

## And How About Another Baby?...

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# And How About Another Baby?...

by [JustMeAndLife \(CaramelCreamCoffee\)](#)

## Summary

Then Ilya reached over and gently tapped Logan's nose. "You never told us what you wished for."

Logan's eyes widened immediately. "Oh."

Shane smiled softly. "You know, when you blew out your candles?"

For a moment Logan looked suspicious, like perhaps wishes were classified information. Then he leaned closer dramatically. "I wished for Isla."

Silence.

Shane blinked. "...Who's Isla, baby?"

Logan looked at him like this should've been obvious. "My baby."

Or Shane and Ilya give Logan the sibling he wished for on his third birthday.

## Notes

I have absolutely adored writing this one for you all!!! I hope you enjoy every second of Hollanov and their adorable little family! I'll definitely be carrying this series on at some point :)

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

The Rozanov-Hollander family travelled pretty loudly these days.

Not because of any last minute packing scrambles or teasing bickers between couples, but because two and a half year old Logan David had discovered excitement, and excitement apparently needed to be announced to every living thing within a five-mile radius.

“I go cot-age!” Logan declared for perhaps the fifteenth time that morning, clutching his stuffed dinosaur against his chest as he waddled through Yuna and David’s kitchen in mismatched socks. “Big wa’er! Fishies! Papa catch big fishie an’ Daddy scream!”

“I did not scream,” Shane called from the hallway where he was trying to zip up an overstuffed duffel bag. “I was startled.”

“You screamed,” Ilya said immediately from the dining room. “Just admit it, malysh!”

Shane leaned around the corner to glare at him. “Traitor.”

Ilya only smirked faintly over the top of the travel mug he was filling with coffee.

Nearly three years into parenthood had softened some of his sharper edges, but not all of them. His hair was still messy from the shower, sandy blonde strands curling slightly at the ends, and Logan looked so much like him it was honestly unfair.

Same dark blonde curls. Same pouty mouth. Same intense eyes, except Logan’s had settled into a warm hazel that shifted gold in sunlight, carrying pieces of both of them. It always melted Shane’s heart to see them glisten with joy.

At the moment those glistening eyes were wide with delight as he climbed onto one of the kitchen chairs backwards, hugging his dinosaur dramatically.

“Nana Una!” he gasped. “M’ bring Rexie on boat!”

Yuna turned from the counter with a laugh, wiping her hands on a dish towel. “Oh, are you now?”

Logan nodded solemnly. “Rexie like fishin’.”

“Well then,” David said from where he sat reading the paper, “better make sure Rexie’s got a life jacket.”

Logan froze.

His tiny mouth fell open in pure horror before he scrambled off the chair and toddled directly toward Ilya, little legs moving as fast as possible. “Papa!”

Ilya caught him automatically before he collided with his knees. “Mm?”

“Rexie no drown. He need w’acket”

The sheer seriousness in Logan's voice nearly destroyed Shane on the spot. "Oh god," he whispered, pressing a hand over his heart. "He's going to make me cry."

Ilya, however, handled the crisis with perfect calm. He adjusted Logan on his hip, pressing a kiss into his curls. "Rexie will not drown," he assured him in Russian first, instinctive and warm. "Papa protects him."

Logan visibly relaxed. Then he held up the dinosaur. "Spasiba, papa."

Yuna made the softest noise imaginable.

Shane looked as dangerously close to crying as he'd stated, which had become embarrassingly common for him since becoming a parent.

"He said thank you," Shane muttered emotionally.

"I know what he said," Ilya replied dryly, though there was unmistakable fondness in his voice.

Logan beamed proudly towards his parents at having used one of his Russian words correctly.

They'd been introducing the language slowly over the past year. Shane handled most of the English reading and speech exercises while Ilya slipped Russian naturally into everyday moments, bedtime routines, meals, and soft reassurances after nightmares.

Logan mixed them together constantly. The result was adorable chaos. He was intellectually advanced, his daycare teachers absolutely adored him and Shane couldn't help but beam with pride.

They made him.

"Papa," Logan announced suddenly, grabbing Ilya's cheeks with both hands. "At cot-age we make painties?"

"You want to paint some paintings at the cottage?" Shane translated.

"Uh-huh! Paint trees! An' ducks! An' Nana Irina stars."

The room softened instantly.

Ilya went very still for half a second.

It happened less now, that sharp flash of grief. But Shane still noticed that visible wound every time.

Logan had never met Irina Rozanov. After all, she had died when Ilya was only twelve years old, leaving behind fading photographs, old recipes written in Russian cursive, and stories that Ilya had once struggled to tell aloud.

Now Logan asked for them constantly.

Tell me about Nana Irina papa!

What songs she like?

Did she painties too?

Is heaven cold?

Somehow, without meaning to, their son had turned grief into something gentler. Something loved openly instead of hidden away.

Ilya brushed his thumb over Logan's cheek. "Da, we can paint stars for Nana Irina," he said quietly.

Logan smiled immediately, satisfied. "Purple stars."

"Purple?" Shane repeated. "I thought the stars were yellow."

"Noooo," Logan giggled, scandalized. "Purple pretty. Is bwetter than Yellow daddy."

"Well," David said gravely, "he's got you there."

Yuna walked over carrying a container wrapped in foil. "Here, sweetheart," she told Shane. "I packed extra pastries for the drive."

"You're an angel. Logan will be desperate for some sugar five minutes into the drive."

"I know."

Shane kissed her cheek gratefully before setting the container with the rest of their mountain of luggage near the door.

Annual cottage trips with the Hollander family had become a tradition after Logan was born. A couple of months away from the city. No interviews and no hockey talk unless absolutely necessary.

Just water, trees, campfires, and Logan getting spoiled by every adult within reach.

Last year Logan had eaten sand. This year they were hoping for improvement. Though considering he was currently attempting to feed a cracker to his stuffed dinosaur, Shane wasn't optimistic.

"Buddy," Shane said, crouching beside him. "Rexie doesn't eat crackers."

Logan looked deeply offended on the dinosaur's behalf. "Rexie hungry."

"Oh, my mistake."

"Daddy silly."

"Yeah, okay."

Logan giggled so hard he nearly tipped over backward.

Ilya steadied him easily with one hand, and Shane's chest squeezed at the sight. He still sometimes remembers that night at the NHL Awards with surreal disbelief.

One minute they'd been secretly fighting through recently resolved feelings and catastrophic tension.

The next Shane had gone into labor in a public bathroom while Ilya panicked hard enough to nearly collapse and pass out himself.

It should have been horrifying.

Instead it had somehow become the strangest, happiest beginning of Shane's life. Because now— Now there was this.

Their son stood laughing in the kitchen. Ilya standing close enough that their shoulders brushed automatically. Yuna arguing with David about whether they'd packed enough sunscreen.

Home. Somehow.

Logan suddenly gasped. "Pawpaw Davey!"

David lowered the newspaper cautiously. "Yeah, kiddo?"

"I see chippy monks at cot-age?"

"If we're lucky."

Logan spun toward Shane with absolute delight. "Daddy! Chippy monks!"

Shane burst out laughing. "Chipmunks."

"Chip-mucks."

"Close enough."

Logan huffed dramatically before climbing into Shane's lap for comfort. "Words hard."

"I know, baby. But you're very clever."

Tiny fingers curled into Shane's hoodie strings while Rexie got squished between them.

For a moment Logan simply sat there, blinking sleepily despite all his excitement. He'd been up since six in the morning talking about the cottage.

Ilya crossed the room quietly and brushed Logan's curls back from his forehead. "Tired?"

"No."

A lie obviously. His eyes were already drooping.

Shane smiled softly. "You can nap in the car."

"No need nap."

"You literally fell asleep in your pancakes yesterday."

Logan considered this carefully. "... Jus' lil nap."

"Thought so."

Yuna appeared with Logan's tiny backpack decorated with dinosaurs. "Okay, adventurer. Ready to go?"

Logan perked up instantly. "GO COT-AGE!"

He launched himself out of Shane's lap with terrifying toddler confidence and sprinted toward the front door.

"Slow down!" Shane called automatically.

Logan ignored him completely.

Ilya sighed like this was a burden personally designed to torment him, but the affection in his face gave him away entirely as he followed after their son.

At the doorway Logan was bouncing in place while Ilya helped him into his tiny sneakers.

"Papa hurry," Logan whispered urgently, as though they were escaping national danger instead of driving to a lake house.

"I am hurrying."

"No, FAST."

"Your Papa's old," Shane offered helpfully.

Ilya looked over his shoulder. "I can still bench press you."

"Promises, promises."

David groaned loudly. "Please leave before I have to witness too much flirting before breakfast."

"Too late," Yuna said cheerfully.

Logan looked between them all with wide eyes. Then, very seriously, he announced, "Papa need kiss Daddy."

Shane choked.

Yuna immediately turned away to hide her laughter.

Ilya raised one eyebrow. “Is that so?”

Logan nodded. “For trip luck.”

“Trip luck?” Shane repeated weakly.

“Uh-huh.”

Ilya stared at Shane for a long moment—still capable of making Shane feel seventeen and furious and helplessly in love all at once.

Then he stepped forward, one hand sliding around Shane’s waist naturally, and kissed him softly.

Warm. Familiar. Easy.

Logan clapped wildly. “YAY!”

“Okay,” Shane muttered, face burning. “We’ve created a monster.”

“Da, but he is our monster,” Ilya corrected quietly.

The drive to the cottage was barely over an hour from their house.

Logan had made it exactly twenty-three minutes into said drive before crashing completely.

One moment he’d been rambling excitedly from the backseat about “chip-mucks” and fishing and whether ducks had grandparents, and the next Shane had glanced back to find him unconscious mid-sentence, cheek squished against the side of his car seat with Rexie trapped beneath one tiny arm.

Now, as the car rolled to a stop beside the familiar lakeside cottage, Logan remained deeply asleep.

The afternoon sun filtered through the trees in warm streaks of gold, reflecting off the lake beyond the dock. The place smelled like pine needles, old cedar wood, and summer.

Home.

“Well,” Shane said softly, turning in his seat. “He didn’t last very long. I feel bad waking him.”

Ilya shut off the engine but didn’t move immediately. His gaze settled on Logan through the rearview mirror, and something impossibly tender crossed his face.

Sleeping, Logan looked younger somehow.

Softer.

His curls had gone wild during the drive, sticking up in every direction, and his pouty lips were parted slightly against Rexie's plush dinosaur head.

Shane's chest ached unexpectedly. Almost three years.

Three whole years.

It felt impossible.

"You okay?" Ilya asked quietly.

Shane blinked and realized he'd been staring. "Yeah," he murmured. "Just... I can't believe how big he's getting."

Ilya unbuckled his seatbelt slowly, listening.

"He used to fit against my chest like this tiny little curled-up bean," Shane continued with a helpless laugh. "And now he runs around everywhere and screams about fish and corrects my pronunciation."

"He still curls up when he sleeps."

"Yeah he does... fuck Ilya, where the hell did our baby go?"

A small smile tugged at Ilya's mouth.

Shane looked back at Logan again, his expression softening further. "I miss my tiny baby Logiebear."

For a moment neither of them spoke.

The lake water moved gently against the dock outside. A bird called somewhere in the trees.

Then Ilya said quietly, "I miss him too."

Shane glanced over.

"But," Ilya continued, "I love who he is becoming much more."

Something warm settled in Shane's chest at the look on his face. So much pride and love. Wonder at how they managed to create someone so special.

"He's fearless," Ilya said softly. "Stubborn, loud. Curious about everything."

"Sounds familiar."

"And dramatic."

"Okay, that's definitely from you."

That earned Shane a flat look.

“He has your heart,” Ilya added after a moment. “And your kindness.”

Shane’s teasing expression faltered instantly.

“And unfortunately,” Ilya sighed, “he also has your inability to stop talking in very awkward situations.”

Shane burst into laughter. “Hey it’s an autistic thing okay? I can’t help it.”

Ilya smirked faintly, reaching over to squeeze Shane’s knee. “He is good because he has the best parts of both of us,” he said more seriously. “Is very special.”

Shane felt his face warm.

God.

He still didn’t know what to do with all the tenderness from Ilya sometimes. Even after all this time it still shocked him that they were able to live openly now.

The sunlight filtering through the windshield caught the gold flecks in Ilya’s eyes, and suddenly Shane felt overwhelmed by the strange, beautiful reality of their life.

So naturally, he coped the only way he knew how. Grinning crookedly, he teasingly said, “Well... we could always have another one.”

Ilya looked at him immediately.

Shane continued lightly, “A planned one this time. Preferably not born beside a public sink while you have a nervous breakdown.”

“I did not have a nervous breakdown.”

“You tried to fistfight a towel dispenser on the way out to the ambulance.”

“It was in my way.”

Shane snorted.

Then he noticed Ilya still watching him. Not amused. Intent and serious in a way that was rare for him these days.

“...What?” Shane asked cautiously.

Ilya’s thumb brushed slowly against Shane’s knee. “Why don’t we?”

Shane blinked. The teasing response died in his throat instantly. “Oh.”

Ilya held his gaze steadily. “Why don’t we have another one?”

The air in the car suddenly felt very small.

Shane opened his mouth and closed it again.

Because the thing was— Even the idea of having another baby should have terrified him.

Two years ago neither of them had known what they were doing. Logan had arrived like a hurricane into the middle of barely resolved feelings and rivalry and chaos.

But now? Now Shane could picture it too easily.

Another tiny baby wrapped against Ilya's chest. Logan proudly teaching them words. Late nights of pure exhaustion and laughter.

A family. Their family.

Shane's heart stumbled painfully in his chest. The answer was yes, yes he wanted another one. He wanted another baby more than anything.

Before he could answer with that, a tiny, sleepy whine rose from the backseat.

Both of them turned immediately.

Logan stirred slowly, blinking blearily as sunlight filtered across his curls. "...Daddy?" His voice came out tiny and rough with sleep.

"There's my baby," Shane said instantly, already twisting around in his seat.

Logan rubbed one eye with his fist, looking utterly disoriented. Then he lifted both arms dramatically toward Shane. "Up."

Shane melted on the spot. "Yeah, c'mere bud."

He climbed into the backseat awkwardly enough that Ilya muttered something fondly insulting in Russian under his breath.

Shane ignored him completely as he carefully unbuckled Logan from the car seat.

The second the straps loosened, Logan practically collapsed into him bonelessly, warm and heavy with sleep. "Ohhh," Shane cooed softly, settling him against his chest. "Big stretch."

Logan buried his face into Shane's neck with a sleepy mumble, one hand still clutching Rexie by the tail.

His curls smelled faintly like baby shampoo and crackers.

Shane held him close automatically, rubbing slow circles against his back.

"I missed cuddly Logan," Shane whispered.

"Mhm," Logan agreed immediately despite clearly barely being awake.

Ilya watched them with an expression Shane knew too well now. The one that looked almost startled by how much he loved them.

Then Logan peeked up suddenly, eyes still half-lidded. “Papa?”

“I am here.”

Logan reached one tiny hand toward him until Ilya leaned over enough for Logan to pat his cheek sleepily.

Satisfied, he tucked himself back against Shane.

Shane nearly died. “I can’t handle how cute he is.”

“You say this every day.”

“Because every day he gets cuter.”

Outside, another car crunched over the gravel driveway.

Logan’s head lifted immediately. “Nana Una?”

“Yeah that’s them kiddo,” Shane said softly. “They’re here.”

The moment David’s truck came into view, Logan perked up despite his exhaustion. “Pawpaw Davey!” he called hoarsely through a yawn.

Yuna climbed out first, laughing the second she spotted him through the window.

“There’s our sleepy boy!”

Logan wriggled frantically in Shane’s lap now, suddenly determined to get out. “Go see!”

“Okay, okay.”

Shane finally climbed out of the car with Logan attached firmly to his hip while Ilya grabbed bags from the trunk.

The cottage steps creaked beneath them as Logan blinked around sleepily at everything—the trees, the dock, the water sparkling through the branches.

Then Yuna opened her arms. “My sweetheart!”

Logan immediately reached for her. “Nana Una,” he sighed dramatically, like he’d survived a terrible hardship instead of a nap.

“Oh, I missed you too.”

David walked up behind her carrying enough grocery bags to feed an army. “What about me?” he asked.

Logan gasped softly. “Pawpaw Davey!”

“There he is.”

Logan leaned dangerously far out of Yuna’s arms to reach for him next, still clutching Rexie between all of them somehow.

Shane watched the whole thing with tired fondness while Ilya came up beside him quietly. Their shoulders brushed. “You did not answer me,” Ilya murmured.

Shane looked over.

Ilya’s expression remained calm, but Shane knew him well enough now to see the seriousness underneath it.

Why don’t we have another one?

Shane looked toward Logan laughing sleepily between Yuna and David on the cottage steps.

Then back at Ilya.

And despite the sudden nervous flutter in his stomach, he smiled. Softly. Honestly. “Maybe we should talk about it after vacation,” he whispered.

Something warm immediately lit in Ilya’s eyes. Hope. “Okay,” he said quietly.

Then Logan spotted a squirrel near the porch railing and screamed loud enough to startle everyone. “PAPA! LOOK CHIPPY MONK!”

The first few weeks at the cottage passed in the sort of slow, golden haze that only existed during summer.

Days blurred together beneath warm sunlight and cool lake water, beneath the smell of sunscreen and barbecue smoke and pine trees swaying lazily in the wind.

And Logan loved every single second of it. Mostly because both his dads were there. No practice. No flights. No interviews. No early mornings at the rink.

Just Papa and Daddy all day long.

It became immediately obvious how much Logan noticed during hockey season, despite being so little.

Every morning he would wake up tangled in blankets between Shane and Ilya, blinking sleepily at them like he genuinely couldn’t believe they were still there.

“Daddy home?” he’d ask softly.

“Yep.”

“Papa too?”

“Still here.”

That always earned them the brightest little smile imaginable. One that had Shane’s eyes glistening with tears.

Then came the routine.

Logan insisting on helping make breakfast even though his contributions mostly involved stealing blueberries and narrating events dramatically from his booster seat.

“Papa burn toast.”

“I did not burn it.”

“Lil burn.”

“Tiny Traitor,” Ilya muttered while Shane laughed himself breathless beside the stove.

After breakfast Logan usually dragged one or both of them outside immediately. He loved the lake with his entire tiny soul. He loved throwing rocks into the water. Loved sitting on the dock swinging his legs while Ilya taught him Russian words for birds and fish and clouds. Loved burying Shane’s feet in sand for reasons known only to himself.

And he especially loved painting.

Every afternoon without fail, Logan would toddle over carrying his little paint kit with complete determination.

“Papa,” he’d announce. “Painties time.”

So Ilya would sit with him on the porch for hours.

Shane watched them constantly.

Logan would sit in Ilya’s lap with his tongue poking out in concentration while he smeared wildly incorrect colors across paper.

Purple trees, orange fish, blue suns.

Ilya treated every single painting like a masterpiece. “What is this one?” he’d ask seriously.

“Family.”

Usually it looked like blobs.

But one afternoon Logan proudly held up a picture with three vaguely human-shaped figures beside a giant purple star. “Nana Irina watch us.”

Shane nearly cried right there on the porch.

Ilya went very quiet beside him before pulling Logan close enough to kiss the top of his curls. “Da,” he said softly. “I think she does too.”

Logan grinned proudly and added more purple paint with terrifying enthusiasm.

The cottage had become noisy in the best possible way. David took Logan fishing almost every morning.

Mostly because Logan worshipped him.

“Pawpaw Davey catch BIG fish,” Logan would tell everyone seriously while holding his hands impossibly wide apart.

“The fish was about this size,” David would agree solemnly.

“It was literally six inches long,” Shane argued.

“Biggest fish in Canada buddy,” David replied without hesitation.

Yuna spoiled Logan relentlessly.

She taught him how to make pancakes, though “helping” mostly consisted of Logan dumping flour everywhere while shrieking with laughter. She brushed his curls carefully after baths while he told her long rambling stories that only made partial sense. Sometimes Shane would walk into the living room to find Logan curled against her chest while she read aloud softly.

It hit him every time.

The overwhelming love surrounding their son.

One evening after Logan had fallen asleep sprawled across Ilya’s chest on the couch, Yuna looked over at Shane quietly. “You know,” she said softly, “you’re a wonderful father.”

Shane blinked immediately.

“Mom-”

“No.” Her voice gentled further. “You are.”

Across from them David nodded once in agreement. “You boys are doing a hell of a job.”

Shane looked down instinctively toward Logan.

At some point during the movie he’d migrated almost entirely on top of Ilya, tiny hand curled into the front of his shirt.

Ilya hadn’t moved once.

“He’s easy to love,” Shane admitted quietly.

David snorted softly. “That’s not the point.”

Shane looked up.

“You and Ilya,” David continued, “you make him feel safe. Happy. Curious.” He smiled faintly. “Kid glows around you two.”

Emotion climbed suddenly into Shane’s throat.

Because sometimes— Sometimes guilt still crept in.

The travelling. The road trips. The games. The nights that Logan fell asleep without one or both of them home.

Even now during the offseason, Shane occasionally caught himself worrying Logan would someday resent it.

Apparently Ilya noticed.

Because of course he did.

Later that night, after they carried Logan upstairs together and tucked him carefully into bed, Shane lingered beside the doorway quietly. The little nightlight cast soft stars across Logan’s sleeping face.

“I feel bad sometimes,” Shane admitted under his breath.

Ilya looked over immediately. “For what?”

Shane shoved his hands into his sweatpants pockets. “For how much we’re gone during the season.”

Ilya stayed quiet.

“He gets so excited just having us here all day,” Shane continued softly. “Makes me wonder if we miss too much.”

For a moment only the sound of crickets drifted through the open window.

Then Ilya stepped closer. “Shane.” Warm fingers curled around the back of his neck gently. “Logan knows we love him.”

Shane’s eyes lowered automatically.

“He knows we leave because we work,” Ilya continued. “And because we provide for him. But he also knows we come back.”

Shane swallowed hard.

“He will never doubt that.” The certainty in Ilya’s voice settled something aching inside him. “And,” Ilya added more lightly, “if we stayed home all the time, he would eventually destroy the house.”

Shane laughed despite himself. “True.”

“He already attempted to feed a waffle into the DVD player yesterday.”

“He said the movie looked hungry.”

Ilya sighed deeply. “Exactly.”

Shane leaned forward until his forehead rested briefly against Ilya’s shoulder. “I love you,” he mumbled.

“I know.”

Shane immediately pulled back. “You are emotionally constipated.”

“And yet you married me anyway.”

“We’re literally not even married.”

“Yet malysh. Not married yet.”

By the beginning of the third week, Logan had become completely feral in the way all happy toddlers eventually did during summer vacation.

He ran barefoot constantly. He carried sticks home like treasured artifacts. He attempted to befriend a frog.

Yuna found him one afternoon sitting in the garden whispering secrets to a caterpillar. “What are you doing, sweetheart?”

Logan looked up very seriously. “Talkin’.”

“To the caterpillar?”

“He shy.”

“Ah,” Yuna nodded wisely. “Of course.”

Meanwhile David had Logan convinced loons were magical creatures. Which meant Logan now screamed “MAGIC BIRD!” every single time one appeared on the lake.

Shane had stopped correcting him by day four.

One particularly warm evening, after Logan had finally exhausted himself enough to fall asleep face-first across Shane’s lap during a movie, Yuna looked between Shane and Ilya thoughtfully.

“You two need a night to yourselves.”

Shane blinked. “Hm?”

“We can take Logan overnight,” she said simply. “Your father and I are going to spend the night at our summer place anyway.”

David nodded. “Five minutes down the road. You can survive one night without him.”

Shane immediately looked down at Logan instinctively. His curls were sticking to his forehead from sleep, one chubby cheek squished against Shane’s thigh. “I don’t know...”

“Oh please,” Yuna said fondly. “You deserve one evening where no one asks you to inspect rocks or explain dinosaurs.”

“Dinosaurs are important,” Shane defended weakly.

Ilya, traitorously, looked interested. “We would only be five minutes away?”

“Yes.”

Shane narrowed his eyes at his parents suspiciously. “You just want uninterrupted grandparent time.”

“Correct.”

David grinned. “Kid likes my pancakes better.”

“Lies.”

“No lies here.”

In the end they agreed.

Mostly because Logan was ecstatic by the idea of a “sleepover adventure.” The next afternoon, he bounced around the cottage excitedly while Yuna packed his tiny overnight bag.

“Rexie come too,” Logan informed everyone.

“Obviously,” Shane said.

“And fish jammies.”

“Obviously.”

“And snackies.”

“Buddy,” Shane laughed, “it’s one night.”

“Need snackies.”

Ilya crouched beside him to zip up the dinosaur backpack. “Nana Una and Pawpaw Davey will spoil you. You will have as many snacks as you want.”

Logan gasped happily. “Ice cream?”

“Absolutely.” Yuna beamed.

“See?” Ilya said dryly to Shane. “So spoiled already.”

When it was finally time for them to leave, Logan hugged both of them tightly.

“Bye Daddy.” A kiss to Shane’s cheek. “Bye Papa.” A kiss to Ilya too. Then he whispered loudly, “Have fun date.”

Shane choked.

Yuna absolutely lost it laughing.

“Okay,” Shane muttered. “Who taught him that?”

David refused to look guilty.

Dinner in town felt strangely quiet without a toddler interrupting every three minutes. Not exactly bad. Just different. It had been so long since either of them had been able to sit down and eat without worrying about tiny choking hazards. It felt nice.

The restaurant overlooked the water, strings of warm lights hanging across the patio while music drifted softly through the evening air.

Shane sat across from Ilya feeling almost shy somehow. Which was ridiculous. They literally shared a child now. Not only that, they had been together for well over a decade.

Still.

There was something about getting uninterrupted time together again that made everything feel softer around the edges.

But of course reality always had a way of breaking the moment. Halfway through dessert, a nervous-looking teenager approached their table clutching a phone.

“Sorry,” he said quickly. “I don’t want to bother you guys, but... could I maybe get a picture?”

Shane smiled apologetically. “Sorry, not tonight. We don’t really get much time to ourselves these days and we don’t want anyone knowing our location...”

The fan immediately nodded. “Oh my god, of course yeah! N-no worries at all.”

Then, brightening suddenly, he added, “Your son is adorable by the way. The dinosaur rain boots picture you posted literally cured my depression.”

Shane burst out laughing.

Ilya looked unbearably pleased.

“Well,” Shane said, already pulling out his phone, “that earned you some brownie points. What’s your name?”

“U-uh it’s Kaylen..” The fan looked seconds away from fainting when Shane followed him on Twitter.

By the time they left the restaurant, the poor kid was still staring at his phone in shock.

“Show-off,” Ilya muttered.

“You liked it.”

“I tolerated it.”

“Liar.”

The night air was warm as they walked back toward the lake hand-in-hand. The walk from the town and back took around half an hour. It was enough time for them to feel at ease and calm from the whirlwind of a vacation it had been so far.

The cottage lights glowed softly through the trees when they arrived home, the world quiet except for crickets and gentle water against the dock. For a while they simply sat together at the end of the pier. No talking. Just simply existing.

Then Shane glanced sideways at him. “Race you.”

Before Ilya could ask what he meant, Shane stripped off his shirt and pants and dove into the lake.

The splash echoed loudly across the water.

A second later Ilya followed with an exasperated curse in Russian.

The water was cool and dark around them, moonlight silvering across the surface while Shane laughed breathlessly as Ilya caught him around the waist.

“You are insane, Hollander! What has gotten into you?!.”

“You, you and your unbeatable love for me.”

Unfortunately true.

They kissed slowly in the middle of the lake, water dripping from their skin while summer air wrapped warm around them.

By the time they stumbled back inside the cottage later, still laughing quietly and shivering from the swim, the whole place felt wrapped in softness and moonlight and want.

They disappeared into their bedroom together, hands tangled, kissing between smiles and whispered teasing.

And for the first time in a very long time— They had an entire night that belonged only to them.

All too quickly the next morning at the cottage arrived leaving the night before in a long flick of memories they'd cherish forever.

Soft sunlight spilled across the lake in ribbons of gold while mist hovered low over the water, the air still cool enough that Shane had stolen one of Ilya's hoodies when they came outside.

They sat together at the end of the dock with coffee mugs warming their hands, bare feet brushing against weathered wood.

It was quiet.

Peaceful.

The kind of quiet that only existed before Logan woke up.

Shane leaned sideways against Ilya's shoulder with a content little hum. "I missed this."

"You missed coffee without someone demanding a sip of it and immediately spitting it out?."

"Well.. that too." Shane chuckled softly. "But no, I missed this, us, moments like this."

Yesterday had been good for them. Really good.

The date. The lake. The uninterrupted sleep.

Though Shane had still woken up briefly around three in the morning in a panic because Logan wasn't starfished between them.

Apparently parenthood permanently rewired your brain.

Across the lake a loon called softly.

Ilya took another sip of coffee before glancing sideways at Shane. "You were talking in your sleep."

Shane groaned immediately. "Nooo, please don't-"

"You said and I quote, 'Logan cannot become a dinosaur chiropractor.'"

"That feels valid honestly."

"I am concerned about what conversations happen in your brain."

Shane opened his mouth to respond before the sound of a car door slamming echoed from the driveway cut him short.

Immediately followed by, "DADDYYYYYYY!"

Shane nearly spilled his coffee.

A tiny blur came hurtling down the path toward the dock at alarming speed, blonde curls bouncing wildly in every direction.

Logan.

Still in dinosaur pajamas despite it being nearly ten in the morning. Still clutching Rexie. Still somehow running like he was being pursued by federal agents.

“Oh! Holy- ,” Shane yelped, already standing because Logan was absolutely going to launch himself directly off the dock if he didn’t.

Sure enough, “DADDY I BONK HEAD!” Logan crashed into Shane’s legs dramatically, immediately pointing at the side of his forehead with deep personal offense.

Shane’s stomach dropped. “What? What happened?” he asked instantly, crouching down.

Tiny fingers pushed curls away to reveal a small reddish bruise near Logan’s hairline.

“Oh, buddy...” Shane gently tilted his face side to side checking him over while Logan blinked up at him with betrayed dignity.

“Hurted me.”

Behind them Yuna hurried down the path looking apologetic while David carried Logan’s backpack and approximately fourteen stuffed animals.

“He’s okay,” Yuna assured quickly. “I promise. He ran into the doorframe this morning.”

“I turn too fast,” Logan explained sadly.

“Clearly.”

Shane pressed gentle fingers around the bump carefully. “No dizziness? No throwing up?”

“Daddy,” Logan sighed dramatically, as if Shane was exhausting him personally.

Ilya snorted softly into his coffee. “Dramatics,” he agreed dryly.

Shane shot him a look. “You’re not helping.”

“I am emotionally supporting from a distance.”

Yuna stepped onto the dock beside them. “He cried for maybe two minutes,” she reassured gently. “Then he demanded pancakes.”

“That sounds accurate,” Shane admitted.

Even so, he still checked Logan over one more time because parent panic apparently overrode rational thought completely.

Logan tolerated this for approximately ten seconds before twisting around suddenly. “Papa!”

Ilya opened one arm automatically just in time for Logan to practically climb him like a tree.

“There you are,” Ilya murmured, settling him easily against his chest.

Logan immediately grabbed his face. “I bonk.”

“I heard. Very tragic.”

“Huge bonk.”

“The biggest.”

Logan nodded solemnly. Seemingly satisfied by the validation, he rested his head briefly against Ilya’s shoulder while Shane finally exhaled properly.

Then he glanced toward Yuna with a sheepish expression. “Sorry,” he muttered. “I know that was a little intense for me. I just hate not being there when he gets hurt-”

Yuna looked startled immediately. “Shane.”

David set down the bags near the porch steps and walked over too. “You never apologize for worrying about your kid,” he said firmly.

Yuna nodded in agreement. “That’s your baby.”

Warmth bloomed painfully in Shane’s chest.

Even after all these years, there were moments when being parented by his own parents so gently still caught him off guard.

Beside him, Ilya reached over quietly and squeezed the back of his neck once. Grounding and familiar in a way that had his heart overflowing with love.

Logan, meanwhile, had fully recovered from his near-fatal forehead incident and was now poking at Ilya’s coffee cup.

“Papa drink mud.”

“It’s coffee.”

“Taste yucky.”

“You eat crayons.”

Logan gasped loudly. “RED ONE N-NO NICE.”

David burst out laughing.

Shane pressed his face into his hands. “I can’t believe you admitted that out loud.”

“Blue one good,” Logan informed them seriously.

“Okay,” Shane said weakly. “Great. Awesome.”

Ilya looked entirely unsurprised by this revelation. “Blue is better colour also. Is colour of blueberries, we like blueberries, da?”

Logan suddenly perked up, eyes widening dramatically. “BLUEBWEERY PANCAKES!”

Ilya glanced toward the cottage. “Right, that's our que .” He shifted Logan higher on his hip before looking at the others. “We should probably go inside before he starts eating furniture.”

“A valid concern,” Yuna agreed.

“PANCAKES AN’ JUICIE!” Logan shouted triumphantly.

Then, before anyone could stop him, he wriggled violently out of Ilya’s arms and bolted toward the cottage.

“Logan! Logan, WALK!” Shane called out automatically.

Logan ignored him completely.

For an almost three year old he moved with terrifying speed, little pajama-clad legs carrying him across the yard in chaotic zigzags.

“He’s one fast kid,” David muttered.

“I genuinely think he teleports,” Shane replied.

Up ahead Logan stumbled slightly on the porch steps, caught himself dramatically, and then threw both arms into the air. “I OKAY!”

Shane nearly had another heart attack.

Ilya just sighed deeply beside him. “He is your child.”

“I am nowhere near as clumsy as that.”

Together they followed Logan toward the cottage while inside already echoed with tiny excited chanting. “PAN-CAKES! PAN-CAKES! PAN-CAKES!”

By the time their fourth week at the cottage came around , Logan had fully decided he belonged outdoors permanently.

Shoes became optional. Pants became negotiable. And every single pocket in the house mysteriously filled with rocks and leaves.

“Why is there a pinecone in my bed?” Shane asked one morning in disbelief.

From the kitchen, Logan yelled proudly, “M’ gift!”

Apparently that explained everything.

Most afternoons were spent down by the lake.

Logan had become obsessed with the big fishing boat tied to the dock and asked at least six times a day if they could go “Family boatin’ now.”

Eventually David gave in.

So one bright afternoon all five of them climbed carefully into the boat while Logan bounced in excitement between Shane and Ilya wearing an absurdly tiny life jacket decorated with cartoon whales.

Rexie, naturally, had his own makeshift life jacket made from one of Logan’s socks.

“Safety first,” Shane said solemnly.

“Rexie safe now,” Logan agreed. The second the boat drifted away from shore he gasped so loudly that even nearby birds scattered. “LOOK WATER!”

“Yes,” Ilya said dryly. “That is generally how boats work.”

“So BIG!”

Logan spent most of the trip switching frantically between people because there was simply too much excitement for one lap.

First he sat with David steering dramatically. Then with Yuna pointing at birds. Then with Shane demanding snacks every three minutes.

Finally he settled against Ilya’s chest while they drifted lazily near the center of the lake. “Papa?”

“Mhm?”

“Rexie like boat.”

“I can tell.”

Logan held the stuffed dinosaur carefully over the side so Rexie could “see” the water. “Don’t fall,” he warned sternly.

Shane watched them from across the boat with such overwhelming fondness it almost hurt.

This. This was what he used to ache for without even realizing it. Something steady. Something warm.

A family.

At one point Logan leaned back sleepily against Ilya and sighed dramatically. “Best day ever.”

David snorted. “Kid says that every day.”

“Pawpaw, ev’ry day is best day,” Logan explained logically.

And honestly, fair enough.

The days slipped by too quickly after that.

Soon, before either of them knew it, there were only a few days left before Logan’s birthday.

He’d be turning three years old.

Shane genuinely didn’t understand how that was possible.

One evening after Logan finally fell asleep upstairs, completely exhausted after attempting to chase frogs in the yard, Shane curled up beside Ilya on the couch with an old photo album balanced across both their laps.

Most of the pictures they have were digital now, but Yuna had made sure she printed hundreds from Logan’s first year.

Tiny newborn Logan wrapped loosely in hospital blankets. Tiny newborn Logan asleep against Ilya’s chest. Tiny newborn Logan glaring suspiciously at the camera with his already pouty little mouth.

“Oh my, Ilya,” Shane whispered emotionally. “Look at his cheeks.”

“He looked like angry potato.”

“A beautiful potato.”

Ilya snorted softly.

Shane turned another page slowly.

There were pictures from Ilya’s weeks alone at the cottage too. Though Ilya made sure Shane didn’t dwell on them for too long. Flipping the pages until they reached Logan’s firsts.

First time smiling.

First time swimming.

First time crawling.

First time standing alone.

First ever birthday cake absolutely demolished by tiny fists.

Every picture carried traces of who he’d become. The curls. The eyes. The endless expressions.

“I can’t believe he’s almost three,” Shane murmured.

Beside him, Ilya’s thumb brushed absently against the edge of the album. “He is growing too fast.”

“Seriously. Yesterday he was tiny enough to sleep on your forearm.”

“Yes. Now he uses my spine as climbing structure.”

Shane laughed quietly before turning another page.

There was a newspaper clipping tucked between the photos from the NHL Awards two years ago. Neither one of them had touched it in a long time.

This year’s awards were happening in Las Vegas in just a few days, but for the first time since entering the league, both of them had declined the invitations.

It hadn’t even been a difficult decision.

The idea of missing Logan’s birthday and being so far away from him felt wrong.

Shane stared down at the clipping for a long moment.

Shane Hollander’s Public Bathroom Birth Shocks The Hockey World.

God.

Their lives had changed so drastically since that moment.

“You know,” Shane said softly, “For a short while I used to think that night ruined everything.”

Ilya looked over immediately.

“But then I realised— no it didn’t,” Shane continued. “How could it have ruined anything when It gave me him? He is the best thing in this entire world.”

Upstairs, faint little snores drifted through the baby monitor.

Ilya’s expression softened instantly. Fingers stroking over his boyfriend's wrist as Shane turned another page carefully.

The photos shifted. The full sized pictures changing into Polaroids Yuna had managed to capture at the cottage after all of the chaos. Snippets of the time Shane had missed.

Logan wrapped tightly in white blankets while Ilya held him against his chest. Looking so tiny and fresh to the world.

Picture perfect father and son.

And suddenly the ache came back.

Shane's smile faded slowly. "I- fuck I really hate seeing these pictures sometimes."

Ilya frowned slightly. "Why?"

"Because I wasn't there." The words came out quieter than Shane intended.

For a moment only rain tapped softly against the cottage windows.

"I spent the first three weeks of his life terrified," Shane admitted. "I barely held him. I barely looked at him." His throat tightened painfully. "I left you alone with him."

"You were recovering."

"I was scared."

"Yes. Part of recovering no?"

Shane scrubbed a hand over his face hard enough to hurt. "I should've stayed."

Ilya went very still beside him. "Shane-"

"I remember all of it," Shane whispered. "Every second I spent away from him. And it's my biggest regret."

Emotion climbed thickly into his voice now.

Because Logan would never know. Would never remember those first weeks.

But Shane would.

The panic. The confusion. The way he'd looked at his own baby and felt terrified instead of immediate certainty.

It haunted him sometimes.

"I should've done better," he said roughly.

The album slipped forgotten into his lap as Ilya reached over carefully, steady hands cupping Shane's face.

"You had a cryptic pregnancy," Ilya said quietly. "You gave birth unexpectedly in a public bathroom with no idea what was happening to your body." His voice gentled further. "That is terrifying."

Shane's eyes burned.

"You were not a bad father."

"I left."

"You survived."

The words landed hard.

Shane looked away helplessly. “I just- I don’t know. N-next time,” he whispered, “I want to do better.”

Ilya blinked once. “...Next time?”

Shane swallowed, finally looking back at him. “Yes. Next time.”

The room went very quiet.

Outside, rain continued softly against the lake.

“You mean that,” Ilya said after a moment.

It wasn’t really a question.

Shane nodded slowly. “I think...” His voice shook faintly. “I think I want another baby with you- and I don’t mean in a few years or a few months. I think I want a baby now.”

For a second Ilya just stared at him. Like he couldn’t quite process the words. Then something fragile and overwhelming cracked open across his face..

Love so deep it almost looked painful.

“You are serious,” he whispered.

Shane laughed shakily. “Yeah.”

Before he could say anything else, Ilya kissed him. It wasn’t rushed or desperate. Just emotional enough that Shane immediately felt tears prick behind his eyes.

Warm hands slid into Ilya’s hair whilst Shane kissed him back just as fiercely, years of fear and love and healing tangled together between them.

When they finally pulled apart, Ilya rested his forehead against Shane’s. “We would tell Logan first,” he murmured softly.

Shane let out a watery laugh. “Obviously.”

“He would lose his mind.”

“He absolutely would.”

Upstairs, a tiny sleepy voice suddenly crackled through the baby monitor. “Daddyyyy...”

Both of them turned instantly.

Then Logan added, half asleep and deeply offended: “Rexie fall bed.”

“I’ve got him.” Shane murmured, beaming as he pressed a firm kiss to Ilya’s mouth. Rushing up the stairs before the Russian could take it any further.

It was a good night all around.

The morning of Logan’s third birthday began violently. Specifically, with thirty pounds of excited toddler launching directly onto Ilya’s chest at seven in the morning.

“OOMPH—” Ilya jerked awake with a deeply offended noise while Logan bounced mercilessly on top of him like an overexcited puppy.

“PAPA WAKE UP!” Logan yelled. “IS MY BIRFDAY!”

Beside them Shane dissolved immediately into helpless laughter beneath the blankets.

Ilya, meanwhile, looked like he’d briefly left his body.

“Why,” he rasped hoarsely, “does he always aim for my organs?”

“Because you’re dramatic,” Shane informed him cheerfully.

Logan gasped loudly.

“UNCLE HAYDEN COMIN’!”

“That’s nice, baby-”

“AUNTIE JACKIE TOO!” Bounce. “RU RUUUU!” Bounce. “JADIE!” Bounce. “ARTIE AN’ BAMBER!” Bounce bounce bounce. “AUNTIE ROSE! AUNTIE SVETAAAA!”

Every name came with increasing volume and physical violence.

By the end of the list Ilya was lying flat on the mattress staring at the ceiling like a war survivor.

Shane wheezed beside him. “Our child woke up and chose destruction.”

“He is three now,” Ilya said solemnly. “This is his final form.”

Logan climbed onto Shane next, curls wild and cheeks pink with excitement.

“Daddy!” he whispered loudly. “M’ BIG now!”

“You are,” Shane smiled softly.

Three years old.

God.

The emotion hit him all over again unexpectedly as he looked at their son curled sleepily in the morning light wearing dinosaur pajamas and grinning so hard his whole face scrunched

up.

Three years.

Three years since the NHL awards bathroom. Three years since panic and fear and impossible love crashed into both their lives.

And now— Now Logan was loud and curious and stubborn and happy.

Shane reached for him instantly, pulling him down into his arms while Logan squealed dramatically. “There’s my birthday boy,” he murmured before covering his face in kisses.

Logan shrieked with laughter. “DADDYYYY!”

“Kiss attack.”

“NOOOO!”

“Too late.”

Shane kept going until Logan dissolved into giggles against his chest, tiny hands grabbing uselessly at Shane’s face.

Finally Shane paused long enough to press one last kiss against his forehead. “Happy birthday, baby.”

Logan beamed.

Then he turned toward Ilya expectantly. “Papa turn.”

Ilya sighed like this was an unbearable burden before reaching over and pulling Logan easily onto his chest again. “Happy birthday,” he murmured in Russian first, voice still rough with sleep.

Logan smiled immediately at hearing it.

Then Ilya kissed his curls once.

Twice.

Three times until Logan giggled.

“Otay,” Logan declared importantly. “Me wan’ presents.”

“Of course,” Shane snorted.

Priorities.

The cottage living room looked some form of dinosaur-themed explosion.

Yuna and David had dropped off decorations the night before while Logan slept, so now green streamers hung from the ceiling beside balloons shaped like tiny dinosaurs.

The second Logan saw everything downstairs he froze. His little mouth fell open. "...For me?"

Shane nearly burst into tears on the spot. "Yes, sweetheart," he said softly. "All for you."

Logan immediately sprinted toward the presents with Rexie tucked under one arm. "OH MY!"

"He sounds exactly like you," Ilya muttered.

Shane ignored the jab, smiling widely because Logan was currently vibrating with joy that was highly contagious.

They should have been more prepared. Opening presents with a three-year-old was approximately ninety percent chaos and ten percent actual progress.

Wrapping paper flew everywhere.

Logan gasped over literally every item like he'd never experienced happiness before.

"DINOSAURRRR!"

Another gasp.

"TRUCK!"

Another gasp.

"OH MY! SOCKS!"

"Excitement over socks... definitely gets that from you, Hollander," Ilya said flatly.

Then Logan opened a gift bag containing two soft dinosaur plushies nearly as big as he was. He stared at them in awe. "...Babies."

"They can be Rexie's friends," Shane suggested.

Logan immediately hugged them both dramatically before looking down at Rexie very seriously. "You still numb' one."

Ilya burst out laughing. "Good to know Rexie's position is secure."

"Rexie boss," Logan explained.

"Obviously."

The entire morning passed in warmth and noise and sugar. By ten-thirty Logan had changed outfits twice because he needed everyone to "see birthday shirt."

The second a car pulled into the driveway, the three year old practically levitated. “THEY HERE!” He bolted toward the front door at horrifying speed.

“WALK!” Shane yelled automatically. “ILYA! He has to walk!”

No one listened.

The door flew open before Shane could even reach it.

“UNCLE HAYDENNNN!”

Hayden barely had time to crouch before Logan launched himself into his arms with enough force to nearly knock him backward. “There’s my birthday boy!” He laughed, catching him easily.

Logan wrapped himself around Hayden’s neck instantly.

Hayden had always been Logan’s favorite. Possibly because Hayden treated every single thing Logan said like the most important information in the universe.

“You got bigger!” Hayden gasped dramatically.

“I THREE.”

“No way.”

“YWES.”

“That’s insane.”

Logan nodded gravely.

Behind them Jackie appeared carrying Amber on one hip while Jade walked beside her holding Arthur’s hand. Ruby followed behind with Rose and Svetlana, all of them laughing at the sheer volume already coming from the cottage.

“Aunt Jackiiiiiiie!” Logan cried next.

Jackie immediately kissed the top of his curls. “Happy birthday, sweet boy.”

“RuRu look!” Logan held up Rexie proudly towards the twins with a smile twice the size of his face.

Ruby gasped appropriately, whilst Jade immediately asked for a cuddle from the stuffed toy.

Shane stood slightly off to the side watching Hayden spin Logan around while Logan shrieked with laughter loud enough to scare nearby birds.

Emotion swelled suddenly in his chest again.

Because Logan looked so loved.

So safe.

Hayden noticed him watching and grinned softly over Logan's shoulder. "Good job, dads," he said quietly.

That nearly did Shane in completely. A warm hand slipped into his.

Ilya.

"You are crying again," Ilya murmured under his breath.

"I am not."

"You absolutely are."

"Shut up."

The cottage filled quickly after that. Voices overlapping. Kids running everywhere. Jackie trying unsuccessfully to keep frosting off of Amber's face.

Ruby and Jade helping Logan assemble one of his new dinosaur toys while Arthur offered deeply incorrect instructions.

Rose taking approximately four hundred photos.

And Svetlana sitting at the kitchen table teaching Logan Russian birthday phrases with complete seriousness.

"Say s dnem rozhdeniya "

"Dem-Rosya."

"Close enough."

Later in the afternoon Yuna and David arrived carrying the cake carefully between them. Logan gasped so loudly everyone turned.

It was dinosaur themed.

Complete with green frosting and tiny edible trees.

"Oh my ," Logan whispered reverently. It had most definitely become his favourite phrase of the week.

Candles flickered warmly while everyone crowded around the table. Logan sat between Shane and Ilya wearing a paper dinosaur crown slightly crooked over his curls.

Three candles. Three years old. Shane honestly couldn't process it. It felt like only yesterday he was shaking and trying to process the little boy that had practically burst into his world.

"Ready?" Yuna asked gently.

Everyone began singing. “Happy birthday to you...”

Logan’s eyes went huge immediately.

Halfway through, Svetlana seamlessly switched into Russian beside Ilya, both of them singing softly together while Logan looked between them in delighted confusion.

The sound wrapped around the room warmly. By the end of the song, Logan was practically bouncing in his seat.

“BLOW!” David encouraged.

Logan inhaled dramatically. Then blew so hard he nearly spit directly onto the cake. The candles went out instantly. Everyone cheered.

Logan looked utterly stunned by his own success. Then he turned immediately toward Shane and Ilya with the brightest smile either of them had ever seen. “M’ THREE!”

The end of the birthday party came around pretty quickly , Logan was running entirely on sugar, excitement, and pure stubbornness. Which meant bedtime was an absolute disaster.

“I NOT TIRED,” Logan insisted while actively falling sideways into Shane’s shoulder.

“You just yawned six times,” Shane pointed out.

“No I din’t.”

“You literally did it during that exact sentence.”

Logan gasped dramatically at such betrayal.

The cottage had finally gone quiet after everyone left. Wrapping paper still littered parts of the living room, abandoned toys scattered across the floor from where Logan had been too excited to choose just one.

Now the lake outside reflected silver moonlight through the bedroom windows while Shane helped Logan wrestle into dinosaur pajamas.

Or attempted to.

Logan somehow got both legs into one pant hole and declared it “fashion.” “Papa help,” Shane laughed helplessly.

Ilya appeared from the bathroom doorway carrying Logan’s toothbrush and took in the scene with one long suffering look. “You leave him unsupervised for two minutes...”

“Daddy broke pants,” Logan informed him immediately.

“I did not! You got yourself stuck and ripped them!”

“Nooooo papa! He did.”

Traitorous child.

Eventually they got him properly dressed and tucked beneath the blankets with Rexie and the two new dinosaur plushies positioned carefully beside him.

“Okay,” Shane said softly, brushing curls back from Logan’s forehead. “Birthday boy needs sleep.”

Logan blinked up at them sleepily. The sugar crash had finally arrived. His eyes looked huge and soft in the dim light.

Ilya sat carefully on the edge of the bed while Logan immediately scooted closer until he was practically sprawled across both of them.

Neither complained. They never did.

“You had good birthday?” Ilya asked quietly.

Logan nodded hard enough to nearly lose balance. “Best birthday EVER.”

“Better than the boat day?”

A pause.

“...same.”

“High praise.”

Logan giggled tiredly into Shane’s arm.

For a little while they stayed there just listening to him ramble sleepily about dinosaurs and cake and how Uncle Hayden let him eat whipped cream directly from the can when Daddy “wasn’t lookin’.”

Shane made a mental note to fistfight Hayden later.

Then Ilya reached over and gently tapped Logan’s nose. “You never told us what you wished for.”

Logan’s eyes widened immediately. “Oh.”

Shane smiled softly. “You know, when you blew out your candles?”

For a moment Logan looked suspicious, like perhaps wishes were classified information. Then he leaned closer dramatically. “I wished for Isla.”

Silence.

Shane blinked. “...Who’s Isla, baby?”

Logan looked at him like this should’ve been obvious. “My baby.”

Both Shane and Ilya froze instantly.

Wide-eyed silence filled the room.

Logan, completely unaware of the emotional grenade he'd just launched, cuddled deeper into the blankets.

Ilya managed to recover first. Carefully, he asked, "You wished for a baby?"

"Yes."

Logan nodded very seriously. "A lil baby."

Shane stared at him. "You... want a sibling?"

"Yes," Logan said immediately. "Need baby."

"Need one?" Shane echoed weakly.

"Uh-huh."

Logan held up Rexie and one of the new dinosaur plushies. "Rexie got babies now." Apparently this was flawless logic.

Shane looked slowly toward Ilya. Ilya was already looking at him. Neither spoke. Because—What were the chances? Just days after they'd finally admitted they wanted another baby.

And now Logan was wishing for one too?

Logan misinterpreted their silence completely. Tiny eyebrows furrowed. "Baby too loud?"

Shane nearly melted into the floor. "No, sweetheart," he said softly, pulling Logan gently into his lap. "Not too loud."

"Baby sleep wif me."

"Well," Ilya said carefully, "babies usually sleep with their parents first."

Logan considered this deeply offensive. "...Why?"

"Because they wake up a lot."

"I help."

Shane snorted helplessly. "You say that now."

"I good helper."

Honestly? He probably would be. Logan already loved fiercely. Every scraped knee became a tragedy. Every stuffed animal needed blankets and kisses.

Last week Shane had found him reading a picture book aloud to Rexie because “he lonely.”

Ilya brushed a hand through Logan’s curls quietly. “What would you teach the baby?”

Logan gasped softly. “EVERYTHING.”

“Like what?”

“Din’saurs.” He held up one finger. “Painties.” Another finger. “Fishin’.” Another. “An’... snackies.”

“Important life skills,” Shane agreed solemnly.

Logan nodded proudly. Then, in a much smaller voice, he asked: “Papa an’ Daddy still love me?”

The question hit both of them like a punch.

“Oh, baby,” Shane whispered immediately. He pulled Logan close enough that their foreheads touched. “There is nothing in the whole world that could make us love you less.”

“Ever,” Ilya added quietly.

Logan searched their faces carefully. Then he relaxed completely boneless against Shane’s chest with a sleepy little hum. “Otay.”

Shane kissed the top of his head instantly.

Ilya’s hand settled warm against Logan’s back.

And for a moment neither of them could stop looking at their son.

Three years old.

Sweet and loud and thoughtful. Already dreaming about loving someone new.

Logan yawned hugely. Then, halfway asleep, he mumbled: “Baby name Isla.”

Shane looked helplessly at Ilya over Logan’s curls.

Ilya looked equally wrecked.

“...That’s actually a pretty name,” Shane whispered.

“I know.”

Logan’s eyes were already drifting shut. “Night Daddy.”

“Night sweetheart.”

“Night Papa.”

“Goodnight, malysh.”

Within minutes he was asleep between them, tiny hand still tangled in Shane’s shirt while Rexie guarded his pillow importantly.

For a long moment neither Shane nor Ilya moved.

Then Shane whispered very quietly, “He wants a baby sister.”

Ilya’s thumb stroked absently over Logan’s back. “Yes.”

Shane swallowed hard around that pill of reality.

And somewhere beneath the tenderness and fear and overwhelming love. Hope bloomed quietly between them.

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Their final day at the cottage arrived way too fast.

Shane hated it immediately. He hated the half-packed bags by the front door. Hated the way the fridge looked emptier. Hated how every conversation now included phrases like “once we’re back in Ottawa” and “training camp starts Monday.”

Mostly, he hated the ache sitting heavy in his chest every time he looked at Logan.

Summer had settled into them so completely that the idea of leaving felt wrong somehow. The cottage had become their little world. Slow mornings. Lake water. Sticky toddler hugs.

No cameras. No pressure and no hockey beyond the occasional game playing quietly on TV while Logan used Ilya’s legs as a racetrack for toy dinosaurs.

And tomorrow it would end.

Logan seemed to sense it too. He’d become extra clingy all morning, shadowing Shane from room to room while carrying three dinosaurs and Rexie tucked under one arm.

“Daddy watch this.”

Every thirty seconds.

“Daddy look.”

Again.

“Daddy LOOK.”

“I’m looking, baby.”

“Watch dis jump!”

Shane watched every single one. Like he could somehow memorize all of it enough to survive the season.

Outside, David stood by the barbecue turning burgers while Ilya and Yuna argued mildly about whether Logan needed another juice box.

“He has already had two,” Ilya said.

“He’s three.”

“That is not a medical argument.”

Logan chose that moment to sprint past screaming, “I FAST!”

David snorted. “Kid’s got enough energy to power the province.”

Shane smiled faintly but it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

David noticed immediately.

He always did.

A little while later, when Logan got distracted trying to teach Rexie how to fish off the dock with Yuna, David wandered over to where Shane sat alone near the lakeshore. For a few moments neither of them spoke. Warm wind moved through the trees softly. The lake glittered beneath the afternoon sun.

Finally David handed him a ginger ale. “You’ve been quiet all day.”

Shane stared down at the can. “Yeah.”

David sat beside him on the old wooden bench with a knowing look. “You don’t want to leave.”

The words hit too directly.

Shane exhaled slowly through his nose. “No,” he admitted quietly. “No I don’t.”

Across the yard Logan’s laughter echoed loudly as Yuna pretended Rexie had caught a fish.

“I used to count down the days until the hockey season started again,” Shane murmured. “Even as a kid.” He rubbed tiredly at his jaw. “And now all I can think about is missing him.”

David listened silently.

“For the first time in my life,” Shane admitted softly, “I care about something more than hockey.” Emotion caught unexpectedly in his throat. “I don’t want to go back dad.”

The confession sat heavily between them.

Shane stared out across the water helplessly. “I want to stay here with my kid.” His laugh came out shaky. “I want to see every dumb little thing he does and I want to enjoy it.”

David smiled gently beside him. “That’s called being a dad kiddo.”

Shane swallowed hard. “But what if it means I’m losing my passion for the game?”

That fear had been creeping around quietly for weeks now. Because hockey has always been everything. His whole life. His whole identity.

Until Logan.

David leaned back against the bench slowly. “You know,” he said thoughtfully, “Before you were born, I thought my life was over.”

Shane blinked.

David grinned. “Seriously. I was terrified of what would come after you arrived.”

“That’s comforting.”

“I mean it.” He looked over warmly. “But then suddenly there was this tiny little person I loved more than anything else in the world and it all clicked into place.” He shrugged. “Everything changed after that. Including hockey, which up until you had meant everything to me.”

Shane listened quietly.

“It didn’t mean I stopped loving it,” David continued. “It just meant something else mattered too.”

The knot in Shane’s chest loosened slightly.

“You’re allowed to feel torn,” David said softly. “That doesn’t make you less dedicated to the sport, son. It gave you drive, it gave you passion in life, in a way it even gave you your family. That’ll always mean something.”

Shane looked back toward the dock instinctively. Logan was currently trying to feed a hotdog bun to a seagull while Ilya intervened with visible exhaustion. Warmth bloomed painfully in his chest. Then, before he could overthink it, he said quietly, “We want another baby.”

David froze.

Then his entire face lit up. “Seriously?”

Shane laughed softly at the immediate excitement. “Yeah.”

“Oh, bud.” David looked genuinely emotional. “That’s wonderful.”

Shane rubbed at the back of his neck sheepishly. “We haven’t started trying yet or anything but...”

“But you want to.”

“Yeah.”

David looked toward Logan again.

Then back at Shane.

“You know,” he said warmly, “this actually sounds like the perfect time.”

Shane frowned slightly. “What do you mean?”

“You’ve finally built a life bigger than hockey.” David smiled softly. “You’re ready to embrace that. It’s a good thing.”

The words settled deep.

And for the first time in weeks, Shane didn’t feel guilty for wanting both.

Family.

Hockey.

Love.

Maybe it didn’t have to be one or the other.

Across the yard Logan suddenly screamed, “SEAGULL STOLE MY CHIP!”

David burst out laughing. “Ah,” he sighed. “Nature heals.”

Their final evening at the cottage felt soft around the edges. The barbecue lasted for hours. Music drifted quietly from inside the house while the adults sat outside watching the sunset paint the lake gold and orange. Logan ran between everyone endlessly sticky from watermelon and ketchup.

At one point he climbed directly into Ilya’s lap carrying three rocks. “Papa gifts.”

“What are they?”

“Special.”

“...Of course.”

Yuna took approximately six hundred pictures.

David let Logan “help” flip burgers which mostly involved waving a spatula dangerously.

Shane sat curled against Ilya's side watching everything with aching fondness. He wasn't ready to leave. But part of him knew this was the beginning of something even better for them, for their family.

Later that night, after Logan finally passed out starfished across the bed between them, Shane whispered into the dark.

"I wish our summers here lasted forever."

Ilya kissed his shoulder sleepily.

"I know. Me too."

The drive home the next morning was much quieter.

Logan cried when they packed the boat away. Cried again saying goodbye to the lake. And then cried the hardest hugging Yuna and David goodbye. "Nana Una come my house," he sniffled miserably.

"We'll visit soon, sweetheart," Yuna promised.

"Pawpaw Davey too?"

"Absolutely."

Eventually Logan fell asleep halfway through the drive home clutching Rexie and one of his birthday dinosaurs tightly against his chest.

Shane spent most of the ride staring back at him. Ottawa felt too loud after weeks at the cottage. Too fast. Their house seemed strangely still when they unpacked.

By the time evening rolled around again Logan had become suspiciously quiet. Shane found him sitting in the living room hugging Rexie with deep concern. "What's up, baby?"

Logan's lower lip wobbled immediately. "Daddy no go."

Shane's heart sank.

Tomorrow was the start of practice. The hockey season right around the corner.

"Oh, sweetheart..."

Logan climbed into his lap instantly, wrapping himself around Shane's chest. "No hockey."

Behind them Ilya stopped unpacking silently.

Shane held Logan close. "Daddy and Papa have practice tomorrow, baby."

"Noooo." Tears started spilling immediately now. "Stay home."

The sound shattered something inside Shane. “We’ll only be gone a little while,” he promised softly.

“I no want Monica come.”

Their babysitter Monica was wonderful and Logan adored her normally, but clearly cottage life had spoiled him completely.

Ilya crossed the room quietly and sat beside them. “Hey.” He brushed Logan’s curls gently back from his damp cheeks. “Look at me malysh.”

Logan hiccuped sadly.

“Papa and Daddy always come home,” Ilya said softly.

“Always,” Shane agreed immediately.

Logan’s tiny hands clutched harder into Shane’s shirt. “But miss you.”

Shane nearly cried on the spot. “Oh, baby.” He kissed Logan’s forehead over and over. “We miss you too.”

“Very much,” Ilya added quietly.

Logan sniffled hard. “You promise?”

“We promise.”

Ilya held out his pinky solemnly. Logan stared at it for a few seconds then slowly hooked his tiny finger around Ilya’s. Shane added his own immediately.

A tiny three-way pinky promise.

“You know what?” Shane whispered. “I think tomorrow after practice we’ll all go out and get ice cream.”

Logan looked interested despite himself. “Blue one?”

“You cannot keep eating blue things,” Ilya muttered.

“Blue good.”

Shane laughed weakly through the ache in his chest.

Eventually Logan calmed enough to curl up between them on the couch while they watched cartoons together.

And later that night, after Logan finally drifted asleep tucked against Shane’s chest— Ilya looked over quietly. “You still want another one?”

Shane looked down at their son. Then back at Ilya.

More than ever.

“Yes,” he whispered.

---

Two weeks into training camp, Shane felt like he was dying.

Not dramatically, well...Maybe a little dramatically.

But in his defense, the nausea had hit him halfway through practice while he was skating drills beside Ilya and nearly sent him face-first into the boards.

One second he was fine. The next his stomach rolled so violently he actually gagged. “Oh, fuck,” he muttered, slowing abruptly.

Coach Wiebes immediately blew his whistle from across the ice. “Hollander!”

Shane lifted one gloved hand weakly. “One sec-”

That turned out to be optimistic.

The nausea surged harder and Shane barely made it off the ice before he was ripping his helmet off and stumbling toward the locker room.

Behind him Coach Wiebes looked deeply alarmed. “What’s happening?”

“I-I don’t know,” Shane managed tightly.

Coach’s eyes immediately snapped toward Ilya. “Rozanov. Go with him.”

“I’m fine,” Shane protested automatically.

Neither man listened to him.

Typical.

Ilya was already following him down the tunnel, skates clacking sharply against the concrete floor.

“Shane.”

“I said I’m fi-” He didn’t get to finish the sentence. The second they reached the locker room Shane practically lunged for the nearest trash can and threw up violently.

“Oh,” Ilya said immediately, all sharpness disappearing from his voice.

Shane groaned miserably against the rim of the bin. “This is humiliating.”

“Less talking.”

“Bossy.”

Ilya crouched beside him, one hand automatically rubbing between his shoulder blades while Shane dry-heaved pathetically for another minute.

The whole thing came completely out of nowhere. No warning. No headache. No fever. Just instant nausea.

Finally Shane sagged back against the bench breathing hard. “There,” he muttered weakly. “See? I’m dying.”

“You are not dying.”

“Debatable.”

Ilya grabbed him a water bottle and waited until Shane rinsed his mouth properly before speaking again. “How long have you felt sick?”

Shane shrugged tiredly. “Since like... ten minutes ago.”

“You felt completely normal this morning?”

“Yeah.”

Ilya narrowed his eyes slightly.

Shane noticed immediately. “Oh my god,” he groaned. “Don’t start.”

“Start what?”

“The look.”

“I have no look.”

“You absolutely have a look. It’s the same look you gave me right before you stated ‘Shane you are having baby’ right in the middle of that bathroom.”

Ilya stayed silent.

Which was confirmation enough honestly.

Shane pointed accusingly at him. “It’s probably just bad takeout.”

“You said the same thing last time.”

Shane froze. Unfortunately that silence was also very telling. Because both of them remembered the signs they’d so easily brushed off. Nausea. Exhaustion. Sudden sickness.

Logan.

“No,” Shane said immediately.

“I did not say anything.” Ilya shrugged casually, leaning against the wall.

“You thought it.”

“I literally did not.”

“You Russianly thought it.”

“That is not a phrase.”

Shane rubbed a hand over his face tiredly. “It’s not that.”

Maybe. Probably. Hopefully.

Ilya still looked unconvinced.

But after another few minutes when Shane stopped looking actively green, he finally stood and offered him a hand up. “You going back out there?”

Shane took the hand automatically. “Coach will kill me if I don’t.”

“You nearly threw up on the ice.”

“And yet capitalism persists.”

Ilya snorted softly despite himself.

“Come on,” Shane sighed. “Let’s finish practice.”

By the time they got home several hours later, Shane felt exhausted down to his bones. Not sick exactly. Just... drained. Training camp was always brutal, but this felt different somehow.

The second he walked through the front door Logan came barreling toward him at full speed.

“DADDYYYYY!”

Shane barely had time to drop his bag before catching him automatically. “Hey baby.”

Logan immediately grabbed his face. “Monica let me make dinosaur cookies!”

From the kitchen Monica laughed. “I supervised. Barely.”

“Was there flour on the ceiling?” Ilya asked suspiciously while setting down his own gear.

A pause.

“...Maybe,” Monica admitted.

Logan gasped happily. “BIG flour.”

Shane smiled weakly and carried Logan toward the couch before basically collapsing onto it bonelessly. Everything hurt. Or maybe he was just tired in the awkward aching way.

Logan instantly curled into his side like a heat-seeking missile. “Daddy guess what.”

“What?”

“I see worm outside.”

“Wow.”

“BIG worm.”

“Life-changing.”

Logan nodded seriously. “Monica say no keep him.”

“Monica was correct.” Shane confirmed, pressing a kiss into his dark blonde curls.

From the kitchen Monica called, “He tried to name it.”

“He lonely!” Logan defended.

Shane laughed softly despite himself, eyes drifting shut briefly as Logan continued rambling happily about his day.

Apparently there had also been :

- A very rude squirrel.
- Three dinosaur cookies casualties.
- An argument with Bluey.
- A tragic incident involving apple juice.

Monica eventually appeared beside the couch carrying Logan’s backpack full of wonderful things and surprises. “He was honestly really good today,” she said warmly.

Logan puffed up proudly at the praise. “I helper.”

“You are the best helper buddy.” Shane murmured.

Monica smiled knowingly at Shane. “And yes, all of his stories are somehow true.”

“I figured.”

Ilya walked Monica to the door while Logan continued chattering softly against Shane’s chest.

“You sleepy, Daddy?”

“A little.”

“You old now?”

Shane wheezed. “Excuse me?”

“Papa say knees make sounds.”

“Your papa’s knees make sounds. Not mine.”

Logan giggled wildly.

The warmth of him curled against Shane combined with the low murmur of Bluey playing in the background and the lingering exhaustion pulling at his body made his eyelids impossibly heavy. He vaguely heard Monica leaving. He vaguely heard Ilya coming back down the hallway.

But by then Logan had tucked himself fully into Shane’s side beneath the blanket and was tracing lazy circles against Shane’s hoodie sleeve.

“Daddy?”

“Mhm?”

“I love you.”

Shane’s chest tightened painfully. “I love you too, baby. So so much.”

Then everything faded softly into the land of sleep.

When Ilya finally came back into the living room a minute later, he stopped in the doorway. Shane was completely passed out on the couch. One arm wrapped loosely around Logan.

Logan, very much awake, looked over immediately and whispered: “Shhh. Daddy sleepy.”

Bluey played quietly across the television while late afternoon sunlight spilled warm across both of them.

Shane looked exhausted even in sleep. More exhausted than training camp alone should explain.

Ilya’s gaze lingered on him for a long moment. Then slowly shifted downward toward Shane’s stomach.

Logan noticed immediately. Tiny hazel eyes narrowed suspiciously. “Papa?”

Ilya blinked once. “Mm?”

“Why you lookin’ at Daddy like weird?”

Ilya huffed a quiet laugh through his nose. “Nothing synok.” But as he crossed the room and sat carefully beside them, one thought looped relentlessly in the back of his mind.

Please let him throw up at practice tomorrow. Let me be right again...

Shane didn't get any better. Three days after throwing up at practice, he was still exhausted. Still nauseous. Still randomly gagging at smells that had never bothered him before.

By Friday morning he nearly threw up because Ilya made eggs.

"Absolutely not," Shane groaned, abandoning his coffee immediately. "Why do they smell like that?"

Ilya slowly lowered the frying pan. "...They smell like eggs."

"Yeah, exactly. Disgusting."

From his booster seat Logan looked personally offended. "I like eggs."

"You also ate half a glue stick last year."

"Is nice."

Ilya stayed very quiet. Too quiet. Because now that he'd started noticing the signs, he couldn't stop. The exhaustion. The nausea. The sensitivity to smells. Even the way Shane kept absently rubbing his stomach like he didn't realize he was doing it.

It dragged Ilya straight back to three years ago. Back to the "flu." Back to Shane insisting he was just run down. Back to months of completely missed signs until labor started at the NHL Awards and Logan entered the world screaming on a bathroom floor.

The memory still made Ilya mildly homicidal.

So by Friday afternoon, after Shane once again disappeared into the bathroom to throw up after practice, Ilya finally snapped. "You are taking a pregnancy test."

Shane looked up from where he sat miserably on the bathroom floor. "...Excuse me?"

"You heard me."

"Ilya."

"No."

Shane stared at him in disbelief. "You think I'm pregnant because I threw up twice?"

"Six times."

"You're counting?!"

"Yes."

"That's psychotic."

Ilya crossed his arms. “You are nauseous. Exhausted. Emotional.”

“I am not emotional.”

Yesterday the man had cried at a dog food commercial. Ilya merely raised one eyebrow.

“...That golden retriever missed his owner,” Shane muttered weakly.

“Pregnancy test.”

“It’s probably just a stomach bug.”

“You said that last time.”

Shane froze instantly. The silence stretched. Because they both remembered.

“Oh my god,” Shane whispered. “No.”

“You had cryptic pregnancy for seven months. You said is flu , I listen and then suddenly we have baby and you panic!”

“That doesn’t happen twice.”

“I googled it.”

“You WHAT?”

“It can happen twice.”

Shane looked horrified.

Logan chose that exact moment to wander into the bathroom carrying Rexie upside down.

“Daddy why you yellin’?”

“We’re having a discussion,” Shane said weakly.

“Papa grumpy?”

“Always,” Shane muttered.

“I heard that.”

Eventually, mostly because Ilya absolutely refused to let it go, Shane gave in with deep reluctance. “Fine,” he sighed dramatically. “Fine. I’ll take the stupid test.”

“Good.”

“But when it’s negative, I get to make fun of you forever.”

Ilya looked unconvinced. He happily took Logan with him to the pharmacy because apparently leaving Shane alone for twenty minutes was safer for everyone involved.

Logan loved errands. Mostly because he viewed grocery stores as a magical kingdom full of snacks.

“Papa!” Logan called excitedly from inside the cart. “Can we buy gummy dinos?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because last time you hid them in your bed.”

“They lonely.”

“Mm. That is reason for everything with you.”

They grabbed the tests quickly.

Well. As quickly as possible with a three year old narrating every single aisle dramatically. Then, while passing the refrigerated section, Logan suddenly gasped. “Daddy milkshakes!”

Ilya looked over. Protein shakes. Shane’s favorites.

Logan pointed excitedly. “Daddy like chocolate one.”

Something warm and painful twisted in Ilya’s chest instantly. Because Logan noticed everything.

Always.

“We get for Daddy?” Logan asked hopefully.

Ilya softened immediately. “Yes, malysh. We can get him some.”

Logan beamed so proudly you’d think he’d personally invented kindness.

By the time they got home, Logan was practically vibrating with excitement carrying the small bag of protein shakes in both arms.

“Daddyyyy!”

Shane looked up from the couch where he’d been curled miserably beneath a blanket.

“What’s up, baby?”

Logan marched over proudly and presented the drinks like an offering. “For you.”

Shane blinked in surprise before his whole face softened. “Oh, sweetheart.”

“Papa buyed them.”

“You picked them out?”

Logan nodded hard. "Chocolate one your fav'rit."

Something emotional flickered across Shane's face immediately. He pulled Logan into his lap and kissed the top of his curls over and over. "Thank you, baby."

Logan giggled. "You sickie. Smells."

"Wow. Rude."

"Need milkshake. You feel better."

Honestly fair.

Ilya watched them quietly from the kitchen doorway while Shane held Logan close for another moment before finally sighing.

"Okay." He looked up reluctantly. "I'm going."

Logan blinked. "Where?"

"Just to the bathroom buddy."

"Okay."

The sheer lack of concern from toddlers remained incredible.

Shane grabbed the bag with the tests and pointed accusingly at Ilya on his way past. "You're insane, by the way."

"We will see."

"You're lucky I love you."

"I know."

Then Shane disappeared down the hallway. The next fifteen minutes felt endless. Mostly because Ilya was trying not to pace visibly in front of Logan. Instead he sat on the living room floor helping build dinosaur towers while his brain screamed at him internally.

Logan happily stacked blocks on Rexie's head. "Papa look."

"I'm looking."

"Baby dinosaur house."

The word baby made Ilya's stomach flip violently. He remembered Logan as a newborn so clearly. Tiny. Warm. Perfect. And now— Maybe, possibly they would have another one to love and adore.

"Papa?" Logan asked quietly.

Ilya blinked down at him. “Mm?”

“Daddy okay?”

“Da. He is okay.”

“Why Daddy takin’ long poop?”

Ilya choked on air. “Jesus Christ.”

“PAPA.”

“Sorry.”

Logan pointed immediately toward the kitchen. “Swear jar.”

Of course.

Because apparently teaching toddlers accountability was a mistake. Ilya was still muttering under his breath while digging coins from his wallet when footsteps finally sounded down the hallway.

Both of them looked up immediately.

Shane stood frozen near the living room entrance. White as a sheet. One hand gripping the bathroom doorframe. And shaking.

Ilya stood instantly. “Shane?”

Shane looked directly at him with enormous wide eyes. “You were right,” he whispered.

The room went silent.

Then Shane laughed once in complete disbelief. “How the fuck did you know?”

“DADDY!” Logan gasped loudly in horror. “PUT COINS IN SWEAR JAR!”

The tension shattered instantly. Shane stared at him. Ilya made a strangled noise that might’ve been laughter.

Logan pointed furiously toward the kitchen again. “THAT BIG SWEAR.”

Shane burst into hysterical laughter so suddenly he nearly doubled over. “Oh my god.”

“That TWO coins,” Logan informed him seriously.

Still laughing shakily, Shane scrubbed both hands over his face before looking back at Ilya.

And suddenly the reality of it settled fully into the room. Pregnant. Again. This time it was all planned.

Wanted.

And they were so loved already.

Ilya crossed the room slowly like he was afraid sudden movement might break something. When he reached Shane, he cupped his face carefully in both hands. “You are really pregnant.”

Shane let out another disbelieving laugh, eyes glassy now. “Apparently... holy shit Ilya, we’re having another baby.”

Behind them Logan looked between both of them in confusion. “...Daddy?”

Shane looked down at him helplessly. And before either adult could figure out how to explain anything— Logan gasped dramatically.

His tiny mouth fell open. “BABY ISLA?!”

Ilya chuckled through his tears. “He is too smart for his own good.”

“Logiebear, it’s a secret okay? You can’t say that out loud just yet.” Shane pleaded.

It wasn’t their smartest idea taking a pregnancy test with a child present.

“I whisper?” Logan frowned in confusion.

“Da, you whisper about baby. No shouting.” Ilya agreed fondly, stroking back their sons curls.

“Otay.”

Shane looked between his boys with pure adoration, hand slowly moving to rest against the flat surface of his stomach. “Our little secret for now.”

---

The earliest appointment Shane’s OB could get them in for was three days later. Three very long days. Three days of Shane randomly staring at walls in disbelief. Three days of Ilya looking unbearably smug every time Shane gagged at the smell of coffee. And three days of Logan, despite their conversation, loudly informing everyone that “Daddy got baby Isla in tummy now.”

Including Monica. Including the grocery cashier. And unfortunately, one of their teammates Evan Dykstra.

Luckily enough, Evan was a pretty quiet guy meaning their secret remained safe for now.

“Kids cannot keep secrets,” Shane groaned as they sat in the waiting room Friday morning. “Especially not our kid. Can you believe he done that?! He’s lucky it was only Dykstra in the locker room!”

Across from him Logan sat happily coloring dinosaurs while kicking his little legs against the chair.

Ilya looked entirely unbothered beside him. “He is excited.”

“He told Coach Wiebe before we even had the chance to open our mouths at that meeting.”

Ilya’s mouth twitched. “I think Coach was happy for us.”

“Coach looked terrified.”

He most likely was, the three year old terror screaming about baby Isla in his face had no doubt been the cause.

Shane shifted nervously in his seat, one hand unconsciously resting against his stomach again. Six weeks. Maybe.

The number still didn’t feel real.

This time was already so different from Logan. For one, they knew this baby existed. It wasn’t hidden away awaiting their day of birth to hit them with the shock factor.

But there was also no panic, no confusion. No denial wrapped around fear so tightly Shane couldn’t breathe through it.

Now there was excitement too. Nerves, definitely. But mainly excitement. With Ilya and their son beside him getting to experience it all from the very beginning.

“Mr. Hollander?” the nurse called warmly.

Logan immediately pointed. “That Daddy!”

“Yes it is,” Shane laughed softly.

A few minutes later the exam room door opened again and Dr. Celia Parkins stepped inside carrying Shane’s chart.

She smiled the second she saw them. “Well,” she said warmly, “this is certainly a more exciting visit than your usual six-month checkups.”

Shane laughed nervously. “You could say that.”

Dr. Parkins had been Shane’s OB and reproductive health specialist since way before Logan’s birth.

She hadn’t had the chance to present for the delivery , by the time Shane ended up unexpectedly giving birth in an NHL Awards bathroom, emergency staff had handled everything.

The first time Dr. Parkins actually saw him after the life changing event was three weeks postpartum during his recovery appointment.

A meeting Shane remembered vividly because he'd cried halfway through it from the sheer guilt of leaving his newborn and boyfriend alone.

Since then she'd continued monitoring his reproductive health every six months, she wanted to be especially careful after the cryptic pregnancy. "You look healthier this time," she noted gently while sitting down.

"Less traumatized too," Shane admitted. "No more accidental bathroom baby's. That helps."

Logan looked up from his coloring. "Daddy had me in potty room."

Dr. Parkins pressed her lips together clearly trying not to laugh. "Yes," she said solemnly. "I've heard the story."

"I'm never escaping it," Shane muttered.

"Nope," Ilya agreed immediately.

The appointment moved through the standard questions first. Like, was he experiencing the usual suspects. Fatigue. Nausea. Appetite changes.

Shane answered while Logan quietly made dinosaur roaring noises into the paper lining the exam table.

"Any cramping?" Dr. Parkins asked.

"A little."

"Bleeding?"

Shane shook his head.

"Alright." She made a few notes before glancing back up. "And when was your last fertility cycle?"

Male carriers didn't menstruate like female reproductive systems did, but they still experienced hormonal fertility cycles. Heightened fertility windows that caused increased discharge, scent changes, temperature fluctuations, and hormonal symptoms rather than bleeding.

Shane thought for a moment. "About seven weeks ago?"

Beside him Ilya smirked instantly.

Shane narrowed his eyes. "Why are you smiling like that?"

"You remember too."

Unfortunately Shane did remember. Very clearly. Because Ilya became absurdly clingy during Shane's fertile periods. And it just so happened to be that time of the month when Yuna and David took Logan for the night.

Dr. Parkins looked entirely unsurprised as she noted the timing down. "And you mentioned over the phone that you're a little worried over how things will go given your last pregnancy was cryptic?" she continued.

Shane nodded.

"Yeah." He rubbed nervously at his knee. "I didn't know until labor so I kinda missed out on all of this sorta stuff. I mean, I get the gist of it, but- I-it's not really the same as experiencing it. It's all a little much. I honestly don't know what's worse, having a surprise baby or dealing with the anxiety that comes with knowing and having to wait to know that they're healthy and okay."

Logan proudly added, "I SURPRISE BABY."

"You certainly were," Shane snorted weakly.

Dr. Parkins smiled gently. "Well it says on your postpartum records and imaging from after your last birth, Logan was positioned very posteriorly during the pregnancy." She gestured lightly. "He developed more toward your back instead of outward. Combined with relatively mild symptoms and his small birth weight, it makes sense you didn't visibly show. There were no issues with the pregnancy and everything developed exactly as it should. I see no reason for this pregnancy to be any different." she said kindly, "of course there's no guarantee your body will behave in the same way again. Every pregnancy is different after all. But that doesn't necessarily mean it will be bad."

Shane blinked. "So I might actually look pregnant this time around?"

"It's entirely possible." She smiled. "Or you may not. Your body may have changed in the last three years and adapt to the pregnancy with ease. It also may depend on what position the baby lays in. If they're anything like Logan and want to lay towards your back then there is still the chance that you won't show at all again. But like I said, it's all up to your body, we can't decide for it unfortunately."

The possibility settled warmly in Shane's chest. A visible pregnancy. Actually getting to experience everything. It sounded pretty nice. He hoped his body would change this time around. He wanted it to.

"Alright," Dr. Parkins said after finishing her notes. "Let's take a look at this baby."

The room instantly quieted. Ilya's hand found Shane's automatically. Warm and steady in support. The lights dimmed slightly while he settled nervously back onto the exam table.

"This early we'll need to use an internal ultrasound," Dr. Parkins explained gently. "It gives us a much clearer image at this stage."

Shane nodded.

He had no idea what to expect from this. The whole thing was so new to him. The only things he'd ever gotten to experience with Logan came after the birth..

He turned to look at the three year old who sat nearby in a chair hugging Rexie while watching with huge curious eyes. "See baby ?" he asked cutely.

"Yeah, sweetheart," Shane smiled softly. "We'll see the baby."

The ultrasound monitor flickered on.

At first the screen looked like blurry gray shadows. Dr. Parkins adjusted the probe carefully while studying the image. Then finally, "There we are."

A tiny shape appeared on the screen.

Shane's breath caught instantly. "Oh my god."

Beside him Ilya went completely still.

"At approximately six weeks," Dr. Parkins explained softly, "everything is measuring exactly on schedule."

Shane stared at the screen in complete disbelief. There was actually a baby there. Already so real and impossibly perfect.

The room felt strangely fragile around him.

Then Dr. Parkins pressed another button on the machine. And suddenly a rapid rhythmic sound filled the room. Their baby's heartbeat sounded out into the room. It was fast , faster than either one of them had been expecting.

Shane made a soft broken noise immediately. Beside him Ilya inhaled sharply like the sound physically hit him. Their baby. Their baby's heartbeat.

"Oh," Shane whispered, tears flooding his eyes instantly. "Oh my- Ilya."

Ilya's grip on his hand tightened almost painfully.

Logan looked up quickly. "Baby makin' noises!"

Neither of them could answer for a moment. Because suddenly it was real in a completely different way. Not just a few tests. Not just symptoms. A heartbeat. A tiny little life already growing.

Dr. Parkins smiled warmly at both of them. "Strong cardiac activity," she said gently. "Everything looks beautiful."

Shane laughed shakily through tears. "I can't believe there's really a baby in there."

“There is,” Ilya whispered.

Shane turned toward him immediately.

Ilya looked completely wrecked emotionally, eyes glassy as he stared at the monitor. And somehow seeing him like that nearly made Shane cry harder.

“You okay?” Shane whispered softly.

Ilya laughed once under his breath. “More than.”

Then he leaned forward and kissed Shane carefully, emotionally, while still holding his hand.

From his chair Logan immediately cheered:

“YAY BABY ISLAAA!”

The ultrasound pictures were tucked carefully into Shane’s jacket pocket as they drove, like they might somehow crease if he breathed too hard.

In the backseat, Logan was happily kicking his little trainers against the leather seat, talking nonstop in the way only a three-year-old could. “-an’ Baby Isla can watch Bluey wif me an’ she can have my yellow dino but not Rexie ’cause Rexie’s MY best friend an’-”

“Buddy,” Shane interrupted gently for what had to be the fifth time since leaving the clinic, “the baby might not be a girl.”

“It is,” Logan said immediately.

Ilya huffed a laugh from the driver’s seat.

Shane pointed accusingly at him. “You are supposed to help me.”

“I learned very quickly,” Ilya replied gravely, “that once Logan decides something, the discussion is over.”

“Baby is girl!” Logan said proudly. “Papa knows.”

Shane groaned and slid lower in his seat while Ilya grinned beside him.

Twelve weeks pregnant and already being outvoted before even adding another child to the mix.

His hand drifted unconsciously to his stomach. Still flat enough most people wouldn’t notice. But Shane noticed. Especially now after the scan.

After seeing the baby move and twitch. Tiny arms. Tiny legs. A fluttering heartbeat that had instantly made Shane want to cry even though he’d sworn beforehand he wouldn’t.

This pregnancy felt unreal in the complete opposite way Logan’s had.

With Logan, there had been no warning. No symptoms anyone caught properly. No bump. No real understanding of what was happening until Shane had gone into labor and suddenly there had been a screaming newborn in his arms and terrified paramedics trying to squeeze their way out of the luxury bathroom.

This time he knew. This time he got to experience it all. The appointments. Possibly the bump. The exhaustion. The tiny little ultrasound pictures folded safely in his pocket. The pure joy of watching something they created from love grown from scratch.

“You okay?” Ilya asked quietly, glancing over.

Shane smiled softly. “Yeah, I’m good.”

From the backseat Logan piped up again, “You finkin’ ’bout Baby Isla?”

Shane laughed helplessly. “Sure am, buddy.”

Satisfied, Logan went right back to babbling about dinosaurs and babies and snacks.

It was the perfect bubble of bliss.

---

It took Shane six weeks to finally come up with the courage to go and tell his parents the news. There was something so intimidating about it, something he wasn’t quite prepared to feel. Ilya was more than happy that morning when he finally decided enough was enough, he wanted people to know. Wanted them to share in their joy.

Yuna opened the front door before they even had the chance to knock. “There you are-” she started warmly before narrowing her eyes suspiciously. “Why do all three of you look so guilty?”

David appeared behind her holding a mug of coffee. “That’s usually not a promising sign.”

“Nana Una!” Logan yelled immediately.

Yuna barely had time to brace herself before he launched at her legs. “Oh! There’s my sweetheart,” she laughed, scooping him up. “You’re getting so heavy.”

“No’m not.”

“You absolutely are.”

“PawPaw Davey!” Logan demanded, already reaching toward David.

David took him with a smile. “Hey, buddy.”

Logan grabbed David’s cheeks dramatically. “Baby Isla on screen today.”

The room went completely silent.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

Ilya looked very interested in the colour of the sky.

Yuna's gaze snapped immediately to Shane. "Oh my god," she whispered.

David blinked. "Baby... what?"

Logan wriggled excitedly in his arms. "Baby Isla! In Daddy's tummy!"

Yuna made a strangled sound.

Shane laughed nervously. "Well. I guess that's one way to tell you."

"You're pregnant?" David said, stunned.

"We had our twelve week scan today," Shane admitted softly.

Yuna burst into tears instantly. "Oh, sweetheart—" She crossed the room and wrapped Shane in a crushing hug before he could brace himself.

"I'm okay," Shane laughed breathlessly. "You don't need to cry mom.."

"I know!" she sniffed. "I'm just emotional! Another baby! It's so amazing."

David joined a second later, pulling both Shane and Ilya into a rough hug while Logan squished happily between everybody.

"I KNEWED FIRST," Logan announced proudly.

"You absolutely did not," Shane said.

"Yes I did. You peed onna stick."

David choked on his own laughter.

Ilya nearly folded in half.

Yuna slapped a hand over her mouth, horrified and delighted all at once.

Logan continued happily, unaware of the destruction he was causing. "An' den Daddy cried an' Papa cried an' Papa picked me up."

Shane buried his face in his hands. "Fantastic. Wonderful. Love that for me."

"You took the test in front of him?" David wheezed.

"We didn't think he understood what was happening," Ilya managed.

"I BIG," Logan argued. "Baby Isla was there."

Yuna was laughing so hard tears kept spilling down her cheeks again. “I love him so much, he’s hilarious.”

Shane finally pulled the ultrasound pictures from his pocket and handed them over.

That quieted everyone immediately.

Yuna stared down at the grainy little image like it was something sacred. “Oh...” David moved beside her, his entire expression softening.

“There’s the head,” Shane said quietly, pointing. “And apparently the baby refused to sit still.”

“Just like Logan,” David said warmly. “A little wiggle worm.”

“No,” Shane said immediately. “This one can stop that whilst they’re still inside. I burn enough calories a day chasing after one of Logan,”

That earned a loud laugh from both of them.

Then Yuna looked back at Shane properly. At the nervous happiness on his face. At the way his hand kept drifting protectively toward his stomach. And her expression gentled instantly. “This must feel very different,” she said softly. “Amazing different.”

Shane nodded. “Yeah,” he admitted. “It really does.” His voice turned quieter. “With Logan... everything just happened. I didn’t even know I was pregnant until he was literally born.” He laughed softly in disbelief. “One minute I thought I was sick and the next I had a baby... I mean you were there, you know how it went.”

David muttered, “Worst night of my life.”

“And you weren’t even the one delivering him on a hotel bathroom floor,” Ilya pointed out. “Was a bad night for all involved.”

“Fair.”

Shane smiled a little, eyes dropping back to the scan photo. “But this time I get to know the baby first.”

The room went warm and quiet around him.

Then Logan shattered it. “An’ HER name is Isla.”

Everyone burst out laughing again.

Shane dropped his forehead against Ilya’s shoulder dramatically. “I’m never winning this argument.”

“Nope,” Ilya said, kissing his temple.

Yuna smiled at Logan. “What if the baby’s a boy, sweetheart?”

Logan frowned at her like she’d asked the dumbest question imaginable. “But she’s a girl.”

“And if the baby isn’t?” David teased.

Logan thought very hard about this. Then he shrugged. “Still Isla.”

Their secret lasted exactly nine more days after telling Yuna and David.

Which, honestly, Shane thought was impressive considering Logan existed. For those nine days Logan had been repeatedly reminded that Daddy’s baby was still a secret. And for those nine days Logan had nodded very seriously and promised, “I no tell.” Then immediately asked strangers at the grocery store if they wanted to see Baby Isla.

“You told Uncle Hayden! Is this true, Logan David!?” Shane asked in mock offense two days later.

They were all gathered in Hayden and Jackie’s backyard around the outdoor table while Logan ran circles around the garden with Luca and Wyatt chasing behind him.

“I DID,” Logan yelled proudly from halfway across the lawn.

Hayden was laughing so hard he nearly spilled his beer. “He marched up to me last week,” Hayden explained, “put both hands on my face and said-” he switched to an overly serious toddler voice, ““Daddy got baby in tummy but is SECRET.””

Jackie buried her face in her hands laughing.

Rose was nearly crying. “Of course he did. God I love that kid.”

“You really tried to keep it secret even after Logan knew?” Troy asked incredulously. “He’s three! Of course he was gonna tell everyone.”

“Well... we kinda hoped everyone would take it as a joke or think that maybe they misheard him!” Shane admitted weakly.

“Your first mistake,” Svetlana informed him dryly, “was assuming a three-year-old whispers.”

“I telled Uncle Hayden first,” Logan announced again, climbing into Shane’s lap.

“Yes, buddy, we gathered that.”

Logan beamed proudly at the accomplishment.

Luca leaned over the table toward Shane. “Honestly? I’m impressed you kept it hidden twelve weeks. That kid narrates his entire life.”

“Papa says I’m helpful,” Logan informed them.

Ilya nodded happily. “You help me remember things I forget all the time malysh! Is very good.”

Wyatt grinned. “So when are we taking bets on whether the baby’s actually named Isla?”

“Never,” Shane said immediately. “Fuck all of you.”

From his lap Logan gasped. “Daddy!”

The entire table dissolved into laughter again.

---

The baby’s first kick happened at a little over nineteen weeks.

Shane was half asleep on the couch with his legs draped over Ilya’s lap while some terrible reality show played quietly in the background. “I still think this woman is going to murder her husband,” he mumbled sleepily.

“She probably should,” Ilya agreed.

Shane shifted slightly and froze. His hand moved instinctively to his stomach. His boyfriend immediately went on high alert.

“What?”

Shane’s eyes widened. “Wait.”

Ilya straightened immediately. “What happened?”

“I think-”

Then it happened again. A tiny flutter. Soft and unmistakable.

Shane sucked in a sharp breath. “Holy shit.”

“What? Shane, you are scaring me...”

Shane grabbed Ilya’s wrist and shoved his hand against the soft skin of his stomach. For a second nothing happened.

Then— Tap.

Ilya went completely still. The baby kicked again, faint but real beneath his palm.

Both of them stared at each other.

“Oh,” Ilya whispered, sounding genuinely stunned.

Shane started laughing and crying at the same time. “There’s a whole person in there,” he said shakily.

Ilya's expression crumpled into something unbearably soft as he leaned down, pressing his forehead carefully against Shane's stomach.

"Hi, Malysh.. oh we love you so much."

Another tiny kick answered him.

Shane burst into fresh tears immediately. It was unlike anything he'd ever felt before. It made him sad to think he never got to feel this with Logan. His positioning and front lying placenta made it impossible for him to be felt, even if they had known about him.

But he pushed those thoughts away.

That was the past, this was his now. And his now was pretty damn amazing.

---

By twenty-nine weeks Shane was finally showing enough that strangers would probably be able to notice. It wasn't a lot, but it was a slight curve that was rounded compared to his usual toned physique. Honestly, considering he was nearly seven months pregnant it was still ridiculously subtle.

But it was besides the point. There was finally a visible curve beneath his shirts now. A soft roundness that hadn't been there before.

Ilya adored it. Completely and possibly mildly obsessively.

Shane caught him staring constantly. "What?" He laughed one evening as he stepped out of the bathroom wearing soft sweatpants and one of Ilya's hoodies.

Ilya's gaze immediately dropped to the small bump barely visible beneath the fabric.

"You're beautiful," Ilya said simply.

Shane rolled his eyes automatically even as pink flushed across his cheeks. "I look pregnant."

"Yes," Ilya agreed immediately, like that proved his point. Then he crossed the room, sliding both hands carefully around Shane's waist before crouching slightly to kiss the curve of his stomach through the hoodie.

Shane melted instantly. Hopelessly falling harder for the man he got to call his forever.

"Baby Isla says hi," Logan informed them from the bed where he was supposed to be putting pajamas on and instead had managed to get entirely naked somehow.

Shane laughed helplessly into his hands. "Where did you put your jammies Logiebear?!"

"On floor!"

"Why are they on the floor?"

Ilya snickered as he watched their son fish for a response.

“Cause em’ itchy!” Logan finally stated, pouting up at Shane.

“Uh huh, how about you wear one of daddy’s T-shirts instead. How does that sound?”

“Pwease.”

“You got it baby.”

---

Logan became fascinated with talking to his baby sibling currently incubating within his carrier. Every morning he would climb into bed beside Shane and immediately press his face against the pregnant man’s stomach.

“Hi Baby Isla,” he’d whisper loudly. “Me Logan.”

As though the baby might’ve forgotten overnight.

Sometimes he’d ramble for ten straight minutes about dinosaurs or cartoons or what snacks he thought babies liked.

One afternoon Shane startled awake to find Logan lying across his lap speaking very seriously to the bump. “You gottu’ come out nice, oday?” Logan explained. “No bite Daddy.”

Shane nearly choked laughing.

Ilya, meanwhile, had started teaching Logan tiny Russian phrases. Mostly because Logan loved repeating them.

“Say hi, baby,” Ilya encouraged one evening.

Logan pressed both palms against Shane’s stomach carefully. “Priveet, Malyesh,” he pronounced proudly.

“Very good,” Ilya praised.

Logan giggled when the baby kicked against his hands. “She likes Russian!”

“She.” Shane repeated. “You’re really certain about that aren’t you bud?”

“Yes,” Logan said patiently. “Baby Isla.”

Of course.

Another kick landed beneath Logan’s tiny hands and he gasped like it was the greatest thing he’d ever experienced. “She’s sayin’ hi to me!”

Shane’s chest physically hurt with love.

---

By thirty-two weeks the nursery was finally finished.

Soft sage green walls. A white crib. Tiny dinosaur decals Logan had insisted the baby needed “so she not lonely.” A rocking chair by the window. Folded little clothes tucked neatly into drawers so impossibly tiny Shane still couldn’t process they would fit an actual person.

The house was quiet for once.

Logan had fallen asleep early after an exhausting afternoon at the park and Ilya had gone out to pick up takeout for dinner.

So Shane stood alone in the nursery with one hand resting against his stomach.

Thirty-two weeks.

The bump was still smaller than most people expected, but undeniably there now beneath his loose shirt.

The baby shifted gently the movement causing Shane to smile automatically. “Hey, sweetheart,” he murmured.

The room glowed softly in the evening light.

He looked around slowly.

At the crib, at the blankets. At all of the stuffed dinosaurs Logan had already lined up carefully beside the rocker in an adorable fashion.

Emotion tightened suddenly in Shane’s throat. “You have no idea how excited your brother is to meet you,” he whispered.

The baby kicked softly beneath his palm. Shane laughed wetly. “Yeah, I know. Me too.”

His eyes burned unexpectedly.

“I don’t know who you’re gonna be yet,” he admitted quietly. “But you’re already so loved.”

Another kick.

“You’ve got the best big brother in the whole world waiting for you out here,” Shane continued softly. “And your papa already talks to you like you can understand every word.”

The baby shifted again.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

“When Logan was born everything happened so fast. I didn’t get to do any of this part.” His voice cracked slightly. “I didn’t get to dream about him first.”

His hand spread more carefully across the curve of his stomach.

“But I dream about you all the time.”

The nursery stayed quiet around him except for the soft hum of the baby monitor down the hall and distant city noise outside the windows.

Then Shane smiled through the tears gathering in his eyes.

“You’re gonna love this family, little one.”

---

Logan had always been good at pretending he wasn’t tired.

It was one of the first things Shane had noticed about him as a toddler. The stubborn blinking, the sudden bursts of energy right before collapse, the angry little voice insisting, “I not sleepy,” while barely able to stand upright.

But lately it had become something else entirely.

At thirty-eight weeks pregnant, Shane could feel the shift in the house as sharply as he felt the weight of the baby low in his abdomen. Logan was clingier than usual, trailing after him from room to room with his blanket dragging behind him, asking to be picked up even though Shane physically couldn’t manage it for long anymore. He cried easier. He fought bedtime like it was personal betrayal. And every time Shane settled himself on the couch with a hand pressed against his aching stomach, Logan would crawl into his lap or wedge himself against his side like he needed constant reassurance that Shane wasn’t going anywhere.

Ilya noticed it too.

That night, Logan had dissolved completely.

It started over pajamas. Then brushing teeth. Then because his banana broke in half. By the time Shane finally got him into bed, Logan was red-cheeked and exhausted, sobbing hard enough his tiny body hiccupped. “I don’t want sleep,” he cried miserably into Shane’s shoulder.

“I know, sweetheart.”

“I want baby Isla now.”

The words came out broken by tears.

Shane blinked in surprise before a soft laugh escaped him despite everything. “Yeah?” he murmured, rubbing Logan’s back slowly. “Honestly, buddy? I feel the same way.”

That finally earned a reaction.

Ilya snorted from where he leaned in the doorway, arms folded. “Jesus Christ,” he muttered affectionately. “Even the toddler’s over the waiting.”

Logan sniffled hard, looking between them. “Daddy wants baby now too?”

“So bad,” Shane sighed dramatically. “I needed them out like yesterday.”

Ilya walked over, climbing carefully onto the bed beside them. “You two are unbelievable.”

Logan immediately crawled toward him, clutching at his shirt. “Papa, stay.”

“I’m staying.”

The room was dim except for the bedside lamp, warm gold light spilling over tangled blankets and Logan’s damp curls. Shane shifted with a quiet wince as another dull ache rolled through his lower back. Everything hurt lately. His hips. His stomach. His ribs somehow. Sleep had become almost impossible between the constant pressure and Isla’s midnight gymnastics.

Ilya caught the movement instantly. “You okay?”

“Mhm.”

“That sounded fake, Hollander.”

Shane smiled faintly. “Just uncomfortable.”

Ilya’s expression softened immediately. He reached over, rubbing slow circles against Shane’s thigh beneath the blanket. Logan wedged himself between them, finally quieting as exhaustion started to win the fight.

“Baby Isla taking forever,” Logan mumbled sleepily.

“They are,” Shane agreed.

“Maybe she scared.”

Ilya huffed a laugh. “If they’re anything like your daddy, they are dramatic, not scared.”

Shane nudged him weakly with his foot. “Rude.”

Logan giggled for the first time all evening. That seemed to break the tension entirely.

Within twenty minutes, Logan was asleep sprawled half across Ilya’s chest, one hand still fisted in Shane’s shirt. Ilya lasted maybe another ten before his breathing evened out too, his arm stretched protectively across both of them.

Shane stayed awake longest.

Listening. Feeling. Timing the strange tightening in his stomach that kept coming and going.

Not painful exactly.

Just... there.

Low pressure. Back ache. Tightness wrapping around his abdomen before easing again.

He stared at the ceiling in the dark, counting seconds between them while Logan snored softly against his ribs.

Twenty minutes. Then eighteen. Then fifteen.

His heart kicked a little harder.

Maybe it was something. Maybe it was not.

He eventually drifted off with one hand over his stomach.

The next day when they woke up, the house felt strangely quiet. Like everyone was on edge patiently waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Logan sat at the kitchen table coloring messily while Shane leaned heavily against the counter sipping water, trying unsuccessfully to ignore the steady ache in his lower back.

Ilya was halfway out the door in team gear before he turned abruptly. "Seriously," he said, pointing at Shane. "You call me if anything happens."

"Nothing's happening."

"You are thirty-eight weeks pregnant. Everything is happening."

Shane rolled his eyes.

"I mean it," Ilya continued. "And if labor starts, call Coach Wiebe immediately because there's no chance I am staying at game."

Logan gasped dramatically. "Papa skip hockey?"

"For baby? Da, I will skip hockey."

Shane smiled softly despite himself.

Ilya walked back over, crouching carefully in front of him. His expression changed immediately up close, concern slipping through all the teasing. "You are sure you are okay?"

Shane hesitated only a second.

The contractions, if that's what they were, had continued all morning. Still irregular. Still manageable. He didn't want to worry him for nothing. "I'm okay," he said quietly.

Ilya studied him like he didn't fully believe it, then sighed. "Promise me you'll call."

“I promise.”

Logan demanded goodbye kisses immediately after that, clinging to Ilya’s neck while babbling about goals and snacks and baby Isla all in one breath.

By the time the door closed behind him, Shane was already bracing himself against the kitchen counter through another contraction.

His breath caught.

Okay. So maybe that one hurt a little more than the rest.

Logan looked up instantly. “Daddy?”

“I’m okay, baby.”

But after it passed, Shane reached for his phone anyway.

His mother answered on the second ring.

“Shane?”

“Hi, Mom.” He exhaled slowly. “Um... I think contractions might’ve started.”

There was immediate silence.

“How far apart?”

“Fifteen minutes maybe? They’re not super consistent yet. Been having them since last night.”

“I’m coming over.”

“You don’t have to rush-”

“I’m already getting my shoes on.”

Shane laughed weakly despite the nerves twisting in his stomach.

Yuna arrived less than forty minutes later carrying enough supplies to survive a natural disaster.

Snacks. Extra clothes for herself and his dad. Chargers. A blanket.

Shane stared at the bags as she kicked off her shoes. “Mom, are we evacuating?”

“Hush,” she said immediately, already moving toward him. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired.”

“Pain?”

“Manageable.”

She pressed a hand gently against his cheek before moving into full mother mode without missing a beat.

Within an hour, Logan was happily occupied building towers in the living room while Yuna timed contractions from the couch beside Shane.

Fifteen minutes.

Then fourteen.

Then thirteen.

Shane breathed through another one, fingers gripping the edge of a pillow.

“That looked stronger,” Yuna said quietly.

“It was.”

“Still mostly in your back?”

He nodded tiredly. His whole body felt heavy now. Hot. Restless.

Logan eventually climbed into his lap during a quieter stretch, curling up carefully against Shane’s chest.

“Daddy otay?”

“Mhm.”

“Baby coming?”

“Soon, I think.”

Logan considered this seriously before patting Shane’s stomach. “Okay baby Isla. Come out now.”

Yuna burst into laughter. Meanwhile Shane was nearly crying from how emotional it made him.

His tiny boy was about to be a big brother.

The hours passed by pretty slowly after that.

The hockey game had started on the television mostly for background noise. Shane barely watched it, too busy breathing through increasingly uncomfortable contractions while Yuna quietly monitored everything beside him.

By the third period, Shane couldn’t sit through them anymore. He was pacing the living room when another contraction hit hard enough to stop him completely. “Oh,” he gasped.

Yuna stood immediately. “Shane?”

He bent forward instinctively, one hand braced against the wall. This one wrapped around his entire abdomen, squeezing tight enough to steal his breath. “Okay,” he whispered shakily as it eased. “Okay. That’s different.”

Yuna checked the timer. “Twelve minutes.”

Shane closed his eyes. Then looked toward the television where the game still played completely oblivious. “I think...” He swallowed. “I think you should call Coach Wiebe.”

Yuna’s face softened immediately. “You want Ilya home.”

“I need him home.”

Another contraction threatened already low in his stomach. The ongoing pain in his back causing unwanted tears to blur his vision.

Yuna squeezed his hand once before reaching for her phone.

In the living room, Logan looked up from the floor.

“Papa come home?”

Shane nodded, eyes suspiciously bright. “Yeah, bud,” he said softly. “Papa is coming home.”

---

By the time Ilya finally got home, the adrenaline from the game had completely burned away.

Coach Wiebe had barely finished saying, “Go. Now,” before Ilya was halfway out of the arena still half-dressed in team gear, heart pounding hard enough to make him nauseous.

The drive home felt endless. Every red light irritated him. Every slow driver made him grip the steering wheel tighter. His mind kept spiraling through worst-case scenarios even though Yuna had repeatedly texted him updates.

Still contracting. Still at home. Still okay.

But labor was happening. Actually happening. They were going to have another baby in a matter of hours now.

By the time he unlocked the front door nearly an hour later, he was breathless with nerves.

The first thing he heard was Bluey playing softly from the television. The second was Shane moaning. Low. Pained. Memories of the public bathroom three years ago came flooding back in an instant.

Ilya’s chest tightened instantly.

He dropped his bag by the door and rounded the corner into the kitchen to find Shane bent over the breakfast counter, forearms braced against the surface while Yuna rubbed firm circles into his lower back.

“Oh, sweetheart...” Yuna murmured gently. “Breathe through it.”

Shane let out another broken sound, hips shifting helplessly beneath her hands.

For one awful second, panic surged through Ilya so hard he thought he might actually pass out.

Then Shane looked up. Relief flooded his face immediately. “Ilya-”

“I’m here.”

He crossed the room in seconds.

Yuna stepped aside instantly as Ilya moved behind Shane, wrapping both arms carefully around his stomach and chest while pressing close against his back. “I’m here, baby,” he repeated softly into his hair. “I’m home.”

Shane sagged against him with a shaky breath. His entire body felt tense. Hot and trembling with pure adrenaline. “Hi,” he whispered weakly.

Ilya kissed the side of his head immediately. “Hi.”

Another wave of pain visibly tightened through Shane’s body before slowly easing again. When it passed, he slumped harder against the counter with a miserable groan. “Jesus Christ...”

Ilya rubbed both hands slowly over his stomach and sides. “How long has it been like this?”

“Couple of hours,” Yuna answered gently before Shane could. “Contractions are seven minutes apart now.”

Ilya nodded quickly, still focused entirely on Shane.

“You okay?”

“No,” Shane said honestly.

That almost made Ilya laugh from sheer affection and panic.

Behind them, Logan sat curled happily on the couch in dinosaur pajamas watching Bluey completely unaware his world was currently shifting around him. Every few seconds he giggled at the television.

The contrast of the two nearly gave Ilya emotional whiplash.

Yuna smiled softly at the sight before looking back at Ilya. “David’s on his way over now that we know labor’s definitely started.”

“Thank you for staying,” Ilya said quietly, sincerity flooding every word.

Yuna waved him off immediately. “Of course I stayed.”

Shane suddenly made another sharp noise, fingers tightening painfully around the counter edge. “My back,” he groaned.

Ilya’s attention snapped back instantly. “Hey, hey. Talk to me.”

“It hurts so bad.” Shane’s breathing turned shaky again. “God, it’s just like it was with Logan-”

Yuna immediately pressed harder against his lower back. “Counter pressure?”

“Yes,” Shane gasped.

Ilya moved without hesitation, replacing Yuna’s hands with his own and pushing hard against Shane’s hips and lower spine the way they’d practiced months ago in birthing classes.

The relief was immediate enough Shane nearly collapsed. “Oh my god,” he moaned. “Holy shit.”

“There?”

“Yes-don’t stop.”

Ilya kept steady pressure against his back while Shane breathed raggedly through the contraction. “Is okay,” he murmured. “You are okay.”

Shane shook his head weakly against his shoulder. “This hurts worse than I remembered.”

“At least this time we know what’s happening.”

That earned him a watery glare. “Ilya.”

“I’m serious,” he insisted, grinning despite the fear knotting in his stomach. “Last time you thought you had acid reflux.”

Yuna laughed loudly from beside them.

Shane groaned dramatically. “Don’t remind me.”

“How could I not?” Ilya snorted softly. “You had a whole baby in the bathroom during the NHL awards.”

“I know!.”

“You cried at me because I called an ambulance and it sent you into panic spiral.”

“No, I cried because I thought I was dying!”

“You were giving birth!”

“I didn’t know that!”

Logan looked away from the television then, blinking at them. “Daddy yelling?”

“No baby,” Shane panted immediately. “Daddy’s just being dramatic.”

“That’s true,” Ilya agreed.

Shane elbowed him weakly in the ribs.

Another contraction finally eased enough for Shane to straighten slightly, though he stayed leaning heavily against Ilya’s chest. His face looked flushed now. Exhausted already. A little scared.

Ilya kissed his temple again. “Have you called Dr. Parkins yet?”

Yuna answered before Shane could. “Not yet. I wanted you here first.”

Ilya nodded and reached immediately for Shane’s phone off the counter.

Dr. Parkins answered after only a couple rings.

The conversation was calm and reassuring in a way that made Shane visibly emotional almost immediately.

Seven minutes apart. Back labor. No water breaking yet. Baby still moving.

“No,” Shane muttered miserably halfway through the call. “I hate the phrase early labor.”

Ilya rubbed his shoulder soothingly while Dr. Parkins continued talking.

Finally, after another few minutes, Ilya hung up.

“What’d she say?” Yuna asked.

“She wants us heading to the birthing centre once contractions are consistently five minutes apart.”

Shane stared at him in horror. “Five minutes apart?”

Ilya blinked. “Yeah?”

“That seems too close together.”

“You’re okay.”

“No, because what if the baby comes fast?”

“You’ve been laboring for hours already.”

“Exactly!”

Another contraction threatened low in Shane’s stomach, making him grip Ilya’s wrist tightly. “I don’t wanna have another accidental bathroom baby,” he muttered anxiously.

Yuna burst out laughing again.

Ilya couldn’t help smiling too. “You are not having this baby in a bathroom.”

“You don’t know that.”

“Shane.”

“What if the traffic-”

“We can leave now if you want.”

That stopped him. “You’d go now?”

“If it makes you feel safer? Obviously.”

Shane’s eyes softened instantly at that.

God.

Even exhausted and sweaty and in pain, he looked devastatingly beautiful to Ilya.

“I’m okay,” Shane said quietly after a moment. “I think.”

“Sure?”

“Mhm.”

Ilya brushed sweaty hair gently back from his forehead. “Okay.”

They stayed like that for a few more minutes. Logan watching cartoons nearby while Yuna packed and repacked the hospital bags for the tenth time.

The house felt strange. Everything was normal in terms of space and vibe. Yet it all felt completely different at the same time.

Every few minutes Shane paused breathing through another contraction while Ilya held him upright and counted softly into his ear.

Outside, evening light slowly dimmed across the windows. Inside, everything narrowed smaller and smaller around waiting.

Then another contraction hit.

Hard.

Shane gasped sharply and folded forward against the counter with a strangled groan. “Oh fuck-”

Ilya caught him immediately. “Okay, okay. Breathe for me.”

“My back!”

“I know.”

Shane clung desperately to his forearm while pain rolled visibly through his entire body. This one lasted longer. Long enough that Logan finally looked over again, frowning slightly now.

“Daddy sad?”

Ilya looked toward him gently. “Daddy is okay, kid. Baby’s just working really hard to come meet us. Is tough for dad, da? But is okay.”

Logan considered that seriously. Then nodded once and turned back to Bluey.

Meanwhile Shane buried his face against Ilya’s shoulder, shaking slightly as the contraction finally released him. “I can’t do sixteen more hours of this,” he whispered hoarsely.

Ilya tightened his arms around him instantly.

“You can.”

Shane laughed weakly against his chest. “You sound suspiciously confident.”

“I have to. One of us needs to keep it together.”

That earned him the faintest exhausted smile. And for a moment, despite the fear and pain and waiting, everything felt strangely steady again.

It happened just after six in the evening.

One second Shane was standing in the kitchen gripping the edge of the counter through another brutal contraction while Ilya rubbed pressure into his lower back. The next— A sudden warm gush soaked down his legs.

Shane froze. Ilya froze with him. It felt awfully familiar.

Yuna looked up immediately from the couch.

“Oh,” Shane whispered.

Then his face twisted sharply as another contraction slammed into him almost instantly afterward. “Oh my- S-shit Ilya-”

“Was that your water?” Ilya asked unnecessarily.

“Yes,” Shane gasped, clutching at him. “Holy shit.”

Yuna was already moving.

“Okay,” she said calmly, though excitement absolutely lit up her face. “That means we’re going.”

The house shifted into chaos immediately after that. Hospital bags. Shoes. Phone chargers. Wallets.

Logan waking up groggy and confused on the couch as Bluey continued playing quietly in the background.

Shane barely registered most of it. The contractions had changed again after his water broke , sharper now, deeper, leaving him breathless in a way they hadn’t before. He bent over the kitchen counter again with a strangled groan. “I hate this,” he whimpered.

Ilya immediately pressed against his back. “I know.”

“It hurts so bad.”

“I know.”

Another contraction built before the last one even felt fully gone. Shane made a broken sound into his forearm.

Yuna appeared beside them with coats and bags. “Car’s ready.”

Logan blinked sleepily from the couch. “Daddy?”

Shane looked over immediately. And suddenly started crying. It hit him all at once. The reality. The transition. The fact that the next time Logan saw him, he’d be a big brother.

“Oh, baby,” Shane whispered shakily.

Logan shuffled over in his dinosaur pajamas rubbing at his eyes. “You crying ?”

Shane crouched slowly despite the pain, taking Logan’s little face in both hands.

“Yeah, sweetheart. But don’t worry, Daddy’s okay.”

“You sad?”

“No.” Shane laughed wetly. “Just emotional.”

Logan clearly did not understand the word emotional as he nervously shuffled closer. He wrapped both arms around Shane’s neck cuddling in as much as he possibly could.

“I love you,” Shane whispered fiercely into his curls.

“Wuv you too.”

Another contraction tore through him hard enough to make him gasp against Logan's shoulder.

Ilya instantly reached down, steadying him. "Okay, baby, up we go."

Shane kissed Logan's cheek over and over before finally pulling away. "You stay with Nana and PawPaw, okay?"

"Otay."

"And when you wake up tomorrow—"

"Baby Isla?"

Shane's eyes filled immediately again. "Yeah," he whispered. "Baby Isla."

God he hoped this kid was a girl. They'd never live it down.

Logan grinned sleepily. Then reached down and patted Shane's stomach one last time. "Bye baby."

Ilya genuinely thought that might emotionally destroy Shane on the spot. Instead, Shane somehow made it to the front door before another contraction doubled him over against the wall with a cry. "Jesus Christ—"

"Car. Now," Yuna ordered sympathetically.

The drive to the birthing centre felt simultaneously endless and way too fast.

The contractions were five minutes apart now.

Real and undeniable.

Every single one stole Shane's breath completely.

He leant sideways in the passenger seat because sitting normally hurt too much, forehead pressed against the cool window while Ilya drove one-handed and kept his other hand locked tightly with Shane's.

Another contraction hit.

Shane moaned miserably. "Oh my god, I hate this one—"

"You're okay."

"No, I'm not."

"You are."

"This is so much worse when you know what's happening."

Ilya snorted softly despite the tension. “I highly doubt that.”

Shane turned his head enough to glare at him through watery eyes. “You don’t get to have an opinion on this one, Rozanov. It is me who has to push these kids out of a hole the size of a fucking coin.”

“You-.”

“ILYA.” Another contraction interrupted him completely. Shane cried out low in his throat, gripping the door handle so hard his knuckles whitened. “Fuck, fuck, fuck-”

Ilya’s joking vanished instantly. “Breathe for me, baby.”

“It hurts.”

“I know.”

“My back kills!”

“I know.”

Shane buried his face against the seat as the contraction finally eased enough to let him breathe again. “I can’t believe there’s still more labor after this,” he whispered miserably.

Ilya kissed the back of his hand. “One thing at a time.”

Thankfully, the birthing centre really was only twenty minutes away.

And even more thankfully— there was no accidental highway delivery.

By the time they pulled into the parking area, Shane was trembling from exhaustion and pain. Ilya barely had the car fully stopped before rushing around to help him out.

The cool night air hit Shane’s flushed skin immediately. Another contraction followed seconds later. He folded forward against Ilya with a helpless groan. “Oh god-”

“I’ve got you.”

Inside, the birthing centre was warm and softly lit, intentionally calm in a way that almost felt surreal compared to the chaos in Shane’s body.

A nurse at reception took one look at him clutching Ilya’s hoodie and immediately moved them through.

“You must be Shane.”

“Mhm,” Shane whimpered.

“And it’s safe to say you’re most definitely in labor.”

“No shit,” Shane muttered weakly.

That earned a surprised laugh from down the hallway. A woman with bright red hair appeared moments later wearing navy scrubs and enough energy for five people. “Excellent,” she declared cheerfully. “Sense of humour still intact. We love to see it.”

Shane blinked at her.

She grinned brightly and held out a hand. “I’m Leila. I’ll be your midwife tonight.”

“I love you already,” Shane breathed.

“Good. You’re trapped with me now.”

Ilya immediately liked her.

Mostly because Shane visibly relaxed for the first time in hours.

Leila swept into motion instantly, guiding them into the birthing suite with practiced ease. The room was dimly lit and surprisingly cozy, large bed, birthing ball, monitors tucked discreetly away, soft lighting instead of harsh fluorescent hospital brightness.

Another contraction hit halfway inside the room.

Shane barely made it to the edge of the bed before collapsing forward onto it with a cry.

Leila was beside him instantly. “Okay, sweetheart, breathe.”

“I am breathing,” Shane groaned.

“Questionable.”

Then, like actual divine intervention, she handed him the gas and air mouthpiece.

Shane inhaled once. Then again. His eyes widened slightly. “Oh,” he said in genuine wonder.

Leila smirked. “Better?”

“You’re my favourite person ever.”

“I hear that a lot.”

Ilya laughed softly from beside him, brushing damp hair back from Shane’s forehead while the contraction slowly eased under the gas and air haze. “There he is,” he murmured gently.

Shane leaned heavily into him immediately. “Tired.”

“I know.”

Leila checked monitors efficiently before crouching beside the bed again.

“Alright,” she said warmly. “I’m going to check your dilation, okay?”

Shane looked mildly offended by the concept but nodded anyway.

A few moments later, Leila's eyebrows lifted impressively. "Well now."

Ilya straightened instantly. "What?"

Leila grinned. "You're seven centimetres."

Shane blinked slowly through the gas and air. "What."

"Seven."

Ilya stared at her in disbelief. "Seriously?"

"Very seriously." Leila beamed at Shane. "You've done beautifully at home. Not long now."

Shane looked like he might actually cry from relief. "Not long?" he repeated weakly.

"Nope." She squeezed his knee gently. "Your body knows exactly what it's doing."

Another contraction started building almost immediately after. Shane's face twisted. "Oh no--"

Ilya moved behind him on instinct, pulling Shane upright against his chest while Leila adjusted pillows around them.

"Breathe through it," she coached once more, voice calmly guiding.

Shane inhaled shakily from the mouthpiece as pain rolled visibly through him again. His entire body trembled.

Ilya kissed the side of his head over and over.

"You're doing so good."

Shane moaned softly as his teeth gritted against the plastic end. "My back... fuck I sound like a broken record."

Leila nodded immediately. "Back labor. No wonder you're miserable."

"Thank you for validating me," Shane muttered.

"You're welcome."

Another wave tightened hard enough that Shane buried his face into Ilya's shoulder with a cry. Ilya held him firmly through every second of it. Counting softly. Rubbing his spine. Whispering praise against sweaty skin.

And somewhere underneath all the pain and nerves and exhaustion, excitement began to bloom too.

Because this was real now.

Their baby was coming. Their second baby. They were about to have a family of four.

Over two hours later, the room looked entirely different.

Not physically.

The soft lighting still glowed warmly against the walls. The monitors still beeped quietly in the background. Rain had started tapping gently against the windows sometime after two in the morning.

But the atmosphere had changed. Everything felt heavier now. Thicker.

Labor had settled deep into Shane's bones. He'd been in labor almost twenty-four hours.

And it showed.

His hair was damp with sweat and sticking to his forehead. His cheeks were flushed dark pink. Every muscle in his body seemed tight with strain and exhaustion. Even between contractions he sagged heavily against the raised head of the bed, eyes half-lidded with fatigue while Ilya rubbed slow circles across his thigh and hip.

The gas and air mouthpiece never left Shane's hand anymore. Neither did Ilya's own hand.

Every contraction dragged another broken sound from Shane's throat now — low cries, exhausted moans, shaky gasps against the mouthpiece.

"I can't," Shane whispered after one particularly brutal contraction finally ebbed. Tears slipped helplessly down his face. "I'm so tired."

Ilya's chest physically hurt hearing it.

He brushed damp hair carefully off Shane's forehead before kissing him there gently. "You're doing so well."

Shane shook his head weakly. "No, I'm—" His voice cracked. "I'm actually dying."

"You said that with Logan too."

"That time I believed it."

Leila snorted softly from across the room while adjusting supplies. "I promise you're not dying," she said cheerfully.

Shane glared at her over the gas and air mouthpiece before another contraction suddenly hit. The expression melted instantly. "Oh-oh god- ow!"

His entire body tensed sharply.

Ilya immediately moved closer behind him, both hands pressing firmly into Shane's lower back while Shane groaned loudly into the mouthpiece.

"That's it," Leila coached calmly. "Breathe through it."

Shane inhaled shakily from the gas and air. His knees trembled visibly against the bed. "It hurts," he cried.

"I know," Ilya whispered against his temple. "I know, baby."

The contraction rolled through him brutally slowly before finally easing enough for Shane to sag weakly backward against Ilya's chest.

He looked completely wrecked.

Leila softened immediately. "Alright," she said gently. "I think it's time I check you again."

Shane made a miserable noise. "Please tell me I've accomplished something."

"You most definitely should have."

He barely reacted as she completed the cervical check, too exhausted to care anymore. The room stayed quiet for several seconds.

Then Leila's face lit up. "Oh, Shane."

Shane blinked tiredly through tears. "What?"

"You're fully dilated."

For one second he just stared at her blankly. Then he burst into tears. Actual sobbing relief. "Oh thank god--"

Ilya immediately wrapped both arms around him as Shane grabbed desperately for his forearm. "Hey, hey," Ilya murmured softly, pulling him tightly against his chest. "You did it."

Shane laughed and cried at the same time, face buried against Ilya's shoulder. "I'm so tired."

"I know."

"Please tell me they're almost here."

Leila squeezed Shane's knee warmly. "Your baby is very close."

That alone seemed to give Shane enough strength to keep going. The room shifted again after that. Purposeful now. Focused.

Leila helped reposition Shane carefully onto his knees on the bed, the head of it raised high enough for him to drape his arms over the top for support.

Immediately, he melted forward against it with a shaky groan. "That's better," he whispered.

Ilya practically climbed onto the bed beside him without hesitation, on knee resting on the mattress as his other leg remained straight with his foot against the floor. Settling close enough that Shane could lean back into him whenever he needed.

His large hands immediately found Shane's lower back again, rubbing firmly over the tense muscles that had been tight for hours.

The gas and air mouthpiece remained clenched tightly in Shane's fist. Another contraction built quickly.

Leila noticed instantly. "Okay, Shane," she said calmly, moving into position. "Your body's going to start pushing now. Don't fight it."

Shane nodded weakly. Then the contraction hit.

Hard.

"Oh FUCK-"

His entire body bore down instinctively. The sound that tore out of him made Ilya's heart lurch.

"That's it," Leila encouraged immediately. "Push with it."

Shane cried out loudly as he pushed for the first time, arms trembling violently against the bed. The pressure clearly shocked him. "Oh my god-"

"I know," Leila soothed.

"No, I can feel them-" Another involuntary push dragged through him. Pain flashed across his face immediately after. "They're so low," he gasped.

Ilya pressed kisses desperately against his sweaty shoulder. "You're doing amazing."

Shane shook his head frantically. "No, this is worse-"

"Worse than Logan?"

"Yes!"

Ilya snorted softly. "As I always say.. Impossible."

Shane twisted enough to glare at him with exhausted betrayal before another push overtook him completely. A deep moan escaped him as he bore down hard again.

This labor was different.

With Logan, fear had swallowed everything whole.

The cryptic pregnancy. The confusion. The panic. The sheer terror of suddenly giving birth in a bathroom with no warning. Shock had dulled the edges.

This time Shane felt everything. Every stretch. Every shift. Every inch of the baby moving lower and lower.

And it was overwhelming.

“I can feel them moving down,” Shane cried shakily.

“That means they’re coming,” Leila assured him warmly.

Forty minutes passed slowly after that.

Painfully slowly.

The room filled with Shane’s strained breathing, Leila’s calm counting, and Ilya’s constant soft encouragement in Russian and English alike.

Shane cried more openly now. Not panicked. Just exhausted. At one point he buried his face against the bed and sobbed through a contraction. “I don’t wanna do this anymore.”

Ilya immediately wrapped an arm tighter around his waist.

“You’re almost done.”

“I’ve been almost done forever.”

Leila smiled sympathetically. “That’s a very common labor complaint.”

Another contraction crashed through him before Shane could answer. He moaned loudly into the gas and air mouthpiece while bearing down again, body shaking from effort.

“That’s it,” Leila encouraged. “Beautiful push.”

Ilya glanced down instinctively— And suddenly froze. “Oh.” The sound came out wet and disbelieving.

Shane looked back immediately, panting hard. “W-What?”

Ilya stared between Shane’s legs with wide eyes.

There, barely visible but undeniably real, was a small oval of damp hair slowly emerging with each push before slipping back again.

Emotion punched straight through him so hard it almost hurt. “Baby,” he whispered shakily. “I can see their hair.”

Shane made a broken sound somewhere between a laugh and a sob. “Really?”

“Da, yes.” Ilya blinked rapidly. “Baby has your hair colour this time.”

That earned the faintest exhausted grin. “Only fair,” Shane panted.

Logan had everything inherited from Ilya. The dark blonde hair, the wide doe eyes, the curls, the dramatic expressions and all.

Apparently this baby had chosen differently.

Another contraction slammed into Shane before he could say more. He cried out sharply and inhaled hard from the gas and air mouthpiece before pushing again with a low desperate moan.

Ilya watched in awe as more of the baby's head slowly appeared. "So good," he whispered emotionally. "You're doing so good."

Shane shook with effort. "I can't—"

"You are."

"It burns!"

"I know."

Leila's voice stayed calm and steady beside them. "She's moving beautifully, Shane. Don't panic. Breathe for me."

Shane sobbed softly but obeyed, sucking in another breath of gas and air before bearing down again with a cry.

Ilya held him through every second of it. Through the shaking. Through the tears. Through the exhaustion dragging at every inch of him.

And underneath all of it now— There was wonder too. Because their baby was right there. Almost in his arms.

The pressure became absolutely unbearable for Shane after that. Every contraction dragged the baby lower in tiny increments he could physically feel, and each one left him shaking harder than the last.

He was exhausted beyond words.

Sweat soaked through the back of his shirt. Tears streaked continuously down his flushed cheeks. His breathing came in ragged gasps between pushes as he clung desperately to the gas and air mouthpiece in one hand and Ilya's hand in the other.

His grip was brutal. Ilya genuinely thought Shane might break his fingers.

He didn't care.

"Okay," Leila said calmly from between Shane's knees. "Next contraction, we're going to ease baby's head out slowly."

Shane made a miserable noise into the mouthpiece. "I can't do slowly."

“You absolutely can.”

Another contraction started building instantly.

Shane’s entire body tensed. “Oh no-”

“I know,” Ilya soothed quickly, rubbing both hands firmly over Shane’s lower back before lacing their fingers together again. “Breathe, baby.”

Shane sucked in a shaky breath of gas and air just as the contraction fully hit. And pushed. A strangled cry tore from him immediately. “Holy shiiiit...”

“That’s it,” Leila coached. “Beautiful. Again.”

The room narrowed completely around effort.

Shane bore down hard, trembling violently while pressure stretched through him in a way that bordered on unbearable.

He could feel everything. Every inch. Every movement.

The head slowly began to emerge once more. “It burns,” he sobbed.

“I know,” Leila said gently. “That’s normal. Pant for me now.”

Shane obeyed shakily, gasping short breaths through the mouthpiece while tears dripped from his chin onto the bed.

Ilya could barely process what he was seeing. From where he stood beside Shane, one arm wrapped tightly around his waist, he had a clear view every time Shane shifted.

And watching their second child slowly come into the world felt almost unreal. “There baby is,” he whispered emotionally.

Shane cried harder at that. “Please tell me it’s nearly over.”

“So close,” Leila promised.

Another tiny push. More of the dark damp curls appeared. Then more.

“Oh wow,” Ilya breathed.

Shane whimpered loudly. “W-wow - ahhhh.. What?”

“You’re doing it.” His voice cracked completely. “Baby, you’re actually doing it.”

Leila’s expression brightened immediately. “Okay, Shane. The head is crowning beautifully.”

Shane looked seconds from losing his mind. “I don’t know what that means anymore.”

“It means your baby is almost here.”

Another contraction slammed into him before he could answer. His entire body bore down instinctively.

This push was different. Deeper. Stronger.

Shane screamed sharply as the stretch intensified to almost unbearable levels. "I CAN'T-"

"Yes you can!" Leila encouraged immediately. "That's it, that's it-"

Ilya held him tighter as Shane cried openly against the bed.

Then suddenly—Relief. A strange slippery release.

Shane gasped hard, panting frantically as the contraction eased. "Ow- god," he choked out.

Leila grinned brightly. "Head's out."

Shane froze. "It is?"

"It is."

Pure exhausted relief crossed his face so fast it was almost painful to witness. "Oh thank fuck."

Ilya burst into wet laughter behind him, pressing his forehead against Shane's sweaty shoulder. "You did so good."

Leila quickly checked around the baby's neck before nodding approvingly. "No cord."

Shane continued panting hard through the gas and air while Leila gently supported the baby's tiny head. "Oh!" she said suddenly. "Well that explains everything."

Shane blinked blearily. "What?"

"Baby's sunny-side up."

Ilya laughed immediately. "Seriously?"

Leila nodded. "Posterior babies usually mean awful back labor."

"That tracks," Shane groaned weakly.

"And it explains why your bump was so small too."

Ilya made another startled sound before looking down at their baby's partially born head with disbelieving affection. "That's exactly why Logan stayed hidden," he said with a wet laugh. "Our children are apparently determined to make things difficult."

Shane huffed a shaky laugh that immediately broke into a groan as another contraction started building low and hard. "Oh please, please no-"

Leila looked up immediately. “Okay, Shane, this is the one.”

Shane whimpered.

“One more big push and you should have your baby.”

Emotion hit Ilya so hard he nearly stopped breathing.

One more.

Shane inhaled sharply from the gas and air as the contraction crashed fully into him. Then pushed with everything he had left. The scream that tore out of him echoed through the room.

Pain. Effort. Exhaustion.

A sudden enormous release.

Shane choked on a sob as he felt the shoulders slip free. “Ah!”

“That’s it!” Leila encouraged brightly. “Again!”

Shane barely even breathed before bearing down one final time.

And suddenly—they were born.

A slippery rush of movement. A tiny body emerging completely into Leila’s waiting hands. Then immediate furious crying filled the room.

Loud and strong. So alive.

“Oh my god,” Ilya sobbed.

Leila beamed. “Congratulations daddies!”

Before Shane could even process it, Leila carefully guided the baby up between his trembling thighs and into his arms.

The gas and air mouthpiece slipped forgotten from Shane’s fingers instantly. “Oh- oh my god- oh my baby.” His voice shattered completely.

He grabbed their baby against his chest with shaking hands, crying so hard he could barely breathe as he pressed frantic kisses against damp dark curls.

The baby wailed loudly in protest, tiny fists flexing against Shane’s soaked shirt.

“They’re here,” Shane sobbed.

Ilya was crying openly beside him now too. Actual tears pouring down his face as he stared at them both.

Leila laughed softly through suspiciously shiny eyes herself. “You two made a beautiful baby.”

Shane looked completely overwhelmed. His entire body shook violently now that the adrenaline was fading. Blood and vernix streaked across his thighs and shirt. His hair was practically plastered to his forehead. His breathing still came ragged and uneven.

And yet he looked happier than Ilya had ever seen him.

Leila smiled warmly. “So,” she asked gently, “what do we have dad?”

Shane blinked down through tears, carefully shifting the baby just enough to check. Then his face broke apart completely into the brightest smile Ilya had ever seen. “Oh my god,” he cried.

He looked up at Ilya through tears and exhaustion and absolute overwhelming love. “Logan was right.”

Ilya’s breath caught.

“She’s a girl,” Shane whispered brokenly. “We have our little Isla Jane.”

That destroyed Ilya instantly.

He let out a choked sob before collapsing forward enough to cradle both Shane and the baby against him. “Hi, baby girl,” he whispered shakily. “Hi, Isla.”

The baby cried louder in response.

Shane laughed through tears, leaning heavily back into Ilya’s chest with relief so intense it almost looked painful.

Neither of them cared that Shane’s shirt was drenched in fluid and vernix. Neither of them cared that the room was messy or loud or chaotic.

Because she was finally here.

And for the first time in almost twenty-four hours— Shane wasn’t in pain anymore.

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For several long moments after Isla was born, the room seemed to dissolve into noise and tears and overwhelming relief.

Shane could barely think.

His whole body trembled uncontrollably from adrenaline and exhaustion, chest heaving as he held Isla tightly against him while she cried loud enough for the entire birthing centre to hear.

“Oh my baby girl ,” he kept whispering tearfully. “Oh my- hi baby.”

Ilya stayed wrapped around both of them from behind, unable to stop kissing Shane's shoulder, temple, hair — anywhere he could reach. "You did it," he murmured over and over. "You actually did it."

Leila moved calmly around them, quietly assessing Isla while still giving them space to exist inside the moment. "Beautiful colour," she commented warmly. "And those lungs work perfectly."

"She sounds angry," Shane laughed weakly through tears.

"She probably gets that from you," Ilya said immediately.

Shane let out an exhausted snort. Then finally, slowly, the intensity of labor began easing enough for coherent thought to return.

And almost immediately— Panic flickered across Shane's face.

"Oh my god."

Ilya looked at him instantly. "What?"

Shane swallowed hard, voice suddenly small. "Did I tear?"

The question cracked straight through Ilya's chest.

Because he knew exactly where Shane's mind had gone.

Logan's birth had destroyed him physically. The cryptic pregnancy, the panic, the speed of the delivery — his body had barely had time to adjust before Logan had been born in that tiny bathroom.

The recovery afterward had been brutal.

Shane's eyes were wide now despite the exhaustion, one shaking hand tightening protectively around Isla.

Leila's expression softened immediately. "Hey," she said gently. "Take a breath for me."

Shane did, though it came shaky.

"You've got a few small abrasions internally," Leila explained calmly. "Very minor. But otherwise?" She smiled warmly. "You look perfect."

Shane froze. "What?"

"No major tearing."

For a second he just stared at her blankly.

Then his entire body visibly gave out with relief. "Oh thank fuck," he whispered, nearly collapsing forward over Isla.

Ilya actually laughed aloud from pure emotional overflow. “There’s my dramatic boy.”

Shane glared weakly over the baby’s head. “You didn’t push a human out.”

“No,” Ilya agreed immediately, eyes impossibly soft. “You did.”

The way he said it made Shane’s face crumple all over again.

Ilya brushed tears gently from beneath Shane’s eyes before leaning down to kiss him properly for the first time since Isla had arrived.

Slow. Shaky. Full of awe.

“I am so proud of you,” he whispered against Shane’s mouth.

Shane let out a tiny broken sound.

Then Leila smiled knowingly from nearby and lifted the cord clamp slightly. “So,” she said brightly. “Want to cut the cord?”

Ilya blinked hard. “Oh.” The reality of that seemed to hit him all over again. “Yes,” he whispered emotionally. “Yes, I do.”

Shane shifted Isla carefully while Leila guided Ilya through it. His hands shook slightly as he took the scissors.

“Right there,” Leila instructed gently.

The snip was oddly anticlimactic compared to the emotion behind it.

Still, the second it was done, Ilya stared at the tiny severed cord with watery disbelief, before immediately looking back to Shane and Isla like he physically couldn’t bear to look away for long.

Their daughter.

Their actual daughter.

She was real.

Shane shifted carefully then, wincing a little as Leila helped him slowly turn onto his side and settle more comfortably against the mountain of pillows behind him.

The second he was positioned properly, exhaustion hit him all over again. Every muscle in his body ached. But now the pain felt distant somehow. Muted beneath relief. Beneath the wonder of the tiny being squirming against his heaving chest.

Leila continued monitoring him quietly before nodding approvingly. “Placenta’s already separating nicely,” she informed them. “That’s a very good sign.”

Shane looked mildly horrified. “Right. Forgot that part existed.”

Ilya laughed immediately. “You thought labor just ended?”

“I had hoped.”

Leila grinned. “Almost done now, sweetheart.”

Compared to delivering Isla, the final stage passed quickly.

Leila guided Shane gently through a few smaller pushes while Ilya stayed tucked close beside him holding Isla carefully whenever Shane needed both hands free.

Within minutes it was over.

“No complications,” Leila announced happily. “You did beautifully.”

Shane looked emotional. As though he was seconds away from crying again. “I never want to be pregnant ever again.”

Leila burst out laughing. “That’s also a very common postpartum statement.”

Once everything was settled and cleaned as much as possible, Leila helped Shane pull his shirt up enough to tuck Isla directly against his bare chest.

The second the baby settled there, she quieted almost immediately.

Tiny cries faded into soft snuffling sounds.

“Oh,” Shane whispered. His entire face changed. Softened completely.

Ilya sat beside him on the bed with one arm around his shoulders, staring down at their daughter like she personally hung the moon.

Isla’s dark curls were still damp against Shane’s skin. Her tiny fingers flexed weakly against his chest.

“She’s so little,” Shane whispered tearfully.

“Not as little as Logan though,” Ilya murmured. “He could practically fit palm of hand.”

Shane laughed tiredly at that.

Then both of them went quiet for a moment just watching her breathe.

Eventually Ilya reached out carefully, touching one tiny fist with his fingertip. “Hi, baby girl,” he whispered again.

Shane leaned his head against Ilya’s shoulder. “You know your big brother already loves you?” he murmured softly to Isla. “Like... aggressively.”

Ilya snorted quietly.

“He’s been demanding you arrive for weeks.”

“He talked to my stomach every day.”

“And ordered you out repeatedly,” Ilya added.

Shane smiled down at her sleepily. “He wished for you,” he whispered.

Emotion crossed Ilya’s face again so suddenly it almost hurt to look at. “He’s gonna lose his mind when he sees her,” he said quietly.

Shane nodded immediately. “Especially the curls.”

“Especially if she coos and squirms as much as he did.”

As if offended, Isla made a tiny indignant sound against Shane’s chest. Both of them laughed instantly.

Then Shane looked down at her again, tears quietly filling his eyes once more.

“Hi, Isla,” he whispered shakily. “We’ve been waiting for you for so long. Welcome to the world baby.”

---

The birthing suite felt entirely different in daylight.

Soft afternoon sun spilled through the tall windows, warming the pale blankets and quiet room in gentle gold. The chaos of labor had faded into something peaceful now. Only hushed voices, sleepy breathing, and the occasional tiny squeak from the bassinet beside Shane’s bed.

Twelve hours old.

Isla Jane Hollander- Rozanov had only existed in the world for twelve hours.

Shane still couldn’t fully process it.

Every time he looked at her, something inside him went painfully soft.

She was so small.

Even knowing newborns were tiny, even having done this once before, he still couldn’t comprehend how someone so delicate had fit inside him only yesterday.

Six pounds, seven ounces.

Slightly bigger than Logan had been, though not by much.

Tiny fingers. Tiny ears. Tiny noises. Everything about her felt impossibly fragile and perfect. And devastatingly beautiful.

Especially right now.

Shane adjusted the little pastel yellow cardigan carefully over her stomach while she slept against his chest, her face half-hidden beneath the cream Winnie the Pooh onesie Logan had proudly chosen months ago.

“I want baby wear bear,” he’d declared at the store.

Apparently he’d been extremely correct.

“She looks fake,” Shane whispered emotionally.

Ilya, sitting beside him on the bed, looked personally offended by the suggestion. “She looks perfect.”

Shane smiled softly. Because Ilya was completely gone already. Absolutely, hopelessly besotted with their daughter.

Every few minutes he reached over just to touch her again — smoothing one fingertip over her tiny hand, adjusting her hat, brushing reverent fingers across coppery curls that still looked surreal against the rest of her very obvious resemblance to him.

She was another miniature Ilya. Curling hair, dark lashes, wide eyes. The same serious little expression Logan had worn as a newborn.

Except there were the small differences.

She had Shane’s hair colour, Black and dark and unmistakably Shane’s mouth and nose.

It made Ilya emotional every single time he noticed. “She has your face,” he murmured for probably the twentieth time.

Shane laughed quietly. “Barely. I still see you in there.”

“She does. She is your girl twin.”

“You just want one child that doesn’t look copy and pasted from you so you don’t have to feel bad.”

“I have no idea what you mean.”

Shane snorted.

A soft knock interrupted them before the door slowly opened. Yuna peeked inside first, smiling immediately at the sight of them. “They’re here David.”

Shane’s stomach flipped instantly. “Oh.”

Nerves hit him all at once. Not fear exactly. Just emotion. Because this mattered. This was Logan becoming a big brother.

He looked toward his mother and his father standing just behind her. “Can you...” Shane swallowed thickly. “Can you bring him in first?”

Yuna’s expression softened immediately. “And then leave you alone together?”

Shane nodded.

“Of course.”

David squeezed Shane’s shoulder gently as he passed. “Ready?”

Absolutely not.

But also yes.

Shane adjusted Isla slightly higher against his chest before nodding nervously.

A second later, Logan appeared around Yuna’s leg.

Still sleepy-haired from his nap. Still clutching his Rexie close. Still impossibly small despite suddenly seeming much older than yesterday.

He stopped completely in the doorway. Hazel eyes immediately locked onto the bundle in Shane’s arms.

The entire room went quiet.

“Wow,” Logan whispered.

Shane nearly burst into tears on the spot. “Hey, bud. I missed you so much.”

Logan looked slowly between Shane and Ilya before taking cautious little steps closer to the bed. “Baby Isla?”

Ilya’s face crumpled instantly. “Da,” he said thickly. “Is baby Isla.”

Logan climbed carefully onto the edge of the bed with David helping steady him.

The second he got close enough to really see her, his entire expression changed.

Wonder.

Pure wonder.

“She tiny,” he breathed.

Shane laughed shakily through immediate tears. “She is.”

Logan stared openly at Isla sleeping against Shane’s chest. Then very carefully reached one finger toward her yellow cardigan. “She soft.”

“She’s very soft,” Ilya agreed weakly.

Neither of them were remotely holding themselves together anymore.

Yuna quietly ushered David back toward the door, both of them suspiciously emotional themselves. “We’ll give you boys some time,” she whispered.

The door clicked softly shut behind them.

And suddenly it was just the four of them.

Their family.

Logan stayed utterly transfixed. “She sleeping?”

“Mhm,” Shane whispered.

Logan frowned slightly. “Why she making squeaky noises?”

That made Ilya bark out a surprised laugh through tears.

“Because she’s dramatic.”

“Like Daddy,” Logan informed Shane seriously.

Shane gasped weakly. “Betrayal.”

Logan ignored him completely, still staring at Isla.

Then finally, quietly— “She came out.”

The simple sincerity of it shattered Shane entirely. “Oh baby,” he whispered, crying openly now. Ilya wrapped an arm around both of them immediately. “Yeah,” he said softly, voice wrecked. “She did. She wanted to meet her big brother.”

Logan looked up suddenly. “Daddy okay?”

Shane nodded quickly, wiping at his face with the heel of his hand. “Daddy’s okay. Just very, very happy.”

Logan considered that carefully.

Then leaned over with painstaking gentleness and kissed Isla’s tiny hat.

The room went dead silent.

Ilya actually made a broken choking sound beside Shane. “My heart Shane...,” he whispered.

Logan pulled back immediately concerned. “Papa sad?”

“No,” Ilya cried helplessly. “Papa loves you.”

Logan accepted that answer easily. Then he looked at Isla again. “She stay with us now?”

“Yep,” Shane whispered.

“Forever?”

The word hit both of them like a physical blow.

“Forever,” Ilya confirmed softly.

Logan grinned.

Then immediately climbed into Shane’s side, wedging himself carefully beside the baby while trying very hard not to touch her too much. “Hi baby Isla,” he whispered proudly.

Shane buried his face briefly against Ilya’s shoulder because he physically could not survive this interaction otherwise.

Ilya wasn’t doing much better. His eyes stayed fixed on all three of them like he genuinely couldn’t believe they were real. “You know,” he said thickly to Logan, “Daddy worked very hard to bring her here.”

Logan looked immediately alarmed. “Daddy hurt?”

“A little,” Shane admitted weakly.

Logan frowned hard. Then carefully patted Shane’s arm. “All better now.”

That did it.

Shane started sobbing openly again. Ilya followed almost immediately, laughing helplessly through tears while Logan stared at both of them in utter confusion. “Why everybody crying?”

“Because we love you,” Shane managed shakily.

“And her,” Ilya added.

Logan thought about that. Then nodded decisively. “I love her too.”

And somehow, impossibly, that made the room feel even fuller than it already had.

---

Later that evening, after the carers had dimmed the lights and the birthing suite had fallen quiet again, Logan finally gathered enough courage to hold his sister properly.

The room smelled faintly of baby shampoo and warm blankets.

Rain still tapped softly against the windows.

Shane sat propped against the bedhead in clean pajamas now, exhaustion written into every inch of him but softened by overwhelming happiness. Ilya sat beside him with one arm draped behind his shoulders, fingers absently stroking through Shane's damp locks while they both watched Logan with complete devotion.

Leila had helped arrange Isla carefully into Logan's lap, layering pillows beneath his arms until she rested safely against his chest.

Logan had gone utterly still afterward. Like moving too quickly might scare her away. "She little," he whispered again.

Isla blinked sleepily beneath her yellow hat, tiny mouth making soft sucking motions before settling against the cardigan Logan himself had picked out months ago.

"You're holding her perfectly," Shane whispered tearfully.

Logan looked very proud of that information.

For a few minutes he simply stared at her. Studying every tiny feature with intense concentration. Then very quietly, in the serious voice only toddlers somehow managed, he leaned closer to her. "I maked wish for you."

The room went silent.

Shane's breath caught instantly.

Logan continued softly, one careful hand resting against Isla's stomach. "I wish you home in house wit' me n' Papa n' Daddy."

Ilya pressed his knuckles hard against his mouth.

"She came to us bud," Shane whispered shakily.

Logan nodded like this was obvious. Then he looked back down at his sister. "I big brother," he informed her carefully. "I wuck af'r you."

A tear slipped silently down Shane's cheek.

Logan kept talking in soft little murmurs only half understandable. "I show Bluey. And dinosaurs. And my trucks." He paused importantly. "No scary monsters."

Ilya let out a broken laugh beside Shane.

Logan frowned thoughtfully at Isla's tiny fist curling against the blanket.

"N' when' sad," he whispered, "you find me Isla."

Shane physically couldn't stop crying anymore.

Ilya wrapped an arm tighter around him, his own face wet with tears as he watched their son cradle their daughter like something precious beyond words.

And maybe that was the moment it truly settled.

Not during the labor. Not during the birth. Not even during the first cry.

But here.

Watching one child promise his whole heart to the other without hesitation. Watching love make room for itself naturally and completely.

Logan eventually looked back up at them, dark eyes sleepy but happy. “She my bestest friend now.”

Shane laughed softly through tears. “Yeah, baby.”

Ilya kissed the top of Shane’s head gently.

Outside, rain continued falling softly over the city.

Inside, wrapped together beneath warm hospital blankets, their family finally felt complete.

Not perfect. Not effortless. Built instead from exhaustion and fear and overwhelming love and choosing each other again and again.

And in the quiet glow of that tiny recovery room, with one love of his life half asleep in her brother’s arms and the other cradling his baby sister like a promise, Ilya realized families were not built all at once.

They were built in moments.

In waiting rooms and whispered reassurances. In exhausted laughter at three in the morning. In tiny cardigans chosen months too early. In hands held through pain. In wishes made by little boys who already knew exactly how to love.

And somehow, against all odds, they had built something beautiful.

## End Notes

Don't forget to comment your thoughts! Sending love <3

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