?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"That's not a reason Hollander."

"It is right now."

Ilya leaned his forehead against the door.

"Shanya..."

"Don't Shanya me."

"You're hiding in the bathroom."

"I'm not hiding."

"Shane."

Silence.

More silence.

Then a frustrated groan from inside.

"Oh my God."

"Shane?"

Another groan.

"I hate this."

The worry in Ilya's chest sharpened.

"Open the door."

"No."

"Shane."

"Fuck off."

The lock clicked anyway.

A second later the door opened just enough for Shane to peer through.

His face was bright red. That was never a good sign.

"Hey.." Ilya said carefully.

"Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Look at me like that."

"Like what?"

"Like you're worried."

"I am worried."

Shane squeezed his eyes shut.

"I lost my mucus plug." He said quiet and quick

For a moment Ilya simply stared.

"Oh."

"Oh?" Shane repeated. "That's your reaction?"

"I don't know what reaction I'm supposed to have."

Shane made an aggravated sound.

"I don't know either." The confession seemed to deflate him.

Embarrassment gave way to uncertainty.

And underneath that, fear.

Ilya's expression softened immediately.

"Hey."

Shane looked away.

"I know it's normal."

His voice had gone quiet.

"I know it means things are progressing."

"Okay."

"But it's so gross."

Ilya failed to hide a smile.

That earned him a glare.

"Don't laugh."

"I'm not." He was mostly endeared.

"You are."

"A little."

Shane folded his arms.

Or attempted to.

His stomach made the maneuver difficult.

"This is disgusting."

"It really isn't." Ilya stepped forward.

Carefully.

Giving Shane plenty of room to move away if he wanted.

Instead Shane sagged against him.

All the irritation disappeared.

Replaced by exhaustion.

And nerves. A lot of nerves.

"What if labor starts tonight?"

Ilya wrapped his arms around him.

"Then it starts tonight."

"What if it doesn't?"

"Then it doesn't."

"What if I'm in labor for thirty hours?"

"We survive."

"What if something goes wrong?"

Ilya kissed the top of his head.

"We call the doctors."

Shane exhaled shakily.

He wasn't embarrassed about the mucus plug.

He was really fucking scared.

"I think I'm freaking out."

"I know."

"Can you call my mom?"

Ilya looked down.

"Right now?"

"Please."

That answer told him everything.

Shane never asked for help when he could avoid it.

The fact that he wanted Yuna meant his anxiety had climbed higher than he was admitting.

"Of course."

When Yuna answered the phone, she sounded remarkably awake for someone being called close to midnight.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Yuna" Ilya said quickly.

"Is Shane okay?"

"Mostly."

"Mostly?" She perked up excited already.

"I lost my mucus plug," Shane called from the background.

A brief silence followed.

Then Yuna laughed.

The kind of laugh only a mother could manage.

"Oh sweetheart."

"Mom."

"It's normal."

"I know."

"You sound terrified."

"I'm not terrified."

Another pause.

"You are. That's fine."

Shane groaned.

Yuna continued gently. "Listen to me. Losing your mucus plug doesn't mean the baby is arriving immediately."

"I know."

"It means your body is preparing."

"I know."

"You keep saying you know."

"Because I do know."

"Then why are you panicking?"

Shane looked toward the ceiling.

Ilya could practically see the answer forming.

Because facts and feelings weren't the same thing.

Finally Shane sighed and leaned back on the bedroom yoga ball.

"Because this is real."

Yuna's voice softened.

"Oh."

The room became quiet.

"I think I've been waiting so long that it didn't feel as real as it does now." Shane admitted.

"Now it does."

"It felt real when you were throwing up every morning."

"Mom."

"It felt real when your ankles disappeared."

"Mom."

"It felt real when you made Ilya drive across the city for an argument."

"I still maintain that was reasonable."

Ilya barked a laugh.

"You're ready.." Yuna said.

"I don't feel ready."

"Nobody feels ready."

"And most importantly," Yuna continued, "that baby clearly inherited the Hollander stubbornness."

Shane groaned.

"Mom."

"Four days overdue?"

"I know."

"Definitely a Hollander."

For the first time all evening, Shane laughed.

"The scary parts don't mean you're doing anything wrong."

Shane swallowed.

"Okay."

"You call me if you need me."

"We will."

"I love you."

"Love you too." The call ended.

Ilya knew something had changed before Shane said a single word.

Mostly because Shane wasn't talking.

Normally, even exhausted, even uncomfortable, Shane always had something to say. A complaint. A sarcastic comment. A demand.

This morning he shuffled into the kitchen, accepted the glass of water Ilya handed him, and silently leaned against the counter.

That was it.

"Morning?" Ilya ventured.

Shane blinked. A few seconds later he nodded once.

Then a contraction hit.

Ilya could tell immediately.

Shane's shoulders tightened.

His eyes closed. One hand braced against the countertop while he breathed carefully through his nose.

Completely focused.

When it passed, he opened his eyes again.

"You okay?"

Another nod.

"Want breakfast?"

A pause. Then a tiny shrug.

Ilya watched him carefully.

The contractions had been coming and going throughout the night. Not close enough together to send them to the hospital. Not intense enough to make anyone think active labor had started.

But they were different.

The uncertainty that had lingered for days suddenly felt like it was disappearing.

Their baby was trying to meet them. Ilya thanked the God Shane would not need surgery or inducing. He had his heart set on a natural birth.

She was coming. Soon.

The realization made Ilya simultaneously excited and terrified.

Shane looked like he felt exactly the same way.

By midmorning, the yoga ball had migrated back into the living room.

Shane spent most of his time sitting on it.

Occasionally bouncing.

Occasionally swaying his hips.

Occasionally staring into space.

Every so often a contraction would arrive.

Then he would stop moving entirely.

Eyes closing.

Hands gripping the sides of the ball.

Then everything would relax.

The cycle repeated all day.

Around noon, Ilya attempted conversation.

"Should I put something on TV?"

No answer.

Shane stared out the window.

"I'll take that as a no."

Twenty minutes later:

"Do you want lunch?"

Shane pointed weakly toward the refrigerator.

"I'll interpret that as yes."

A contraction interrupted whatever response Shane might have offered.

His head dropped forward.

Ilya immediately moved closer.

The contraction lasted longer than the others.

When it finally faded, Shane exhaled heavily.

"You okay?"

A nod.

"Need anything?"

Head shake.

"Water?"

A pause.

Then another nod.

"See? Communication."

Shane opened one eye.

The look he gave him was exhausted but fond.

Ilya counted that as a victory.

By early afternoon, Yuna had called.

Ilya answered while keeping one eye on Shane.

"How's Shane?"

Ilya looked across the room.

Shane was sitting on the yoga ball with his forehead resting against the back of the couch.

"He hasn't spoken in approximately six billion years."

Yuna laughed.

"That sounds promising."

"I think so?"

Another contraction arrived.

Shane's posture changed instantly.

His back straightened.

His breathing deepened.

The movement had become familiar enough that Ilya recognized it before Shane even reacted.

Yuna apparently heard the silence.

"One now?"

"Yeah."

"How long?"

Ilya checked the timer.

"About forty seconds."

"Okay." Her voice remained calm.

As though none of this was unusual.

As though babies arrived every day.

Which, of course, they did.

Just not *their* baby.

Not *Shane's* baby.

That still felt impossible somehow.

The contraction ended.

Shane slumped forward again.

Yuna spoke gently.

"Shane?"

A faint noise emerged.

Not quite a word but definitely an answer.

"Are you eating?"

A longer pause.

Then:

"Maybe."

"Shane."

"I ate."

"Good you'll need it."

Another silence.

Then Yuna laughed softly.

"He's definitely in labor."

"I think so.." Ilya said.

"I know so."

Something about her certainty eased the knot between Ilya's shoulders.

Because if Yuna wasn't worried, maybe he didn't need to be worried either.

The afternoon blurred.

The apartment became strangely quiet.

Neither of them had much energy for conversation.

Shane walked laps around the living room.

Then sat on the yoga ball.

Then leaned against the kitchen counter.

Then paced again.

Every position seemed uncomfortable after a few minutes.

Every contraction demanded something different.

One happened while he was standing near the bookshelf.

He leaned both forearms against the wall and breathed through it.

Another arrived in the kitchen.

He gripped the edge of the counter and closed his eyes.

A third came while he was sitting on the ball.

His entire body went still.

When it passed, he remained frozen for another few seconds.

Ilya sat nearby pretending to read.

Mostly he was watching.

Making sure Shane drank water.

Making sure he ate.

Making sure he wasn't trying to tough everything out alone.

Which was absolutely something Shane would do.

By four o'clock, the contractions were close enough together that Ilya had stopped pretending this was anything other than labor.

Not hospital time yet.

But labor.

Definitely labor.

Shane seemed to know it too.

His expression had changed.

The nervous anticipation from yesterday was gone.

There wasn't room for it anymore.

The work had started.

His world had narrowed.

Contraction.

Rest.

Contraction.

Rest.

Everything else felt secondary.

Even talking.

Especially talking.

Another contraction rolled through.

Shane immediately stood from the yoga ball.

He planted both hands on the back of the couch.

Head lowered.

Eyes shut.

Ilya rose automatically.

Not because Shane needed him.

Because *Ilya* needed to be closer.

He placed his hand on Shane's hips and pushed down on them in circle motions.

The contraction built.

Held.

Then gradually eased.

When it was over, Shane leaned backward against him.

Ilya wrapped his arms around him carefully.

"You are doing amazing."

Shane made a doubtful sound.

"You are."

Another doubtful sound.

Ilya smiled against his hair.

"You know, for somebody who spent the entire pregnancy insisting he wasn't nervous—"

A glare appeared.

"I was right," Ilya said.

The glare intensified. "Very nervous."

Shane pointed at him.

A silent threat.

Ilya laughed.

"There he is."

For the first time all day, the corner of Shane's mouth twitched.

Not quite a smile.

Close enough.

Dinner had been Shane's idea.

For the last twenty-four hours, convincing Shane to eat had been a negotiation. Half a sandwich here. A banana there. Crackers when he could tolerate them.

Now, suddenly, he wanted actual food.

Which was why they were sitting at the kitchen table eating pasta while Anya lay sprawled dramatically across the floor nearby.

For a few minutes, things almost felt normal.

Shane had barely spoken through the entire meal. He sat carefully in his chair, one hand resting on the underside of his stomach as he pushed pasta around his plate.

Ilya watched him over the rim of his water glass.

"How's it going?"

A shrug.

"Helpful."

Another shrug.

"I've missed your sparkling conversation Hollander."

That earned him a tiny eye roll.

Progress.

Then Shane froze.

The fork slipped from his fingers.

It hit the plate with a sharp clatter.

Ilya straightened immediately.

"Shane?"

No response.

Shane's entire body had gone rigid.

One hand gripped the edge of the table.

The other pressed against his stomach.

His eyes squeezed shut.

This wasn't unusual anymore.

The contractions had been getting steadily stronger throughout the day.

But something about this one felt different.

Shane inhaled sharply. His chair scraped backward across the floor.

He stood so abruptly that it nearly tipped over behind him.

"Shane—"

The contraction hit full force.

A strangled sound escaped him.

Then another.

Much louder. "ILYA!"

The scream ripped through the kitchen.

Ilya was out of his chair before he'd consciously decided to move.

Shane stumbled toward him.

Both hands grabbing handfuls of his shirt.

Holding on with astonishing strength.

"Oh my God," Shane gasped. "Oh my God!"

"I've got you."

Another cry escaped Shane.

His forehead dropped against Ilya's shoulder.

The contraction seemed endless.

Longer than any of the others.

Anya exploded into motion. She launched to her feet barking furiously.

She raced circles around them. "Anya, it's okay," Ilya said automatically.

The dog ignored him completely.

Shane made another sound.

Half groan. Half gasp.

Anya barked louder.

"I know..." Ilya told her. "I know."

Eventually the contraction began to loosen its grip.

Shane's breathing remained uneven.

His hands still twisted in Ilya's shirt.

But the worst of it was fading.

The room became quiet except for Anya's anxious whining.

For several seconds neither men moved.

Then Shane lifted his head.

His face looked pale.

Determined.

Certain.

More certain than Ilya had seen him in days.

Their eyes met.

"It's time, she's coming."

The words were calm.

Completely calm.

That scared Ilya more than the screaming had.

Because Shane wasn't guessing.

He knew.

Somewhere deep down, he knew.

And Ilya believed him immediately.

"Okay."

A breath. "Okay."

Everything they'd planned suddenly snapped into place.

Months of preparation.

Lists.

Conversations.

Practice runs.

All of it.

Now.

It was happening now.

Ilya kissed his forehead.

Then sprang into motion.

"Sit down."

Shane blinked.

"Ilya—"

"Sit."

For once, Shane didn't argue.

He lowered himself carefully into a chair while Ilya grabbed his phone.

First call.

Yuna.

She answered on the second ring.

"Hello?"

"It's time."

A pause.

Then:

"Oh. Oh my god. Shane's having the baby. Shane is having the baby."

In the background, he heard David immediately asking questions.

"Contractions are intense," Ilya said. "We're heading to the birthing center."

"We'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"Thank you."

"How's Shane?"

Ilya glanced across the room.

Shane was groaning through another contraction.

Eyes closed.

One hand gripping the edge of the table.

"He has been better."

"Tell him we're on our way."

"I will."

The call ended.

Second call.

The birthing center.

This conversation felt surreal.

A real person answered.

Questions were asked.

Contractions.

Timing.

Symptoms.

Progress.

All the things they'd discussed during classes and appointments.

The midwife's voice remained calm.

Confident.

Professional.

"Come on in," she said. "We'll be ready for you."

The moment he hung up, adrenaline hit him like a freight train.

This was real.

This was actually happening.

Their baby was coming.

Tonight.

Maybe tonight.

Definitely soon.

"Чёрт возьми."

Shane opened one eye. "You're freaking out."

"I'm not freaking out."

"You are."

"I am excited."

Shane managed a weak laugh.

Another contraction interrupted it.

His head dropped forward immediately.

Ilya crossed the room.

Applied the counter pressure.

Waited.

Counted breaths.

The contraction ended.

Shane exhaled.

Then stood.

"I need fucking shoes."

"Okay."

"I need actual pants." He looked down at his boxer clad legs.

"Okay."

"I need to go upstairs." Shane groaned, out of breath.

"Okay."

For a few blessed minutes, everything seemed under control.

Then another contraction arrived halfway through putting on his shoes.

Shane stopped abruptly.

One hand landing on the wall.

The other pressing against his stomach.

"Fuck me."

The sound was small.

Surprised.

His eyes widened.

"Uh."

Ilya looked up from the hospital bags.

"What?"

Shane stared downward.

"Uh."

"What!?"

"I think—"

A pause.

Then:

"My water broke."

For one horrifying second, Ilya envisioned every movie scene he'd ever seen.

Instead, Shane stood there looking vaguely annoyed.

Nothing dramatic had happened.

Just a slow trickle that darkened the back of his grey sweats.

"Really?"

"Pretty sure."

Another pause.

"Definitely."

Ilya stared.

Shane stared back.

Then both of them burst out laughing.

Not because it was funny for some reason. Nervous laughter probably.

"Oh my God," Shane said. "I need different pants."

"You need the car."

"I need pants first."

"The car."

"The pants."

"Shane."

"The pants."

Despite himself, Ilya surrendered.

"Fine."

Victorious, Shane shuffled upstairs.

Another contraction hit before he reached the landing.

The process took much longer than it should have.

Meanwhile, Ilya transformed into a tornado.

Hospital bags.

Phone chargers.

Snacks.

Paperwork.

Water bottles.

Pillows.

Everything went into the car.

He laid a towel across the passenger seat.

Then another.

Just in case.

By the time Yuna and David arrived, he was making frantic laps between the house and driveway.

David stepped out of the car.

Took one look at him.

"Relax."

"I am relaxed."

"You look like you're preparing for a tsunami son."

Yuna immediately disappeared inside to check on Shane.

Anya greeted them as they came in.

The poor dog clearly understood that something major was happening.

Five minutes later, Yuna emerged smiling.

"He's changing."

"Changing into what?"

"I don't know, he didn't open for me."

That answer should have worried him more.

Instead, Ilya kept pacing.

Minutes crawled by.

Then the front door opened.

Everyone turned.

And immediately started laughing.

Shane stood in the doorway.

Fresh clothes.

A Snickers bar in one hand.

A bag of sour cream and onion chips tucked under his arm.

For a moment nobody spoke.

The image was so absurd that it short-circuited everyone's brain.

"What?" Shane asked.

Another contraction threatened.

He pointed the candy bar accusingly at them.

"Mom told me to eat."

Ilya doubled over laughing.

David laughed.

Yuna laughed.

Even Shane started laughing.

There they were.

On the verge of becoming parents.

Heading to the birthing center.

Labor fully underway.

And Shane had apparently decided that his final act before delivery would be consuming the nutritional equivalent of a gas station snack run.

For the first time all day, nobody felt scared.

Just excited.

A little overwhelmed.

And very, very ready.

Eventually Shane wiped tears from his eyes.

"Can we go have a fucking baby now?"

Ilya grinned.

"Yeah."

He stepped forward and took Shane's free hand.

The one not occupied by candy.

"Let's go have baby."

Together they walked toward the car.

Anya barked from the doorway.

Yuna promised she'd send updates.

David hauled the last bag into the trunk.

Shane settled carefully onto the towels and immediately opened the chips to grab a handful.

Ilya started the engine.

As Ilya pulled away from the curb, Shane reached across the console and took his hand.

And together they drove toward the birthing center to meet their baby.

Chapter 11

The birthing center was quiet when they arrived.

"Move faster," Shane snapped.

"I am moving. I literally cannot walk any faster while carrying a towel under your ass."

Shane glared at him.

Another contraction rolled through him.

The glare vanished instantly.

"Oh, fucking God." His knees nearly buckled.

Ilya caught him before he could stumble.

Warm fluid soaked through the towel again.

The woman at the front desk immediately stood.

"Shane Hollander?"

"No," Shane grunted.

The woman blinked.

Then Ilya sighed.

"Yes. That's him."

"Hollander-Rozanov." Shane corrected.

Another midwife appeared almost instantly.

They were guided down a hallway toward a private room.

Shane concentrated entirely on putting one foot in front of the other.

The room itself was bigger than he expected.

A large bed, still fitted with an adjustment system and handle bars but looked like it could fit him and Ilya.

Dim lighting from a single orange strip light from behind the wooden feature of the bed.

A rocking chair that looked so plush and comfy, Shane made a mental note not to sit there until he had the baby to not soil it.

A yoga ball.

Medical equipment tucked discreetly along one wall.

A really nice shower with a tub on one end and a walk in shower on the other.

For a brief moment he felt hopeful.

Maybe—

A contraction slammed into him.

His breath caught.

The hope vanished immediately.

"Fuck me." he wheezed.

The settling-in period lasted approximately one hour.

Ilya help him get all his toiletries set up in the bathroom while Shane supervised from the bed.

Then he got out Shane's labor outfit and the babies swaddle and things.

After that, all hell broke loose.

Shane tried everything.

He sat on the bed.

Then he hated the bed.

He stood.

Then he hated standing.

He paced.

Then he hated pacing.

Eventually he migrated toward the yoga ball layered with puppy pads.

That became his preferred location.

Mostly because it gave him something to focus on besides the fact that his entire body seemed determined to fold itself inside out.

Ilya remained beside him through every second.

Their midwife, Rachel, seemed equally determined.

Beep.

When contractions intensified, she showed Ilya how to apply counter pressure with their heated pad.

For a few moments it actually helped.

Then the next contraction hit.

Beep.

"Harder." Shane groaned into his arm as he leaned on the bed.

"I am pushing Shanya." Ilye said calmly.

"Harder."

Beep.

"You so love that word.."

"HARDER." Ilya increased pressure.

Shane groaned. "Okay, not that hard."

Rachel bit her lip from where she was monitoring from the corner.

Beep.

Ilya tried to keep his face neutral.

"You just said—"

"I know what I said."

The contraction eased.

Beep.

Shane slumped forward.

Then immediately pointed at both of them.

"Whatever that fucking machine is turn it off."

Rachel moved to one of the tiny monitors hooked up Shane's bump and hit a button.

"Was just tracking movement hon." She said calmly

Shane nodded as he swayed from side to side. "Okay..okay..okay."

Five minutes later Shane was yelling at them again.

"It doesn't help!"

"It wont get rid of the pain Shane." Rachel said calmly

"Then why are you doing it?"

Shane lurched over again as another contraction took him.

"Why aren't you doing anything?!" He groaned at Ilya.

"You told me not to!" He replied as he resumed counter pressure.

The hours blurred together.

Night deepened.

The contractions intensified.

Shane's patience disappeared completely and by midnight he was operating entirely on instinct.

He was turned on the bed, arms resting at the top of it with his knees bent beneath him.

"Loving this view Shane..."Ilya said as he applied the pressure with the heating pad.

It was just them two right now so Shane wasn't to worried about anyone hearing them.

"Fuck off..." He said softly

Ilya kissed his back.

Then Shane's eyes shut and he bit into his lip as the next contraction started.

Ilya knew Shane did not like anyone talking to him when he contracted, its not like he could hear them anyway.

Shane groaned into the wall and pulled himself up as the pain mounted.

"Fuck! Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!" His hand swung down to grip onto Ilya and press his hand down even harder on the heating pad.

"What the fuck am I doing?" Shane cried out to no one.

Ilya could see the tears forming in his eye's

He kissed Shane's arm where his iron grip still held.

Then it was over and Shane a slummped again.

"Feel her-fuck. Feel cmon." Shane dragged Ilya's hand to his belly.

Ilya nearly gasped when he felt his daughter's back low in Shane's belly.

"She is so low Shane.."

"Yeah.." Shane nodded tiredly.

"Almost their дорогой."

By one in the morning he was barely operating at all.

A particularly brutal contraction hit.

Pain flooded every thought.

Every attempt at composure vanished.

He started crying. "I can't!"

Ilya immediately knelt beside him where he was laid on an array of towels with a peanut ball between his legs.

"You can."

"No."

His voice cracked. "I can't do this."

"You are doing it."

"It hurts."

"I know."

"It hurts! I don't want this!" Another sob escaped him.

He sounded younger somehow.

"I want my mom."

The room went silent.

Shane pressed both hands against his face.

"I want my mom."

Ilya's expression softened instantly.

Rachel quietly stepped out. "I'll get the rest of the team."

Yuna arrived forty minutes later.

She still wore slippers.

Her hair was pulled into a rushed ponytail.

The second Shane saw her he nearly cried from relief.

"Mom!"

"I'm here."

Yuna crossed the room immediately.

She kissed his forehead.

Smoothed damp hair away from his face.

Exactly the way she had when he was little.

"I brought your charger too and Dad send his regards."

Shane laughed through tears.

"Thank you."

Someone else walked into the room.

"Jacob! Finally." Shane said.

Jacob was the doula from their paternity class and he and Shane had clicked.

He was the one who recommended his center to them.

"Yes. Rachel got me up to speed." He got down on the floor with the rest of them.

Ilya rubbed Shane's back as another contraction hit. "Shane had too much pressure on his hips and this felt best."

Jacob smiled. "This is perfect, and should move babies head into the right place.

Shane gave a weak smile back. "Yaaaay.."

A little later Ilya finally stood.

"I need to use the bathroom. Will be back"

Shane stared up at him. "What?"

"I need to pee. You know what that is Hollander"

"No."

"I'll be right back Shanya."

"No."

"Shane." Yuna said from where she was rubbing his back.

"No."

Panic flashed across Shane's face. "What if she comes?"

"She is not coming in thirty seconds."

"What if she does?"

"I promise I won't miss it."

The contraction hitting at that moment did not help.

Shane grabbed his wrist.

"Don't leave me."

"I have to. But I will come back Shanya I promise."

"Fine."

Ilya hurried away.

The second the door closed Shane looked horrified.

"What if he misses it?"

Yuna rubbed his shoulder.

"He won't." Shane sobbed

"He might."

"He won't."

"He's taking forever."

"He left like twenty seconds ago man." Jacobo said with a smirk.

When Ilya returned less than two minutes later, Shane looked genuinely relieved.

"You came back."

Ilya blinked. "Of course I came back sweetheart."

Around two in the morning Jacob mentioned nitrous oxide.

Pain-relief gas.

Not an epidural.

No giant needle.

Shane immediately wanted it.

Unfortunately there was a wait.

That information nearly broke him.

"A wait?"

Jacob winced.

"A short one."

"I need it now."

"I know."

"You and about half the center hun." Rachel rubbed his leg.

Shane looked ready to cry again.

Ilya disappeared from the room.

Twenty minutes later he returned triumphantly.

The gas setup followed shortly afterward.

Yuna eyed him suspiciously. "How did you manage that?"

"I am a problem solver."

"What does that mean?"

"It means money solves many problems."

Yuna snorted.

They moved Shane off the floor and onto the bed.

The second Shane got access to the gas his entire body relaxed slightly.

"Oh."

"Better?" Ilya asked.

"So much better. I love you Il-ya...I love you so fucking much.." Shane's body finally relaxed into the bed.

Ilya just smiled down at him and smoothed out his hair.

"This bed is so comfy now that I think about it." Shane turned to Yuna. "Mom this bed is so nice."

"Only the best." Jacob said as he adjusted the monitor on Shane's midsection.

"Mmm yeah.."

Shane got hungry.

Which turned out to be its own tragedy.

Rachel offered ice chips.

Shane accepted.

At first he seemed grateful.

Then he started crunching them.

Then his face crumpled.

Tears filled his eyes.

"Oh no," Rachel said.

"I want food." The tears spilled over.

"I know."

"I want actual food but I ate all my snacks in the car..."

Yuna looked away to hide a smile.

Shane sobbed dramatically.

"I'm so fucking hungry."

Ilya kissed his forehead. "We will get you something Shanya."

"I don't know. Eating during active labor can cause nausea, its why we don't encourage it."

"Shut up Jacob." Shane groaned.

Jacob spun around to face the small computer in the corner. "Well fuck me then."

later Yuna somehow returned from 'the bathroom' carrying a veggie wrap from the Panera.

Shane looked at it like it had descended from heaven itself.

"It's my labor, I'll do as I damn please." He said before sinking his teeth into the wrap.

Jacob just shrugged.

The relief from the gas eventually stopped feeling like enough.

The contractions intensified again.

Shane returned to the yoga ball.

Sweat soaked his shirt.

His hair stuck to his forehead.

The room spun.

Another contraction hit.

His stomach rebelled and he let out a loud retch.

Rachel barely got a container in front of him before he got sick.

"Sorry."

"Nothing to apologize for."

"I hate this so fucking bad."

"Understandable. Lets get you up on the bed for a dilation check."

Shane shook his head. "I don't think I can."

Rachel smiled softly. "We can help you hun."

Shane nodded and suddenly Ilya was behind him lifting him slowly.

"Oh god!" Shane sunk his nails into his thigh.

Ilya stopped the movement as the contraction arrived.

"It's okay baby.." Yuna said wiping the sweat off him.

"Fuck! Hold my hand can you-can you!" Shane practically shoved his hand into his mothers.

"Of course baby, cmon." Yuna squeezed his hand back.

Shane pushed up a little more as the pain mounted forcing himself deeper into Ilya's arms.

Finally he slumped and the groaning died down as they moved him onto the bed.

After checking him again, Rachel smiled.

"Seven."

Shane blinked.

"Seven?"

"Seven." Jacob agreed as he adjusted Shane's gown. "Internally you are 9, that's good."

Ilya immediately stood.

"I'm going to look."

"No."

"Please Shane. Just to make sure."

"You don't know what you're looking for."

"I can learn."

Rachel laughed.

Shane buried his face in his hands.

"Very wide"

"Shut up asshole."

At some point exhaustion turned everyone slightly delirious.

Which was how Yuna ended up putting on Megan Thee Stallion.

"Trust me honey, a little dancing will get you the rest of the way."

The music filled the room.

Ilya immediately began dancing. "Look at how I bodied that. Ate it up and gave it back."

Shane stared at them.

Eventually he started bouncing to the beat.

Ilya pointed dramatically. "That's my husband."

Shane rolled his eyes.

Another bounce.

Ilya got behind him and started air humping him. "Throw it back Shane show them how its done."

"Oh my God." He wheezed but he just kept bouncing.

Yuna hollered as she recorded across the room.

"Come on Shane, you got it."

During the chorus he will admit he was twerking more than bouncing.

Body-ody-ody-ody. Bounce bounce bounce

For several bizarre minutes the room felt almost normal.

Almost joyful.

Around four in the morning Ilya's phone rang.

FaceTime.

The screen lit up.

Zane Boodram. Cassie beside him.

Ilya answered.

"ARE YOU AT THE HOSPITAL?" Cassie yelled into the phone

"Congratulations!" Bood cheered

"IS IT HAPPENING?"

Shane looked horrified from his yoga ball. Absolutely horrified.

His hair was a disaster.

He felt disgusting.

He was exhausted.

He was not about being perceived.

"No."

Ilya grinned.

Then wisely ended the call.

He would text them later.

The next stretch felt endless.

Then suddenly it wasn't.

Shane felt the difference instantly.

"Am I transitioning or something, why is this so fucking bad." He said as he laid on his side on the bed with a death grip on the handle bar.

Rachel smiled gently.

"We're getting close."

Close.

Another contraction hit.

"I can do this!" Shane yelled into the room.

Jacob nodded from where he was setting things up. "Yes you can."

"I-I can." HE nodded towards Ilya who nodded back at him.

"I feel like i'm gonna die! Oh Jesus!" He yelled at his contraction was at its worse.

He cried and flailed even as Yuna did the counter pressure.

Ilya moved the gas tube into his mouth and Shane took it like a starved man.

"Ilya hold my hand!"

"I have you Shanya. I do."

"It's so hot.." Shane groaned.

Despite their best efforts Shane was sweating like a pig.

Ilya had even brought out Shane's portable fan from his labor bag and had it shoved in his face as he lay on his side.

Jacob eventually checked his temperature after Yuna asked and Shane was running a fever.

"Could be nothing, could be an infection. We need to run some tests to be sure."

"Is the baby okay?" Shane asked with a shortness of breath.

Everyone began to reassure him.

Ilya stayed by his side as the got him some blood tests and placed an IV.

The tests came back clear so they just gave him some medication and cooling towels to stabilize his temperature.

"I'm gonna do this." Shane said eerily calm.

"Yes sweetheart." Ilya said as he fed Shane more ice chips.

Shane crunched and smiled "Mmm I am.."

He knew he had too.

Around an hour later when Jacob checked again his temperature and he was back down to something safe.

They were good.

The urge that followed was overwhelming.

His eyes widened.

"I wan to push."

Jacob nodded calmly. "Not quite yet."

"I need to."

"I know."

"I NEED TO."

Shane grabbed the handle bar so hard you could hear the metal whine. "I want her out!"

Ilya and Yuna gave each other a look.

"I need to sit up! I NEED TO SIT UP!" Shane closed his eyes and flailed his hand around for someone arm to catch.

Ilya stuck his arm out of course.

Rachel briefly reached for the gas mask to help reposition him.

Shane immediately grabbed it back.

"No."

The desperation in his voice silenced everyone.

He clung to it like a lifeline.

"Please."

They got him back on all fours and adjusted the bed the back of it was raised so he could lean.

"I need you to tell me when to push!" He screamed into the wall. "Fuck! Fucking tell me!"

"We will Shane" Jacob soothed "But you're body will know, mine sure did."

He nodded absentmindedly and shifted his hip to try and distribute the pain.

The final stage felt disconnected from reality.

"You're doing great." Jacob said from behind him.

"FUCK ME OHHH FUCK ME I CANT OH FUCK AHHH OH FUCK."

This pain was deeper stronger and lower than before

Shane groaned as the contraction ended.

"Sorry..fuck" He groaned out

"Do not use the S word right now Shanya..you are allowed to yell." Ilya said as he rubbed his exposed back with a cold cloth.

"I want it to stop. I feel like the exorcist came out of me.."

"I know."

"Please stop."

His voice cracked.

Then another wave came.

And all he could do was focus on surviving it.

"I need everyone off! OFF PLEASE, PLEASE! OH GOD."

Everyone immediately backed off. Hovering but not touching.

Thirty seconds later he reached blindly for Ilya's hand.

"Don't let go."

"I'm not."

Another contraction.

Another.

"Baby is really low Shane." Jacob said as he checked Shane's dilation for what felt like the thousandth time.

"OH MY GOD SHUT THE FUCK UP. GOD. OH GOD. I WANT TO PUSH. I WANT TO BE DONE. FUCKING FUCK. FUCK THIS WHOLE PLACE. GOD WHAT AM I DOING. I'M GONNA RIP OPEN. WHAT THE FUCK." Shane screamed into the pillow under his head.

Jacob just nodded and moved on.

Shane started crying as the contraction ended.

"I'm so ready..." He sobbed.

Ilya tried and failed to hold back his tears, thankfully Shane was facing away from everyone so it didn't matter if he did cry.

Yuna reached over and gave his arm a squeeze in reassurance.

"You're doing great." He and Shane both nodded at that.

And then suddenly everything changed.

"Alright bud, your ready to push." Jacob said with a smile.

"What?" Shane tried to turn his head but stopped as the pain mounted.

"It's happening Shanya, I love you. I love you oh god."

"I wanna push the baby out." Shane said as he breathed through the contraction.

"That's good, that really good. Your body knows." Rachel says from his other side.

"I can't-I need" Shane starts shaking his head.

"What do you need honey?" Yuna says softly.

Shane wordlessly pulls on his gown and Ilya immediately undoes the back of it and tosses it aside.

"Next contraction were pushing." Jacob said firmly.

"WE WHO THE FUCK IS WE. ME. YOU'RE NOT DOING FUCKING SHIT. ITS FUCKING ME." Shane yells in reply.

Jacob just laughs "Yes.."

"How do you want to push Shane?" Rachel says next to him.

"I don't know!" Shane groans.

"Well you need to tell us now."

"I can't!"

"Yes you can Shanya.." Ilya reassure as best he can and prays he sounds calm.

Shane let out a blood curdling scream as the next contraction came.

"I-I" He tried but it was too much and he scrunched his face up in effort.

Ilya tried not to make a face as Shane...releases.

Rachel immediately cleans it up and changes the puppy pad wordlessly.

"So good sweetheart." Yuna says while she squeezes Shane's arm.

"I know-I know." Shane nods as his eye's focus on her face.

The contraction ended and Shane slumped over.

He turned to face Ilya only to get some more gas.

Ilya wiped away the sweaty hair on his face and gave him a small peck.

"You are so brave."

"Mmmm" Shane replied.

Then another wave of pain came.

"I CANT PUSH, I cant do it right now. I can't push right now!"

"Yes you can hon." Rachel said.

"You can do it"

"Come on Shane." Jacob said firmly. "You got it."

Shane threw his hand in Ilya direction and of course his husband caught it.

"We have this Shanya."

Shane bears down and lets out a half grunt half scream. "AUUUUUGHHH-I CANT. I CANT DO IT!"

Ilya squeezes his hand back. "You can. You are Shane Hollander."

Shane starts crying as the pain recedes.

"The baby is a little stuck and we aren't getting the movement we want-"

"Is it my fault..." Shane said shuffling down the bed still on all fours.

"No!" Every says immediately.

"Nothing is your fault baby," Yuna comforts.

"Lets try on your back okay?" Rachel says.

"I'm so fucking done, oh my God." Shane slowly turns over.

He sees how everyone is looking at him and chooses not to notice the tears building in Ilya's eyes.

"What do I do now?!" He yells into Yuna face as he pulls her close by the hand he is holding.

"What were gonna do is push." Yuna confirms.

"I don't even want to do this!" Shane screams.

No one replies and instead they all comfort and brace him as the next contraction builds.

"OH GOD SOMEONE HELP ME!" Shane says as he bears down yet again to push.

"We got movement!" Jacob says happily.

"Shanya I see her hair! I know is not yours because well.."

Shane just shakes his head, in fact his whole body is shaking.

"It's normal, that's just the adrenaline." Rachel says as she looks at Ilya's worried face.

"Just wait.." Shane groans.

"No waiting now my guy." Jacob says with a chuckle.

"Stop it..I.." Shane looks pulls on Ilyas hand to sit up with the next contraction.

"I CANT DO THIS, IT-I CANT." Shane yells into the room.

"You're already doing it Shane. You got it already." Jacob said while incredibly focused on where baby girl was making her entrance.

"OH GOD YOUR GONNA HAVE TO DO THIS OH GOD-OH FUCKING GOD." Shane nearly folds himself in two with the effort to push.

"That's it Shane." Ilya soothes.

"GOD IT FUCKING BURNS WHAT THE FUCK-WHY-OH GOD-DO SOMETHING HELP ME-HELP ME."

"We cannot-"

"FUCKING HELP, OH GOD I HAVE TO DO THIS. I'M DOING THIS. OH GOD. I NEED TO PUSH. I NEED TO PUSH."

Jacob looks up "Give you body a second to adjust to the stretch Shane. You're crowning."

Ilya looked down and saw his daughters full head of hair peaking out. "О боже.."

"I HAVE TOO, OH MY FUCK! MOM! MOM!" He turned frantically to Yuna.

"You got it baby!" She squeezed his hand.

Shane's eyes rolled back into his and his spine arched impossibly as he leaned back and pushed letting out a silent scream.

Suddenly Ilya turned back to see his daughters entire head was out.

She was all purplish and slimy and beautiful.

"She is almost there Shane. You have this. My heart, my light."

"SHE'S OUT?!" Shane tries to look down.

"Feel her." Jacob guided his hand down.

"She has quite the head of hair." Rachel commented.

Everyone let out a tired laugh.

"SHE HAS SO MUCH HAIR OH FUCK.." Shane said as he felt her head.

Shane refocused his grip on Ilya's hand.

Ilya kissed it and did not even mind the fluid that was now on it.

"Just let your body-"

"IM FUCKING PUSHING OH MY GOD."

Jacob moved quickly. "Give yourself a second. You still-"

"I CAN'T STOP. I'M DOING IT I-I AUUUUUUGHHHH." Shane nearly shook the room with his screams.

There was a gush that Shane heard hit the floor.

But inside Shane's head everything went quiet.

Sudden relief.

A tiny cry pierced the air.

The sound froze him completely.

For a moment he simply stared.

Unable to process what had happened.

Unable to process what he was hearing.

Their daughter.

His daughter.

The tiny crying baby placed carefully against him felt impossibly warm and wet.

Impossibly real.

Shane's eyes widened.

Shock rooted him in place.

His expression completely blank looking around the room.

Ilya was crying.

Yuna was crying.

Rachel looked emotional.

Jacob was smiling.

But Shane barely registered any of it.

He could only stare.

Tiny fingers.

Tiny nose.

Tiny sounds.

A whole person.

A whole entire person.

Their person.

Shane found Ilya standing beside him.

Crying openly. Smiling through tears.

Looking happier than Shane had ever seen him.

"My Shanya.." Ilya whispered.

Shane swallowed. "She's here."

Ilya nodded.

"Yeah."

Their daughter stretched one tiny greyish slimy hand.

Shane immediately offered his finger.

She wrapped her impossibly small hand around it.

Her boba pearl eyes already open and taking them in.

"Our Irina.."

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

I imagine they have one of those optical illusion babies. I saw this video of this muscular dad holding his baby and it being small and cute compared to him and then handing it off to his wife and it was the size of a one year old. Irina is like that but both her dads are big so they see her a little and cute. When she meets Yuna and David though, she fills up their arms.

The first thing Ilya noticed was how loud the room suddenly seemed.

For hours, everything had narrowed down to Shane. Shane breathing. Shane gripping his hand hard enough to leave bruises. Shane bearing down with impossible determination. Shane looking simultaneously exhausted, stubborn, beautiful, and completely unlike himself.

For a moment Ilya forgot how to breathe.

The baby was laid carefully on Shane's chest, pink and damp and squirming.

Their daughter let out another offended scream and immediately settled one tiny fist against Shane's skin.

Ilya stared.

Ten fingers.

Ten toes.

Dark hair plastered against her head.

She was real.

She was here.

"Congratulations," Jacob said gently.

The man's voice finally broke through the haze.

"You have a daughter."

A daughter.

Their daughter.

Ilya laughed and cried at the same time.

The sound startled even him.

Shane looked up.

His green eyes were glassy with tears.

Ilya pressed a trembling kiss against his forehead. "She's real."

Jacob smiled.

"The cord's stopped pulsing." He held out the scissors.

"Dad?"

Ilya froze.

The scissors suddenly felt like the most important object in the world.

"Me?"

"You're up."

His hands actually shook.

Hockey games.

Olympics.

Stanley Cup Finals.

None of them had prepared him for this.

Carefully, he accepted the scissors.

The cord connected Shane and their daughter.

One final link after months of carrying her.

Growing her.

Protecting her.

Ilya swallowed hard.

Then he cut.

The cord separated.

And Ilya immediately kissed Shane again.

"You did it."

Shane gave a tired laugh.

Ilya brushed damp hair from his forehead.

"You did it."

Shane looked too exhausted to agree.

The adrenaline was already fading from his expression.

He stared down at the baby with complete wonder.

Meanwhile the placenta was delivered with far less drama than everything preceding it.

Shane barely seemed aware of it.

Jacob and Rachel handled everything calmly.

While Shane looked as if he had just been informed he'd traveled to another dimension.

"Baby okay?" he asked.

"Very okay."

Only then did Shane seem to relax.

A few minutes later Rachel carefully lifted their daughter away to clean her and weigh her.

The second she left Shane's chest, both fathers looked alarmed.

"She's okay?" Shane asked instantly.

"Perfectly okay."

"I know that look," Rachel laughed.

"That is first-time-parent panic." Jacob agreed.

Ilya wasn't even embarrassed.

He absolutely had first-time-parent panic.

The two of them moved around the room efficiently.

Then one of them looked at the scale.

Paused.

Looked again.

"Oh."

"What?" Shane asked.

"What?" Ilya echoed.

Rachel laughed. "Your daughter is a healthy ten pounds, three ounces."

Then Ilya barked out a laugh.

"A what?"

"Ten pounds, three ounces."

Shane's mouth dropped open.

"Excuse me?"

Jacob actually laughed.

"I was wondering when we'd get the final weight."

"Ten pounds?" Shane repeated. "Ten?"

"You make very impressive babies Shanya."

"I carried a bowling ball?"

Everyone laughed.

Including Shane.

Though he looked slightly horrified.

Jacob brought over the freshly wrapped baby.

She looked enormous with thick cheeks and chunky thighs.

Perfect little rolls everywhere.

"She's gigantic..." Shane said.

"She's beautiful." Ilya corrected.

"And healthy." Yuna added.

The baby yawned.

Immediately everyone melted.

Then Jacob crouched beside the bed.

"Shane, I want to talk about your tear."

Shane's eyes widened.

"What tear?"

"You have a third-degree tear." Instant panic appeared.

Ilya saw it instantly.

Shane had been through enough.

The last thing he needed was more fear.

Jacob immediately noticed too.

"Hey."

His voice softened.

"You're okay."

"Okay?"

"Yes."

"It sounds bad." Shane said quietly.

"It sounds scarier than it is."

Jacob explained everything carefully.

How they'd repair it.

How healing worked.

What recovery would look like.

Every question Shane asked was answered immediately.

By the end of the explanation, some of the panic had faded.

"You'll heal," Jacob promised. "We're going to take very good care of you."

Shane nodded.

"Okay."

The repair took time.

Ilya stayed beside him throughout.

Holding his hand.

Kissing his forehead.

Telling him how amazing he was every five minutes.

Eventually Yuna stood.

"I think I'm going to head back."

Shane blinked. "Already?"

"You two need time."

She kissed Shane's forehead.

Then Ilya's.

Then the baby's.

"My beautiful family."

Tears immediately returned to Shane's eyes.

Yuna smiled.

"I'll see you at home."

Then she slipped out.

The room became quieter afterward.

Shane turned to Ilya.

"I need something."

"Anything."

"Sushi."

Ilya blinked. "Sushi?"

"Immediately."

Jacob laughed. "You've thought about this."

"For months."

"Domoishi?"

"Yes."

Ilya was already standing.

"I'll be back."

"Ilya."

"What?"

"Extra spicy tuna."

"I am getting everything."

Then he practically sprinted from the room.

Forty minutes later he returned carrying enough food to feed a hockey team.

Shane looked emotional just seeing it.

The sushi disappeared alarmingly fast.

Because Shane was too tired to sit comfortably, Ilya fed him piece after piece while he held their daughter.

The sight nearly killed him.

His husband.

His daughter.

Both safe.

Both beautiful.

Neither felt entirely real.

At one point Shane started crying.

"Why are you crying Shanya?"

"The salmon is really fucking good."

Ilya laughed so hard he nearly dropped a chopstick.

Eventually they finished eating.

Shane looked far more human.

Color had returned to his face.

The shaking had mostly stopped.

Their daughter slept peacefully.

"I want pictures," Ilya announced.

"No."

"What?"

"No, Ilya."

"Why?"

Shane pointed at himself.

"I look insane."

"You look beautiful."

"I look like naked, hello?"

"So we get you clothes.."

"I need a shower first."

Ilya groaned dramatically.

Shane remained unmoved.

A shower was required.

Unfortunately standing proved difficult.

Rachel and Ilya carefully helped him toward the bathroom.

"Okay," Rachel said. "No sudden movements. No tearing stitches. No heroic independence."

"I wasn't planning heroic independence."

"Good."

Even inside the shower Shane couldn't comfortably stand.

So they brought in a chair.

He lowered himself onto it with a sigh.

"Wonderful."

Ilya knelt beside him.

"You okay?"

"Tired."

"You are beautiful."

"I look like death."

"You look perfect."

Shane rolled his eyes.

Warm water poured over his shoulders.

The tension gradually eased from his body.

And throughout it all Ilya stayed beside him.

Washing his hair.

Kissing his temple.

Whispering Russian endearments into his ear.

Words only Shane received.

Words only Shane truly understood.

Beautiful boy.

My heart.

My life.

My love.

Every single one made Shane smile.

Then disaster struck.

Or at least what felt like disaster.

The second Shane stood up afterward, a dramatic gush of blood appeared.

Everyone froze.

Then Rachel calmly assessed the situation.

"Normal."

"Normal?" Shane squeaked. "It doesn't feel normal."

"It is."

Unfortunately it also meant another shower.

Shane groaned.

"I just showered."

"I know."

"Fuck me..." Shane looked up at the ceiling.

Ilya kissed him.

"You still look beautiful."

"Stop saying that."

"Never."

The second shower was much quicker.

Eventually they managed to get him clean again and Rachel left to check on Irina.

Then came the bathroom setup.

Shane sat gingerly on the toilet.

Ilya assembled supplies with military precision.

Cooling pads. Creams. Ice packs.

Enough equipment to stock a pharmacy just to soothe his torn aching hole.

And all he had to do was sit on the toilet and wait for his diaper.

Unfortunately sitting on the toilet reminded his body of another task.

His expression immediately changed.

"Fuck..."

"What?"

"I have to pee."

Ilya immediately stood. "The super soaker."

"Do not call it that."

"I'll get it."

He hurried away.

The specialized peri bottle had now become one of the most beloved objects in their lives.

As he grabbed it, Rachel's voice carried from the nursery area.

"Ilya."

"What?"

"I think she's hungry."

His heart immediately twisted.

He looked toward their daughter.

She was beginning to fuss.

For one moment disappointment hit him.

He had wanted the first feeding to be Shane.

Or himself helping Shane.

Something special.

Something memorable.

Then practicality won.

Neither of them was in any condition.

"Cooler bag."

Rachel nodded.

"Left pocket."

"There's frozen colostrum."

Shane had spent weeks collecting it.

Rachel retrieved it while Ilya returned to the bathroom.

Shane was crying.

"Hey..." Ilya moved into the room.

"It burns." Shane squeezed his eyes shut.

"I know."

"It burns so fucking much, fuck..." He pressed onto his thigh.

"It's almost over.."

The tears fell anyway.

Ilya crouched beside him and squeezed the bottle as he went.

"So good Shane..almost."

Eventually the ordeal ended.

Shane looked victorious.

"I survived, yaaaay." He sighed

"You survived."

Another kiss.

Another reminder that everything was okay.

Finally they emerged from the bathroom.

Rachel sat nearby feeding Irina from a tiny bottle.

The baby looked deeply satisfied.

Then Shane reached into his bag.

Pulled something out.

And handed it to Ilya.

A waist trainer.

Ilya stared.

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Please." He began to use that pout that always got to him.

"No...."

"It helps."

"Absolutely not."

Shane narrowed his eyes.

The expression carried surprising authority for someone who had given birth a few hours earlier.

"Ilya."

"No."

"I want it on."

"No."

"Ilya, this will ensure I don't stay bloated forever."

"No."

Eventually Shane crossed his arms.

"I carried your gigantic daughter."

"She's our gigantic daughter."

"I carried her."

"Are you sure..."

"I want the waist trainer. The the fucking thing on."

Ilya sighed.

He wrapped Shane carefully and watched as he rounded belly was flattened into a small lump.

Shane looked smug.

"Thank you."

"I disagree with this."

"I know." Shane sighed.

Then came the striped pajamas.

Once dressed, he settled carefully onto the heavily cushioned hospital bed.

He looked infinitely happier.

Rachel appeared carrying a freshly cleaned and swaddled Irina.

"There she is."

The baby immediately settled against Shane.

Like she'd always belonged there.

Maybe she had.

Ilya's chest tightened painfully.

The sight was almost too much.

Shane looked down.

Irina looked up.

The entire universe seemed to pause.

Then Ilya remembered the camera.

"Oh."

His phone appeared instantly.

Click.

Click.

Click.

Click.

Click.

"How many pictures are you taking?"

"Not enough."

"Ilya."

He photographed everything.

Shane smiling.

Irina yawning.

Father and daughter together.

Then Shane forced him into the frame.

"Your turn."

"No."

Reluctantly Ilya accepted the baby.

Immediately his heart exploded.

There was no other explanation.

Irina fit perfectly against his chest.

She was so small in their arms despite being so large in rachels.

Like she had always belonged there too.

More photos followed.

Dozens.

Hundreds.

Probably thousands.

At some point Rachel laughed.

"I don't think your phone has that much storage."

"It will. If not I buy more. I have sugar daddy, right Shanya."

Shane laughed.

The happiest sound in the world.

Hours seemed to pass in minutes.

Finally Ilya lowered the phone.

Enough.

For now.

The memories weren't going anywhere.

Then he reached into his overnight bag.

And produced a large plastic tote.

Shane immediately recognized the expression on his face.

"No."

"Yes."

The nesting instinct had apparently transferred to Ilya.

He began gathering supplies.

Diapers.

Wipes.

Bottles.

Extra swaddles.

Rubber gloves.

Disposable pads.

Nursing supplies.

Every item not physically attached to the room.

"Ilya."

"We need this. We pay these people good money."

"We do not need four boxes of gloves."

"We might. Oh and these!"

By the time he finished, the tote looked prepared for a six-month expedition.

Shane bounced Irina gently against his chest.

Watching his husband spiral into extremely affectionate over-preparedness.

His smile softened.

Ilya finally finished rearranging the room.

Then he sat beside Shane.

Close enough that their shoulders touched.

Irina slept between them.

Neither spoke for a while.

There wasn't much left to say.

The room hummed quietly around them.

Then Shane looked over.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"We have a daughter."

Ilya swallowed.

The words still felt unbelievable.

"We do."

"A whole daughter." Shane laughed.

Their baby stirred.

Then settled again.

Ilya wrapped an arm around his husband and Shane leaned against him immediately.

The three of them sat together while evening slowly approached.

A family.

Not a future family.

Not an almost family.

Not a someday family.

A family.

Shane smiled.

Ilya memorized everything.

The curve of Shane's cheek.

The weight of Irina against his chest.

The overwhelming certainty that he would spend the rest of his life loving these two people.

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

STOP TELLING ME MY HARD WORK IS AI.

Chapter Notes

SO I get back from a trip with my family and i get ANOTHER ai allegation for this very work. now I was away from my computer and longing to get my stuff uploaded and what not. I really missed writing for you guys and then BOOM "THHthisS ISss CLearLy AI." Legit made me want to hurl my head through a wall. I am sitting here with my back hunched still have airplane smell on me and THIS is what i get, why WHY. When will it be enough for people. It legit ruined my whole motivation. BUT I refuse to let one person fuck up this entire chapter thats been rotting in my notes app. I'm so upset, honestly but I can pour that into the *checks notes* seven drafts I have waiting to be edited and posted.

There was the soft hum of the engine, the faint rush of tires against the road, the occasional click of a turn signal when Ilya changed lanes. There was the sound of his own breathing, uneven and careful, as if his body still had not realized the hardest part was over.

Except it did not feel over.

Shane looked down at the tiny bundle strapped safely into the car seat next to him and felt his chest tighten.

Their daughter.

Their daughter was actually here.

For years, Shane had imagined what it would feel like to reach this moment. He had imagined the joy, the overwhelming love, the disbelief. He had imagined holding a baby who had his eyes or Ilya's stubborn expression. He had imagined the two of them walking out into the world together, finally free, finally able to be exactly what they had always been.

He had not imagined how terrified he would be.

In front of him, Ilya kept both hands firmly on the steering wheel. His posture was so rigid that Shane knew he was only pretending to be calm.

It would have been funny if Shane had not felt exactly the same way.

“You are driving like an old man...” Shane whispered.

Ilya glanced at him briefly. “I am transporting the most important person in the world.”

Shane looked toward the car seat.

“You are going five miles under the speed limit. She's gonna get fussy if she stays in this position too long.”

“I am being responsible, my judgment says stay slow.”

“You once drove through a snowstorm because you wanted pancakes, your judgment is shit when it comes to driving.”

“That was different, I was young.”

“You were 29.”

“Da, young.”

Shane laughed softly, then immediately regretted it when his body reminded him that laughing was still not something he could do comfortably.

Ilya noticed.

His entire expression changed.

“Are you okay Shanyushka?”

Shane hated that question. Not because he hated Ilya asking. He loved that Ilya asked.

But Shane was tired of not being okay.

“I’m fine, Rozanov..” he said automatically.

Ilya gave him a look.

Shane sighed. “I am not *fine*. But I am alive, and she is alive, and we are going home.”

That seemed to be enough for Ilya.

Yuna was standing up from the porch chair before Ilya had even fully parked the car. David was right behind her, trying and failing to pretend he was not equally eager. Anya was practically vibrating with excitement beside them.

“She knows...” Shane whispered.

The moment the car door opened, everything became a blur.

Everyone remembered Shane was healing. Everyone remembered there was a tiny sleepy baby involved. They moved with the cautious excitement of people who had waited a very long time for this moment.

Yuna cried.

The second she saw Irina, tears filled her eyes.

"Oh," she whispered. "She is even more perfect than she was in the hospital."

That was all she managed.

David was quieter, but Shane saw the way his face softened.

The same man who had watched Shane grow up, watched him become a hockey player, watched him fall in love, was now staring at his granddaughter.

It was almost too much.

"God, boys...she is just..stunning." He said smoothing Irina's swaddle.

Anya was the biggest surprise.

Shane had expected excitement. He had expected the dog to want to investigate every smell and every sound.

He had not expected Anya to become the gentlest creature alive.

The moment Irina was brought inside, Anya approached slowly. She lowered herself onto the floor and waited.

Shane stared.

"You trained her?"

Ilya looked offended. "Why would you assume I trained her?"

"Because you are the dog person and she is sitting down and being calm for this first time since I've met her."

"I am the dog person because she loves me and *maybe* she knows her sister needs to be handled with care."

Anya ignored both of them and carefully sniffed the baby blanket before looking up at Shane as if asking permission.

The sight nearly broke him.

He let her rest her head on the baby's feet.

Kept a watchful eye as Anya studied the little thing and Ilya snapped pictures that would be his screensaver for years to come.

Eventually, though, the excitement had to settle.

It was time to settle in.

Shane was way too happy to get back into the familiar space of his home.

The birthing center had been nice but, there's no place like home.

Shane had one major problem though.

The stairs.

The trip upstairs looked like a mountain.

“I can do it..” Shane said to himself.

Ilya looked at him.

He sighed.

“Okay. I can do it with assistance.”

Ilya was on one side of him before he finished speaking. Yuna was on the other.

They moved slowly.

Jacob had stressed how important it was that he does not aggravate his stitches

Shane hated how vulnerable he felt. He hated that his body, the same body that had carried him through years of hockey and injuries and impossible expectations, suddenly needed someone to guide it one stair at a time.

But Ilya never made him feel weak.

He simply held him steady.

When Shane finally reached the bedroom, relief washed through him.

Ilya got a smaller softer pillow and placed it just under Shane as Yuna lowered him down.

Then he sat down.

And immediately looked toward the doorway.

His face changed.

Ilya noticed. “What?”

Shane swallowed. “She’s downstairs.”

Ilya blinked.

“She is with your father.”

“I know.”

“She is safe.” Ilya softened.

Shane looked frustrated with himself.

“I know all of that. I just...” He looked toward the door again. “I just had her with me for nine months. She was right there. And now she is downstairs.”

That was the moment David appeared.

Without saying anything, he walked in carrying Irina.

“Someone was missing her dada” he said.

Shane immediately reached out.

David smiled. “And apparently someone is also very hungry, chunky little thing.”

Shane laughed. “She is not that chunky dad..”

David looked at the baby. Then looked back at Shane.

“She is, just like you where.”

“Dad!” Shane blanched as his dad pinched his cheek.

When Shane finally held Irina again, the tension in his shoulders eased.

This.

This was what he needed.

His daughter against his chest.

Ilya sat beside him, watching the two of them.

He still could not believe this was real.

Neither could Yuna or David, apparently, because within minutes both grandparents were taking pictures.

“Mom” Shane protested.

“Wait-wait.”

“Dad!”

“Just a few more buddy.”

“I am exhausted.”

“You look so cute.” Yuna said softly.

“I look terrible.”

“You just had a baby.” Ilya retorted.

“That is exactly why I look terrible.”

David shook his head. “You are holding your daughter. Nobody is looking at anything else.”

Shane rolled his eyes, but he did not argue.

Because secretly, he wanted the pictures.

He wanted proof.

Proof that this moment existed.

Eventually, Yuna and David left them alone.

The house became quieter.

There was a baby now.

The first week passed like a storm.

There was no magical moment where Shane and Ilya immediately understood how to be parents.

There was only learning.

Learning every sound Irina made. Learning the difference between hungry cries and tired cries. Learning how little sleep two people could function on. Learning how much love could exist alongside exhaustion.

Shane’s recovery was harder than he expected. The pain was constant.

The postpartum care alone felt like a second full-time job.

He thanked the gods he had friends like Jackie and Wyatt who told him to prepare the witch hazel pads he would depend on when he was gushing blood constantly.

He and Ilya sat making casual conversation as Ilya squeezed the 'squirters' to help him pee.

"For breakfast i'm thinking some bacon and egg sandwiches." Ilya said as he handed Shane some toilet paper once they were done.

Shane cleaned himself up. "Sounds good, the smell might upset Rina though.."

"Risks we will have to take, no more living off fiber cereal for you." Ilya said as he pulled one of Shane's pre-made diapers from the cart they were now keeping next to the toilet.

They moved the stand him up as Ilya slipped them up onto him.

"My beautiful husband.." Ilya said into Shane's cheek punctuating it with a peck.

They always finished this sequence with a light kiss and Ilya reminding him that he was beautiful.

And then there was the milk.

So much milk.

It was practically an accessory on every clothing item he put on.

Shane stared down at the pump one morning with disbelief.

"This is ridiculous."

Ilya was holding Irina against his chest and looked over to where Shane was propped up in the bed.

"You said that yesterday."

"Because it was ridiculous yesterday too, Ilya."

The problem was that Irina was always hungry.

She made that very clear.

The second she wanted something, the entire household knew.

And Shane's body responded before his mind did.

The first cry would come, and instantly he would wake up and look around for her despite agreeing with Ilya that Shane can't do nights.

His eyes would open.

His heart would race.

And unfortunately, his body would remind him exactly what to do by making milk soak his sleep shirt.

So he would clean up and change shirts as Ilya bounced and fed their baby.

He would sit half asleep and pump manually then when Irina was calmed down.

Ilya would take it and pack it up to go in their mini fridge.

Honestly, Shane is so tired.

He might take up Ilya's offer of just sucking it out himself so he can just lie there.

Ilya noticed everything.

That was the thing about him.

When Shane was in pain.

When Shane needed help but was too stubborn to ask.

Everything.

So one morning, Ilya decided when Shane was sleeping.

To do something special.

He took Irina downstairs, secured her safely in the wrap carrier, and moved through the kitchen as quietly as possible.

He cleaned the pump.

He prepared breakfast.

He made sure bottles were ready.

He fed Anya and let her out.

He did everything he could while keeping one hand on his daughter.

When Shane finally woke, it was not because of crying.

It was because Ilya was gently shaking his shoulder.

“Hey sexy..”

Shane blinked.

"He-" He winced as the pressure from his peck made itself known.

Another morning waking up engorged.

Yippee!

“Oh my God.” He groaned as he tried to sit up without spreading his legs too much.

“I know my sweet malysh.”

“Fuck you..” Shane groaned as he peeled open his shirt.

“Mmm, tempting but not for 5 more weeks at minimum.”

“I am so uncomfortable.” Shane groaned as he rubbed soothing circles around the top of his peck.

“I know but super husband will make it better.”

Shane looked at him. “You let me sleep too long.”

“Yes.”

“Ilya.” Shane said annoyed.

“You needed it.”

Shane wanted to argue.

He really did.

But then he saw the yogurt parfait.

And the clean pump.

And the baby monitor.

And the fact that Ilya looked exhausted too.

So instead he reached out and touched his husband’s face.

“Thank you.”

Ilya kissed his palm.

“No..Thank you.”

Irina was incredible.

She was tiny and loud and demanding and perfect.

She had a big personality already.

Very opinionated.

She hated being cold.

She hated being put down when she was awake.

She loved being held.

She loved eating.

She especially loved eating.

Shane quickly learned that his body was determined to make sure Irina never went hungry as a result.

He was producing far more milk than they expected, which sounded wonderful until it meant constant pumping, constant discomfort, and constant management.

Shane felt like he was constantly taking care of something.

His body.

The baby.

The house.

The emotions he couldn't always control.

Sometimes he would sit there with Irina sleeping against his chest and feel completely overwhelmed.

Sometimes he would cry because he was happy.

Sometimes he would cry because he was tired.

Sometimes he did not even know why he was crying.

Ilya never made him feel bad about it.

"Why don't you call Leena or Rose while I change her and get her to sleep." Ilya said as he crouched down to the bedroom couch and used his sleeve to wipe Shane's tears.

Shane just nodded and passed Irina off.

It was just what he needed.

Shane ate while pumping, slowly waking up.

Ilya brought Irina over and settled her into her co-sleep mat.

Then he helped Shane to the bathroom.

The shower was quick.

Ilya standing, massaging shampoo into his scalp as he sat in the 'shower chair'

Running over his body with a soap soaked cloth and not even flinching when a blood clot fell onto the floor as Shane stood.

Just cleaned him up some more and lotioned him up.

Ilya helped him into a soft striped button-up pajama set.

"You look comfortable."

"I feel eighty years old."

"You look so beautiful to me."

Shane rolled his eyes.

Back in bed, Irina eventually started fussing.

Shane reached for her immediately when he sat down.

"I've got you sweet girl."

Ilya watched him.

Shane held their daughter against himself and gently rocked her.

He whispered. "It's okay..."

Irina settled.

The morning light came through the window.

It caught the two of them perfectly.

Ilya froze.

He reached for his phone.

The picture captured everything.

Shane with his freshly washed and dried hair, freckles stark in the sunlight.

Irina in her soft orange cream colored onesie looking like a sweet peach. He soft eyes squinted.

The soft light making them look like a maternal renaissance painting.

Ilya was in awe.

Later, when Shane saw it as Ilya's screen saver on his phone his reaction was completely different.

He stared at the photo.

Then frowned.

"My stomach."

Ilya blinked. "What?"

"My stomach."

"Shane, is this new Canadian way of saying you are hungry."

"The shirt." Shane pointed at the phone.

"What about the shirt?"

"My...skin is showing."

Ilya looked at the picture.

He saw his husband.

He saw someone who had gone through something incredible.

Shane saw something else.

"The skin is spilling over my pants, I look weird.."

Ilya's expression softened.

"Shanya..."

"Get my waist trainer while I change this."

"No."

Shane looked at him.

"What?"

"No."

"Ilya really, again."

"You just gave birth."

"I know what I did."

"Your body is healing."

"As I said, no harm comes from wearing it, I just want my abs back sooner rather than fucking later okay?"

Ilya sat beside him. "I know..."

"Then get it."

Shane stared at him.

For a moment, neither moved.

"You are being an asshole, you know I can't."

"I am protecting you."

"I am asking for something that literally causes no harm."

"You are asking because you are hurting though."

Shane looked down.

"I don't recognize myself like this."

Ilya reached over and took his hand.

"I know."

"I feel like everything is gonna be stuck like..this."

Shane looked at him.

Ilya squeezed his fingers.

"But you are still you."

The words sat between them.

Shane looked at Irina.

She was asleep.

Completely peaceful.

"I just want to feel normal."

"I know."

A long silence followed.

Then Shane sighed.

"Please."

Ilya closed his eyes.

He knew.

He knew this was not really about the waist trainer.

It was about control.

About feeling like he had some part of himself back.

Eventually, reluctantly, he stood.

"I am getting it."

Shane looked relieved.

"But."

"There is always a *but* with you."

"But I am only getting it because you asked. Not because you need to hide."

Shane looked away.

Ilya returned with it.

He helped him carefully.

But even as he did, he kept talking.

About Irina.

About breakfast.

About how Anya had fallen asleep outside the nursery door.

About anything that reminded Shane that he was more than his body.

The week continued.

It was messy.

It was exhausting.

It was filled with tears and laughter and moments where neither of them knew what they were doing.

But every night, when they finally settled together with Irina nearby, they looked at each other.

They had made it another day.

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