**from seed to tree, i grew so tall**

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# from seed to tree, i grew so tall

by imbihesgay

Summary

It seems silly to ever, ever be sad when this is his life.

Yet, the brilliant sunlight today seems to be tinged with a gray tone he can't blink away. A filter over his eyes, over his heart, making his limbs feel like lead. Fear, palpable and boiling in his stomach. He has everything he ever wanted, and what if- god what if he lost it?

Thoughts of his mother, too. The beautiful, funny, brilliant woman who used to comb his messy curls and call him her little angel whenever she spoke to him. The woman who soothed his aches when he was hurt, who brushed the harsh words of his father right out of his ears with her own gentle ones.

He gets why she left. He doesn't blame her, not really. Sometimes, he thinks he might really understand it. Days like today, he thinks, which is a bit scary.

-ilya has a bad mental health day on a babymoon trip to the cottage with shane and their daughter. his family is there for him-

Notes

i love you sad boy ilya, i love you pregnant boy shane <3

this is an unedited mess of word salad - if you don't like it don't read! please be nice to me in the comments bc im sensitive and despite all my years doing this (damn near 15) ive never been so afraid to post in a famdom lmao

that said, i hope you enjoy and thank you for reading <3<3

See the end of the work for more notes

It feels like Ilya Rozanov's life can be boiled down to a few very key moments.

There was, of course, his birth, which he does not remember. Then, the death of his mother, which he cannot forget no matter how hard he tries. Getting drafted first in the NHL, meeting Shane Hollander, falling in love with Shane Hollander, leaving his entire life behind to play hockey with Shane Hollander.

Loving Shane.

Marrying Shane.

Having a child with Shane.

It's all very monumental, the big ones. Yet, as he sits perched atop the deck outside their lakeside cottage, feeling the cool spring air on his face, he finds himself entirely enraptured by this objectively inconsequential moment.

Shane, six months pregnant with their second, wading into the lakewater until it's thigh-high, soaking the hem of his shorts. He's wearing an unbuttoned, loosely flowing shirt, exposing the stretched golden skin, pale white stretch marks illuminated under the brilliant beams of sun. His hair's grown out enough to tug on, and his face is looking fuller this time around, healthy and glowing with the life growing inside him.

At his knees, currently trying to show him a patch of soggy, dripping lake plant she'd pulled from the murk, is their two-year-old daughter, Hina. Her dark, curly hair is pulled up in two messy little pigtails atop her head. Ilya always has to double take when she turns her face to him to smile, because sometimes, it's like he's seeing double. The crinkle in her nose, the spray of delicate freckles across her cheeks, the curve in her upper lip, the big doe brown eyes, it's like Shane made a copy of himself and gave birth to her.

Not that Ilya is complaining, considering his favorite thing to do in the world is look at those little matching faces.

"Show Papa!" Shane encourages her, gesturing over to Ilya. He glances up, meeting the other man's eyes, and his smile widens.

"Papa!" Hina whirls around in the water and holds up her disgusting little mud plant. "Lookit!"

He replies to her in Russian, words rolling smoothly off his tongue. "That is very interesting, little angel!"

The process of raising a multilingual child is sometimes a little overwhelming, especially when there are *three* languages they want her to learn. But, they're taking it at their own pace. She's a good speaker already, for her age, and Shane has done all the research on the best ways to integrate French, English, and Russian into her learned dialect.

"Da," she agrees, already hunting in the water for her next spoil.

Normally, Ilya would be in the water with them, splashing Shane to annoy him and trying to convince Hina to race him. She's already a pretty good swimmer for her age, though one of them is always right by her side when they go any deeper than standing height.

Today, though, he awoke with a feeling in his chest. It's a familiar one, a deep, pulling weight that makes his back feel heavy and his feet drag. He is so happy, so fucking happy he does not always have words to express it- retired, still young, well-off, madly in love with the most perfect family he could've ever hoped for?

It seems silly to ever, ever be *sad* when this is his life.

Yet, the brilliant sunlight today seems to be tinged with a gray tone he can't blink away. A filter over his eyes, over his heart, making his limbs feel like lead. Fear, palpable and boiling in his stomach. He has everything he ever wanted, and what if- god what if he lost it?

Thoughts of his mother, too. The beautiful, funny, brilliant woman who used to comb his messy curls and call him her little angel whenever she spoke to him. The woman who soothed his aches when he was hurt, who brushed the harsh words of his father right out of his ears with her own gentle ones.

He gets why she left. He doesn't blame her, not really. Sometimes, he thinks he might really understand it. Days like today, he thinks, which is a bit scary. He owes Galina a call.

"Ilya?"

He startles a bit, realizing the sun has been eclipsed by Shane's silhouette, standing above him. He's looking at Ilya tenderly, one hand cupped under the swell of his belly. Hina is at his side, already climbing on to the chaise lounge to plop herself in Ilya's lap.

"Done swimming?" he manages to ask.

Shane nods. "We're getting hungry. Do you want something to eat? I can heat up some of that chicken parm my parents brought over this weekend."

"Poulette," Hina says to Ilya, followed by, "CLUCK CLUCK!"

Ilya furrows his brow curiously, hunting down the French in his brain for a moment before he realizes she's said *chicken.*

*"Kuritsa,"* he says. "CLUCK CLUCK!"

She giggles and Shane rolls his eyes. "Alright, come on chickens. Inside. Daddy has a hungry belly."

"We must feed Daddy's belly," Ilya says to her somberly. He scoops her body up, grinning as the ruffles of her little polka dot swimsuit tickle his chest.

"It's your fault I have such a hungry belly," Shane reminds him as Ilya and Hina follow him up the path toward the cottage. Ilya keeps one arm extended, fingers brushing delicately over

Shane's lower back as he traverses the uneven ground to get to the path. The last thing he needs is to take a tumble.

In the kitchen, Shane tells him to sit at the table, he'll handle the food. Ilya plops down on one of the bartop stools with Hina in his lap. She babbles to him about chickens and he tries his best to feign genuine interest.

He's not his best self today. Normally, he cannot wait to listen to his little angel talk about utterly nothing of consequence. Her language skills are developing so impressively, and she's also fucking adorable, so it's usually easy.

But not today. Today, he nods at her, and smiles, and can tell that even she knows in some way, it isn't the truth.

Shane serves him a plate of food and scoops Hina off his lap before he can say anything. He adjusts her on his hip with one arm, and brings his other hand out to rub slowly down Ilya's back.

"Why are you feeding me first?" he demands. His father used to insist on being the first one to eat. Even though Ilya would spend hours killing himself at practice and get home starving, his father always ate first. Ilya is *not* his father.

"Because you didn't eat breakfast," Shane says matter-of-factly. "And Hina and I are having the leftover sushi bake."

"Why-" Ilya shakes his head. "I could have eaten that, too. Make it easy."

In lieu of a reply, Shane leans in and kisses the top of his curly hair. "Eat, babe."

He brings Hina around to the fridge and talks to her in French about what he's doing. Ilya catches bits, it sounds like he is explaining how to reheat rice. Ilya doubts Hina will retain the information, but she does look soothed by Shane's calm, flat voice.

Glancing down at the chicken parm in front of him, Ilya hesitates. It's his favorite dish, and the Hollanders were so fucking kind to bring them dinner the other night, knowing he loves this meal.

He still hasn't taken a bite by the time Shane is sitting beside him. Hina is in her booster seat, demolishing seaweed and crab meat like her life depends on it. Shane doesn't make a show of it, just rests his head on Ilya's shoulder while taking a bite of his own food.

"Not hungry?" he asks quietly.

"Mm, I guess not," Ilya admits, voice hushed. He knows Shane is worried about how he's acting today, and he feels like the worst husband and father in the world. Shane is pregnant and looking after their toddler while Ilya sulks. It isn't fair.

Shane's lashes flutter as he lifts his eyes to look at Ilya's face. There's a brief pause, and then he says, "you don't have to eat that, if you don't want it. We have some ice cream. Cookie dough."

At that, Ilya arches an eyebrow. “Could it be? My husband, Shane Hollander, *Mr. Whole Foods*, wants me to eat ice cream for my lunch?”

“Fuck you,” Shane replies fondly, a small smile on his face.

“Who are you and what have you done with my Shane?”

“Mm. Uptight Shane is at the shop. Right now you have pregnant, worried Shane.” The other man nestles closer, cheek squished into Ilya’s bicep. “Do you want some ice cream?”

“You do not have to worry, *moy lyubimyy*,” Ilya murmurs, reaching out to rub his hand slowly over the swell of Shane’s belly. He’s rewarded with a nudge against his palm. “I am luckiest man alive, here with my beautiful family.”

“Ilya.” Shane’s voice is a warning.

“Shane,” he hits back with a light tease in his tone. He doesn’t want Shane to be worried about him. He will be fine. It is just an ugly day for his brain and his body.

“I’m gonna put her down for her nap, after lunch,” Shane says, ignoring the bicker-bait. “Do you want to shower with me? Wash off the lake water.”

Ilya would have to be pretty fucking depressed to say no to a shower with his sexy husband. He is sad, but not stupid.

“Of course I do,” he murmurs, kissing the top of Shane’s hair. It’s still warm from the sun, and Ilya thinks that only makes sense. Radiant as he is, to be humming with warmth and comfort.

Hina is fussy going down today. She doesn’t want Shane to pull back when he gently lays her in the small toddler bed that belongs to her. Ilya can’t say he blames her. He understands, intrinsically, the desire to hold on to the ones closest to you. Maybe if he’d done that a little tighter, his own mother-

*Stop it,* he tells himself firmly. Those are bad thoughts and he won’t go down that path.

“Let me try,” he murmurs, nudging past Shane to plop down beside Hina’s toddler bed. Her eyes are teary, and her little nose is all wrinkled with displeasure.

*“Shhh, moya lyubov,”* he coos, brushing the backs of his knuckles softly over her freckled cheeks. “Papa is here, little angel. No need to cry. Just close your eyes. I promise, I am with you.”

She looks up at him with those big, watery brown eyes, and he feels his heart crack a bit. The pain there, albeit unreasonable, irrational two-year-old pain, is palpable. He can’t stand the sight of his baby hurting, it rips his chest to shreds to see her anything less than happy and content.

“Ilya,” Shane prompts gently. He’s been a proponent of sleep training, after reading thirty million books about it. Ilya hasn’t ever been able to bring himself to follow through on any of

the practices. His baby needs him, he cannot leave her side.

“I know,” he whispers back, still brushing his fingertips along her cheeks, “she will not learn to self soothe or be independent. She is doing well sleeping on her own. If we coddle her, she-”

“Hey.” Shane’s voice is softer this time, and Ilya looks over to see the tenderness in his expression. “It’s okay. She’s upset. We’re her people. We take care of her. We can sit here until she falls asleep.”

“Papa,” Hina sniffles wetly, wiping at her nose with the back of her chubby little hand. “M’not tired! Don’ wanna go sleep.”

“I know, baby.” Shane says, lowering himself with a huff and a grunt of discomfort until he’s sitting beside Ilya next to the bed. Their knees brush. “Papa and I are right here with you. Just relax. *Spat.”*

It’s quiet for a long while, as the three of them exist in this tiny little bubble. Hina takes a while to get sleepy. Her eyelids begin to droop, and her little bowed lips fall slack, and before they know it, she’s letting out these adorable, itty bitty sleep noises. Soft little puffs of air and tiny snuffling sounds. It is so cute Ilya feels his heart tense in his chest.

Looking at her sleeping face, lashes drawn down, freckles made starker on sunkissed skin, dark hair curling around her face, Ilya can’t help but lean in and press his lips to her forehead ever so delicately.

“She is out,” he whispers to Shane, nodding with assurance.

“Okay. I’m gonna need some help.” Shane gestures sheepishly to his distended middle.

Ilya smiles briefly, and gets to his feet, reaching out for his husband. He carefully helps Shane stand, bracing a hand on his lower back until he’s completely upright.

They leave the door cracked enough so they can still hear inside, and Ilya notices Shane rubbing his lower back with his knuckles. His expression is twisted up- his beautiful nose all crinkled underneath his freckles.

“Let me help, *nasekomoye.”* Ilya replaces Shane’s hands with his own, pressing firmly into the taut flesh of his lower back. Shane stutters out a relieved noise, head dropping down between his shoulders as his eyes flutter shut.

“Did you just call me an insect?” Shane demands after a few moments of blissful quiet.

Ilya’s lips press together to hide his smirk. “Mm, yes. You are my bug.”

“Excuse me?” Shane pops an eye open and shakes his head. “No, I don’t like that. I’m not a *bug.”*

“You are. My bug. My Shanebug.”

“Ilya.” Shane snorts out a quiet laugh. “Of all the dumb nicknames-”

“Okay, okay, no bug. How about my little *yagoda?”*

Shane stares at him for a beat until the translation seems to register. “Now you’re calling me a berry? Really, fruit?”

“You are trying to say you are *not* a fruit?” Ilya arches an eyebrow. “That may be trouble for our marriage.”

Shane’s face heats pink under his freckles, and he swats Ilya’s hand away. “I’m showering alone, nevermind.”

“Noooo.” Ilya smiles and pulls him closer, nuzzling his nose into the soft skin of Shane’s neck. The resistance melts out of his body hilariously quickly, and if it were any other day, Ilya would probably tease him for how easy he is. He submits to Ilya’s touch like it’s hardwired into his body, and at this point it very well may be.

“Sorry I teased,” Ilya says quietly, pressing his lips against Shane’s collarbone. “Don’t banish me from showering with my sexy husband.”

“Don’t call me a fruity insect again,” Shane warns.

Ilya snorts. “Yes sir.”

“Alright. Let’s go.”

The shower is quick, since Shane is getting pretty exhausted already from the long morning of being in the sun and chasing after Hina. They get toweled off and dressed in loose-fitting, comfortable house clothes. Shane looks utterly adorable with his round belly stretching out the front of his *Centaurs* t-shirt. The thing is so old it has holes in the shoulders and neckline, but it’s soft cotton and he swears it’s the only thing that’s comfortable right now. Ilya is generous enough not to tell him the entire underside of his swollen belly pokes out.

A quick check finds Hina still unconscious, drooling on her arm and tangled up in colorful bedsheets. Ilya lingers a moment to watch the gentle rise and fall of her little belly, making sure her breaths come with even tempo, before they retreat down into the den.

Shane makes a beeline for the kitchen, grabbing a jar of pickles, a few bananas, a can of Ginger Ale, and a small tub of frosting from when they’d made cupcakes a few nights ago. Indulging a craving.

Ilya helps lower him to the slouch couch perched in the back corner of the living room, and Shane immediately cracks into the pickles. He never used to be too much of a pickle guy, but with this pregnancy apparently they’re his favorite go-to snack. Ilya pretends he doesn’t see him dip one in the frosting, though he internally notes that it is no longer a *shared* tub.

“You should have a snack,” Shane says conversationally, extending one of the bananas in his direction. There’s no pressure or insistence behind the words, but Ilya can still see the worry

creased deeply in his eyes. He's trying to play it nonchalant, but he can obviously tell Ilya's mind is shrouded by a gray cloud today.

Ilya accepts the banana with a nod of thanks, and peels it gracefully. He pulls off the stringy bits, which disgust him, and takes a hefty bite, arching his eyebrows suggestively at Shane. It is, after all, an amazingly phallic fruit.

"You're gross," Shane deadpans, before dipping another pickle in the frosting.

Ilya does not have the heart to tell him which of them is gross right now.

They waste away for an hour or two, hanging out on the couch with their toes pressed together. Shane makes it through half the jar of pickles and most of the tub of frosting before he proclaims he's too full to stand. Ilya scoots over and rests his cheek on Shane's thigh, one palm rubbing small circles over his distended belly. The baby nudges and kicks lightly against his hand, which makes him smile in spite of himself.

"Do you think she will be like Hina?" he asks softly, moving his thumb in gentle motions over the exposed skin of his underbelly. "Or, completely different?"

"I think she'll be perfect either way," Shane murmurs, threading his fingers through Ilya's half-dry curls. He really should have done a treatment, but he'd let them air dry after their shower and he knows he must look disheveled.

"I hope she knows how much we love her," Ilya says, the tenor of his voice a bit haunted.

It takes Shane a moment to reply to that. "They both do, babe. You know that."

"I was thinking about my mom this morning," Ilya responds quietly.

"I kinda figured," Shane says, still stroking his hair. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"You must be tired of talking about it." Ilya laughs once, more of a dry bark than anything with real humor in it.

"Hey." Shane's hand comes down to firmly grip his chin. Their eyes meet. Shane's are steadfast. "You are my husband, and the father of my children, and my best friend. Irina is my mother in law. We can talk about her until we are blue in the face if you want to, honey."

Ilya's chest feels warm, the way it always does when Shane refers to his mother this way. *She is my mother in law*- as if she somehow has some active presence in his life. He has never even met her.

"You are too kind to say these things," Ilya murmurs. "You did not even know her, but you are so sweet about her."

"She gave me everything," Shane replies without hesitation, one hand coming to meet Ilya's where it's resting on his belly.

Ilya glances up at him, brows furrowing.

“She gave me you,” Shane says softly. “And you gave me our family. I owe all of my happiness to her, in a way. How could I not love her with every fiber of my being, Ilya?”

Ilya bites down hard on the inside of his cheek to keep himself from blubbering. Shane is not particularly good at long emotional talks, though he’s definitely improved on that since they became parents, but sometimes he says these things that Ilya can tell are just purely from his heart. He really means them, as sappy as they might sound, and that makes them so fucking impactful.

“Thank you, *moy sladkiy.”* Ilya grabs his hand and squeezes once. “I am sorry that my mind is…not where we like it to be, today. I wish I could snap fingers and make it better right away, so it would not ruin our day.”

“I don’t want that.” Shane shakes his head. “I’m sorry you’re hurting, baby. I wish you could feel better, too. But I love you just like this, even when you’re cloudy. Nothing is ruined. We just have a different kind of day today, alright? No pressure.”

Ilya’s lip wobbles. *“Ya tak schastliv, chto Bog podaril mne tebya.”*

Shane smiles softly at him, brushing curls off his forehead with tender hands. “*Ya krutoy, da?”*

Ilya throws his head back and laughs, Shane joining in with his own quiet chuckle. The noise in his brain filters out a bit, softened around the edges by Shane’s warmth, and his comforting words.

So, that’s it then. It’s that simple. Today, they will just have a different kind of day. No pressure, like Shane says.

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Hina wakes up from her nap around two, bright-eyed and bushy tailed when Ilya pokes his head in the room to check on her. She’s already scrambling out of her toddler bed, curly hair a wreck atop her head, clothes askew on her body. She’s already running a million miles an hour, thoroughly recharged from her midday nap as she blabbers about how hungry she is and what color the sky is and what sounds kitty cats make.

Ilya hikes her up on his hip, kissing her disheveled hair, and listens patiently as they walk down the staircase back toward the den. They’d had plans to get dressed nicely tonight and meet Shane’s parents in town for dinner, but Shane had called to cancel. He told them he wasn’t feeling very well, that he was exhausted from the pregnancy and needed a night off. They were completely understanding and even offered to take Hina if they needed. Shane had looked curiously at Ilya, who shook his head no. He wants his family close today.

He had also thanked Shane for being so willing to forego seeing his parents in favor of helping Ilya rot today. He hates that it’s a choice Shane had to make, but a swift kiss to the cheek and a loving spank as Ilya passed by, was enough to assure him Shane doesn’t mind one bit.

Shane is in the kitchen when Hina and Ilya make it downstairs. He's already working on chopping up some fruits for her post-nap snacking. There's already a cup of watered down apple juice on the island, and her little ceramic animal plate is half-decorated with an array of colorful treats. Diced strawberries, bell peppers, cucumbers, and peaches.

"Hi baby," Shane says when he sees them, his eyes wrinkling with his smile. "Do you want snacks?"

"Snacks!" Hina shrieks. "Yes Daddy! I wan'snacks!"

Ilya chuckles and sits down at the island with her on his lap. She bounces excitedly when Shane passes her plate over and ruffles her hair.

"What do we say?" Ilya prompts her gently.

Hina debates for a moment, her little eyebrows pulled together thoughtfully. She looks at Ilya with uncertainty in her pretty brown eyes.

"Daddy made you a very nice snack," he says in a leading tone, "what do we say when people do nice things for us?"

"Oh! Thank'ya Daddy!" Hina offers him a big gummy grin.

Shane's entire body seems to get more languid at the sight of her smiling face. He leans against the island and smiles back at her.

"You are very welcome, sweet girl. Enjoy."

"Come and sit, Daddy, you should not be on your feet." Ilya gestures for him to join them.

Shane makes his way around the island and lowers himself into one of the chairs with a quiet huff. He leans back, thighs spreading almost involuntarily to make room for the growing belly hanging off his hips.

He really is so beautiful like this. He'd argue it was sweat, but his suntanned, freckly skin is practically glowing. He's absolutely radiant. He's the most wonderful man in the entire world. The most wonderful *person* really.

Ilya does not know how he got so lucky. He wishes he could stop feeling afraid of how badly it would hurt to lose this. He wishes he could just enjoy this moment. But his brain will not let him.

*You are spoiled, always getting what you want,* he hears his father say. *You think you deserve this? You are just an ungrateful boy. Just you wait.*

He shakes his head briefly, as if trying to clear it. He deserves this. Happiness is not something he has to earn. He's allowed to just have it. And when he has it- it isn't too good to be true.

“I love you,” Shane says quietly, as if somehow sensing the internal battle happening in Ilya’s mind. He reaches over and squeezes his thigh. “Don’t we love Papa so much, Hina?”

“Luh’you Papa,” she manages to get out between frantic bites of peach and berry.

Both men laugh fondly, and Ilya strokes her tangled hair. He really wishes he were a better conversationalist today, but he just doesn’t have it in him. He feels weirdly exhausted.

“Should we watch a movie on the couch?” Shane asks Hina. “It has been a while since we watched Babar.”

“Yes!” Hina agrees eagerly.

Shane glances at Ilya, who nods and smiles. A movie sounds perfect.

They migrate back into the den after Hina’s snack is cleaned up. Shane has an old VCR and found a bunch of tapes online that he ordered when he found out he was pregnant with Hina. He wanted her to be able to watch some of their childhood favorites. Ilya had opted out of providing any titles for Shane to try and find copies of. He doesn’t remember watching a lot of cartoons growing up, too busy in his free time at the rink or hanging out with his friends to avoid his father, but what he recalls, early 90s Russian animation is nothing worth sharing with her.

They settle on the couch with Shane’s back supported by a few pillows, Ilya curled up beside him with his head on Shane’s shoulder. Hina plops herself down in the small crevice of space where their bodies meet, nestled into both of them.

The film is a familiar one. A quiet, understimulating little movie about an elephant. The colors are not too bright, and the voice overs are not obnoxious. It’s soothing and quaint. Hina likes this one as much as Shane does, they both go pretty quiet while watching.

Ilya feels warm and safe with their bodies pressed against his. He’s comfortable, stretched out on the sofa. The movie is relaxing. For a little while, everything goes quiet in his brain.

He falls asleep in twenty minutes.

His dreams are unhurried. Slow, gliding images of things he can’t quite get a good grasp on. His fingers brush against a small wrist as a blonde-haired woman brushes by. He knows it’s his mother, but she doesn’t slow down long enough to confirm it. She’s moving, further and further away from him with each step.

Shane is there now, glimmering brown eyes and sharp little smile. His freckles glisten like stars on his face, glowing silver and gold from inside. He opens his arms, and Hina is there, her chubby little fist grabbing onto Ilya’s index finger so tightly, like she’s afraid he will slip away.

Ilya will not. Unlike his own mother, he is here to stay. He will never, ever leave her side.

“I love you,” Shane says, tired and out-of-breath.

Ilya looks down at him, the image shifted to him sitting in the hospital bed with their newborn baby on his chest. His forehead is sweat stained, his hair matted down and damp. Thirty-eight hours of labor to bring Hina into the world. She's the most beautiful baby Ilya has ever seen. Experiencing her birth with Shane was something spiritual.

"You did so well, *moy lyubimyy."* Ilya brushes Shane's hair back with gentle fingers. "I am so proud of you. I love you."

"I wouldn't want to do this with anyone else," Shane replies, smiling despite the bags under his eyes and the feebleness of his voice. "I'm so lucky it's you."

Ilya kisses him firmly, tears slipping down his cheeks. "I am the lucky one, *dorogoy."*

The images continue to swim. Hina's first birthday party- funfetti cake all over her curls, Yuna squealing as Ilya chased her down with water balloons, both of them drenched and laughing uproariously on the front lawn. David and Shane arguing over the grill temperature, good-natured and warm. Bood and Cassie and their children hovering while Hina tried her new little electric car they'd bought, Hayden and his family loudly singing *happy birthday* around the candles. The smiling faces of their friends, and family, all surrounding their little girl on her special day.

Their wedding day. Laughter, dancing to bad music, booze and food, and the feeling of an impending future so wonderful neither of them could have ever conceived it to be reality someday. Shane, so beautiful in his tux, so happy and loose and utterly *free.*

His life boiled down to small moments- beautiful and intricate, however miniscule they might seem in the split second they occur. Each of them, tiny little reminders of how full and blessed his life truly is.

Ilya wakes up with a start, breath catching in his chest. The light in the den has shifted. It's dark outside now, moonlight cresting over the hills as the sunset begins to creep down. He is alone on the couch now, Shane and Hina nowhere to be found. The television is playing a different movie now, something about talking babies.

Ilya pushes himself upright, cringing at the stiff feeling in his extremities. He was out really hard.

"Shane?" he croaks, rubbing sleep from his eyes with that hazy, syrupy feeling one gets after an ill-timed nap lasts far too long.

He gets no reply, which makes his heart begin to race.

"Shane? Hina?" He clamors to his feet and makes an instant move for the kitchen. Maybe they are making dinner, or eating dinner.

The kitchen is empty when he steps in, which only makes him panic. He's about to head for the stairs when he hears the sliding door open, and turns to see Shane walking in from the deck. He's got a tray of burgers balanced on one hand, and is ushering Hina inside with the other.

Their eyes meet, and Shane smiles. “Hey! You’re awake. Just in time. Are you hungry? We had some meat in the fridge, so I just made some-*oof!”*

He’s cut short as Ilya lurches forward. He takes the tray swiftly, sets it on the island, and pulls Shane in for a bone-crushing hug. He knows he’s being clingy, but he doesn’t care. He wants to feel Shane’s round belly pressed into his flat one, smell the familiar musk of a long day on his neck, kiss the curve where his lips part.

“Baby, hey.” Shane gently pries him off, meeting his gaze with a concerned expression. “Are you alright?”

“Yes.” Ilya leans back in for a kiss, happy when Shane obliges. “I just…had lots of dreams and it made me miss you.”

“I’m glad you were able to rest.” Shane cups his cheek, though there’s still worry evident on his face.

“Papa!” Hina tugs on Ilya’s pant leg, getting his attention. “I help Daddy make cooking.”

“You did?” Ilya squats down beside her, scooping her up in his arms with a big wet kiss on the forehead. “I bet you were such a good helper. What did you help Daddy make?”

“Buggers!” She points to the tray of burgers, beaming proudly.

“They look delicious.” Ilya kisses her again, then turns to Shane. “I am so sorry I slept through dinner prep. You did not have to-”

“No, no.” Shane shakes his head. “It’s okay, I promise. I feel good. I was feeling like, squirrely. Too much energy. Baby won’t stop pummeling my ribs and it’s making me feel like I need to move around.”

With a gentle frown, Ilya places his hand flat over the round swell of Shane’s belly. He feels around for a second until the familiar press of their daughter’s foot beats against his palm.

“Mm, I see what you mean,” he muses, “little girl, be nice to Daddy. He is growing you such a nice home.”

“She’s as bad a listener as her papa,” Shane teases. “Come on, dinner will get cold.”

They eat out on the deck by the fire pit, watching the orange glow flicker with warm spring wind. Ilya likes the sound of the trees when the weather is like this- soft, billowing sounds, like the world is breathing around them. He can’t explain why, but there’s a comfort in it, the knowledge that the world is still moving, even when he feels like it has stopped.

It stopped for him that day. When he lost his mother. Or at least, it felt like it did.

The truth is, the sun kept rising and setting. The world kept turning. He kept growing older and older, and the sound of her laugh became a memory. Someday it won’t even be that anymore.

But the living brought other things with it. Shane. Hina. Their family.

He remembers Shane telling him something about some wildfires that happened a long while back in this area. It had devastated the natural landscape. So much was lost. The land was desolate, ash coating the stumps of what used to be the forest.

Ilya looks up at the trees now, lush and green, illuminated by silver moonlight. It must have seemed to them too, that the world had ended for a while.

Yet here they are. Breathing, growing, *living*.

“What are you thinking about?” Shane asks, leaning his head against Ilya’s shoulder as his eyes drop briefly to Hina’s hair. She’s asleep against Ilya’s chest, cheek smushed into his peck, a small trail of drool dried on her chin. She’d had a big day, and a hefty dinner always knocks her out early for a good night of rest.

“The trees,” Ilya replies, lifting his arm to circle it around Shane and pull him closer. Shane sighs softly, nestling against his side.

“There are lots of them,” Shane says.

Ilya lets out a whispering laugh. “Yes, *moy sladkiy,* there are. Is not what I was thinking, but yes.”

“You were thinking you want to fuck me against one, weren’t you?” Shane looks up at him accusatorily.

“Your mind is always in the gutter.”

“You’ve rubbed off on me.”

Ilya smirks. “I definitely have.”

“Ugh.”

“I was thinking about what you told me about the fires a long time ago.” Ilya tilts his head thoughtfully. “I wonder if it will happen again.”

“Probably,” Shane says, “we get them a lot up here. We’ve been lucky in this area.”

“To survive something like that, something so horrible and…never know for sure if it might happen again. If you might have to rebuild yourself from scraps, all over again.” Ilya clears his throat. “Scary thought.”

Shane is quiet for a beat, biting the inside of his cheek. His lashes flutter on his cheeks, and he reaches over to cup his hand under Ilya’s, where it’s currently cradling their daughter against his torso.

“The trees know how to regrow,” Shane murmurs. “That’s life.”

“I think it’s death.”

“Life can come after death.” Shane nestles a little closer. “There’s no way to know something bad won’t happen again. But that doesn’t mean you don’t *live.”*

Ilya exhales shakily.

“It’s okay to feel afraid. Some days more than others. I’m afraid sometimes too.” Shane lets out a quiet huff of breath. “It’s easy to be afraid when you have so much to lose.”

“I am sorry that my brain won’t let me feel that way today.” Ilya clears his throat. “I will call Galina tomorrow, Shane.”

“Okay, good.” Shane scooches forward and kisses the hollow of his throat. The movement is gentle, tender, pouring with affection. “You never have to be sorry for how you feel. *That’s* life too, baby.”

“Mm.” Ilya leans his cheek against the top of Shane’s head, managing a smile. It feels fragile and fleeting, but then again, so does everything good right now. “When did you get so wise, Hollander? You are like an old oak.”

“Oh, *I’m* a tree now?” Shane laughs gently. “I’m losing track of all these metaphors.”

“There’s the man I fell in love with. He hates metaphors.”

Shane snorts. “I prefer to speak plainly, yes.”

Ilya nudges him until he lifts his face. Their eyes meet. Shane’s are glowing with amber flecks from the firelight, glimmering reflections in his deep brown eyes. He’s as beautiful as the day Ilya laid eyes on him outside that rink in Saskatchewan. Even more so now, glowing with the spread of life under his belly.

“You *are* a tree,” Ilya tells him quietly. “You give me everything, right down to the air that I breathe.”

Shane’s lips twitch into a smirk. “Normally I’d be opposed to being called a tree, but that was pretty romantic. I think I like it better than *insect* or *berry.”*

“It was actually *bug.”*

“A tree,” he muses with a chuckle. “At least I’m useful.”

“Bugs and berries are useful, you know.”

“But I give *life.”* Shane grins wickedly at him.

“Mhm, you do. My Shanetree.”

“My Ilyatree.”

Ilya smiles back at him, expression softening. The tight knot that's been tangled around in his chest all day loosens a little. He definitely still needs a long talk with Galina tomorrow, but Shane has no idea what he's done for him today. Just…letting him be like this.

"Thank you," he says, tracing his fingertips along the shape of freckles on Shane's cheek. "For today. For…not asking me to be anything different than what I am."

"I fell in love with everything you are," Shane assures him warmly, "that won't ever change."

"Even when we are gross old men and I can't remember my own name and you need help changing your diapers?" Ilya arches an eyebrow, adding some levity to an actual fear that pervades his mind.

"You've helped me change my diapers before," Shane reminds him, gesturing down to his belly.

"Postpartum does not count." Ilya waves a hand dismissively, making Shane laugh.

"I appreciated it all the same." Shane's eyes warm. "You're a good man. The best, actually. The best dad, the best husband, the best-"

"Hockey player?"

"Don't get carried away now."

Ilya chuckles.

"My best friend," Shane whispers. "Forever."

Ilya swallows the thick lump in his throat. "You are too. My best friend."

"Just a couple of trees." Shane snorts. "And our little tree babies."

Ilya smiles at the image. Four little leafy-haired trees, growing, changing shape, living together. It is a nice thought, that like the trees, they can always regrow. That even though he cannot control what happens, the fear of losing what they have ever-present, he can choose to *live.*

It's a choice he's already made, but sometimes it's important to be reminded of that.

"I love you," he tells Shane, his voice surprisingly heavy and somber.

"I love you too, *moy serdtse."* Shane settles against his side, going boneless. "We should get her into bed."

He gestures to Hina, who is fast asleep on Ilya's chest still, completely unaware of her father's anguish and internal struggles. He hopes to god that she never truly knows the depth of his pain and fear. He hopes she never has to heal from her childhood the way he is still fighting to do.

“Just one more minute,” he says softly. “I want to be out here, with the trees, just a little longer.”

Shane nods, relaxed at his side.

Ilya thinks about his life, boiled down to just a few key moments. The important ones, and smaller, but just as important, the seemingly inconsequential ones.

Being loved by Shane is not made up in grand gestures or life-altering moments. It’s this. These slow, steady days, where his mind is in pieces, and Shane quietly picks them up to hold until he’s ready to put them back together.

He does not know what he could have done to deserve these moments with Shane Hollander, but he is so fucking glad he did it.

Even if, he reminds himself, he never had to *earn* the happiness in the first place. He’s allowed to have it. Just as he is.

End Notes

you can find me on x @ imbihesgay or tumblr @ boopernatural

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