

a rainy day in ottawa

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by [imbihesgay](#)

Summary

“You all good, Hollander?” Wiebe asks, startling him as he turns his head to see their coach standing beside the bench.

“Fine, coach,” he huffs out his reply, a little embarrassed at how out of breath he is. “Just taking a quick break.”

“You know, you can sit out practice?”

“I know, you’ve been telling me for months.”

“Well, you’re gettin’ there, kid. That baby looks about ready to score a hat trick. I’m thinking you should probably start taking it easy. When’s your due date again?”

Shane’s eyes darken, lips thinning. “Not until next week.”

“Next week?” Wiebe looks surprised by this. “What the hell are you even still doing here, Hollander?”

--shane gives birth to his and ilya's first baby at the cottage---

Notes

DISCLAIMERS-

unedited, unproof-red, i dont know where the fucking cottage is geographically so ignore any issues with that, and also this is an mpreg fanfic and not intended to be a hyperrealistic portrayal of labor and birth

HAVE SOME FUN!!

its pregnant shane week over on twitter so im here to drop a lil shanelabor to celebrate!! all hail the world's mpreggiest pregnant boy!!

ty for reading enjoy xx

It's a rainy day in Ottawa.

Shane sits on the benches of the Centaurs arena, watching his teammates skate in rhythmic circles. Drills are going well, they're making clean shots, even though Hayes is doing his damndest to block them, the team is on fire this season.

It's been a good year, all around. Despite them losing one of their best players to his medical leave, they've managed to almost secure a spot in the playoffs. They're close, really close, and it's exciting. The Centaurs might even get their third cup since Shane and Ilya joined the team.

Shane, however, is not going to be a part of that victory. Despite everyone, Coach Wiebe included, kindly telling him he's *always included*, he's spent the better part of the last nine months doing exactly what he's doing right now.

Just watching.

He's sitting on the bench, his thighs spread to make room for his ever-growing middle. His palms are splayed out behind him on the hard material, bracing the heft of his weight. Their baby, in the 98th percentile for size, and rambunctious as her fathers, shoots a friendly kick to his bladder that makes him wince and adjust his hips.

"You all good, Hollander?" Wiebe asks, startling him as he turns his head to see their coach standing beside the bench.

"Fine, coach," he huffs out his reply, a little embarrassed at how out of breath he is. "Just taking a quick break."

"You know, you can sit out practice?"

"I know, you've been telling me for months."

"Well, you're gettin' there, kid. That baby looks about ready to score a hat trick. I'm thinking you should probably start taking it easy. When's your due date again?"

Shane's eyes darken, lips thinning. "Not until next week."

"Next *week*?" Wiebe looks surprised by this. "What the hell are you even still *doing* here, Hollander?"

"Ignoring his husband's wishes, as usual." Ilya skates up to the bench, resting his chin on his gloved hands with warm eyes that settle on Shane's belly. It stretches the front of his bright red **NO CONTACT** jersey pitifully, though at least it's big enough to cover all of his stretch-mark addled skin.

"You're not in charge," Shane bites back.

Ilya taps the "C" emblazoned on his jersey. "*Actually-*"

“Ilya.” Harris’ voice gets their attention as he makes his way through the seats toward their small gathered group. “Do you have a death wish?”

Ilya reconsiders whatever he was about to say, probably for the best considering the myriad of pregnancy hormones currently vying for control of Shane’s decisions.

“All I was saying,” he course-corrects, “is my beautiful Shanya should be at home resting, getting ready to deliver our beautiful daughter. Is nothing else.”

Shane’s eyes narrow menacingly.

“*But,*” Ilya adds, “he is a grown man who can make decisions for himself and I support him.”

“Nice, Roz!” Wyatt calls from the goal. “Doesn’t sound rehearsed at all!”

“I’m done with my break.” Shane scowls at them and attempts to push himself to his feet. He fails, on the first try, the round swell of his stomach providing a solid barrier to bend the way he needs. He exhales a frustrated sound, and tries again, wincing at a cramp in his side and falling back to his ass on the bench.

Ilya reaches a hand for him, looking desperately like he has to help or he’ll combust. “Solnyshko, can I-”

“*No!*” Shane barks.

“Can *I?*” Harris asks gently, laying a hand on Shane’s padded shoulder.

Shane glances at him, face softening at the gentle expression Harris is wearing. It’s kind, not condescending.

“Alright,” he agrees.

Harris and Wiebe each take an arm and help haul Shane to his feet, holding him steady until he’s righted on his skates. He huffs again, shaking his head before reaching for his helmet and mouth guard.

“Shane,” Ilya starts, but he’s quickly cut off.

“A reminder!” Wiebe yells to the guys, leaning over the railing to project his voice. “We have a *no contact* jersey on the ice! Watch yourselves, watch your pucks!”

The guys all nod their understanding. It’s not a point that has to be reiterated, because Shane has been attending practices his entire pregnancy. They’re quite used to the routine by now. Shane in his bright red jersey that makes him feel like a school crossing guard or a kindergartener on a field trip, is not to be touched.

Ilya hovers nervously while Shane’s skates slowly descend on the ice. He keeps close, not touching, but inches away should he need to catch Shane. It’s ridiculous really, his concern, because Shane has not needed his help out here once. He may be a million months pregnant

and ready to kill anyone who looks at him funny, but he's been skating since he could walk. It's second-nature at this point. Their doctor gave him the all clear, as long as he felt comfortable.

He's also padded to the gills, which he'd never have done before if it was a no contact skate, but, Ilya insisted. Shane figures he's already being pushed pretty far by still having Shane on the ice, so the excessive padding was at the very least, a fair compromise.

He looks ridiculous, though. Like a big, fat penguin with stupid bulky pads under his fire alarm red shirt. He's never felt more clumsy or idiotic. He can't wait for this pregnancy to be over. He's ecstatic for the baby part of it, but he'd love to never do this to his body again.

Ilya can carry the next one. They will figure it out. He's not going through this again.

"I don't understand why you're still skating," Troy says as Shane glides past him. "You look miserable, dude."

"Thanks Barrett, that's incredibly helpful to hear," Shane mutters.

"I just meant--"

"I know what you meant." Shane ignores him and pushes forward, taking his place in the drill line.

True to form, everyone takes it easy on him, like they have been for months. Gentle passes his way, shots he could hit into the goal with his eyes closed, and everyone seems to be moving at a glacial pace to match his. He must really be slow today.

"You guys don't have to take it easy on me," he insists, though his point is slightly deterred by the ragged wheeze in his breath. He lost the ability to breathe comfortably sometime around his seventh month. Ilya's gigantic baby takes up most of his torso real estate.

"We're not!" Luca lies with a big, beaming smile. "You're as fast as ever, Shane."

"Don't lie to me, rook," he snaps.

Luca looks at Ilya with fear in his eyes, like he's angered some sort of temperamental beast.

Not entirely untrue.

"Shanya," Ilya says conversationally, "no one is taking easy. We are just trying not to permanently damage our small baby with a hockey puck going speed of a Porsche."

Shane glowers at him. "I get it, okay? I'm a big slow blimp. But I'd really like to *try* and keep my skills sharp for next season. Can you guys at least--"

He's cut off by a sharp pain that crests through his lower abdomen. It's nothing too intense, just a tight, pulling sensation that cramps up his belly. He exhales sharply, finding himself so stunned by the feeling that his voice falters. He cups a gloved hand under the swell of his stomach, blinking slowly as he tries to reconcile the odd pain.

“Shane?” Ilya is at his side the next instant, a concerned hand on his back, big eyes glued to his face, watching for signs of pain.

Shane tries not to notice the way everyone else has gone stock-still, and quiet, like they’re waiting for him to explode.

“Fine,” he stammers, “I’m fine. Just a cramp.”

Ilya’s eyes go even wider.

Shane should not have said that.

“A cramp, like a contraction?” Ilya demands.

“No, just a normal cramp.” Shane waves him off, exhaling a frustrated sound. “Can we please just finish our drills?”

There’s another beat of silence. No one moves.

“Seriously?” Shane demands, glancing around him at the *traitors* who call themselves his teammates.

“Maybe you should just relax now, Hollzy,” Bood suggests, though he says it from a very safe distance. “Cassie was fucking miserable at this point, man. No need to push yourself this much. You still got the hard part coming up.”

“A very smart idea!” Ilya agrees, looking hopefully at Shane. “Maybe it is time to go home and rest now, da? I can drive you.”

“But, I-” Shane starts to argue, but he’s cut off by Coach Wiebe.

“I don’t like the look of what I just saw out there, Hollander,” Wiebe says, though his voice is not unkind. “Last thing we want is you getting hurt. Let’s call it, okay? You can rejoin us for practice after you’ve healed up from having that baby.”

Shane’s teeth grind together, the material of his mouth guard rubbing uncomfortably between them. His jaw locks and he moves toward the benches, ignoring Ilya trailing behind him like a concerned shadow.

When he finally makes it back to the locker room, Ilya and Harris are both trailing in behind him. He plops down at his stall and starts shedding his gear, cursing in frustration.

“Oh, Shane.” Harris gingerly sits beside him, expression soft. “I know you’re just miserable right now. But you’re doing so great.”

Shane exhales again, but he can’t find it in himself to be angry at sweet Harris Drover. “Thank you. It’s...yeah. I’m not myself right now, I guess.”

“That will get better,” Harris says, placing a comforting hand on his arm. “How about I stop by this weekend and drop off some apple hand pies? The ones you liked before, from the

barbecue? Would that be nice?”

Shane lowers his head, resisting the urge to let tears fall. He sniffs once, nodding as he glances sheepishly at Harris. “Yeah. That’d be nice, thanks.”

“You know we’re all going to be counting down the minutes until you’re back,” Harris assures him. “Your spot here is safe, you know that, don’t you?”

Shane hesitates. He would like to say he knows that, but the truth is, professional sports can be a very fickle industry. He’s taken off almost an entire season just so he can use his body to grow their baby instead of to score goals. It’s been a monumental adjustment, and he’s sure everyone is at least a little frustrated with him, even if they’re too nice to say it.

And depending how the birth goes, and postpartum, he could potentially be taking off even *more* time than originally planned. He doubts Coach is too keen to hold his spot on the line forever.

So, while what Harris is saying is very sweet, and his heart is in the right place as always, it’s not exactly true.

But, again, Shane would never want to wipe the smile off this guy’s adorable face. “Thank you, Harris. That means a lot.”

“And how about you and Barrett?” Ilya asks with a teasing eyebrow waggle. “When are you going to settle down and knock him up?”

Harris tilts his head back with a raucous laugh, loud and bellowing. “Puh-lease! Can you imagine *Troy* trying to change a diaper? I think we’re both content with fun uncle status for the rest of our lives.”

“Troy changing a diaper would be extremely funny,” Ilya notes.

Shane bites his lip to hide his smile at the image. His restrained laughter is cut short by another sharp pain, dancing over his belly. This time, he does inhale sharply in surprise, his now glove-free hand coming down to press into his jersey.

“Shane?” Ilya notices immediately. “What is wrong? Another cramp?”

“Um, yeah.” He clears his throat, wincing. “Kinda hurts, actually.”

Harris and Ilya exchange a look that Shane can’t read, and the shorter man gets to his feet.

“Well, I’ll leave you guys to it.” Harris smiles and pats Shane’s arm once again. “You got this, Shane! See you this weekend for those hand pies.”

He nods at Ilya as he heads out of the locker room, leaving the two of them alone. Ilya is squatting between Shane’s knees, while he sits on the bench, one hand firmly joining Shane’s on the lower half of his belly.

“Your stomach feels hard,” Ilya observes, brows furrowed. “Didn’t the book say-”

“The book is just a general how-to,” Shane interjects, shaking his head. “It doesn’t mean every time I get a cramp that the baby is coming.”

Ilya stares at him. “Well, could it mean that when you get *two* cramps a *week* before your due date that the baby is coming?”

Shane huffs. “We have at least another week, maybe more. The doctor said first babies are usually late, not early. We have time.”

It’s quiet for a moment. Ilya seems to be debating his words in his head before he speaks. After a pause, he nods once.

“Okay. Let’s get you home, then. Come on.”

He helps Shane shed the rest of his gear, and does the same with his own. After a bit, they’re both redressed in comfortable sweats and t-shirts, both of their bags slung over Ilya’s shoulders because he refuses to let Shane carry his own, even though it weighs less than what he still benches at the gym.

“Careful on the pavement, *kotik*,” Ilya says as he observes the downpour of rain. “Is slippery.”

“I know, I will be.” Shane does heed his advice, moving slowly over the slick cement toward their car. His balance isn’t exactly where it used to be, less so when he’s walking nowadays. Or, he should probably say *waddling*.

The dreaded waddle started a few months back, when his center of gravity truly shifted all toward his front. His back is arched painfully, with his round belly taking up most of his body at this point. His thighs are spread almost reflexively, to make room for his ever-growing middle, and futilely attempt to relieve some of the pressure on his aching hips. The *waddle* is an unintended symptom of all of these things.

He hates it. He really does feel like a big, fat, stupid penguin.

“I hate being pregnant,” Shane announces quietly, once they’re alone in the cabin of the car.

Ilya glances at him with sympathy glimmering in his eyes. His expression is so soft, as he reaches over and rubs his palm gently over Shane’s belly. The fabric of his t-shirt is stretched thin over the itchy flesh.

“I know, my sweetheart.” Ilya rubs his belly a few times, encouraging their daughter to kick at his hand. “It has been a very hard few months for you, and I am so sorry to have put you through this. You are doing such a good fucking job.”

“I don’t like...regret it, or anything.” Shane reaches down and joins Ilya’s hand over his belly. “She’s worth all of this. I promise.”

And, it’s true. Through every bout of morning sickness, every electric jolt of sciatic pain, every humiliating time he couldn’t stand on his own and needed help hauling his blimp of a body upright, he has never once regretted doing this. Their daughter is not even born yet and

she is already everything to him. He would do this ten times over, if it meant he got to hold her at the end of it.

Tears prickle the corners of his eyes, and he blinks rapidly, lower lip jutting out in a pout.

“Darling,” Ilya coos, brushing tears off his freckled cheeks with the pad of his thumb. “What is it?”

“Just- I want to meet her, Ilya,” Shane sniffs, wiping at his face. “I am tired of this. I want her out of me. I don’t wanna share my body with her anymore, she’s too big now and everything hurts. I just want to hold her.”

Ilya’s expression cracks a bit, his own lips drawing down in a sympathetic pout. “I know, *moy sladkiy*. I am so sorry. You are almost there, Shane. So very close to meeting her. You can do this. Just a little longer.”

Shane breathes out slowly, running his own hand along the curve of his distended belly. He feels her tiny feet kick back at him, and smiles in spite of himself. Ilya is right. He’s made it this fucking far. No sense moping around about it now.

“I’m not actually in that much of a hurry,” he admits quietly as Ilya pulls the car out on to the street.

“Oh?” Ilya arches an eyebrow. “So you were not just crying about wanting to meet her?”

“Fuck you. Asshole.”

“I am asking real question!”

“I *do* want to meet her. I am just not looking forward to all the stuff that happens right before I meet her.” He looks down at his belly accusingly.

Shane has spent the last nine months trying, and failing, to get comfortable with the idea of giving birth. It’s sort of been his biggest fear throughout all of this. They’ve done all the lamaze classes, met with all the experts, asked their doctor about five billion questions. They’ve got the cottage all prepped for a safe home delivery, got their midwife on speed dial, and mentally prepared themselves as much as possible for how much pain and suffering Shane is about to endure.

None of that actually makes it less scary though.

So much can go wrong. And despite Ilya’s efforts to try and get Shane away from that corner of the internet, he’s researched just about each and every thing that could go sideways.

He’s healthy. Perfectly cleared for a homebirth with no expectations of complications. That is reassuring, actually.

However, his decision for a homebirth means he’s going au natural on the pain relief, and that’s kind of scary too.

He knows he can handle it. He can handle anything he sets his mind to. He's just not particularly *excited* about having to handle it. And a small, sort of embarrassing part of him, is really dreading Ilya seeing him that way.

Shane knows that won't be what matters in the moment, but he doesn't love the idea of his husband -who he'd still like to have sex with after all this is done- seeing him so vulnerable, and ugly. Immature? Yes? Untrue? No.

As they're pulling into the cottage driveway, Shane's belly tightens again with that same tight, pinching pain. He exhales sharply, rubbing the spot again. Is it getting worse? It feels like it's starting to increase in intensity with each one.

Fuck, these are fucking contractions, aren't they?

"Are you okay?" Ilya asks after Shane's shoulders have settled. They're sitting idly in the driveway, both of them paused in their tracks by his sudden cramping.

"I had another cramp," he admits softly. "I think, um, they're getting worse."

Ilya eyes him. "Worse, like, contractions get worse?"

"Yeah, I think so." Shane grimaces. "I mean, I've never done this before, so I'm not *sure* but, definitely a weird feeling that's getting more intense."

"Okay," Ilya replies simply, "we will keep an eye on it, da? I am not going back to practice today."

"You don't have to stay h-"

"Shane." Ilya's voice leaves no room for argument, nor do his frighteningly serious eyes. "I am not leaving your side."

"Okay," Shane agrees quietly. "Thank you."

"Do not thank me, my love." Ilya kisses his knuckles. "Lets go inside and wash off this arena smell. Then we will relax."

By the time they're out of the shower and drying off, Shane has had two more cramps. He ends up leaning against the bathroom sink, eyes squeezed shut, trying desperately to rotate his hips and relieve some of the squeezing pain on his lower abdomen.

Ilya finds him like this, bare naked except for the towel slung low around his waist, his large belly tightening with each huff of breath. His silvery stretch marks, etched deeply into sunkissed skin, look glaringly noticeable under the fluorescent bathroom lights. He was insecure about them for a while, but he's come to realize that Ilya loves them, worships them, and it makes him feel sort of proud. As hard as all this has been, as much as he's kinda hated every minute of it, he's pretty proud of what his body has been able to do.

And, simultaneously terrified of what it's *about* to do.

“I think it’s contractions,” he says through his teeth, looking up at Ilya with alarmed eyes. “What if I’m going into labor?”

“Then, we will do everything as planned,” Ilya assures him, kneading his hand over Shane’s lower back. “We have it all prepared. Midwife Jeni is just a call away. Yuna is just a call away. Inflatable tub is ready to be filled. Everything is ready, *dorogoy*. ”

“What about my ball?” Shane frets. “Or my comb? I don’t know where I left-”

“Ball is blown up, in the den,” Ilya soothes him. “Your birthing comb is on the table by the guest bed, with the rest of the tools.”

Shane drops his head between his shoulders, shuddering out a sigh. “Okay. Okay. We’re ready. We’re prepared.”

“We are, Shane. It is going to be just fine. Come, let’s get you dressed and sitting down.”

They get Shane settled on the big L-shaped sofa in the den. He’s wearing a pair of loose-fitting cotton sweats, and a baggy blue t-shirt, rucked up over his belly. Everything feels too sensitive right now and he doesn’t want fabric suffocating his taut dome of skin.

Ilya makes them some lunch, and looks worried when Shane only picks at it. The cramps keep coming, rhythmic, on pattern, and slowly increasing in their intensity.

It’s labor, they both know it.

It’s happening more quickly than Shane expected, as he finds himself rolling his hips on their birthing ball in front of the TV. There’s a rerun on of an old movie with Rose in it, and her familiar, smiling face is an odd sort of comfort as he breathes through his teeth and tries to keep his body relaxed.

Ilya is just out of earshot, on the phone with their midwife to update her. Shane tries to focus on rotating his hips, and breathing steadily, and not letting the anxiety choke him into a pathetic, blubbery mess.

When Ilya returns, he smiles slightly at the sight of Shane on the ball. “Are you doing okay?”

“I’m fine,” Shane replies quickly. “What did Jeni say?”

“She wants to come see how dilated you are.” Ilya squats beside his ball, resting a hand over his thigh. “She’ll be here in an hour or so.”

Shane nods, bringing both hands down to cup the weight of his belly.

“How are you feeling?” Ilya asks as he squeezes the flesh of Shane’s leg gingerly.

“It hasn’t really sunk in yet.”

“I know, for me either. Still feels like Jeni will get here and say false alarm, hm?”

Shane nods again.

“Do you need anything, right now?” Ilya checks. “Something to drink? A snack? Your special pillow?”

Shane shakes his head. “I’m fine, right now. Just going to keep trying the ball. It’s supposed to help move things along. I’d rather this go too fast than too slow.”

Ilya smiles. “How about we aim for *just right*? A Goldilocks birth sounds nice, da?”

“I’ll do my best,” Shane retorts dryly.

“Well, big strong papa bear is here.” Ilya winks and Shane rolls his eyes.

“No more of that, if you want to be helpful.”

“Ah, you love it.”

Shane snorts out a laugh, which he has to admit, does feel kind of good right now.

“Jesus. Fuck. Ah- fuck.”

“Shane, just try to breathe, I am right here. You are okay.”

Ilya’s voice is somewhat lost on him, as Shane leans forward against the kitchen island. He’s sort of frantically adjusting his hips, hoping to somehow relieve the immense pressure that’s started to build there, to no avail. Ilya is behind him, rubbing a hand between his shoulder blades and murmuring sweet nothings while the contraction takes Shane’s words.

“*Fuck*, this hurts,” he manages to grind out through his teeth. Maybe he made a mistake, opting for a home birth with no epidural.

“You are doing so well,” Ilya murmurs, “I am so proud of you, Shane.”

There’s a light knock on the front door, which frustratingly breaks Shane’s focus.

“Who the fuck is here?” he demands.

“Jeni.” Ilya kisses his temple. “One moment, sweetheart. I have to let her in.”

Shane grumbles under his breath, but nods his assent.

A moment later, their reliable, intelligent midwife is standing beside him with her hands on her hips. She smiles at Shane, arching her eyebrows. Jeni is a simple woman, no frills about her in all the ways Shane likes in a person. To the point, accomplished, and good at what she does.

“That looks like early labor, if I had to take a guess,” she says to him.

Shane exhales shakily as the contraction finally releases him. “It’s getting worse and worse.”

“How long?”

“A few hours,” Ilya answers for him. “They are about fifteen minutes apart, now.”

“Alright.” She nods in Shane’s direction. “You okay with me doing a quick check, see how far along we really are here?”

Although Shane is dreading this part, he knows it’s a necessary evil. He nods, and reaches for Ilya.

They make their way upstairs to the guest bedroom, where the bed has already been prepped with plastic sheets and everything else they might need. Ilya helps him carefully on to the bed, while Shane maneuvers his bottoms off, feeling on display and ridiculous with his giant belly in the way of anything happening below the belt. He looks at the ceiling and tries to pretend he’s in the penalty box at a game against Montreal. Anywhere but here, doing this.

“Okay, Shane, feeling me. Just take a deep breath.” Jeni grips his knee in one hand, and her gloved fingers enter him.

He startles a bit, grabbing Ilya’s hand and squeezing. He exhales a pained sound.

“Sensitive?” Jeni asks sympathetically.

“Mm, uh-huh,” is all he can manage.

“I’m sorry hon. Give me a moment here...oh, this is great, Shane. You’re around four centimeters dilated.”

“That’s it?” He can’t see her over his belly, but he tries without much success to sit up and look at her.

“Shane, that is great!” Ilya looks at him with concern. “You are making good progress in just a few hours.”

Shane fumbles for the right words. “But- I’m- I’m so fucking uncomfortable already. It’s still going to get more than *twice* as bad?”

“Oh, Shane, try not to think of it that way.” Jeni shakes her head. “Remember, this pain and discomfort is incredibly productive. You are moving very fast, which means it’ll be over that much sooner.”

He looks between her and Ilya. Neither of them seem worried at all. Everything is going well, right on schedule. He’s okay. Baby is okay. Everything is fine.

So why does he feel so fucking anxious?

“Can- can you call my mom?” he asks Ilya quietly.

While obviously a bit surprised at the non sequitur, Ilya replies without any hesitation. “Of course I will. Do you want her here now?”

Shane nods, trying to pretend there aren’t tears pricking at the corners of his eyes. Earlier today he was at practice with his team, and now he’s *four* fucking centimeters dilated? He’s in labor? His baby is going to be here soon?

It’s equal parts thrilling and fucking terrifying. He needs his mom, he thinks, more than he’d expected to.

“I am going to head out,” Jeni says, while Ilya helps Shane redress and ease off the bed. “But keep me posted and give me a call as things progress. I’ll want to stick around once Shane is nearing the transition stage.”

“Got it.” Ilya nods at her. “Thank you.”

“Stay hydrated, keep moving if you can,” she says to Shane, “and try to relax, if possible. Everything is going great. You’re doing an awesome job.”

He nods again, finding himself wordless.

“Hey,” Ilya says once they’re alone, squatting down beside him again and meeting his eyes. “I am here with you, Shane. You are okay. Everything is okay.”

“Mhm,” Shane replies weakly.

“I can feel you starting to get anxious,” Ilya tells him. “What can I do, my love? I am here, anything you need.”

“Just, just my mom, please.” Shane looks at him with big, watery eyes.

“Okay.” Ilya kisses his forehead and extends his arms to help him up. “We will get Mama here right away.”

“Shane?” Yuna’s voice is gentle, surely an attempt to be comforting, but right now it grates Shane’s nerves more than anything ever has.

Why the *fuck* did Ilya bring his mom here?

“Mmmmmmm,” is all he can get out, low and guttural. Two more hours have passed since Jenni checked his dilation, and with each contraction the pain only seems to get worse. He’s not an idiot, he knows that’s how labor works, but he didn’t expect it all to happen so quickly.

“Shane, you need to breathe honey.” Yuna crosses the room to where he’s currently squatting on the birthing ball. “Like this, okay? *In and out-*”

“*I know how to fucking breathe!*” He shouts, surprised and ashamed by his own outburst, but unable to help it.

“Okay, baby.” Ilya is there the next second, hands rubbing his shoulders, his upper back, the column of his aching spine. “You are doing so good.”

“I’m sorry,” he sniffs in his mom’s direction as the pain recedes again. “I’m being such an asshole. I can’t- I don’t know why-“

“Honey.” Yuna leans over and kisses his damp hair. “You’ve been an asshole for the past five months. I was expecting it to be worse during this.”

“Yuna!” Ilya exclaims. His tone doesn’t exactly say he disagrees, it more says: *why would you anger the murder penguin even more?!*

“I’m sorry, but it’s true.” Yuna shrugs. “I was an asshole when I was giving birth to Shane, too. I’m sure David will never forgive me for some of the stuff I said. You get a free pass, though. It’s okay sweetie, be an asshole. I can take it.”

Shane whimpers quietly, dropping his head and trying to catch his breath.

“Yuna,” Ilya says patiently, “would you mind going to the kitchen and getting him some more juice? I think he could use some sugar.”

“Absolutely.” She whirls on her heels and rushes out like a tiny woman on a mission.

Shane looks up miserably at Ilya through tear and sweat-soaked eyelashes. “Why did you bring her here?”

“I am sorry, *moy lyubimyy*. Was very stupid of me. She is stressing you out, is she?” Ilya continues kneading the damp flesh of Shane’s back as he speaks.

“She’s not trying to. It’s just- I can’t focus with her here. I feel outside of my body right now.”

“I will send her away.”

“You can’t. It will hurt her feelings.”

“Shane.” Ilya pauses his movements and leans down so their eyes are meeting. “With much respect to your mother, it is not *her* feelings I care about today. Only yours.”

Shane doesn’t even have time to soften at how sweet that is, because another bout of pain twists up his insides. He leans forward, a low, guttural sound pulling from his chest almost against his will.

“Good Shane, you are vocalizing just like Jeni said to.” Ilya rubs his back again, firm pressure the way Shane needs. “Be loud, my love, is okay.”

Shane’s eyes squeeze shut as the pain crescendos inside his lower abdomen. He can feel their baby squirming in the tense confines of her ever-shrinking home, and it’s unbearable and weird. He’s overstimulated by all of these sensations. The pain and *pressure* is already so intense, he can’t comprehend that it’s going to keep getting worse.

“Good boy.” Ilya kisses his temple as Shane finally breathes raggedly and relaxes, signaling the contraction is over. “You are kicking labor’s fucking ass.”

“I’m not,” he wheezes, “It’s kicking mine, Ilya. I don’t know what I’m doing.”

“You are enduring.” Ilya grabs his hand and squeezes it firmly. “You are surviving. You are brave and strong and powerful, *moy sladkiy*. You are going to get through this.”

“Shane, I brought orange since you’ve had a lot of apple today.” Yuna reappears in the doorway, extending a glass toward him.

Tears prick his eyes and he lets out a pitiful sob. “I want apple. Ilya, I want apple juice. Please please can I-“

“Of course, of course baby.” Ilya kisses his damp cheek again and stands. “Yuna, can we chat?”

“Sure honey.”

The two of them disappear into the kitchen, and whatever Ilya is saying to get her to leave, Shane’s grateful it’s not his job today.

“Easy, Shane, is okay. Keep breathing. Good job, good job.” Ilya’s voice is low and rhythmic in Shane’s ear, the flat of his palm firmly kneading the bare skin of Shane’s back.

He’s lying on his side in their shared bed. He hadn’t wanted to be on the clinical, plastic bedsheets of the guest room right now. It’s just the two of them, and has been since...well, Shane’s lost track of time, actually. But a while, just the two of them, just like this. Shane, lying on his side with his hands cradling his tensed, round belly, Ilya behind him massaging and quietly murmuring assurances in his ear.

“Ilya,” he sniffs after a particularly rough contraction grips his body, “it really hurts. What the hell was I thinking?”

“You were thinking, *I am Shane Hollander, and I can do anything I put my mind to.*” Ilya kisses the top of his head gingerly. “It is true, for the record.”

Shane manages a weak, broken laugh. “You’re so nice to me. I hope you still love me after all of this.”

“Shane.” Ilya sounds more serious at that. “Is this a bad joke?”

He drops his head softly against Ilya’s forearm, resting his cheek against the warm skin there. The worse his contractions get, the more intense this all begins to feel, the deeper his anxiety takes root.

“You are feeling nervous,” Ilya says when Shane doesn’t reply. He gently massages his back with his fist. “Talk to me, Shane, please. I want to be here and support you, but is hard when I do not know what is going on in your pretty *mozg*. ”

Shane furrows his brow, translating internally for a moment. “Is that brain?”

“Da. Pretty brain.”

“Mean brain, right now.”

“Talk to me, my love.”

Shane blinks rapidly to keep a sudden influx of stubborn tears from falling over his flushed cheeks. “It-it’s nothing, I’m fine, it’s just...” He exhales shakily. “Just anxious, I guess about all of it.”

“All of what, darling?”

“The birth, obviously. And also what comes after.”

Ilya is quiet for a beat. “Postpartum, you mean?”

Shane shakes his head.

With a huff of disbelieving laughter, Ilya says, “*hockey?*”

Shamefully, he nods.

“Shane. Why are you worried about hockey when there is a living human being trying to come out of your body?”

“Oh don’t worry, asshole, I’m worried about both.”

“Shane-”

“What if this is it for me?” With a grunt of effort, Shane readjusts on the bed, turning to look at Ilya with frantic eyes. “You saw me out there at practice. I could barely move. Everyone’s been treating me like I’m some sort of breakable *thing*. What if this wrecks my body? What if I can’t ever skate the way I did before? What if I lose my spot on the team because I took too much time? What if-”

He cuts himself off with a startled gasp as another contraction squeezes his insides like a vice. He lets out a groan, reaching frantically for something to hold on to. He finds Ilya’s hands, and grips tightly, panting through the pain like Jeni reminded him to do.

“*Ahhhh, fuuuuck,*” he vocalizes loudly, “*ah, fuck, fuck, shit.*”

“Good job,” Ilya murmurs, his tone ever-so-sweet and caring. “You are doing so, so good, *moy lyubimyy.*”

When the pain recedes, he’s left breathing heavily, sweat coating his face. Ilya tenderly dabs at his forehead with a soft towelette, and smiles sympathetically.

“That was long,” he says, “I am going to tell Jeni she should come back soon.”

“Okay,” Shane whimpers.

“Shane.”

He glances up, his eyes meeting Ilya’s, surprised to see how intense the other man’s gaze is.

“Yeah?” he asks.

Ilya reaches forward and takes his face in one hand, thumb gently stroking small motions over his freckled cheek.

“You are the best hockey player anyone has ever met,” Ilya tells him somberly. “You are going to have a beautiful, healthy baby. You are going to recover very nicely. And you are going to go back next season, better than ever. Do not doubt this for even a second. *Never* doubt who you are and what you can do. You are Shane Fucking Hollander. Do you hear me, Shane?”

Shane blinks at him, a bit awed and disbelieving at how Ilya somehow always knows the perfect thing to say to him.

“Say it with me,” Ilya says, “you are *Shane Fucking Hollander*.”

“I-I am Shane Fucking Hollander,” he musters. It’s not as impressive or firm as Ilya’s, but it’s *something*.

“Good boy, Shane Fucking Hollander.” Ilya kisses his damp forehead again. “I am calling Jeni. Be right back.”

He steps out of the room with his cell phone, leaving Shane alone on the bed. He sighs, glancing down at his tense stomach, hands cupped gently around it. It’s going to be weird, after he spent all this time getting used to this growing belly, to now be saying goodbye to it. Or at least, he sure *hopes* he’s saying goodbye to it.

“Do me a favor,” he says quietly, to no one in particular, “don’t make this too hard on me?”

If the baby heard him, she gives no indication.

“*I’m going to die!*” Shane exclaims, fingers gripping the poor, abused skin of Ilya’s forearm as his own head falls between his shoulder blades.

He’s in the *transition* stage, as Jeni keeps obnoxiously referring to it. He’s almost fully dilated and ready to push. His water has broken, removing any semblance of cushion from the unbearable pressure on his pelvis. The pain is cranked up to, about ten thousand, and he’s pretty sure he’s about to *use the bathroom* in front of Jeni, her assistant Keisha, and Ilya.

“You are okay, *malysh*,” Ilya murmurs in his ear, allowing him to death-grip on his arm. Shane is currently on his knees in the birthing tub, leaning over the side where Ilya is kneeling down to comfort him. “She is coming so soon. You’re doing great.”

“I’m gonna die,” he wails again, “it feels like I’m going to die. And I have to use the bathroom. Don’t let me use the bathroom in this fucking tub, Ilya, please.”

“Hon,” Jeni says from behind him, her voice calm and even, “that isn’t the *bathroom*. That’s your baby. She’s descending into the cervix, so you’re gonna feel a lot of pressure, but it’s just her. You do not need to worry, okay?”

“She’s too big,” he frets, looking up at Ilya with pleading eyes. “I can’t do this, Ilya. We have to go to the hospital. You have to ask them to just take her out. Okay? Please? Can we?”

Ilya looks tortured, glancing over his head at Jeni for help.

“She is not too big, Shane,” Jeni replies, voice still relaxed. “Everything is going absolutely perfectly, I promise.”

“*You* fucking push her out then,” Shane snarls, not really even noticing how nonsensical that retort was.

Jeni chuckles. “I’d love to help you out hon, but I’ve already pushed my own kids out.”

“Ilya.” Shane looks back at him desperately. “I want everyone to leave.”

“I’m sorry, *moy lyuibmyy*.” Ilya cups his cheek. “I cannot let them leave, they are here to keep you both safe.”

In lieu of a coherent reply, Shane drops his head against the side of the tub and lets out another low moan of pain. The pressure building in his pelvis is so blinding that he wants to crawl out of his skin just to escape the feeling.

“Here Shane, try the comb again.” Jeni gently unfolds his clenched fist and presses the small wooden comb between his fingers. His hand immediately tightens around it, and while the pain is a somewhat useful distraction, it’s nowhere near the agony tearing through his middle.

He tosses the comb across the room with a growl. “That’s useless!”

Over his head, he hears quiet voices muttering. His head snaps up, glancing between Ilya and the midwife team. He doesn’t like that they’re talking behind his back while he’s in this miserable state.

“What?” he demands.

“Oh, nothing Shane.” Jeni shakes her head. “I was just suggesting we do some recentering exercises, to help regulate you. You seem stressed.”

Shane’s teeth grind together painfully. “Are you serious? *Obviously* I’m stressed! There’s a human being trying to force its way out of me!”

“Baby.” Ilya nudges his face with his fingertips, bringing their gazes to eye level. “I know you are suffering, and I am so so sorry I cannot make it better. But, let’s try something to help relax you, okay? Help make you more comfortable.”

Shane swallows thickly, anger melting out of him at the sight of Ilya's worried eyes. "I-I'm sorry for shouting, I just-"

"No sorries, not now, not ever. Not for what you are doing here." Ilya shakes his head firmly, and gets to his feet. With one quick motion, he's removed his t-shirt and sweats, leaving him in just his plain black boxers. Shane watches with disbelief as he crosses the threshold of the tub, and lowers himself in behind Shane.

Immediately, Shane reaches for him. Ilya opens his arms and lets Shane curl against his now soaked chest. He buries his face in the nape of Ilya's neck, inhaling the familiar scent and feeling his muscles relax.

Yes, this is exactly what he needed. Ilya, as close as physically possible, here in this moment with him.

"There you go, *solnyshko*," Ilya coos softly, gliding his fingers through Shane's damp hair. "So good, just breathe."

They stay like this for a while.

Shane doesn't know how long, because time has stopped existing to him, for the most part. He does know, Ilya's fingertips get wrinkly, and when Jeni checks him the next time, he's ready to push.

"Ilya," he says shakily, glancing over his shoulder to where Ilya has positioned himself in a supportive stance. Shane's back is pressed to his bare chest, both of them exposed here in the tub, though Shane a bit more.

"Yes, sweetheart?" Ilya murmurs, watching from the corner of his eye as Jeni gets her gloves on and wades into the tub with them.

"I love you," Shane manages, voice wrecked and weak, tears spilling into his lips. "I'm scared and I love you so much."

"Oh, Shane." Ilya's voice is swollen with emotion. "I love you more. I love you so much I do not have words to say it. I know you are scared, and that is okay. I am a little scared too. Let's bring our daughter here, now, together, da? You have waited long enough."

The first push feels like a herculean effort. The feeling is absolute agony, but at least now, he's *doing* something with it. Working toward a goal, forcing his body into gear to try and put an end to this apparent neverending misery.

Ilya holds his thigh for him, and pets his hair, and kisses his sweat-drenched face wherever he can reach. He murmurs to him, half in English half in Russian that Shane only picks up bits and pieces of. It's tender and loving, it gives Shane the strength he needs to keep going.

"Almost there, Shane!" Jeni encourages. "A little bit more and we'll start to see her head!"

Shane lets out a ragged groan of pain on the exhale. "Her head isn't there yet?!"

“Not quite yet, hon, but you’re doing so well. Just keep doing exactly what you’re doing. Pant and let her come down slowly.”

Shane lets out an involuntary whimper of frustration. Ilya kisses him again.

“Keep going,” he says softly.

Shane keeps going.

He does as Jeni instructs, trying not to push too hard too fast, trying not to hurt himself. The effort is so strenuous he sees black spots in his vision, and the veins in his neck throb, and his entire body pulls taut as a bowstring.

He’s rewarded for his efforts with a burning, fiery agony he doesn’t think he’ll ever forget.

“What the fuck,” he gasps through choked wheezes, *“oh my god ow what the fuck? Ow, ah, ah!”*

“Her head’s crowning, Shane! Keep going!” Jeni’s hands are in motion and her eyes are alight with excitement.

He screams. Shane honest to god *screams* as her head finally comes through his opening. He feels Ilya flinch behind him, obviously distraught by the echoing sound of his pain, but he cannot help it.

“She’s got a beautiful head of hair, Shane,” Jeni tells him. “Would you like to feel?”

Haggardly, Shane manages a weak nod.

Jeni guides his shaking hand down between his legs, and he gasps at the feeling of his daughter’s soft skull poking out of him in the water. Her wispy hair is plastered down over her tiny forehead, and he can feel a tiny little nose.

“Oh my god,” he sobs, “she’s right there.”

“She’s so close,” Jeni affirms, “let’s get her shoulders out, you can do this, Shane.”

His monumental efforts are not over yet, but he’s spurred on by the elation of feeling his baby girl so close to being born.

And before he knows it, a wailing, wiggling, sopping wet baby is being plopped against his chest while he gasps and shudders in complete and utter shock.

“Bohze moy,” Ilya cries behind him, “she’s so beautiful, Shanya.”

Shane’s vision is blurry as he looks down at the small, wriggling baby in his arms, but he knows he agrees.

She’s impossibly small, though her weight is considerable in his grasp. Her skin is toned like his, and she’s got a small sweep of dark hair. Her little face is scrunched up, red from the

effort of screeching.

“I-it’s okay,” Shane stammers, one hand coming up to brush against her tiny, plump cheek. “You’re okay, I’m here. I’m your Dad. Holy shit, you’re here. You came out of me.”

In reply, his daughter just shrieks.

“Is she okay?” Ilya asks Jeni, through thick emotion. His voice is wet with tears.

“She’s perfect,” Jeni says back, beaming at them. “Shane, you did so well.”

He sniffs, but can’t find it in him to look away from the baby.

“And Shane?” Ilya asks. “Shane is okay?”

“Everything looks great. We’ll get the afterbirth delivered and then get her all cleaned up and weighed.”

Shane can only half-focus on what they’re saying, too enamored with this small human to do anything but stare at her perfect, scrunched up little face.

He can’t believe he *did it*.

Shane sleeps on and off for a little while, on that rainy Ottawa day.

He’s awoken intermittently by the quiet, gentle sounds of their daughter’s cries. She’s so tiny, each little finger and each little toe an absolutely miniscule, fragile thing. Each wisp of dark hair, thin and tenderly combed over her soft head, more perfect than the last.

His mom cries when she holds her, the first person after he and Ilya.

“Oh, honey,” Yuna sobs, holding the baby close to her chest while Shane smiles up with tears in his own eyes, “you did so well. I’m so proud of you.”

Her forgiveness for his truly humiliating behavior is that quick and that easy. He loves his mom so much sometimes he wonders how he ever got lucky enough to have her.

His dad weeps too, pressing the baby close and kissing the top of her head with salty tears soaking his own cheeks.

Ilya watches over all of them, his eyes intent on the small pink bundle, as if he’s ready to shoot laser beams at anyone who holds her even slightly recklessly. It’s been an immediate and beautiful alteration in him- becoming a father mere hours ago, yet his entire being seems changed. Everything about his posture, his expressions, the quiet nods and gentle support, it all reads to Shane as the most quintessential traits of a *dad*.

It’s kind of insane, that’s what they are now. *Dads*.

It's later in the evening, or maybe very early the next morning, Shane isn't sure. The rain is still coming down against the windows of the cottage, soft pattering sounds that relax Shane's nervous system, and fall in rhythm with the snuffling noises from his daughter as she hungrily eats. Thankfully, she's taken to feedings well, and so has he. It's a little odd and will take some getting used to, the feeling of something suckling on your chest, but it also makes him feel so close to her.

"How are we doing?" Ilya enters the room, his voice a whisper. He's carrying Shane's freshly refilled water bottle, and a plate of snacks.

Shane looks over at him, squinting in the darkness with his nose wrinkled. He smiles in spite of himself, at the sleep-ruffled appearance of his husband. Ilya's curly hair is disheveled and wrecked, the bags under his eyes are deep, and he's swaying on his feet like he's exhausted. Shane knows the fuckin' feeling.

Still, his eyes land only on Shane and the baby, his gaze entirely focused on them. He smiles back as he settles himself on the bed beside Shane, offering him a sip from the straw of the water bottle before he does anything else.

Shane greedily sips down water, and exhales a soft sigh of relief. This makes him thirstier than he'd expected. And hungry.

As if reading his mind, Ilya lifts the plate for Shane to examine. It's a hodgepodge of different snack items that Shane loves. Pistachios, mangoes, strawberries, bananas, teriyaki jerky, butter crackers, and several assorted chocolates.

Shane softens, adjusting the baby carefully against his chest before he whispers back, "thank you."

"What first?" Ilya inquires.

"Oh, I'll eat it after I'm done feeding her."

"Mm, no, my love. You are hungry now. You eat now." Ilya lifts a piece of chocolate and brings it gently to Shane's lips.

He's a little ashamed at how easily they part around what Ilya offers him. The chocolate is the most delicious fucking thing he's ever tasted.

"I love you," he murmurs after he's swallowed his first bite, looking up at Ilya's face in the moonlight space of their bedroom.

The rain beats down a little softer outside the windows. Fresh, new, clean. Enriching the trees and earth, bringing forth new life in a way that makes Shane feel oddly in tune with nature right now.

"I love you more than anything in the world. I love you both, more than life." Ilya tells him.

They always say that to each other, but right now when Ilya speaks those words, Shane really does believe him.

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