

## So You Do The Noble Thing

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# So You Do The Noble Thing

by [sirlivi](#)

## Summary

“Uh.” Shane drags his knuckles against his knee. “So you remember how we sort of, like, had sex, right?”

“Yes, of course. You think I forget this? Forget you?”

“No, no, I just...” Shane’s having trouble remembering how he and his mom had rehearsed this. “Did you wear a condom?”

-

or: ilya accidentally knocks shane up

## Notes

THIS IS AN MPREG FIC. IT IS AN AU. NEITHER OF THEM ARE PROFESSIONAL HOCKEY PLAYERS. If that doesn't sound like ur cup of tea please turn back now! :)

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

Shane meets Rozanov at a party that Hayden drags him to one Friday night.

There's no real introduction made. Shane's spent the last hour hugging the wall and holding a beer he's barely sipped on when they accidentally catch eyes. Rozanov's talking to a girl by the staircase, holding her drink for her, but as soon as his gaze locks on Shane's he ditches her like she never existed at all.

"Um, hey," is all Shane can manage at first. Rozanov had approached with cheetah-like speed but now that they were actually standing across from each other, he's not saying much. "I'm Shane. Shane Hollander?"

"I know," Rozanov responds. He steps closer, and raises his left arm to lean against the wall with, so he ends up looming over Shane like some kind of very toned, very handsome grizzly bear hovering around a beehive. "You play hockey, yes?"

Shane feels a divot come between his brows. "Yeah. How'd you know?"

Rozanov shrugs. On the wall, his palm inches nearer to Shane's shoulder. "I watch you at rink, sometimes."

"You watch me?"

"Not watch," Rozanov corrects. He smiles. It's a pretty and deliberately placed smile, some mix between cocky and kind. "I mean, I see you at rink. I am not stalker, Hollander."

"I didn't say you were."

"You think it, though?"

Shane clears his throat. He can feel his cheeks going hot, which he hates. To curb the embarrassment, he swigs the rest of his beer back—trying not to gag at the piss taste—and then lowers his eyes to the carpet. "What'd, uh, what'd you say your name was?"

"I did not. But is Ilya Rozanov."

"Ilya," Shane pronounces carefully, except it doesn't sit in his mouth quite right so he tries again: "Rozanov." That's better.

Rozanov dips his head, still grinning. "Yes. You want more drink? I will get you one."

"No thanks."

"You don't like?"

"Not really. I don't... drink much."

"What do you do at parties, then?" Rozanov asks, one eyebrow rising.

Shane hesitates. "I don't really 'do' parties, either. This is just... My friend made me come. He's got this girl he wanted me to meet, but now that I've met her, he sort of left me alone."

"Ah," says Rozanov. "He is bad friend, then. Rude, mean friend. I will not leave you alone like bad friend, Hollander."

"I don't even know you."

"Is okay," Rozanov says. His voice has settled into this quiet, almost intimate tone, as if he doesn't want anyone else around them to listen in. Which is silly, because nobody at this party gives a shit about Shane Hollander. Everyone's too busy laughing and dancing in their own worlds. But maybe Rozanov doesn't realise this. Maybe he thinks Shane is hot shit or something. "Here, I show you what you do at parties, when not drinking. Come."

"Huh? Come where?" Shane asks, even though he's already following.

They weave through the crowd hanging out in the living room, cutting past a group of girls in the kitchen, before reaching the sliding door at the end of the house. It leads out into the backyard, which is where Rozanov finally slows down enough to grab hold of Shane's hand and tangle their fingers together.

"Um," Shane says in reaction to this. "What are you doing?"

"No one out here," Rozanov explains. "Come. There is, uh..."

He trails off and points at the swingset nailed into the grass.

"Swings?" Shane finishes.

Rozanov nods. "Yes. Swings. We go."

So they go. Shane takes the left side, sneakers planted awkwardly on the ground, with Rozanov on the right. It's quiet as they first start to move, but eventually it becomes a competition of who can go higher.

Rozanov wins. Shane leaps off with his heart practically beating out of his chest and shoots the guy an annoyed look.

"Don't Russians abide by the laws of physics?" he asks. "How the fuck did you do that?"

"Yes, Russians have many powers, like Clark Kent. That is how I learn to fly," Rozanov says. He remains seated on his side of the swing, making no effort to move.

"Oh, yeah? So what's your kryptonite, then?"

"Kryptonite?"

"Yeah, like... You know, your weakness. It's a Superman thing."

Rozanov blinks. Then, smirking a little, he says, "Pretty boys with freckles, probably."

Shane's stomach cramps with nerves. He stares down at Rozanov and, before he can overthink it, steps forward till he's standing between Rozanov's spread legs.

Then, belly still hurting, he mumbles, "I'm not pretty," while praying the nerves aren't obvious on his face.

"Da, you are. This is my opinion, Hollander."

"Okay? So your opinion is wrong."

"Not wrong," Rozanov says. His big hands move and settle over Shane's waist, drawing him even closer. "I am not ever wrong, Hollander. Remember this."

Shane is about to respond—how, he's not exactly sure—when suddenly his phone pings in his pocket. Frowning, he pulls away from Rozanov's careful grip to yank it out from his jeans.

There's a notification from Hayden lighting up the screen-

**Hayden** [10:47pm]: *Hey dude me and Jackie are gonna head out so can u find ur own ride home pls*

"Shit," Shane grumbles. He starts typing out a string of expletives to prove to Hayden exactly how pissed he is about the change of plans, but never ends up hitting send because Rozanov's palms have just slid back over his waist like they belong there, and the warmth coming off of the guy's hands is enough to distract Shane so much he drops the phone by accident.

"*Shit*," he repeats, ducking down to grab it.

"Forget phone," says Rozanov. "Forget friend. Do this with me."

"Do what?"

"You know. I have been obvious, Hollander."

Shane slides the phone into his pocket (leaving Hayden on seen) and hesitates. "I don't really do that, Rozanov. I mean, we just met, and you're..."

"You meet me tonight. I don't meet you tonight."

"Huh?"

"I tell you already," Rozanov says. "I watch you at rink sometimes. You are good skater. I see you helping little kids there as teacher. Is your job, I think."

Shane chokes out a laugh. "So you *are* a stalker. What the fuck, man?"

"Ah, don't be mean to me, Hollander," Rozanov says, pretending to be coy. "Be nice."

"I am nice."

“Yes. You are nice, nice boy with pretty freckles. And you want to show me how nice you can be, yes?”

Shane feels like he’s at a crossroads. He wants this, but he doesn’t want to admit to Rozanov exactly how much.

“How would we do it?” he asks, just to prolong the inevitable.

Rozanov huffs. He’s still on the swing, still below Shane—physically—and yet the sheer broadness of him makes Shane feel like he’s the one sitting down.

“Many ways to do it,” Rozanov says. Now he’s less coy, more sultry. Teasing. “We do with me fucking you or you fucking me. Maybe you with face in pillow in my bed as you come. Or maybe on couch, you riding my dick. How *you* want it, Hollander? Because I am easy.”

“Oh, god,” Shane says. He hates himself for it, but just Rozanov’s words alone have him chubbing up a bit in his pants. “Okay. Fine. At your place?”

“Da. I drive you. Come—ah, I do mean like that yet.”

“Fuck off,” Shane retorts, beyond embarrassed. He lets Rozanov lead him around the house and to the car parked further down the street, anyway.

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Thirty minutes later finds Shane pressed into the guy’s couch, half-naked, as the guy in question sucks a mark into the side of Shane’s neck and rubs their crotches together through their clothes.

“What you want, Hollander?” Rozanov whispers between kisses, leaving a sloppy line of spit along Shane’s collarbones. “Tell me what is you like. I do for you anything.”

“I don’t know,” Shane says honestly. His back arches off the couch, overwhelmed.

Rozanov laughs into their next kiss, nose tickling Shane’s cheekbone. “You don’t know?”

“I don’t know. Can’t you just—fuck me?”

“*Just* fuck you? What else?” Rozanov taunts. “I do whatever. Really.”

“I’m not exactly a kinky guy.”

“What porn do you watch?”

“*What?*”

Rozanov withdraws enough for them to actually look into each other’s eyes, their faces inches apart. “Yes. I want to know your deepest darkest secrets. What you come to when you are alone and touching yourself. Tell me.”

“You’re such a weirdo.”

“Tell me, Hollander. I beg. Please.”

“Okay,” Shane says awkwardly, his hands running self-soothing motions up and down Rozanov’s biceps. “I guess I kind of—well—you can, you know, be mean to me. I like that.”

Rozanov smiles again. He looks good when he smiles, when he’s happy. “Okay. I do that. How mean? I call you names? Hurt you?”

“No, not *hurt*,” Shane says. “But you can, like... manhandle me? You know, sort of—” he guides Rozanov’s hands to his hipbones and encourages him to squeeze. “Like I’m not the one calling the shots.”

“I see,” Rozanov says. He darts a quick kiss to the corner of Shane’s mouth. “I will do this for you. ‘Manhandle’—is good word.”

Shane laughs. “Yeah, it is a good word.”

They don’t drag it out any longer than it needs to be. At some point Shane gets flipped onto his stomach as Rozanov shoves a finger dripping in lube up his ass, followed by another, and another, until Shane’s been scissored open enough and he’s whining like a dog in heat into the sofa cushion. Then, and only then, does Rozanov drag Shane onto his knees and press his cock inside, inch by inch. It’s torturous—it’s heaven—it’s everything. Shane groans as it enters him, and continues to groan once Rozanov begins rocking in and out of him properly.

Afterwards, Rozanov disappears into his apartment’s kitchen to grab them both some water and a rag. He wipes the come off of Shane’s sweaty back and the leftover lube off of his thighs, all while Shane tries to get his thoughts in order.

He’s had sex a few times before. Twice, with his high school girlfriend—they had split up three years ago when Shane started college, and she went straight into some office job her dad set up for her. The third time had been with a guy he met over Hinge. They’d talked on the app for several days, and eventually Shane had agreed to meet with him at a cafe near campus. Turned out the guy’s personality was a total dud, but Shane was kind of desperate to actually have sex with a dude for the first time, so he’d let himself be convinced to go back to the guy’s place for a night. Afterwards, he texted Shane to ask if he wanted to go out again—to the movies, maybe—and Shane hadn’t responded.

This feels different. Very different, which makes no sense. It really is just a hookup. They met at a fucking party, for god’s sake. So Shane knows abstractly how it’ll go. Rozanov will be polite, but firm, when he kicks Shane out tonight without any attempt to be polite. And they’ll never talk again, probably, but Shane will think about it for the rest of his life. How the best dicking down he ever got was from some asshole stranger he played on a swingset with, once upon a time.

Somehow the opposite happens. Rozanov tucks Shane into his bed with him and they cuddle, talking about random things for the next hour or so. Rozanov asks if Shane enjoys studying exercise and sports science, what classes he was planning to take next semester, whether he preferred dogs or cats, if he played anything aside from hockey. Shane has difficulty keeping

up, because he's tired and his ass is aching a bit. Yet he tries his best anyway, to show just as much interest in Rozanov as Rozanov is showing to him.

He blames it on the accent. There's something extremely attractive about how Rozanov talks, about how he carries himself. Shane doubts he'd have gone home with anyone else like this. He just isn't that type of person.

Eventually they fall asleep, with Shane on his side and Rozanov draped over his back like a clingy monkey. His dreams are peaceful.

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In the morning, Rozanov is gone from the bed, but the place where he'd slept is still warm to the touch, so Shane figures the guy couldn't have left too long ago.

Shivering a little, he throws on a random shirt from the floor and tiptoes into the kitchen, where he finds Rozanov talking in rapid Russian to someone on the phone, and simultaneously frying a couple of eggs over the stovetop. He doesn't notice Shane, not even when Shane creeps forward till he's sat hunched at the kitchen bench, trepidation growing up his spine.

He manages to catch a few words of hissed English—papa, idiot, go fuck yourself. Enough for Shane to figure out it's not a pleasant phone call, and that maybe he shouldn't be eavesdropping on it.

But then Rozanov twists and finally realises he's there. He hangs up immediately, not even saying goodbye to the person on the other end, and his sullen expression turns relieved within a second.

"Good. You wake. I make breakfast for us," he says, not even acknowledging the call. "You like fry eggs or scramble or omelette? I can hardboil too but I'm not so good at it."

"Um, I don't mind," Shane replies. His hands fidget where they're placed in his lap, under the counter. "And you don't—you don't have to. I can be out of your hair, like, if you have stuff to do or whatever."

"Is Saturday. I will sit in front of TV all day like potato, maybe go to gym down road from here. But you? You have 'stuff' to do, do you?"

"Uh, I've got work this afternoon, yeah." Shane shrugs. "But it's no rush. I'm not, you know... due anywhere right this second."

Rozanov raises an eyebrow. "Oh? So what you want to do, then? Maybe you watch TV with me."

"Sure," Shane says. "If it's not any trouble."

"You, Hollander? *You* is no trouble, ever," Rozanov says, and returns to the frying pan to finish up with the eggs. He forks them onto a plate for them to share.

They get halfway through an episode of some old sitcom before Shane's horniness wins over. He clamours onto Rozanov's lap and kisses him like his life depends on it.

"So do you, uh, you live here alone?" Shane asks later, after Rozanov has wrung two more orgasms out of him, and they've returned to the bedroom. "You're an international student right?"

"Mmh. I am on scholarship. It pays some of rent. I pay rest. Is nice place, right? I make house a home, you think?"

Shane muffles a laugh into his fingers. "Sure, Rozanov. I'm sure you'd be a great househusband. You'll make a girl very happy one day. Or, uh, sorry. Guy?"

"Either, I do not care."

"Cool. Right."

"And you?"

Shane blinks. "Oh. Me? Uh, just guys, I guess."

He's never said it aloud before. His parents probably have a bit of a clue, but he's not ready to formally come out of the closet yet. It just feels weird, and kind of unnecessary. But he doesn't want people to simply assume he's gay, either. That would be rude, wouldn't it? And stereotyping?

"Good for you," Rozanov says, rolling Shane onto his back and planting himself casually in the space between his legs, like it was a position he was born to be in. He lowers his face till their lips are almost touching. "And is good for me, too, I think."

"You're kind of an asshole, you know that?"

"I have been told. Now be good boy and suck my dick, Hollander."

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Shane has to leave eventually. At the door, Rozanov makes a very convincing argument for him to stay (which mostly involves nipping at his jawline and whispering sexy things into his ear), but Shane's not going to risk his job for a hookup, so he pushes him off after a minute or so.

"Really," he says, because Rozanov looks two seconds away from sulking. "I gotta go. Hayden probably thinks I died."

"You hate me, Hollander," Rozanov responds. He's leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed, as Shane steps back into the drafty corridor. "You kill me dead and leave me like this."

"What? Did you wanna just lock me up in your room and never let me go? You're crazy, dude."

Rozanov's eyebrow ticks up, considering. "Ah. Is not bad idea. Next time maybe I buy some rope... tie you to my bed... torture you with orgasm?"

*Next time*, Shane thinks, dazedly. "Yeah, maybe. But seriously. Goodbye, Rozanov."

"Bye-bye, Hollander. I miss your pretty cock already."

Then the door is slipping closed, and Shane's heading to the stairwell, and getting into the Uber he'd ordered to drive him to the rink, and halfway through the drive over he realises he never asked for Rozanov's number—or Instagram—or Snapchat—or anything, because he's a massive idiot, clearly, and now there's not going to be a next time, after all. Fuck.

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It's been at least a month, and Shane's still thinking about it. About Rozanov's hands crawling like spiders over his sides and back, Rozanov's tongue licking at the head of his dick, Rozanov's voice in his ear urging him to *come come come fuck yes baby so good for me*.

It's stupid. It makes him feel stupid. He bets Rozanov has slept with a dozen more people since their night/morning together—he seems the type—while Shane has spent that time just sitting around and daydreaming about it. And not just because Rozanov had made it his personal mission to get him off as many times as possible, but because Rozanov was so... nice. The entire time, his attention had never wavered. Shane can't remember a time he's been so doted on by another person, except for when he was a kid, and his parents would get all crazy whenever he got the flu.

Even Hayden starts to notice, and Hayden doesn't tend to notice much of anything:

"Dude," he says one day, smacking Shane in the arm. "Are you good? You've been weird lately."

"Yeah, no, sorry."

"It's fine. I'm just- well, I'm kinda worried, man. Is something wrong?"

"No. I'm fine. It's just—it's these exams coming up, I guess. I must be stressed or something."

Hayden leans back on the couch, looking suspiciously at Shane. "Alright, if you say so."

He ends up having to miss a week's worth of classes, after he wakes up with a stiff belly and dry throat. Hayden spends the morning rubbing his back as Shane stoops over the towel bowl, puking out his breakfast.

"I'll go get some panadol," Hayden offers later, once Shane's brushed his teeth (twice) and finally gotten rid of the vomit smell on his breath. "Drink water."

But the panadol doesn't help, nor does the homemade soup Jackie brings over for him to eat. By the end of the week the both of them have banded together to force Shane to go to the doctor.

“Your mom’s gonna freak out if she finds out you’re hiding this from her, buddy,” Hayden says as he drives Shane to the clinic.

“I’m not hiding anything. It’s just, like, a stomach bug.”

“You look like shit and I heard you crying in your room last night. This isn’t just some *stomach bug*, bro.”

Hayden parks the car and asks if Shane wants company inside. Shane’s embarrassed as he is about needing to be dropped off like this, so he quickly shakes his head and heads up the street on his own.

He has to wait half an hour for his name to be called, even though he’d made the appointment in advance. The doctor wastes the first few minutes of it going through Shane’s medical history, since it’s been a while since Shane had a check up.

“Okay, then,” she says once that’s done with. “I’ll do the physical examination now, if you don’t mind.”

Shane leans over slightly, elbows on his knees, as she checks his breathing from his back and chest. Then she puts light pressure onto his belly, which makes him wince.

“Shane,” the doctor says, pulling away. “Are you sexually active?”

He hesitates. “Um, not, like... Right now.”

“Uh-huh. How many sexual partners have you had in the last three months?”

“Just one.”

“A man?”

He stares at the wall over her shoulder. “Yeah.”

“Okay,” she says, carefully. She returns to her desk and clicks something on his file. “I see here that you tested negative for being a carrier in 2016.”

“Yeah?”

“I’m going to suggest we run the test on you again.”

“Why?”

“Because your symptoms are consistent with the first trimester of male pregnancy, Shane,” the doctor explains, glancing away from her computer screen to face him directly.

“Oh.”

“Yes. ‘Oh’. It’ll be a bit of a wait but I’ll have the receptionist call your name again soon so you can get your blood drawn. We should be able to get the results back pretty quickly.”

Shane nods and lets her shoo him out of the office and back to the waiting room. She sends him one last smile—as if to comfort him—before asking for her next patient. Shane sits down and shoves his face into his hands.

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**Hayden** [11:30am]: *Are you ok? What's taking so long?*

**Shane** [12:41pm]: *I'm fine. You can go home without me, I'll talk to you later.*

**Hayden** [12:42pm]: ???

**Hayden** [12:42pm]: *Dude*

**Hayden** [12:43pm]: *What's wronh???*

**Hayden** [12:43pm]: *Is it bad?*

Shane ignores the flood of notifications coming in from Hayden and swipes to his mother's contact information. He's still staring at the call button five minutes later when the waitress comes over to hand him the hot chocolate he'd ordered earlier.

"Thanks," he says. She nods and returns to the front counter.

Shane finally calls. Yuna answers immediately.

"Hi, hun," she says by way of greeting, and her voice is kind of echoing like she has him on speakerphone as she does something else. "Aren't you supposed to be in class right now?"

"Uh, yeah. But I sort of—I didn't go."

"Oh, no. How come?"

"I'm sick."

"Oh, nooo," she repeats. "Sick how? Runny nose? Fever? You want Dad to come bring you some medicine?"

"No, uh," Shane says. He tries a sip of the hot chocolate and finds it scalding on his tongue, making him wince. "Uh, sick like, I'm- I guess I'm..."

"Mmh?"

"I went to the doctor and they did the test and I'm- I'm pregnant."

Silence.

"Honey," Yuna eventually murmurs. Now her voice is loud and clear, as if she's picked the phone up and placed it right by her mouth. "Are you sure? We didn't know you were seeing anybody."

“I’m sorry.” Shane scrubs his dry eyes. He’s wanted to cry for the last hour yet nothing will come out. He’s an empty glass. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Of course you didn’t. Look, Dad and I going to drive up there now. Where are you? With Hayden?”

“I don’t know. Some- some cafe, I guess. It had a rainbow flag in the window.”

“Okay. How about you share your location with us, and I’ll tell Hayden where he can find you? We’ll be there soon, baby, don’t worry too much.”

Shane nods even though she can’t see him. “Thanks. And really, I’m- I’m sorry. I’ve been so stupid.”

“You aren’t stupid, don’t be silly.”

He nods again. “Okay. I’ll, um, I’ll see you soon, then.”

“Mmh. Soon, hun. Love you.”

“Love you, too. Bye.”

It’s as if he’s in a dream after that. Shane blinks and suddenly he’s being tugged out of his chair by the arm, Hayden like an angel above him. The car drive is quick, and he doesn’t even remember pulling the seatbelt over himself before they’re back at the apartment, where Jackie has a cup of tea ready for Shane. He doesn’t drink it, though, because what if it’s bad for the baby? He knows he can’t have coffee—is it the same for tea? God, he’s so dumb, why doesn’t he know something simple like that?

Jackie throws a blanket over him and the buzzing in his ears seems to lessen, slightly, for the first time since he left the doctor’s office.

“I didn’t even know he was gay,” he can hear Hayden saying from down the hallway. In the kitchen, maybe. “And a carrier, too? I mean, what the fuck?”

“His mom said…”

“I know what she said, but like, I’m just so confused—”

“Well, look at him! It’s obviously something he’s been bottling up for awhile—”

Shane lays down with his head on the cushion, eyes on the TV in front of him. The screen is paused in the middle of an episode of *Kobra Kai*. It makes him think of Rozanov, for some reason. Probably, because everything does.

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The conversation with his parents lasts the entire afternoon. There’s a lot of talk about what Shane’s going to do (he doesn’t know), how far along he is (sevenish weeks), if the doctor had prescribed any meds to help with the nausea (not yet), but most of it boils down to who the other father is, and whether he was going to be in the picture at all.

“I’m not sure,” Shane admits, biting at his thumb. “It was just a...”

He trails off, catching his dad’s furrowed brow. “Nevermind.”

“What’s his name?”

“Uh, Ilya, Ilya Rozanov.”

“Wow. European?”

Shane shrugs.

“You’ll need to talk to him,” Yuna says, reaching across the couch to hold Shane’s hands.

“This boy has a right to know, whatever you decide.”

“Decide?”

“Yes, Shane. About whether you want to keep it or not.”

Shane swallows. “Right, yeah. Of course.”

Early the next morning, after searching through his Uber history for the address, he borrows his parents car to drive to Rozanov’s place (since his own is low on petrol). His stomach hurts the whole way over but he’s not sure if that’s because of the baby or his nerves. Probably a mixture of both.

He knocks at the door twice and waits. Then, when there’s still no answer, he knocks a third time, waiting less patiently by that point. Eventually it swings open in front of him and on the other side of the landing he’s welcomed by—not Rozanov, but a woman.

“Sorry,” he says, “Um, I think I’m at the wrong apartment.”

“It’s okay,” she answers. The vaguely Russian accent makes Shane blink. Maybe he’s not at the wrong apartment, after all.

“Do you know Ilya? Ilya Rozanov?” he asks, the name tasting like sour candy on his tongue.

“I need to talk to him.”

“Ah. Yes. Hold on.” The curly-haired girl disappears from the doorway and Shane listens to her shout something in Russian. A moment later she comes back, holds up a finger, and says, “Will be one second.”

“Uh, sure.”

One second is more like thirty. But finally, the girl is brushed aside as Rozanov appears—shirtless—in her place, with what Shane thinks is a sort of surprised, sort of annoyed look on his face. His hair is dripping wet like he’s just hopped out of the shower.

“Hollander?”

“Rozanov. Uh, hey.”

“You say you need to talk to me?” He leans against the doorframe, arms crossed. “So talk.”

“In- in private, please?”

The annoyed expression wins out against the surprise. “Fine. Come in, Hollander. Svetlana is just leaving, anyway.”

The girl scoffs, complaining to Rozanov in rapid Russian. In response, Rozanov rolls his eyes and fetches her purse from down the hall while Shane gets settled on the couch, where over a month ago they had, potentially, conceived the clump of cells now in his uterus.

After the girl—Svetlana—is gone, Rozanov sits down next to Shane without offering him any water or anything. It’s a stark contrast to how attentive he had been before, the first time Shane was here. Always asking if he was okay, if he was thirsty, if he felt tired or whatever the fuck. Now he just crosses his meaty arms and stares at Shane from the other side of the sofa, his eyes betraying nothing.

“It’s- it’s good to see you again,” Shane tries.

“Okay.”

“I’m sorry for, you know, visiting like this. I know it’s probably kind of weird.”

“Weird?” Rozanov says. “Is very weird. Is rude, too.”

“Right. Sorry.”

“What is this about, Hollander?”

“Uh.” Shane drags his knuckles against his knee. “So you remember how we, sort of, like, had sex, right?”

“Yes, of course. You think I forget this? Forget you?”

“No, no, I just...” Shane’s having trouble remembering how he and his mom had rehearsed this. “Did you wear a condom?”

Rozanov’s jaw pinches, his nose scrunching a little. “You are joking? Yes, I use condom. Always. What? You have disease, Hollander? Because is not from me. I am clean. I am very responsible. I go for test every three months. So it must be from your other boys, this disease, because I do not give to you.”

Shane coughs out a little laugh, even though it’s not funny, and Rozanov doesn’t seem to be joking.

“No,” he says, “that’s not what I meant. I meant, like... I’m a carrier, okay?”

“Carrier?” Rozanov shakes his head. “I do not know this word. I look up?”

He reaches for his pocket, but Shane stops him. “Don’t bother. I can just—ugh. Look, maybe this will help.”

He grabs the home pregnancy test from his backpack. His mom had suggested doing one and bringing it over so Rozanov could have some sort of physical proof, in case he didn’t believe Shane from the get go.

Rozanov takes it silently, and stares at it with a blank look in his eye. Just as Shane begins to wonder if he might not know what it is, Rozanov finally says: “You are pregnant, Hollander?”

“Yeah.”

“And is mine?”

“Well, yeah.”

“You are sure?”

“What, that you’re the father? Pretty sure, considering I haven’t exactly been with anyone else for awhile and—”

“No. You are sure there is baby in here?” Rozanov clarifies, as he points at Shane’s stomach like a little kid pointing at a stranger in public. “You have seen doctor? Sometime, these are wrong.”

“No, yeah, I’ve—it’s all one-hundred percent, I promise.”

Almost gingerly, Rozanov places the test on the coffee table and leans back. “Wow.”

“‘Wow’?”

“Yes, Hollander.”

“That’s it? I’m- I’m *pregnant*, Rozanov. You have nothing else to add?”

“Is a lot! Let me understand. My mind has not wrapped it yet.”

“Fuck, sorry, you’re right. Do you want me to go? I can come back...”

“No. Stay. I—I will get juice for you. Wait here.”

Then he’s gone, before Shane can say that he’d really prefer to have a glass of water instead.

Rozanov hides out in the kitchen for about five minutes. Shane tolerates it only for so long, until he’s standing up and following Rozanov through the narrow hallway. He finds him bent over the sink, staring into space, hair a bit dryer (and curlier) than it had been when Shane first arrived.

“Are you okay?”

Rozanov flinches, turning to look at Shane. “Jesus. You scare me, Hollander. You is ninja, now? You walk silent, like cat.”

“Ha, yeah, sorry. You were sort of... taking a while and I got worried.”

“Please don’t worry. I just did not notice time.” Rozanov quickly takes two glasses from the cabinet above his head and then squeezes past Shane to get to the fridge, where he grabs a jug of apple juice for them. He pours it out before leading Shane back to the living room.

“So, um, yeah,” Shane says. “That’s pretty much it. My mom thought I should probably tell you, since it’s your baby too and all, and we figured you... you know, might want to know.”

“Thank you, Hollander. I am grateful you come tell me.”

Shane nods, feeling out-of-place now that the cat is out of the bag. He’s got nothing else to say.

“I have question,” Rozanov ventures, sounding as awkward as Shane looks. “You... you keep the baby? Or you want to... Uh, sorry. I do not know word in English.”

“Terminate? Like- like an abortion?”

“Maybe. Da, I think so.”

Shane chugs his juice, wiping his lips with his sleeve. “I guess I don’t know yet. What- what do you think I should do?”

Immediately, Rozanov shakes his head. “No. I don’t have opinion. My baby, yes, but yours, too. You want, I am happy. You do not want, I will not hold against you. I am not like that.”

“But you do want it? The baby?”

Rozanov hesitates. “Would be nice, but is very unexpected. I do not know how to look after child. And... in Russia, two men do not have family together—is merzost, or... forbidden, as you say. So if- if baby comes, it will not know my family. My family will not want to know it. You understand, Hollander?”

“I think so, yeah. I’m sorry, Rozanov, I didn’t realise it was so bad there.”

“Is fine. I am used to it. I... would not want baby to be used to it?”

“Ah.”

“Only if baby comes, is what I mean,” Rozanov adds. “I know baby might come or might not.”

“It’s fine. I don’t know yet either. It’s a difficult decision.”

“Yes. You, uh, you have told your mother?”

“Oh, yeah, both my parents know. So does Hayden. Do you remember Hayden?”

“Yes, your rude friend, who left you alone at party for big bad Russian to come eat you up.”

Shane snorts. “Yeah, him. He knows, too.”

He doesn't stay for much longer after that. They exchange phone numbers, so Shane can keep Rozanov updated on his decision, and then he's being shown to the door. Neither of them lean forward to kiss each other goodbye like they had that day after the party, but Shane wants to. God, does he want to.

---

“You have options,” Yuna says that night at dinner. Dad has made them a huge pot of spaghetti bolognese, which Hayden elected to eat in his room so Shane could talk things over with his parents in private. He sits across from them at the table, stirring his fork absently through the pasta sauce.

“I mean, I either keep the baby or I don't,” he responds. “It's pretty black and white if you ask me.”

“You could look into adoption.”

“Mom, I'm not gonna put it up for adoption. Be serious.”

“I'm just trying to point out that it's not so black and white.”

“What'd the other father say?” asks his dad, carefully.

“I told you. He's- he doesn't really care what I do. He just wants to be kept, like, informed about it.”

“Fair enough.”

“Yeah, well.”

“Shane,” his mom says. She looks at him sympathetically. “You know we'll be here for you, no matter what you end up doing, but you can't put it off forever. If you do, the choice will be made for you.”

He shoves a forkful of spaghetti in his mouth. “Yeah, I know, Mom. I *know*.”

---

At work, Shane goes through the motions with the kids, and dodges questions from one of the other trainers about why he'd called off last week. He high-fives the children at the end of the class and then heads to the mini-mart just outside the building to buy a cup of fruit salad for himself.

Which is also where, two minutes later, he runs into Rozanov.

It's been a few days since they talked at Rozanov's apartment, and Shane had gotten no closer to figuring out what he wanted to do. The idea of getting fat and pregnant made him freeze up with both nerves and fear—he was too young to be a dad, he didn't make enough money, he'd have to move out 'cause there was no way Hayden should have to put up with a crying infant in his home—but then, after a minute or so, those nerves would turn into something else. Excitement, maybe, as Shane wondered whether it'd be a girl or boy.

“Well, hello there, pretty boy,” Rozanov says in greeting. He leaves the aisle he'd been hanging out in to join Shane, following him out to the street.

“Uh, hey, man.”

“How are you? And how is, uh...” he gestures vaguely at Shane's belly.

“Fine,” Shane says, glancing sideways before crossing the road toward his car. Still, Rozanov trails behind him. “Did you... wanna hang out or something?”

“If you are free, da, could be nice. You did not text, Hollander.”

“Yeah, sorry. I've been busy.”

“But you not busy now?”

“No, not now. What- what do you wanna do?”

Rozanov shrugs. “I do not mind. I am easy.”

Shane abruptly gets a flashback to that evening they met. He's pretty sure Rozanov had said something similar then, to persuade Shane into his bed for the night.

“Well, I was just gonna go home and maybe, like, read my book, I guess.”

“Boring,” Rozanov chirps, tone light. “We do something fun instead. Movie? Bowling?”

Hesitating, Shane says, “I don't know. I'm sort of tired.”

Rozanov's expression drops for a split second, before he quickly recovers and his grin doubles in size. “Ah, okay. Is fine. Another day?”

“Yeah, another day.”

“Okay. I leave you alone now, Hollander. But text me this time, yes? For real?”

Shane laughs. “Fine, yes, I'll text you. Geez.”

Rozanov reaches out and flicks Shane teasingly on the nose. He doesn't say anything else as he goes, returning to the other side of the street and inside the shop they'd just come from. It makes Shane regret not asking when he had the chance what Rozanov was doing there—did he go skating? He'd not seen him on the rink, so maybe he was about to book a session.

Back home, he eats his fruit salad on the couch and lasts thirty minutes before succumbing to the temptation of tapping onto Rozanov's contact on his phone.

**Shane** [4:56pm]: *Hey. It's Shane.*

**Rozanov** [4:58pm]: *Shane? i do not know this person...*

**Shane** [4:58pm]: *Shane Hollander?*

He barely resists the urge to add 'I'm carrying your baby??? Does that jog your memory, asshole?'

**Rozanov** [4:59pm]: *I was kidding hollander!*

**Rozanov** [5:00pm]: *Because i am funny guy*

**Rozanov** [5:01pm]: *Or u think i am asshole?*

**Shane** [5:01pm]: *Fuck off*

**Rozanov** [5:02pm]: *What are u doing right now?*

**Shane** [5:02pm]: *Texting you*

**Rozanov** [5:03pm]: *U are not so funny as me i think*

**Shane** [5:03pm]: 🙄

**Shane** [5:04pm]: *I'm eating watermelon*

**Rozanov** [5:05pm]: *Ugh so boring*

**Rozanov** [5:06pm]: *Want to have lunch tomorrow?*

Shane's fingers hover over the screen, heart quaking in his chest. Eventually he writes *Sure, where?* and lets Rozanov do the rest of the planning. At the same time, he places a hand over his tummy and keeps on wondering about things he shouldn't wonder about. He thinks he'd prefer a boy, but a girl could be cool, too. He'd have to ask his mom for a lot more help if he has a daughter. Shane barely knows how to dress himself, let alone a little girl.

It's in that moment that he realises he's made his choice. He wants it. He shouldn't, but he does. He wants the baby, and all the struggles that will come with it, in terms of money and Hayden and probably dropping out of college to look after it. That's how bad he wants this baby. It's a miracle he hadn't realised it faster.

---

His parents don't kick up a fuss about Shane's decision. They exchange a single, lingering look with each other before starting in on arranging an OB appointment for him, and googling whether he'd already missed any important steps in maintaining his—and the

baby's—health. Then, and only then, do they show a bit of concern: is he sure he wants to go to lunch with Rozanov tomorrow?

“Yes, Mom. It'll be fine,” Shane insists over the phone, as he gets ready that morning. First he tries a plain shirt with jeans, except the jeans are the same pair he wore at the party, and he doesn't want Rozanov to think he only owns one pair of jeans. Except his other pair don't match any of his clean jackets. Somehow he ends up staring at himself in the bathroom mirror in a tuxedo he'd had to buy for his uncle's wedding last year, and he feels so ridiculous he strips completely and topples backward onto his bed, phone still held to his ear.

“And you've practiced all the questions you're going to ask him?”

“Uh-huh. I have them written down in my notes app in case I forget anything.”

“Good. He'll probably have some questions as well, so just answer honestly. Keep the channels of communication open, okay? We don't want either of you shutting each other out.”

“Uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.”

“Did you hear me?”

“Yes. Be honest, be nice, don't shut him out, I know. Mom, can I go? I wanna get there early.”

“Of course. Good luck.”

“Thanks. Bye, love you.”

He changes into his original outfit before heading out to the small, casual(ish) restaurant Rozanov had picked for them. Surprisingly, Rozanov's already there when Shane arrives twenty minutes before the reservation, and he holds the door open for him as they go in, which makes Shane feel a mixed cocktail of emotions. Discomfort, shyness, gratitude.

“So, Hollander, you look good,” Rozanov says at the booth table he snagged for them in the corner. “You do not show yet?”

“You saw me yesterday. And I don't think pregnant people even have a bump until the third trimester or whatever.”

Rozanov hides the bottom half of his face behind the menu. “Yes, I know.”

Shane copies him and says, while looking at the ingredient list for the carbonara pasta, “In case you were wondering...”

“Mmh?”

“I *am* going to have a bump. Eventually.”

Rozanov abruptly drops the menu and stares wide-eyed at him. “You mean you want to keep \_\_\_”

With the worst timing known to man, their waiter appears at the head of the table to take their drink orders. Rozanov gets halfway through requesting a vodka and orange before suddenly glancing at Shane from the corner of his eye, and then orders a simple cola instead.

“And for you, sir?”

“A ginger ale, please. Thank you.”

“Of course.”

The waiter leaves again. Shane nervously taps his fingers against the table, while Rozanov just keeps on grinning at him. He seems almost as happy as when he finally convinced Shane to have sex with him.

“We will be parents, then,” Rozanov soon says.

Shane’s fingers still. “If you want to co-parent. Sure.”

Rozanov’s smile dims, just a shade. “Co-parent?”

Shane figures maybe he doesn’t recognise the term, so he starts explaining it, which only seems to darken Rozanov’s mood more, so after a pause he decides it might be best to shut up completely. They wait in silence for their drinks, and then order their food (Rozanov gets a burger while Shane asks for a poke bowl, because it seems like the healthiest option), which they also eat in silence. It’s horrible.

“It is tasty?” Rozanov eventually says. He tips his chin at Shane’s plate.

“Uh, yeah. Kind of bland but it’s alright.”

“‘Bland’. Da, I am not surprised. Looks like food for rabbit. You want to be like rabbit, Hollander?”

“Just because it has vegetables doesn’t mean it’s made for a rabbit. And anyway, it’s better than your burger. Look how much salt they put on the chips.”

Rozanov raises an eyebrow. “You are vegetarian?”

“No. Just...”

“Fussy? Health freak?”

“Conscious of the food I put in my body,” Shane snaps.

Now Rozanov’s other eyebrow goes up. “Is okay. I think it is good thing. I try to go on diet once but it did not last, because I was too in love with McDonalds. You have more control than me.”

Shane grimaces. “McDonalds?”

“Da. It is second best thing to happen to me since leaving Russia.”

“Okay, well, rule one now that we’re having a baby together,” Shane says. “You can’t feed it McDonalds. That’s disgusting.”

“Ah, Hollander, I am not stupid. I promise to not feed our baby McDonalds. Maybe when they are older but not when they are still tiny.”

He can’t help laughing. “Okay. Deal. There, our first compromise as parents.”

After that talk flows much easier, almost as well as it had that night they fucked. Shane becomes so consumed by the conversation he forgets all the questions he was meant to ask Rozanov, like about custody and finances and whether he’ll want to attend Shane’s doctor appointments with him. Instead he finds himself questioning Rozanov about where he works (at a deli), what he studies (economics and political science), and which part of Russia he comes from (Moscow).

Rozanov pays when the bill comes around, which kind of stings Shane. He’s perfectly capable of paying for it himself. Then again, as they’re leaving, he catches a group of girls staring longingly at Rozanov, and suddenly the embarrassment is replaced by pride. Yeah, he thinks. Rozanov is really fucking hot. He’s also the one who bought me my lunch. And there’s nothing humiliating about that, is there?

“Text me when you are home,” Rozanov instructs him outside.

“Why?”

“Want to know you are safe.” He pauses. “You *and* the baby.”

Shane nods. That makes sense. “Yeah, okay.”

The subsequent drive back is less harrowing than the drive there. Shane plays his classical music loud, humming along. And when he arrives at the apartment, Hayden is waiting for him in the living room, curious to know how it went. Shane prioritises messaging Rozanov first, though, much to Hayden’s annoyance.

**Shane** [3:15pm]: *Thank you for lunch. I just got home. When can I see you again?*

**Rozanov** [3:16pm]: *Whenever u want u can see me Hollander ))*

**Shane** [3:16pm]: *How about Wednesday?*

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Life rushes forward. Shane visits his parents more often, and whenever he checks his phone there’s always a notification from one of them, to see how he’s going. Anytime he goes to the campus library to study, he always ends up sidetracked on his laptop, going down a baby-furniture rabbit hole on the IKEA website. The week she finds out about his decision, Jackie

bakes him a congratulatory ‘You’re Pregnant!’ cake, which he can’t tell if he’s meant to take as a joke or not. Either way, she seems a little jealous that he had beaten her to the punch.

The whole thing feels less stressful now a real plan is taking shape. Yes, Shane’s having to rearrange the rest of his life, but it’s not the end of the world—more like the start of a new one. He’ll finish off this semester before going on a year-long break from studying. Ideally, that will give him enough time to give birth, recover, and get settled with the baby, all of which will be even easier now he knows Rozanov is there to support him.

His parents are more than happy to have him temporarily move home while he saves for a new place. When they ask why, he explains that he refuses to make Hayden live in the same apartment as a newborn. There’s being an asshole, and then there’s being straight-up evil, and Shane won’t toe that line. He figures he should try to find somewhere close to Rozanov’s, just to avoid as much hassle as possible if the other ever wants to see the baby.

Which, altogether, is how he spends the rest of the first trimester: finishing up his exams, making a timeline for the future, and sleeping. He’s also pissing more than usual, but he’s read online that that’s to be expected.

Going to the doctor is the only shitty part of the deal. Shane never communicates himself as well as he should, so he rarely feels as understood as he wants to. Unfortunately, his mom insisted on scheduling appointments for every month. At least Rozanov is willing to tag along and keep him company for them.

“Look at our baby, Hollander,” he says to each new ultrasound picture, smiling down at the smudge of grey on the page. “They are too cute. Cutest in world, probably. I think they will win awards for being so cute. Don’t you want to hold them already?” Then he leans across the car and addresses Shane’s stomach directly: “Come out quickly, baby! Papa wants to meet you.”

It’s totally at odds with the type of person Shane assumed Rozanov was. He doesn’t seem like a fuckboy—for one, he’s always quick to respond to Shane’s messages, even in the middle of the night, so he can’t be *that* busy. Secondly, he’s much more down to earth than what you’d guess from his Instagram profile.

It had secretly become Shane’s guilty pleasure, looking at Rozanov’s account. Previously the app was collecting dust on his homescreen, virtually forgotten except for when he got a follow request from somebody he was doing a group assignment with. But now, he often lays in bed and instinctively pulls it up on his phone, scrolling till the afternoon has faded away into evening.

Rozanov is just... he’s very interesting, okay? He’s got, like, a stupid amount of followers. Almost two thousand, in fact. Shane doesn’t even *know* that many people. Is it possible Rozanov really does? Or are half of them old hook-ups like he had intended Shane to be?

Then there are the actual posts. Each of them seems carefully curated, like a museum of Rozanov’s life. Most recently uploaded is a black-and-white photo of Rozanov posing outside a vintage movie theatre with a group of guys, captioned simply, ‘Saturday night out.’ Another is one of those slideshow types, depicting Rozanov at a club—then another club—

then a rave (that one he's shirtless in, holding the waist of that Svetlana girl who had been at his apartment when Shane told him the news. Glitter coats every inch of their bodies)—and finally a table covered in empty bottles of alcohol. A song is attached to the post, something vaguely funky and extremely European sounding.

Then there's some clearly from his teenage years. He looks younger in those pictures, but no less cocky. Shane stares at the selfies of him smoking, him skating, him at a concert, and wants. Desperately, does he want.

So yes, it's addictive. Shane is endlessly curious about Rozanov's past, but he's too nervous to bring it up. What would he even say? *Hey, I know it's not relevant to anything about our situation, but could you tell me how you realised you were bisexual? And who are those guys on your Instagram? Are they your friends? How'd you meet? What's your favourite movie? Do you have any other hobbies?*

Definitely not. It's too personal. The information is useless, anyway. What would Shane even do if he knew that stuff? So instead of mentioning any of it he just keeps his desires close to his chest, and lets the status quo stay exactly that.

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It's been a nice day. Rozanov sent him a good morning text, none of the kids at his work had any tantrums, and now he's eating beef curry in front of the TV, tonight's Montreal versus New York match playing in front of him. In retrospect it seems inevitable that his parents would ruin it.

"Shane, hun," says Yuna, during one of the ad breaks. "Dad and I were thinking..."

"Yeah?"

"Well, don't you agree it's time we meet this Ilya Rozanov character?" she asks, in a tone that makes it obvious she's trying to avoid upsetting him. "I know you're not... *with* him, per se, but it would still be nice to get to know him ourselves."

Shane makes a face. "No way. That's weird."

"It isn't weird. He's going to be in your life permanently, and we're part of your life, too. It makes sense."

"Just invite him over for dinner," adds David. "Or we could go out to eat somewhere. Your choice."

"Can I think about it?"

"Of course, son."

The game comes back on. Shane can't focus, though. In his mind paranoia whirls. What if Rozanov visits and says something that makes his parents totally freak out? What if they disapprove? What if they say something that scares Rozanov off? There wasn't truly anything tying him to Shane. Yes, the baby had become a sure-thing now, and Rozanov claimed to be

happy about it, but those were just words. He could change his mind tonight and be gone from the face of the earth by tomorrow morning. Shane wouldn't be able to do anything if Rozanov decided to disappear.

The Voyageurs win. That strikes Shane as a sign. He turns to his mother on the other end of the couch and says, "Fine. Okay. I'll tell Rozanov you wanna meet him. But, you know it'll be awkward, right? Like, you'll wanna die, it's gonna be so awkward."

She smiles. "Not unless we let it!"

Shane groans, not at all enthused by her enthusiasm.

Rozanov is easy to convince after he learns there's free food involved. They arrange a Sunday evening to meet, because it's the only day his parents have available, plus it gives Shane a week to mentally prepare. He does his breathing exercises and tells himself to be cool—be normal—so many times it becomes like a mantra. Only then does he feel ready for it.

He cooks lasagna, which the internet tells him is a safe, smart choice. After all, who doesn't like lasagna? For dessert he settles on tiramisu, since it's his dad's favourite, and something like that can be used as a conversation topic if they run out of things to say. Shane also drives down to the local shop to buy a bottle of wine, more grateful than ever to not have a bump yet. He can't imagine how many judgemental looks he would've gotten if he was visibly pregnant.

"Good luck, bro," says Hayden when Shane tells him about it.

"It's gonna be terrible."

"I believe in you. Just, you know, remember to—"

"Breathe? Yeah. I know."

"Alright, man. See you Tuesday. Oh, by the way, Jackie says good luck, too!"

"Yeah, thanks. Bye."

He hangs up. Rozanov arrives five minutes later, which is about twenty minutes early. The guy doesn't seem like the type, but he's done it multiple times now, so once again Shane reminds himself to stop judging a book by its cover.

Almost immediately, Rozanov volunteers to help set the table, pour out the drinks, while Shane's parents come into the dining room to introduce themselves.

"I'm Yuna, and this is David."

"Da. It is very nice to meet you. I am Ilya."

His mom laughs a little nervously. "So you are. We've heard a lot about you."

“All good things?”

“*Only* good things, son,” Shane’s dad says. “So, did you catch the game on Wednesday?”

Turns out David Hollander is a genius. Hockey is something all four of them can talk about for hours, and talk they do. Rozanov supports the Bears (“You ask me ‘why’? *Why*? Because they are best, that is why!”) which evokes plenty of outrage from the table, and by the time the tiramisu is being plated they’re still grilling him about it.

“So, Ilya, Shane tells us you came to Canada to study?” his mom asks at some point, between sips of her wine.

“Yes. I apply to many places, but Ottawa has best scholarship, so it was obvious pick,” says Rozanov. He hasn’t touched his own glass all evening. “Though to tell truth, as long as I left Russia, that was most important thing. It is not great place for someone like me.”

“I see. And what about your family?”

Shane winces, but Rozanov responds in stride: “I have brother who I tell about Shane. He take news, eh... not well. But I expect this. Now I wait for him to tell my father. Or maybe he already has and is why they have not called me.”

“Oh, sweetheart, I’m so sorry. But, you know, David and I are gonna be here for you both every step of the way. This baby is a surprise, yes, but it’s a very lovely thing as well.”

“I know.” Rozanov glances briefly at Shane, who’s sitting nervously beside him. “Is very good. I am happy and grateful.”

After they eat, they migrate to the living room, where that wine starts to loosen Yuna’s tongue more than Shane expected.

“So how is it you two met exactly?” she says, suspicious. “Shane’s always so mysterious about it. I don’t understand why it has to be some big secret, but I suppose that’s Shane for you.”

“We meet at ice rink,” Rozanov replies. “I see him teaching and I think, wow, very handsome man. Then I decide to make plan to ask him out. But, maybe I am not his type, because he never looks at me. Lucky thing I know Hayden, and he is very good friend, so I make him introduce us. Then, *vot!* Now baby is coming.”

Shane furrows his brows. That’s not even close to how it happened.

“Oh, well, that’s not so bad,” says Yuna. “The way Shane’s been acting I expected something a little more scandalous. Isn’t that right, hun?”

His dad nods. “Yeah. It’s not bad at all. Young love, right?”

Around nine, the night winds down. Yuna and David head to bed first, as they need to be up early tomorrow morning, but they insist—while throwing knowing looks at Shane—that

Rozanov stay for as long as he wants. It's all terribly embarrassing, but thankfully Rozanov withholds from teasing him about his overbearing parents, so it's not all bad.

"Thank you for inviting me," he says instead. They're on the sofa together, Shane curled up in the corner, sipping a ginger ale, while on the other end Rozanov has his legs spread in a far too enticing way. "I was a little nervous meeting your parents, but they are very kind to me."

"They're crazy, but thanks. I'll let them know."

He shakes his head. "They do not seem crazy. I like them."

"Is it true what you said about your brother? He hasn't talked to you since he found out?"

"Yes. I prefer this way, though. My brother—Alexei—he is not, uh, good man. He is much like my father. Very traditional. In Russian I call him 'mudak'."

"What's it mean?"

Rozanov grins. "It means he is asshole."

"Ha. Right. So I guess if he takes after your dad... you're more like your mom?"

The grin disappears. "Ah, no. I do not think I am like her."

"Oh. What's she like?"

"Well, she was very pretty," Rozanov says slowly. "But not pretty like you. Pretty like... Do you know when you hit glass too hard, and it breaks easy?"

"Fragile?"

"Da. She was fragile. You are pretty like sunset."

Shane blushes. A second later he notices the tense Rozanov is using. "Wait, your mom... she's d—she passed away?"

"I was twelve. Yes."

"I'm so sorry. That's horrible."

Rozanov shrugs. "I know. I thought I was over it because it was so long ago... but now I cannot help feeling sad because our baby will not know her. She- she loved children. Maybe is why she liked me so much. I did not want to grow up."

Shane's mouth goes dry. Pity blossoms in his stomach, right where he imagines their little boy or girl is starting to develop its head and body. "What was her name?"

"Irina."

"That's a nice name."

“Yes, I think, too.”

“Maybe...” Shane says, hesitantly. “Maybe we could, I don’t know...”

“What?”

“Nevermind.” He wishes he hadn’t brought it up. “Do you want any more tiramisu? There’s tons left. I think I made too much.”

“Of course. If I ever say no to more food, know I have been replaced by alien, Hollander. Got it?”

Shane laughs and leads him back to the kitchen. “Got it.”

They keep talking for hours. Shane’s so, so tempted to take Rozanov upstairs and give him a tour of his childhood bedroom, but just in time he remembers that’s not what this is. They’re co-parenting, not parenting. It’s not romantic, or sexual, or anything like that. The only reason they even talk at all is so the baby isn’t raised by parents completely ostracised from each other. Now Shane knows how Rozanov grew up, it seems obvious that that’s why he’s so onboard with sticking around.

It’s midnight when Rozanov finally makes his way to the front door. Shane shows him to the porch (with a lunchbox full of leftover lasagna) and tries not to feel sad about watching him go. He tells himself he shouldn’t beg, shouldn’t stoop so low just for another minute of Rozanov’s company.

“I’ll see you soon, Hollander.”

“Yeah. You, too, uh, Ilya.”

Rozanov—Ilya—smiles a gentle, almost tender smile. “You remember my name. So romantic. Goodbye, Shane.”

“Alright, don’t push it. Get home safe.”

Ilya makes an aye, aye, captain gesture before finally heading off to his car. Once it’s driven away, a small speck on the end of the road, Shane returns inside, locks the door, and makes his way to his room, where he strips quickly. Naked, he lays down in bed, and jerks himself off to thoughts of Ilya’s face as he calls Shane pretty for the millionth time.

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In his second trimester he starts avoiding tight-fitting clothes. No more workout shirts or leggings, because they make it obvious how big he’s getting.

Shane’s not used to being... soft, especially in the belly area. He’d been a scrawny kid, and during puberty he made sure to turn all his baby fat into muscle through constant exercise. It was half the reason he insisted on getting his license as soon as possible. That way he could drive himself to the gym anytime he needed, without having to bug his parents to take him. Now he’s in his twenties, which should be his prime. After all, he eats clean, works out every afternoon, and on the weekends tortures his body even further at work.

None of it helps, though. The baby's getting bigger and so is Shane. He stares at himself in the mirror in the morning, palm curved over his increasingly swollen stomach, and wonders if the changes will be permanent. Will he be able to get back in shape after giving birth?

At fourteen weeks, his mom catches him analysing a photo on his phone, showing each stage of pregnancy on an otherwise slim woman. Shane won't get larger breasts like that—a rise in estrogen, yeah, and slightly thicker pecs, but not real boobs—so only the belly part is accurate. He struggles to imagine himself getting as large as she is in weeks 37-40. It didn't seem possible. Still, it's not like he can argue with google.

“What are you doing?” Yuna says.

Shane startles and turns his phone off. “Nothing. Just, you know. Research.”

She comes around the other side of the kitchen counter, pursing her lips. “You're not regretting this, are you?”

“What? No!”

“It's okay if you are. This is a big thing you're doing. Everything's changing...”

“Mom, I promise, I'm happy with my choice.”

“Okay. It's only, sometimes it can be like pulling teeth to get you to talk about it, hun. Your father and I are trying our best and you certainly don't make it any easier.”

“I know, I know.”

“How's Ilya?”

Shane hesitates. “Fine. He got good results on all his classes. He, um, invited me over to his apartment to celebrate.”

“That sounds nice.”

“I think it's meant to be like... an actual party.”

“Ah.”

“Yeah. So.” Shane clicks his tongue. “Probably won't go.”

“Well, you could if you wanted. Just try to avoid anybody smoking, and don't drink, and make sure to stay close to your friends—”

“Mom, I'm not fourteen. I know.”

“Oh, well, if you *know*, forget I said anything. God forbid your dear old mom looks out for you.”

Shane snorts, rolling his eyes. “My dear old mom should stop worrying so much. It’s not like I’m actually going. I can just see Ilya another day.”

“But he’ll be so disappointed, don’t you think?”

“Doubt it.”

“Really? Because I thought he seemed very taken with you when we met,” Yuna teases, which makes Shane roll his eyes a second time, though now he’s blushing as he does it. “Just try not to hurt his feelings, okay?”

“Uh-huh. I’ll try.”

He’s being sarcastic, but she doesn’t notice.

Later that afternoon Shane messages Ilya the bad news. Another few minutes after that Ilya responds with a crying-face emoji, followed by a call. Shane picks up on the third ring:

“What’s up?”

“Hollander. Do you hate me?”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“Is not ridiculous. You do not want to come to party, you do not want to see me, you do not like me. And so you must hate me.”

“I’m pregnant. What the fuck am I gonna do at a party?”

“Play on swings.”

“Your apartment has swings now, does it?”

“No, but you can sit in my room and imagine them while I bring you fresh ginger ale every half hour.”

Shane scoffs. He was in the middle of writing a list of most to least important things to buy for the baby (nappies, food, clothes, shoes, books, toys), but at this point in the conversation he puts the pen down to focus completely on Ilya.

“Hiding out in your bedroom doesn’t sound very fun, Rozanov.”

“You haven’t tried it. How would you know?”

“Fuck off. I’m not coming to your stupid party.”

“But is good time to meet my friends,” Ilya needles. “I have many. I am popular guy. You are lucky to know me, really.”

“Did you tell them about me?”

“Da. About you, about baby, about us. They want to meet you and tell you horrible things about me for fun.”

Shane licks his bottom lip and says, “Really? Like what?”

“Ah, like when I was fourteen and smoked for first time. Very embarrassing memory.”

“Fourteen? What kind of person gives a fourteen year old kid a cigarette?”

Ilya laughs, and Shane instantly wants to bottle up the sound to drink it like hot chocolate.

“You are sweet, Hollander. It was not, ah, normal cigarette. Man sell it to me and does not care my age. As long as I had money...”

“Jesus. You were doing drugs that young?”

“Mmh. Now, when I first try *normal* cigarette—I think I was maybe nine or ten. I steal them from my brother’s secret spot under the floor. Same place where he keep all his naughty pictures.”

“You mean his porn?”

“Hollander! Language! What if baby hears?”

“I don’t think the baby can hear us, Ilya,” Shane says, mouth twitching into an unwilling smile. “It’s still inside me, remember?”

“Maybe not. I read baby has ears by this time.”

“You read that?”

“Da. I also read baby can maybe move around now it is more, ah, developed.” Ilya’s accent trips over the word a bit, but Shane understands him fine. “You feel it yet? The baby?”

“Sort of. They’re not, like... kicks. It’s more like a little flutter, you know? And only when I’m not doing anything else so I can concentrate on the feeling.”

Ilya’s voice turns quiet. “Wow. That is very... Wow. I wish I could feel.”

“Are you a carrier?” Shane asks. He can’t believe neither of them had brought it up before. “Maybe one day you could—”

“No, not me. I am not responsible like you, anyway. Would fuck it up, I think.”

“I don’t think that. You’re really smart, Ilya.”

“Mmh, thank you. So smart I even get distinctions on all my classes this semester. You remember I tell you this, Shane? Is why I want you to come over. We should celebrate.”

Shane sighs. “You don’t give up, do you?”

“For you? Never.”

“Alright.” He swaps his phone to the other hand. “I’ll come. But can you, like... I don’t know, tell your friends not to smoke or- or vape or whatever? It’s not a big deal if they drink, obviously, but if I inhale any of the smoke it might be bad for the baby.”

“Of course. Is bad for you, too, I think, if it get in your lungs. I will tell them and make them promise.”

“Thank you.”

“Thank *you*. I will see you Friday, Hollander. Do not forget.”

“Okay. See you then.” Shane waits for Ilya to return the goodbye before hanging up. Then he very bravely resists the urge to go squeal into his pillow like a teenage girl with a crush.

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The party isn’t what he expects. There’s no terrible music playing—just some top fifty classic rock playlist, which is tolerable enough—and the apartment isn’t busy at all. There’s a group of four or five drinking in the living room, an even smaller group in the kitchen, and that’s it. If Shane wanted, he thinks he could even memorise all their names.

Ilya makes sure to drag him around and make the proper introductions: “This is Cliff, this is Troy, this is...” and so on. They’re nice people. More extroverted than Shane prefers, but that’s fine. He accepts a cold ginger ale from the fridge and lets himself be sucked into a conversation with Svetlana about how Ilya yanked all his baby teeth out as a kid, whether they were loose or not. It makes him laugh, which is obviously Svetlana’s goal. Both of them ignore the elephant in the room, though, no matter how badly Shane wants to know what she and Ilya were in the middle of doing that day he came over.

Nobody smokes, nobody makes fun of Shane, nobody even mentions the pregnancy. His mom was right. Clearly he’d been all in his head about it for nothing.

As the hours pass, Ilya clings closer to Shane’s side, which Shane is perfectly content with. They sit on the sofa together, knees and shoulders touching, while Cliff complains about how one bad assignment mark is fucking up his grade for a whole unit. Shane smiles at the right points, nods when he’s expected to, and sympathises where needed.

“You are okay?” Ilya murmurs into his ear during a lull in the conversation.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

“Tired?”

“Maybe a little, but don’t worry. I’m normally in bed by this time.”

Ilya throws a casual arm across Shane’s shoulders. Nobody else in the circle comments on it. Hell, they don’t even look over.

“Sleep if you want,” says Ilya, now using that arm to tuck Shane properly against his side. The point of contact between them feels like fire. It makes his heart race. “I take care of you. Maybe you even stay here tonight?”

“You wish.”

“Da. Yes, I wish. So you stay?”

Shane blinks, surprised by the sincerity in Rozanov’s voice. Then, a tad hesitantly, he finally agrees. “You really don’t mind if I sleep on the sofa?”

“Is fine by me.”

“Okay. I... guess I’ll stay, then?”

“This is question, Hollander?”

“Fuck off.” A beat, then, “Is *that* a question?” which makes Ilya laugh in a way that warms Shane from the inside.

Around two AM, Ilya kicks everyone out, instructing them all to call their Ubers or rideshares or “whatever the fuck you use.” As the apartment empties Shane, quite pathetically, dozes on the couch, his eyelids becoming too heavy to keep open. As he falls into that state in between wakefulness and sleep, he thinks he hears vague noises of Ilya cleaning up... Ilya running water at the sink, muttering to himself... Ilya saying a long, drawn-out goodbye to Svetlana at the door.

When he comes back over to Shane, kneeling on the floor beside him, Shane sleepily asks, “What were you talking to her about?”

“Nothing. You not worry.”

“I do worry, Ilya,” Shane says, almost too quiet to hear. “I worry all the time.”

“But is not needed. You know I look after you.”

Shane twists his neck, shoving his face into the cushion. “I worry, anyway.”

Another minute passes. Now, he can hear Ilya just breathing, a far too comforting sound. In his mind’s eye he imagines Ilya’s heart gently beating away in his chest. Shane wants to take that heart and keep it in a glass box to protect forever, so nobody can ever harm it. It’s the least Ilya deserves.

“Come on, *kotik*. You rest now,” Ilya eventually says, and then reaches out to pick Shane up bridal-style. It must be difficult—Shane’s heavy usually, thanks to all the muscle, and even heavier lately thanks to the baby. But Ilya doesn’t grunt or make any noise of complaint. He just holds carefully at Shane’s hip and armpit, carrying him through the hallway and into the bedroom where almost four months ago they had fucked under the covers. Where Shane had woken to a warm bed and the smell of eggs floating in from the kitchen.

“Noo,” Shane murmurs once he realises where he’s been kidnapped. “I said I’d take the sofa. I feel bad. Rozanov, you don’t have to be so—”

“Shane, Shane, Shane. I am not so anything. You think every time I do something it is like diamond, but is not. When you take bed, you know... It is nothing to me. When I give you something real you will see difference.”

He thinks he only understood half of Ilya’s rambling, but the sentiment seemed obvious enough. “Alright. But only ‘cause I’m too tired to fight.”

Ilya huffs. “Da, okay. I see you tomorrow—we have breakfast together, I think. Good night, Shane.”

“Good night, Ilya.”

He’s almost expecting a kiss. It just feels like it would make sense, considering how tenderly they seem to be speaking to each other right now. Of course, no kiss comes, and the last bit of Shane’s energy is sapped from him. He goes limp on top of the mattress, brain full of what-if’s.

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They do go to breakfast the next morning, at some cheap pancake place near Ilya’s apartment. Shane orders plain ones with a liberal drizzle of maple syrup (he might be careful about what he eats but he’s still Canadian), and Ilya gets a huge stack of nutella pancakes, which he insists on cutting a section off of and forcing Shane to try. They also share a banana milkshake, though Ilya hogs most of that.

A few days later they meet again, this time for an early lunch before Shane has to head to work. And on the following weekend Ilya texts him out-of-the-blue to invite him shopping. They dedicate the afternoon to going baby-store to baby-store, buying anything that seems like it’ll be helpful in six months time.

“Look at these tiny little socks,” Ilya says in the clothing aisle. He holds up a pair of pastel yellow socks, white frills lining the top of them. “Oh, my god, Hollander, I will die of cuteness.”

“Oh, my god, *I* can’t believe you know what that even means,” Shane responds, and then they’re both giggling while other would-be parents wander past them. It’s a nice way to spend the time, because it means he’s only focusing on all the exciting, fun stuff about becoming a parent, rather than the scary stuff like giving birth, and how scared he is of inadvertently ruining the poor baby’s life.

Outside again, they return to Ilya’s car, weighed down by several bags full of infant clothing and toys.

“I drive you home?” offers Ilya, as they pack everything into the boot.

“You don’t have to...”

“Shane, we have this conversation before. I will drive you home.”

“Yeah, yeah, fine. Do you remember my address?”

“I am not stupid person, da, I remember your—”

Ilya gets interrupted by a middle-aged woman suddenly stopping her trolley next to them in the car park and gushing about how sweet a couple they were. “I’m so sorry,” she says, smiling, “but I just think it’s fantastic to see young people settling down and having a family like this. And aren’t you both so handsome? Congratulations.”

Shane’s always a tad uncomfortable when strangers talk to him in public, regardless of if they’re attempting to hit on him or just ask for directions to somewhere nearby. He thinks it’s just... not needed. Why would he want to be complimented by somebody he doesn’t know? Why can’t they just google the location of wherever they’re going? So normally he tends to nod, probably rudely, and rush through the conversation as quickly as possible, not caring how he comes across.

It turns out Ilya is much better at handling it. “Thank you. You are very nice. But we are very busy today so we have to go now, I think.”

“Oh, of course! I’m sorry for stopping you guys! Congrats again. Having children is truly the greatest thing you can do.”

“Mmh. Da. Thank you, we think same. Very nice to meet you, ma’am.”

“Goodbye, have a *great* day!”

“You, too,” both of them echo at the same time, and finally the lady goes off on her merry way.

Shane breathes a sigh of relief and cuts around the car to climb into the passenger seat. Ilya mimics him, though obviously he gets into the driver’s side.

“You are shy, Hollander?” asks Ilya as the car starts.

“What? No.”

“You seem, ah... How do I say without hurting your feelings? You seem down.”

“I’m not ‘down’. I just... isn’t it rude that she even assumed I was pregnant in the first place? I mean—am I—be honest—do you think I’m getting fat? Is it that obvious?”

Shane’s insides curdle like milk as soon as he says this. God, he sounds like a desperate idiot, begging for compliments.

“You are not fat, Shane,” Ilya reassures him. “But why does this upset you so much? I mean, so what? Some woman knows we are having baby, okay, big deal. We never see her again now.”

“You think I don’t know that? Obviously it doesn’t matter. But it’s still embarrassing.” He puts a hand to his front, where his small baby belly is hidden beneath a thick hoodie. “I just don’t like talking to strangers. It’s none of her business whether we’re, you know, ‘having a family together’.”

Ilya stares. Then he blinks, pivots his head to the road, and begins driving. Eyes glued almost unnaturally to the traffic, he says in a neutral tone, “I see.”

“What’s wrong with you now?”

“Nothing, Hollander. Put on music, please. My phone password two-zero-zero-four. Already connected to my Spotify.”

“Um. Okay.” Shane types in the code and then taps on Ilya’s most recently played. Immediately a song from the new Drake album begins to ring out through the speakers, loud and unfamiliar in Shane’s ears. Whatever, though. He settles into the car seat and the rest of the ride passes without another word exchanged between them.

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He’s still thinking about it a week later, during his shift at the rink. One of the other trainers is talking his ear off about her weekend but Shane is in his own world, wondering what he did wrong. *Did* he do something wrong? Not for the first time he wishes he could just read other people’s minds. It would make communication so much easier.

“Teacher Shane,” says one of the kids, skating over to him. They’re meant to be warming up for the lesson—doing laps around the ice and stretching their knees, that sort of crap—which typically doesn’t warrant many questions from the children, since it’s supposed to be easy to do independently.

“Yeah, Jamie?”

“My mom told me to tell you that she’s gonna pick me up late today, ‘cause she’s gotta pick up my sister from tutoring before she comes here and traffic can be bad between here and there. Normally my sister has tutoring on Sundays but she was sick this Sunday so she had to do her make-up class today instead even though today is meant to be my day for doing things. I guess she couldn’t help it, though. She couldn’t get out of bed *all* weekend. Anyway, now my mom has to pick both of us up.”

“I got it, Jamie.”

“So it’s okay?” the kid says. “If my mom’s late today?”

Shane smiles. “Yeah, buddy, of course it’s okay. I’ll wait with you, alright?”

Jamie grins back at him, one of his front teeth missing. “Yay. Thank you, teacher.”

“Don’t worry about it. Now get back to your laps!” He puts on his strict face as he says this, but Jamie just giggles before skating away and joining his friends in the corner of the rink.

Over the next couple of hours Shane can't help checking his phone anytime the kids are distracted. Everybody else he works with does it, messaging their friends and even going on TikTok sometimes—usually when their students are busy putting on their skates or having rest breaks—but Shane wasn't that type of person. He always had some fear that he'd get caught and fired for daring to check his phone for the time or something.

But his anxiety about the whole Ilya thing is enough to change Shane's habit. He waits for Ilya to text, to send him a stupid reel on Instagram, for any sign of life, only to be greeted with nothing each time. It made him wonder if they were fighting. Was Ilya angry?

Eventually Shane texts first, then goes back to the kids.

**Shane** [1:42pm]: *Hi. Are you busy?*

Ilya responds twenty-ish minutes later.

**Rozanov** [2:05pm]: *No. something wrong?*

**Shane** [2:06pm]: *Nothing wrong, just wanted to hear from you. Is something wrong on your end?*

To that, he doesn't get an answer. Shane finishes the rest of his shift and, as promised, waits with Jamie in the parental pick-up zone outside the area. Together they watch dozens of kids clambour into their mom and dad's cars, waving goodbye to each other, until eventually Jamie is the only one left.

"Is your sister feeling better now?" Shane asks to break the silence.

Jamie nods. "Yeah. She puked a lot, though."

"That sucks."

"I think so, too. She was vomiting in the middle of the night and woke *everybody* up. I tried telling her to shut up but my mom got real mad at me for that, and told me she couldn't help it, so I needed to be nicer."

"And were you?"

Jamie shrugs. "Not really."

Shane smothers a laugh. Fucking kids, he thinks.

"Well, you could try being a little more sympathetic, buddy. Getting sick like that's not fun. I've been puking myself a lot lately—and let me tell you, it is not a good time."

"Oh. Are you sick right now, teacher?" Jamie says, inching to the opposite end of the bench, as if that would help prevent the spread of germs.

Shane laughs again. "No, not like that. I'm..." Jamie is twelve. That's probably old enough, and the kids ask all the time about if he's dating anyone, or if he's married, or if he has any

kids. For some reason they seem to think he's forty, rather than twenty-one. "Well, actually, I'm pregnant. That's why I've been a little sick."

Jamie gapes up at him. "You're having a baby?"

"Uh-huh."

"Wow." Jamie looks impressed, blinking rapidly. "Wow. Wait till I tell Bella. She has a big crush on you so she's gonna be so sad."

Isabella was only nine, but she'd been placed in Jamie's group because she had been skating a lot longer than the rest of them.

"Hey, I think your mom's here, buddy," Shane says suddenly, having noticed the white SUV pulling to a stop near them. "You got all your stuff? You don't wanna leave your water bottle here again."

"Yeah. I got everything."

"Good. Come on." Shane leads the kid over to the car, and his mom comes out to say hello and make her profuse apologies about forcing Shane to wait so long. Shane repeats it's fine, it's okay, about twenty times before she finally ushers Jamie into the backseat and says goodbye. Then, finally, Shane's work day is done.

He doesn't head home yet, though. Instead, Shane puts his skates back on, and enjoys the rink himself for another hour or so. He wishes he was still on a hockey team—it'd be a good way to get out all this restlessness inside him lately—but he hasn't played hockey properly like that since he was in high school. There just hadn't been time when he started college; between studying and working, it fell to the bottom of his priority list.

And anyway, it'd probably be irresponsible now that he was pregnant. What if he got hurt? Shane would never forgive himself. So for now he settles on just skating in wide circles, avoiding the other people on the ice, and deliberating which luxury brand to buy a baby crib with. His mom had recommended one but Reddit was insisting on another.

Around four, he changes into fresh clothes and checks his phone for the first time in a while. Still no new texts from Ilya. Frustrated, Shane walks to the carpark and starts on his way home.

*He hates you*, a voice whispers in his head as he's stuck at a traffic light near his parents house. *He wants the baby, not you.*

"Shut up, brain," Shane says.

It doesn't shut up. *You're too hard to hang around with*, the voice continues. Shane arrives home and immediately has a shower, soaping up his pits and shampooing his hair till the bubbles are running down his face, stinging his eyes. It feels like a punishment for some reason. *That's why he's acting weird. He can't be bothered putting up with you any longer. You're too much, Shane. Too boring...*

“Are you okay, sweetie?” Yuna says that night at dinner.

“Yeah. I’m fine.”

Her brows furrow. “Are you sure? You- you’re being very quiet. Did something happen at work?”

“No. Well, I told one of the kids about the baby. He couldn’t believe it.”

Her brows unfurrow, her expression lightening. “Gosh, that’s cute. They’ll all wanna have a feel of your belly once you start showing properly, you know.”

Shane grimaces at the idea.

“Ah, to be inspiring the next generation of mad little hockey geniuses,” muses his dad. “You must be so proud of yourself, Shane.”

“I teach them how to tie their shoes and hold their sticks, Dad. It’s not rocket science.”

His parents laugh at this like they always do, as if exaggerating the impact of Shane’s work will somehow translate into real life and actually make his work more important. In reply he sighs and excuses himself from the dinner table early.

That night, all tucked up cosy in bed, Shane goes through his usual routine of pulling up Ilya’s Instagram and stalking anything fascinating on it he can find. This evening he taps onto the recent post—which isn’t *really* recent anymore; it’s four months old—and goes through all the profiles Ilya had tagged in the picture. Some of the guys Shane now recognises from the party, others he’s never seen or heard of before.

Ilya doesn’t really talk about other people much when they hang out. It’s always all about Shane, Shane, Shane. Maybe that’s why Ilya had decided to ignore him today.

By accident, Shane’s index finger double taps on one of the older pictures on Cliff’s account. It’s just a generic one, a photo of him, some other dudes, and Ilya huddled together on a beach, but realising what he’s done still makes Shane want to scream. Quickly he unlikes the post and frantically searches up on Google whether Cliff is still gonna receive the notification that Shane had been stalking him like a fucking freak.

Seriously, Shane needs to recalibrate. He’s been in such a funk lately, and he doubts he can blame it all on the pregnancy hormones. Like, why does every train of thought seem to end up at Ilya’s stop? Everything he does or says reminds him of Ilya. And whenever he’s jerking off late at night it’s to the memories of their time together—how expertly Ilya had fingered Shane open, fucking him like a professional that singular, heavenly evening, as well as during the morning after.

Shane wants to beat himself over the head for not savouring it at the time.

An hour later, Shane has just barely managed to forget about the hiccup with Cliff’s Instagram account by distracting himself in the bathroom and brushing each individual tooth

for thirty minutes, when a DM from Ilya arrives. On the sink his phone pings, the screen lighting up with a notification that is way too ominous for Shane's tastes.

*ilya\_roz04 sent a message*

Terrified, Shane opens it.

**ilya\_roz04** [01:24am]: *If u want in cliff's pants u should know there is no point*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:25am]: *He does not swing this way*

By some miracle, Shane manages to type out a reply despite his trembling thumbs.

**shanehollander** [01:25am]: *What??*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:26am]: *You do not know this saying? svetlana teach me it*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:27am]: *It means cliff will not fuck u hollander*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:27am]: *So no point sliding in dm's because he will not manhandle u like u need*

**shanehollander** [01:30am]: *I don't know what you're talking about.*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:31]: *Hollander. he is awake right now snapchatting his 5 bazillion girlfriends and see u liking his posts and tell me*

**shanehollander** [01:35am]: *Oh, my god. It was an accident. I don't want to sleep with him.*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:36am]: *Why were u stalking him then?*

Too stressed to do anything else, Shane puts himself on do not disturb, wanders back to his room, and tries to sleep. Key word, 'try'. He tosses and turns, stomach doing somersaults (he hopes the baby doesn't mind all the butterflies invading its territory), before finally giving up and returning to the chat with Ilya.

**ilya\_roz04** [01:37am]: *Stalking is right word yes?*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:39am]: *If it makes u feel better I did to u too Hollander*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:40am]: *I mean before we even meet*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:41am]: *But I am not dumb so I do not accidentally like ur posts*

**ilya\_roz04** [01:42am]: *U probably not even notice if I did*

**ilya\_roz04** [1:50am]: *Shane? Did u die?*

**shanehollander** [1:55am]: *Can we please not talk about this?*

The typing bubble appears for a moment, then disappears, then reappears, and then—a call comes in. Resigned to the inevitable, Shane clicks accept on the third ring.

“Yeah?”

“Are you having panic attack, Hollander?” says Ilya straight away. “Should I tell police? What is emergency number in Canada?”

“I’m fine. I’m just feeling really fucking stupid.”

“Is okay. I feel this way all the time when my English is not working. I am big genius when I speak in Russian, you know. Probably smarter than Einstein or whatever other smart guy you like.”

Shane puts a hand over his eyes and tries not to cry.

“*Kotik?* Do you hear me? I am just kidding. I’m not really smart. Maybe little above average. Are you mad because you think I will make our baby dumb?”

“No, Rozanov. Of course not. I’m just... you can be sort of hot and cold, you know that?”

“I do not know what this means.”

“Never mind. I wasn’t trying to like Cliff’s post. I was just... I- I was on *your* account at first, and then I guess I went down a rabbithole and I wasn’t thinking. He doesn’t actually think I’m into him, does he?”

“No. He is stupid straight man, Hollander, he does not think about things this way. Probably he just think you really like beaches.”

“Oh.”

“Da, ‘oh’. But back to what is important, you were stalking me first, were you?”

Shane groans. “Don’t let it get to your head.”

“Is nice compliment, anyway.”

“You said you did it, too!”

“Yes, and that is also compliment. Do not be so serious, Shane, everyone does it.”

“Wait,” Shane says, remembering the exact wording of Ilya’s message. “You said you stalked me before we even met. Do you mean before the party? *Before* we hooked up?”

“Da.”

“Wha— why?”

“Because you are handsome, Shane, why you think? I have told you million times I see you at your job and want to fuck you! Svetlana was one who helped me find you on Instagram,

though. We had to go on ice rink Facebook page first, then look up many different men named Shane on stupid LinkedIn...”

“But...” Shane says, slowly wrapping his head around this. “But that means you could’ve reached out after that night. You ghosted me on purpose.”

There’s silence for a long, terrible moment. Then Ilya says, in a tone so full of put-upon nonchalance it irritates Shane almost to the point of hanging up: “Yes. But, you know, after that night, I think is in your hands if you want to see me again. I even said ‘next time’ and waited for you to ask for my number. But you do not ask so there is no next time.”

“I *forgot* to ask, you asshole.”

“Ah.”

“I’m gonna go,” Shane says, because he doesn’t want this to devolve into a real fight. Plus, he can’t tell who he’s angrier at, himself for being so stupid, or Ilya for being so stubborn. “Good night, Rozanov. See you later.”

“Wait—Shane—”

He ends the call. He gets no sleep that night.

---

The next month is like hell on earth. Shane goes to his doctor’s appointment without Ilya and thinks about Ilya the whole time he’s getting the cold ultrasound gel spread across his belly. He goes on walks around the neighbourhood and sees people with their dogs and thinks of Ilya then, too, because Ilya seems like the type of person who would want a dog. He ignores how his mouth turns dry and his eyes start to hurt whenever his parents mention Ilya casually in conversation, fighting against the pain suddenly exploding in his chest.

Shane doesn’t know why he’s reacting like this. Maybe ‘cause the whole argument (if you could even call it that) has just reminded him of something he almost forgot. Sure, Ilya was attracted to him when they met, but not so much he felt compelled to reach out afterwards. If it weren’t for the pregnancy they would’ve never seen each other again. Shane scrubs at his face and hates what this realisation does to him. All the domesticity and planning for the future had clearly been making him delusional...

It gets to a point where he ends up telling Hayden about it. Not for advice or anything, but just so someone else knows, and Shane can feel less crazy.

“You said he found you on LinkedIn? Man, he really was desperate to have sex with you,” is the first thing Hayden says, shaking his head in awe. “I have to give him props for that. Dude was committed.”

“Yeah, but once I gave him what he wanted, clearly the effort wasn’t worth it anymore.”

“I guess. But what’s the big deal? You’re having his kid now—you’ve got him locked down and all that. I mean, unless...”

“What?”

“Well, if he really was obsessed with you before you guys hooked up, all this might’ve been part of his evil Russian plan.”

“Huh? I don’t get it.”

Hayden looks at Shane, and his tone is half joking, half serious: “Maybe he poked holes in the condom or something. Got you preppers on purpose, you know?”

“Hayd, that’s fucked up.”

“I know!

“No, you idiot,” says Shane. “It’s fucked up for you to even think that. Ilya’s not evil just ‘cause he didn’t want to have, like, a- a relationship with me.”

Hayden frowns. “Oh. Right.”

They change the topic soon after, and decide to make a couple of toasted cheese sandwiches for lunch. While Shane’s eating his, he privately resolves to never vent to Hayden again. The guy clearly doesn’t know how to comfort people.

---

One sunny morning he wakes with awful cramping in his legs and swelling along his feet. It takes him ages to find the fortitude to get out of bed and ready for the day, but somehow he does it.

He lasts an hour. Shane attempts—and fails—to get through his usual routine of changing into his workout clothes, heading out for a jog and back, only to have to abandon the effort before he’s even reached the end of the block. It just hurts too much. Plus, what if something’s actually wrong? Like, this isn’t just general pregnancy pain, and pushing himself to the limit of what his body is capable of will harm the baby?

So Shane is forced to go to the chemist nearby. When he arrives he goes down each individual aisle, searching for over-the-counter medication that’s safe for a pregnant person to take. Paracetamol is allowed, ibuprofen isn’t. Actually, according to google, most things aren’t allowed. Fuck.

“You and me both, sweetheart,” says an unfamiliar male voice next to him. Shane glances over: it’s a pregnant guy standing there, though he looks a lot further along than Shane, his belly stretching almost grotesquely against the fabric of his polo shirt. He also looks much older than Shane, which would explain why he seems more cheerful, too. Probably *his* kid was planned. Probably *his* partner loves and dotes on him everyday. Probably all the aches and pains feel worth it to him, because he’s getting a real family out of it. Lucky.

“Uh, yeah,” Shane responds awkwardly. Then he hurries off to the front counter with his tail between his legs.

He buys the paracetamol (as well as a bottle of lavender essential oil, which claims on the label to target and help relax pregnant people), and on the return trip to his parents house he continues thinking about that man. How soon would it be till Shane looked huge like that? A month? Two? A *week*? His own stomach was big and getting bigger, sure, but he doesn't think he's popped quite yet.

At home, Shane gets comfortable on the sofa, an old Hollywood movie playing on the TV in front of him. The medicine is starting to work, the cramps slowly fading, so he jumps on the opportunity to really relax. For several hours he reads his new book (a biography about Montreal's most famous coach from the nineties), glasses on and so absorbed in it his usual stress and anxiety just floats up, up and away from him.

Then his mom appears, apparently returned from work, to break his concentration.

"Oh, god, Shane, hon, you have to let me get a picture of that," she says, her phone already held up and angled toward him. She stands in the living room doorway, smiling. "You look so sweet and *pregnant*."

"Mom, no—"

"What? It can go in a photo album your kid will be very excited to flip through some day!"

"Please stop. I probably look stupid with my glasses and my stupid belly and—"

Yuna takes the photo, anyway. In response, Shane slams his book closed and storms off to his bedroom like he's ten again and throwing a tantrum because his parents couldn't afford the state-of-the-art skates that all the other kids on his team had.

He stewes for half an hour. He'd have gone longer but his mom comes into his room, perches herself on the edge of his bed, and forces him to calm down.

"What's going on, sweetie?"

"Mom, did I make a mistake?" he asks.

Her expression drops. "Oh, hun, what are you talking about?"

"With the baby and- and Ilya. I must've been insane to think I could do this with someone I only met a few months ago!"

"Did Ilya say something? Are you two fighting?"

"We're not *fighting*, we're just... We want different things."

She reaches out to smooth a hand over his fringe. "Shane, you're both adults, and you need to act like it. This baby inside you is gonna be a real living, breathing human soon, and you need to step it up. Talk to him."

"Do I have to?"

“Don’t be silly. Of course you do. How do you plan to raise this poor child if you can’t even talk to each other?”

Shane remembers how he had said *you ghosted me on purpose* and Ilya didn’t even try to deny it. Then he remembers all the times they hung out before then, and how badly Ilya seemed to want to be a father. Not just any father, but a good one. Better than his own.

He sighs. “Okay, Mom.”

“Is that it? That’s why you’ve been so sensitive lately?”

“‘Sensitive’?”

“You know what I mean.”

“I guess I...” Shane’s mouth goes dry. “I’m really scared, Mom, of- of having the baby, and what it’s... like... doing to me.”

Now comprehension dawns on her. The stuff with Ilya, maybe that was above her salary, but this—the physical stuff—Yuna could not only understand, but relate.

“You know,” she says, “I was terrified when I had you. Your Obaa-san was always telling me to eat less and move a lot during my pregnancy so I could stay skinny. It was her worst fear that people might think she had a fat daughter.”

Shane frowns. He hadn’t known his grandparents very well, though his grandma did live with them for a while when he was a little kid, after his grandpa passed away and she sold her house. She died herself a year or so later.

“My worst fear is you feel unloved, Shane,” Yuna continues. She dots a gentle kiss to his cheek. “Never, ever feel that way. There are more important things than what your body looks like right now, or in six months time. I mean, for god’s sake, there’s a baby growing in there.”

“Right.”

“You’ll tell me if you’re feeling insecure, or rejected, won’t you, hun?”

Slowly he nods. “Yeah. I promise.”

“Good. Now, how about you have a quick power nap before dinner? I remember how exhausted I was during the second trimester—I could barely stay on my feet for an hour at a time...”

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The conversation with his dad goes about the same way that night.

“Your, uh, your mom told me what’s been going on, son,” David says, having knocked at Shane’s door and waited for a response before coming in. “If I’d known... I mean...”

“Dad, it’s alright.”

“Anytime any of this, whatever it is, gets to feeling like too much for you, you come to me, okay?” Dad continues. “Maybe we can drive out to the coach for some fresh air or something. You always enjoyed that when we were little. You’d get all red in the face because of the cold but you’d keep playing in the water anyway.”

Shane smiles. It’s been a while since he did something like that, something fun just for the sake of fun. “Okay. Maybe. I’ll let you know. Thanks.”

David nods, then retreats. In his absence Shane finally does what he should’ve done weeks ago—he calls Ilya to apologise.

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Rozanov lets him get halfway through saying “I’m sorry for being such an asshole,” before interrupting to give Shane his own apology for how he had acted. It’s such a stupid situation, to be sitting on opposite sides of the phone and telling each other the same thing, that after a minute or so they both stop and just explode with laughter.

“Let’s agree to forgive each other,” Shane says. “We can put it behind us.”

“Yes, please. Is driving me crazy to not hear from you, Hollander.”

“I’ve got my next appointment soon,” admits Shane, “I’m really far along now so I have to go every two weeks. You can come if you want.”

“Obviously. I love you laying with your belly out as doctor looks at our baby—is great thing to watch. Give me date and time and I will take you.”

Which is exactly what happens. Ilya drives Shane to the clinic and they go through the usual motions, whereby the doctor asks a bunch of check-up questions and such before ordering Shane to roll his shirt up so she can do the scan. This time around though the baby is apparently big enough for the doctor to determine the gender with almost one-hundred percent accuracy.

“Do you wanna know?” Shane asks, while flat on his back and Ilya’s hand clinging to his.

“*Da*, if you do.”

They’ve both discussed in the past they had no preference. With this in mind Shane says yes, the doctor can tell them.

“Alrighty, then,” she says, yanking her gloves on and smearing the cold gel onto Shane’s belly. “Here we go.”

It takes a minute. Shane stares and stares at that black and white screen, desperate to figure it out himself despite knowing absolutely about anatomy. Finally, the doctor smiles and says, cheerfully, “It’s a girl! Congratulations!”

Shane's mouth drops open. Ilya's hand tightens where it was already holding on pretty damn tight to Shane's fingers.

"Really? A girl? Oh, my god! Kotik, did you hear? Is girl! We are having girl!"

Shane nods. He manages the rest of the appointment fine and then, once they're in the car again, he bursts into tears.

"Oh, no. Shane, no, no, what is it? You did not want girl? You are unhappy?"

"No- it's not that— it's actually the opposite." Shane wipes his face and glances across the console at Ilya's handsome, sincere face. "I'm more happy than I've ever been. I... I just can't believe it."

Ilya smiles, and for a second it seems like his eyes flicker to the bottom half of Shane's face, looking at his lips. But he doesn't do anything about it, so maybe Shane was imagining things.

"Da," he says softly, driving them onto the main road. "I know what you are meaning, Shane. I cannot believe I have been so lucky, too."

---

They were in the final stretch now. Shane had put down a deposit for a small-ish apartment a five minute walk away from Ilya's place, and was in the process of moving in despite the difficulty of transporting boxes back and forth when seven months pregnant.

His parents, Hayden, Jackie, and Ilya at least volunteer to help out.

"You have so many hoodies, kotik," Ilya as he heaves one of the crates labelled 'Clothing' into Shane's new bedroom. It was a pathetic space, just big enough for a king-sized bed and a set of drawers against the opposite wall. He hopes once he's gotten around to hanging up his posters and photoframes that it'll look more exciting. "And they are all identical. Why does one man need four of same Adidas jacket?"

"They're not the same. This one's blue, this one's green, and this one is—oh, shut up," Shane says, noticing Ilya's amused expression. "They're comfortable, alright?"

He's been picking up more shifts of late, happy to take over for anybody's class at the rink when the usual trainer was absent, but making rent each month was still going to be stressful. All his family and friends know this already (he's catastrophised about it frequently enough) so that evening they order a bunch of pizza and insist Shane pay for none of it.

"You guys didn't have to do this," he says through a mouthful of pepperoni.

"Don't even worry about it, bro. Think of it as a housewarming present," Hayden responds, clapping a hand to Shane's shoulder.

"Hope you do not plan to feed baby this terrible food," says Ilya, sidling over to Shane an hour later, as he's doing the dishes. "Remember rule one, Hollander?"

Shane smiles. “No McDonalds.”

“Mmh. Da. You are good boy, you do remember.”

Shane twists the tap off and turns his body to face Ilya properly. “Thanks for helping today. I really appreciate it. And I know this place kind of sucks, but I think it’s a good start. Hopefully I will have graduated by this time next year so I’ll be able to get a better job, and then the baby and I can live somewhere a bit more, um, respectable.”

“Calm down, Mr Real Estate. This place is good. Good location, good neighbours, good cafe on corner. Do not panic.”

“Right. Sorry.”

“I only ask you let me see her a lot,” Ilya goes on, quieter. “Our baby. I love her already, Shane. I want to be with her all the time, or as much as you let me.”

In the ensuing moment Shane can do nothing but blink at Ilya, struck speechless. His mind whirs. It’s just such a ridiculous thing to say.

“Ilya,” he eventually manages, chuckling a tad nervously. “Of course you can see her whenever you want. I... I... thought we were raising her together? I mean, if you really want you could move in today and I wouldn’t care. That’s—isn’t that what we agreed? To co-parent?”

Ilya shrugs. “I do not know, really. I know you told me you wanted to have the baby but maybe not have her *with me*. I am just guy you got stuck with. Could have been anyone.”

“No, that’s not it at all. I’m happy to do this with you. You’re definitely the better option over the other guy I’ve, uh, hooked up with. God, he was boring.”

“You hook up with other man?”

“Before I met you.”

“Ah.”

“Can I ask you something?” Shane says, the confidence entering him out of nowhere—maybe it’s a result of how vulnerable Ilya had made himself, by begging to see their daughter when she was born even though he thought Shane might tell him no. “Are you... have you been hooking up with people... like, lately? It’s fine if you have been, I know we’re just... Um...”

“Co-parents?”

“Yeah. I get that’s all we are so it’s not like I’m gonna be *bothered* if you say yes or whatever.”

Ilya licks his bottom lip. “Shane, *kotik*, maybe you tell others to go now?”

“What?”

“If you are asking me this I cannot talk about it with them here. Please. I am not trying to be rude, is just truth.”

“Oh. Okay.” Shane hesitates for another second, then hurries through the kitchen and into the living room where Jackie’s leading a conversation about some doughnut shop near her house closing soon. He kicks them all out, regardless of the reaction it earns him from his mother, before returning to Ilya, who hasn’t moved in an inch throughout the whole affair.

“Okay. They’re gone. Talk.”

“Shane, I...”

“If it’s something bad, you can just keep it to yourself,” Shane interrupts, terrified suddenly that whatever Ilya needed to tell him in private is going to ruin their friendship. Like maybe Ilya has a long-term partner, who’s gonna want to fight for custody of Shane’s baby or something else equally as horrible. “You don’t need to tell me anything. We can keep things as we are. I shouldn’t have even asked.”

“No. Is not bad, I do not think. Maybe for me, but do not need to feel bad about it,” Ilya swears. “Is just... I am... I am coward, Shane. I have done many things wrong between us. Maybe I should have said it sooner but now it is too late.”

“What- what do you mean?”

“I want you, Hollander. I want you all the time. Every day, every hour, I think about you and what you are doing. At the party I could not believe the chances of seeing you there, and that you were alone. I mean, how did everyone else pass by? How did I get to you first that night? And then I take you home and you let me fuck you and it is *so* good. Better than I could have ever imagined, and trust me, I was imagining a lot. I mean, really, you are so good at sex, Shane. Your ass, it is—ah. I am sidetracked.”

“You think?”

“Then we talk all next day and you kiss me on couch and I think I fall in love with you right there, but I do not say it because I knew you would not believe me.”

Shane almost chimes in to say *I don’t believe you right now* either but Ilya keeps ranting, becoming increasingly passionate, before he can get a word in—

“So I tell myself, be patient, Ilya. Do not ruin it, Ilya. You can romance him today and bring him on date tomorrow and next day after that and eventually, maybe, hopefully, he will fall in love with you, too, and everything will be perfect like fairytale. But... but, well, you know, I think you did not want my number. You do not look me up online. So I say to myself fuck him, he is asshole, he tease you with those pretty freckles and then disappear. Unfair. And maybe after some weeks I almost forget it. Well, I did not really, because you came back and you were having my child and now it is all fucked up because maybe I *think* I love you that first night but since then I realise that I did not really, not yet, because it is nothing to how I

feel today, right now. I love you more than anything in this moment. It hurts me but is true, Hollander. I'm so sorry. You told me we co-parent and here I am wanting to be your husband. I'm making myself an idiot. I'm sorry."

"Holy shit."

"Da. Holy shit."

It's a miracle Shane doesn't collapse. Instead he just leans against the kitchen counter, head bent toward the floor. For a long, torturous minute they both stay like that: Shane, attempting not to hyperventilate, as Ilya—with unexpected kindness, considering the circumstances—soothes him by running his hand up and down Shane's spine, up and down, up and down, till that touch is all he can focus on, rather than the hurricane of thoughts sweeping through his mind.

"You're such a fucking asshole, Rozanov," he eventually says, glaring at him. "You're springing this on me when I have the worst fucking pregnancy brain in history? Do you know I forgot what *salt* was yesterday? I tried describing it to my mom as the *spice* from the fucking *ocean*, like that's a normal thing to say. But still you- you think now is a good time to drop this on me?"

"I tell you I am sorry!"

"Jesus."

Shane goes back to his breathing exercises for another minute. Then, more calmly, he asks, "Do you even know why I'm freaking out?"

"Because you are mad? Because I make it awkward? Because I keep this secret?"

"All of the above, you dick," Shane says. "And because it means I'm gonna have to *completely* redo my five-year plan to account for us getting together rather than just co-parenting."

Ilya looks gobsmacked. Shane scoffs and invades the narrow space separating them to press a hard, furious kiss against Ilya's dry mouth. He doesn't feel any reciprocation at first, and the cocktail of emotions in his stomach fills briefly with regret, but then, finally—fucking *finally*—Ilya returns the kiss with equal vigour. Neither of them bother breaking for breath until they absolutely have to, their lungs crying out for it.

That night, they break in Shane's new apartment on the couch, in his bed, and in the shower. The last one is a bit of a tricky manoeuvre, what with the glass and his belly in the way, but they make do. By morning Shane has never felt so blissfully fucked out. "You still love me?" he asks Ilya as the sunrise drips warmth over them through the window.

"You almost kill me with your asshole," Ilya says, huffing. "But yes, kotik, I love you."

"Kotik," Shane echoes. "You've been calling me that for ages now. What's it even mean? If it's some bullshit like 'sweetheart' or something that I should've caught onto earlier—"

“It means kitten in Russian. Nickname, you know, everyone has one,” explains Ilya. He begins pressing wet kisses along the side of Shane’s neck, until eventually reaching his chest where he bites at both his sensitive nipples. “Fuck, baby, your tits are so hot.”

“Don’t call them tits.”

“Is what they are. Will you breastfeed?”

Shane grimaces. “I don’t know. If I do, they won’t go flat like they used to be for... like... a while.”

“And you want your big, handsome, strong pecs back?”

“Well, I worked hard for them.”

“Then you do not breastfeed. Or maybe you do. Your choice. There is time still to think on it,” Ilya says. He shuffles upward, returning from his quest to suck a hickey along every inch of Shane’s shoulders so they’re face to face again.

“I guess you’re right. My mom breastfeed me, but it’s not like, I don’t know, a big deal if I don’t. I’ll have to do some research on what brands of formula are best for value in Ottawa, so put that on my to-do list for the next—wait.”

“Yes, my little kotik?”

“It means *kitten*?” Shane says. “You’ve been calling me kitten in public? Oh, my god, you’re such a fucking pervert, I love you.” Then he’s wrestling Ilya onto his back, clambouring atop his crotch, so they can have their fourth round of the day.

---

He had read a lot about birth over the past nine months. He learned about it from a woman’s perspective, the most common way, where though there could be complications, usually everything went well. He had also, obviously, researched what it was like for a man—a carrier, more technically speaking—to go into labour. How his asshole will temporarily have a new purpose for the first time in his twenty-two years on earth, when it works in the same way a chicken’s cloaca does to push the baby out. How doctors, midwives and nurses in general all tend to be more experienced in female delivery, simply because there weren’t many queer carriers around wanting to have a child.

But it’s fine, Shane tells himself. They’re still professionals, even if it’s not something they run into every day. He manages to stick by this mantra up until he actually goes into labour, and suddenly the whole thing is fucking terrifying.

“Oh, god, I feel dizzy,” he says as Ilya is frantically driving them to the hospital. In the passenger seat, Shane sweats, curses and tries not to cry in intervals. The baby was kicking like crazy in his belly, the contractions awful. “Is that bad? Am I gonna die?”

“Shut the fuck up. You are not going to die,” Ilya snaps, without looking at him. With the speed they were going Shane wouldn’t be surprised if they were breaking a couple of laws.

He's put in a private room at the hospital, where he and Ilya wait for his parents to arrive. They come quickly, making Shane stay on the phone as they hurry out of bed to get on the road themselves. "I can't believe this is happening!" crows Yuna, excitedly, "breathe, honey, breathe. We're gonna be grandparents."

Over the next sixteen hours there's a lit of swear words said in that hospital room. Shane is sure he's bleeding out at some point because the pain is so great, but Ilya's clutching onto his hand like a lifeline and promises he's doing wonderful, he is doing best job, nobody in the world has ever given birth as skilfully as him. Which... doesn't really make sense, but Shane laughs anyway, and at least laughing helps distract from the horribleness of it all.

"Is our baby, kotik," Ilya says at the end of the pushing and pushing and pushing. Tears glimmer in his eyes, the sight of which makes Shane—as exhausted as he is—weep a little as well. "Is our baby daughter. My god, she is perfect."

"Did you guys end up settling on a name?" Yuna asks, watching them from the chair on the other side of Shane's bed. David stands behind her, smiling down at them.

"Uh, yeah, maybe," Shane says.

Ilya stares. "We did?"

"I mean, I've just been thinking about it." He touches his index finger to the top of the baby's head, enjoying the soft feel of her skin. The tiny weight of her in his lap is indescribable. Shane would kill everybody on earth if it helped keep her warm. "Maybe we could, I don't know, call her Irina. For your mom. Only... only if you're comfortable with it."

"Oh."

"Is that a bad 'oh'?"

Quickly, Ilya shakes his head, and reaches across to dot a kiss onto Shane's cheek. Then he does the same to the baby. "Irina Hollander-Rozanov. Thank you, kotik. Thank you, thank you, thank you," he murmurs all the while.

"You don't have to thank me," Shane says. "It's a pretty name. Not exactly a hardship."

Ilya smiles a wobbly smile at him. If you had told Shane Hollander nine months ago that the hot guy talking to him at that party would someday be smiling at him like that, he probably would've smacked you. Now he just smiles back, and lets himself rest.

## End Notes

Kudos & comments always appreciated! <3

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