

Built for Three

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Built for Three

by [AnonymousDJ](#)

Summary

After a difficult car-shopping trip turns emotional, Shane accidentally reveals to Ilya that he's pregnant.

The dealership is bright in a way that feels artificial—too much glass, too much shine. Every surface gleams like it's trying to convince you of something. New beginnings, maybe. Or expensive mistakes.

Ilya has been in heaven since they walked in.

He moves through the showroom like he belongs there, hands in his pockets, eyes lighting up every time a low-profile sports car comes into view. Red, silver, black—anything with sharp angles and the promise of speed pulls him in like gravity.

“That one,” he says for the third time, pointing at a low, sleek sports car in a violent red. “No, wait—that one. Shane, look at the curves on it.”

Shane trails behind, slower, his hands clasped loosely in front of him. He stops beside a dark gray SUV, running his fingers along the door absentmindedly. It's not flashy. It's solid. Dependable. The kind of car you don't have to think too hard about.

“I'm looking,” Shane replies, but his eyes never leave the SUV.

Ilya notices—and frowns. “You didn't even turn around.”

“I saw it earlier,” Shane says. “It's... small.”

“That's the point.”

Shane exhales through his nose. “It's impractical.”

Ilya laughs, bright and easy. “You keep saying that word like it's an insult.”

“It is,” Shane mutters.

They've been doing this dance since they walked in.

Ilya drifting toward cars that look like they were built to be admired. Shane gravitating toward vehicles with wide back seats, reinforced frames, high safety ratings. Every time Shane pauses, Ilya inevitably comments.

“That thing's massive.”

“That looks like a dad car.”

“God, Shane, it's ugly.”

At first, Shane just rolls his eyes. Then he stops responding altogether.

The salesman eventually clocks the dynamic and wisely keeps his distance.

Ilya, oblivious, finally settles on a silver sports coupe parked dead center under bright lights. He circles it slowly, reverently.

“This,” he declares, “is art.”

Shane stands several feet away, arms crossed tightly over his chest. His jaw is set, shoulders stiff.

“It’s a death trap,” Shane says.

Ilya waves a hand. “Statistically, that’s not true.”

“Statistically,” Shane shoots back, “you drive like an idiot.”

That earns him a grin. “You love it.”

“I tolerate it.”

“Same thing.”

Shane doesn’t smile.

When the salesman offers a test drive, Ilya doesn’t hesitate. Shane hesitates—but he gets into the passenger seat anyway.

The interior is sleek and narrow. Everything feels close. Tight. The door shuts with a solid click that echoes louder than Shane expects.

Ilya adjusts the seat, clearly pleased. “Listen to that engine,” he says as they pull out. “She’s perfect.”

Shane stares straight ahead from the passenger seat. “She’s a death trap.”

“Don’t be dramatic.” Ilya pulls out smoothly, confidence effortless. “You just don’t appreciate good design.”

Shane exhales sharply. “I appreciate not dying.”

They drive for a few minutes in tense silence. The car accelerates smoothly, hugging the road. Ilya is relaxed, one hand on the wheel, humming softly.

“This is so much better than those ugly tanks you were eyeing,” Ilya says casually. “I mean, what were you planning to haul? Furniture?”

Something in Shane snaps—not all at once, but enough.

“Can you stop?” Shane’s voice rises suddenly, sharp and raw, cutting through the car like a slap. “For once, can you just stop acting like everything I want is stupid?”

Ilya startles, foot easing off the gas. “What?”

“Stop making fun of it,” Shane says, breath uneven. “Every time I look at something I actually like, you tear it apart.”

“Shane—”

“No,” Shane says, louder now. “You keep saying it. Ugly. Big. Too much. Like I’m asking for something ridiculous.”

“I was joking,” Ilya says automatically. “You know I—”

“Sports cars aren’t practical or safe,” Shane snaps, finally turning to him. His eyes are bright, furious. “And I’m tired of pretending that doesn’t matter.”

The words hang there.

Ilya opens his mouth, ready to fire back—ready to defend himself, the car, the joke—

And then Shane’s voice breaks.

“Just—pull over.”

A tear slips free before Shane can stop it. He turns his head away immediately, pressing his knuckles against his mouth. When Ilya reaches over without thinking, Shane flinches and pulls back.

Don’t touch me.

The message is clear.

Ilya’s chest drops straight into his stomach.

He pulls the car over at the first place he can—a quiet park just off the road. Trees sway gently, oblivious. The world keeps going.

The second the car stops, Shane opens the door and gets out, slamming it hard enough that Ilya flinches.

“Shane—” Ilya says, already climbing out after him.

Shane is walking fast, shoulders hunched, hands shaking. He doesn’t get far before stopping near a bench, breath coming unevenly.

Ilya approaches carefully, like Shane might shatter if he moves too fast.

“Talk to me,” Ilya says, voice low. “Please. What’s wrong?”

Shane laughs weakly, bitter. “Everything.”

“That’s not fair,” Ilya whispers. “I didn’t know—”

“I know you didn’t,” Shane says, spinning around suddenly. His eyes are red, wet, overwhelmed. “That’s the problem. You didn’t even see it.”

Ilya swallows. “See what?”

Shane’s chest heaves. He looks away, then back at Ilya, like he’s fighting himself.

“I just...” His voice cracks completely now. “I just want a car with room for the car seat.”

Ilya freezes.

“What?”

“And space,” Shane continues, words tumbling out now that they’ve started. “Enough space so I can sit in the back if I need to. So I can reach them. So I don’t feel like everything is cramped and unsafe and—”

He chokes, shoulders collapsing inward.

“So I can be there with my baby.”

The world tilts.

Ilya stares at him, heart pounding so hard it hurts. “W—what?”

Ilya stares at him, his brain lagging behind the words. “Your... what?”

Shane looks up at him then, tears streaming freely now. “I’m pregnant.”

The sentence lands like a punch to the chest.

Ilya’s heart stops.

“I—” His voice comes out hoarse. “What?”

“I didn’t plan to tell you like this,” Shane sobs. “I didn’t want it to come out during a fight. I just— I needed you to understand why this matters so much to me.”

Ilya sways slightly, like he needs to sit down. “Pregnant,” he repeats faintly. “You’re... you’re pregnant?”

Shane nods, barely holding himself together. “I was waiting. I wanted to tell you when things were calm. When I wasn’t scared you’d think I was crazy or—”

He doesn’t finish. He steps forward instead and collapses into Ilya’s chest, sobbing openly. Whatever’s been holding him together finally breaks, fists clutching at Ilya’s jacket like it’s the only thing keeping him upright.

Ilya doesn’t hesitate this time.

He wraps his arms around Shane tightly, protectively, like he’s afraid if he lets go even for a second, he’ll lose him. His own eyes burn, his heart racing, thoughts colliding violently in his head.

A baby.

Their baby.

And Shane has been carrying this alone.

“Oh my god,” Ilya whispers, pressing his face into Shane’s hair. “Oh my god, Shane.”

“I’m sorry,” Shane cries. “I didn’t mean to yell. I just—I feel like everything is changing and I’m terrified and I needed something that felt safe.”

Ilya’s chest aches.

“I’m so sorry,” he says fiercely. “I should have listened. I should have seen it. I made you feel small when you were just trying to protect our family.”

Shane clutches at him, shaking. “I just wanted you to understand.”

“I do,” Ilya says, voice thick. “I swear I do.”

They stand there for a long time, holding each other in the middle of a quiet park, the weight of the future settling around them—heavy, terrifying, and impossibly real.

And for the first time, Ilya doesn’t see a sports car.

He sees space.

Safety.

A back seat big enough for Shane and their baby.

And he’s never wanted anything more.

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Shane sits down hard on the park bench like his legs can’t hold him anymore.

His hands are shaking.

He keeps wiping at his face even though the tears won’t stop, embarrassed by how badly he’s falling apart now that the words are out. The secret is gone. Hanging between them in the cool afternoon air.

I’m pregnant.

Ilya stands frozen a few feet away.

He looks pale.

Not angry.

Not upset.

Just... stunned.

Like someone reached into his chest and rearranged every organ without warning.

Shane can’t even look at him properly. Shame burns hot under his skin.

“This wasn’t how I wanted to tell you,” Shane says hoarsely. “I know this is horrible timing.”

Ilya finally moves.

Slowly.

Carefully.

Like Shane is something fragile now.

He kneels in front of the bench, lowering himself until he's looking up at Shane instead of down at him. The movement alone nearly makes Shane cry again because Ilya never kneels for anyone.

"I need you to look at me," Ilya says softly.

Shane tries.

His vision blurs almost immediately.

"I'm sorry," Shane whispers brokenly. "I didn't mean to throw this at you during a fight."

"Hey." Ilya's voice cracks. "Hey, no. Don't apologize for that."

Shane presses the heels of his hands against his eyes. "I wanted it to be nice," Shane says, voice cracking. "I had this whole plan and—and I was gonna wait until dinner next week and maybe give you the ultrasound picture or something stupid—"

"That's not stupid."

Shane laughs weakly through tears. "It sounds stupid now."

"It doesn't." Ilya's voice breaks. "Baby, it doesn't."

The endearment nearly undoes Shane again.

He looks away quickly.

Ilya notices immediately.

Everything about him feels hyperaware now. Every expression. Every shake in Shane's breathing. Every tiny shift in posture.

Like his brain has finally recalibrated around one horrifying, beautiful truth:

Shane is carrying their child.

His hands flex helplessly near his knees before he quietly asks, "Can I touch you?"

The question alone nearly undoes Shane.

Ilya has never asked before. Not because he's careless, but because touch between them has always been easy. Natural. Automatic.

Now Ilya looks terrified of crossing a line.

Shane nods shakily.

Immediately, Ilya reaches for him with unbearable gentleness, resting his hands carefully on Shane's thighs first, like he's grounding himself before moving any closer.

"I'm sorry," Ilya whispers again. "God, Shane, I'm so fucking sorry."

Shane's lip trembles.

"I kept making fun of the cars and you were..." Ilya swallows hard. "You were thinking about our baby."

The word hits Shane directly in the chest.

Our.

Fresh tears spill down his face.

"I didn't know how to tell you," Shane admits quietly.

Ilya looks wrecked by that sentence.

"How long have you known?"

"Almost two weeks."

Ilya inhales sharply.

Two weeks.

Two weeks of Shane carrying this fear alone.

Two weeks of morning sickness and exhaustion and anxiety while Ilya joked about ugly SUVs.

"Oh my god," he whispers.

Shane looks down at his hands. "I was trying to figure things out first."

"You shouldn't have had to do that alone."

"I didn't know if you'd even want—"

"What?"

The sharpness in Ilya's voice makes Shane flinch.

Not anger.

Hurt.

Pure hurt.

Shane immediately shakes his head. “I know that sounds awful—”

“You thought I wouldn’t want our baby?”

The devastation on Ilya’s face is unbearable.

Shane starts crying harder instantly. “I didn’t know. I didn’t know how you’d react!”

Ilya looks like someone just stabbed him.

“Shane,” he breathes.

“You love your freedom, and your cars, and hockey, and your life and—”

“And I love you,” Ilya says fiercely.

The words crack straight through Shane’s panic.

Ilya shifts closer, resting his forehead carefully against Shane’s knee.

“You really thought there was a chance I’d hear you were carrying my baby and not want it?”

Shane can’t answer.

Because now that it’s out loud, it sounds ridiculous.

But fear had made everything feel possible.

“I was scared,” Shane whispers.

That nearly kills him.

Ilya bows his head for a second, trying to pull himself together. His chest hurts so badly he can barely breathe through it.

“You are carrying my child,” he says softly. “There is nothing in this world that could make me stop loving you.”

Shane breaks down again immediately.

Ilya stands quickly and pulls him back into his arms before he can collapse completely, holding him tight against his chest.

“I’m here,” Ilya whispers into his hair desperately. “I’m here. I’m sorry I made you doubt that.”

Shane clutches at the back of his shirt.

“I didn’t mean to ruin today.”

“You didn’t ruin anything.”

“I yelled at you.”

“You had every right to yell at me.”

Shane shakes his head against him. “I just got overwhelmed.”

“I know.” Ilya kisses the top of his head softly. “I know now.”

For a long moment neither of them moves.

The wind rustles quietly through the trees around them. Somewhere nearby, children laugh on a playground.

The sound hits Ilya differently now.

Everything does.

Finally, Shane pulls back enough to wipe at his swollen eyes again.

“We should go back,” he says quietly, embarrassed. “The salesman probably thinks we stole the car.”

Despite everything, Ilya huffs out the smallest laugh.

“Probably.”

Shane tries to smile, but it falters quickly from exhaustion.

Immediately, Ilya notices.

“You okay?”

Shane blinks at the sudden concern.

“I’m fine.”

“Are you dizzy? Do you need water? Should we sit longer?”

Shane stares at him.

The shift is so immediate it almost gives him emotional whiplash.

Shane stares at him.

This is the first moment it fully sinks in.

Ilya isn’t upset.

He isn't trapped.

He isn't angry.

He's terrified for them.

And suddenly Shane can't breathe around the relief crashing into him.

Ten minutes ago Ilya was teasing him for wanting "dad cars."

Now he looks one second away from calling an ambulance because Shane blinked too slowly.

"Ilya..."

"What?"

"You're hovering."

"I am not."

"You absolutely are."

"I'm being attentive."

Shane actually laughs a little at that.

The sound makes Ilya feel like he can breathe again.

When they start walking back toward the sports car, Ilya stays close enough to catch Shane if he trips. He opens the passenger door before Shane can reach for it himself.

Shane pauses.

"I can do it myself."

"I know," Ilya says quickly. "I just wanted to."

Something in Shane's chest aches painfully.

He gets into the passenger seat carefully while Ilya circles around to the driver's side.

The second Ilya sits down, he grimaces.

"How did I ever think this was practical?" he mutters.

Shane snorts softly, wiping beneath his eyes. "That's what I said."

Ilya starts the engine but drives out of the parking lot agonizingly slow.

Five minutes pass.

Then ten.

Shane notices he hasn't gone over the speed limit once.

Not once.

And Ilya keeps glancing at him every few seconds like he's checking Shane is still there.

Still breathing.

Still okay.

Shane's chest tightens painfully.

Finally, Ilya mutters under his breath, "I hate this car."

Shane blinks at him.

"You loved this car ten minutes ago."

Ilya's grip tightens slightly on the wheel.

"Ten minutes ago," he says quietly, "I didn't know my fiancé was carrying my baby."

Shane's eyes immediately fill again.

"Oh no," Ilya says quickly. "No, don't cry again, baby, please—"

"That's your fault," Shane chokes out, laughing weakly through tears. "You can't just say things like that now."

"I'm serious." Ilya glances around the cramped interior with open disgust. "This thing is awful."

Shane laughs harder.

Relief floods through Ilya so intensely he almost feels dizzy.

By the time they pull back into the dealership lot, something fundamental has shifted between them.

Earlier, they walked in as two people arguing over taste.

Now—

Now they walk in as parents.

The salesman approaches carefully, clearly uncertain after their dramatic exit.

"So," he says hesitantly. "How was the test drive?"

Ilya looks at the sports car.

Then at Shane.

Then back at the salesman.

“It’s not for us.”

Us.

Shane feels the word physically.

The salesman nods quickly. “No problem. Was there something else you wanted to look at?”

Earlier, Ilya would’ve pointed at another sports car immediately.

Now he says, “What’s your safest SUV?”

The salesman pauses.

Shane freezes.

Ilya continues before anyone can speak.

“What’s best for winter roads? Which one has the most backseat room? Which has the easiest car seat anchors?”

The salesman brightens immediately, launching into an explanation.

Shane barely hears him.

Because Ilya is listening so seriously.

Asking questions.

Real questions.

Questions Shane had been researching alone at two in the morning while terrified.

An hour ago the man standing before him would’ve mocked every SUV in sight.

Now Ilya is asking about airbags with deadly seriousness.

“Cargo space?” Ilya asks.

“Excellent in this model.”

“And enough room in the back seat for someone to sit comfortably beside a car seat?”

The question makes Shane’s chest cave in.

Because Ilya remembered.

He remembered exactly what Shane said in the park.

The salesman nods. “Definitely.”

Ilya immediately looks at Shane.

Like the answer matters more coming from him.

“Do you want to see it?” he asks softly.

Shane can barely speak around the emotion clogging his throat.

He nods once.

Ilya squeezes his hand gently before leading him toward the SUV.

And for the first time since this entire terrifying conversation began—

Shane feels safe.

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The salesman—Mark, according to the little badge clipped to his tie—leads them tow

And for the first time since this entire terrifying conversation began—

Shane feels safe.

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The salesman—Mark, according to the little badge clipped to his tie—leads them toward a row of SUVs gleaming beneath bright showroom lights.

Before, Ilya would’ve called the entire section depressing.

Now he walks into it like he’s entering a battlefield.

Focused.

Alert.

Terrifyingly serious.

Shane stays tucked close to his side, emotionally wrung out, fingers loosely hooked around Ilya’s sleeve without really meaning to. Every few seconds, Ilya glances down at him like he’s checking he hasn’t disappeared.

The salesman gestures toward a sleek midsize SUV.

“This one’s popular for families,” he says, stopping beside a sleek gray crossover. “Excellent crash test ratings, adaptive safety features—”

Ilya folds his arms.

And suddenly becomes impossible.

“What’s the side-impact rating?”

Mark pauses.

“Uh—”

“And rear collision?”

“Well—”

“How does it handle in snow?”

“We’d have to check—”

“What about rollover resistance?”

Mark blinks.

Shane stares.

Ilya keeps going.

“How much rear legroom? Storage capacity with seats folded? LATCH system accessibility? Blind spot coverage?”

Mark looks mildly panicked.

Shane almost laughs.

Because this is absurd.

And oddly adorable.

Ten minutes ago Ilya wanted horsepower.

Now he’s interrogating this poor man like he’s preparing for battle.

Mark recovers admirably and begins listing specifications.

Ilya crouches beside the rear door.

“This seat feels stiff.”

“It’s memory foam—”

“It feels stiff.”

Shane bites his lip.

Mark opens the trunk.

“Cargo space is one of its strongest—”

“Too shallow,” Ilya says.

Mark blinks.

Shane coughs to hide a smile.

Too shallow?

Since when did Ilya know anything about trunk depth?

They move to the next SUV.

Ilya immediately disapproves.

“Too high.”

Mark hesitates. “High is usually considered good—”

“Not if Shane has to climb into it.”

The words come out so naturally that Shane freezes.

Mark looks between them.

“Oh,” he says politely. “Right.”

Shane looks down quickly.

His heart is behaving strangely again.

Shane snorts softly despite himself.

“You’re being ridiculous.”

Ilya straightens immediately.

“I’m being thorough.”

“You hated SUVs this morning.”

“I’ve grown.”

Shane huffs out a startled laugh.

The salesman, sensing survival is his best option, leads them onward.

Another SUV.

Rejected.

The third SUV has leather seats.

Ilya presses the upholstery.

“Slippery.”

The fourth.

“Too narrow.”

The fifth.

“Visibility sucks.”

Mark is sweating now.

“I assure you these are all excellent vehicles—”

“They’re fine,” Ilya says.

Fine.

The same man who practically proposed to a sports coupe an hour ago is now dismissing luxury SUVs with the expression of a disappointed king.

Shane watches him quietly.

There’s something almost overwhelming about it.

The determination.

The focus.

Like Ilya has latched onto this responsibility with both hands and refuses to let go.

They stop beside a black SUV.

Mark launches into another practiced speech.

“This model has five-star safety ratings across—”

Ilya opens the back door.

Then frowns.

“No.”

Mark falters. “No?”

“Too cramped.”

Shane peers inside.

It actually looks spacious.

But Ilya shakes his head.

“No.”

He slides into the back seat himself.

His knees bump slightly.

Immediately his face darkens.

“No.”

Mark looks genuinely offended.

“This vehicle is considered very spacious—”

Ilya gets out.

“If I sat back here with Shane and a car seat,” he says matter-of-factly, “we’d all hate each other.”

Mark goes silent.

Shane does too.

Because—

Because Ilya said if.

Not if there’s a baby.

Not if someday.

Just—

If I sat back here with Shane and a car seat.

Like the future already exists.

Like it’s real.

Mark clears his throat.

“Well... perhaps something larger.”

“Yes,” Ilya says immediately.

Shane follows them to the next row, emotions beginning to swell again.

He didn’t expect this.

He thought maybe—

Maybe Ilya would be supportive.

Maybe emotional.

But this?

This fierce attention?

This immediate shift?

It feels almost too tender to look at directly.

They stop beside a deep blue SUV.

Bigger.

Solid.

Mark opens the door.

“This one—”

Ilya narrows his eyes.

Mark visibly braces himself.

But before either of them can speak—

Shane stops moving.

It happens quietly.

Almost imperceptibly.

But Ilya notices instantly.

Because he’s been watching Shane nonstop.

Shane stands near the passenger side, completely still.

His eyes move slowly over the vehicle.

The wide frame.

The roomy back seats.

The trunk.

The shape.

Something soft enters his expression.

And then—

He reaches out.

His fingers brush the door.

Ilya watches him.

Really watches.

And suddenly the noise of the dealership fades.

Shane hasn't said anything.

But he doesn't need to.

His entire face changes.

The tension leaves his shoulders.

His eyes soften.

And for the first time all day—

He looks safe.

Ilya feels something shift sharply in his chest.

Mark starts talking again.

“This model includes premium safety packages and—”

“Open it,” Shane says quietly.

Mark immediately does.

Shane leans into the back seat.

And goes silent.

The space is huge.

Roomy.

Comfortable.

His hand slides across the upholstery.

He looks toward the middle seat.

Then the window.

Then the distance between seats.

His breathing catches.

Ilya sees it.

Sees the exact moment Shane imagines it.

A car seat.

A small blanket.

Tiny shoes dropped on the floor.

Shane sitting in the back.

Watching over their baby.

His eyes go glassy.

Oh.

Oh.

Ilya's heart clenches painfully.

Mark is still explaining features.

Storage.

Technology.

Packages.

Ilya hears none of it.

Because Shane turns toward him.

And there it is.

No words.

Just his eyes.

Soft.

Hopeful.

Almost afraid to want it.

This is perfect.

The realization hits Ilya so hard it nearly steals his breath.

The car suddenly stops being metal and price tags.

It becomes something else.

A future.

A home between destinations.

A place where Shane could feel safe.

That matters more than anything.

Mark continues talking.

“This trim level also offers—”

“This one,” Ilya says.

Mark stops.

Shane blinks.

“What?”

Ilya walks over.

He places a hand gently against Shane’s lower back.

“This one.”

Mark smiles uncertainly. “You’d like to test drive it?”

“No.”

Shane looks confused. “Ilya—”

“This is the car.”

Silence.

Mark brightens immediately.

“Oh! Wonderful—”

But Shane is staring at him.

“You didn’t even look at the others.”

“I don’t need to.”

Shane laughs softly in disbelief. “You’ve criticized literally everything.”

“I still can.”

“You hated all of them.”

“I did.”

“So why—”

Ilya looks at him.

And his voice softens.

“Because you looked at this one like you could finally breathe.”

The words hit Shane so hard his eyes sting instantly.

Ilya reaches up carefully, brushing damp hair behind his ear.

Shane swallows.

“I—”

“You looked happy.”

That nearly breaks him.

Mark suddenly becomes very interested in pretending to organize paperwork nearby.

Shane looks back at the SUV.

Then at Ilya.

“You’d really pick this one?”

Ilya doesn’t hesitate.

“It’s safe.”

“It’s big.”

“You were right.”

Shane laughs weakly.

“You hate admitting that.”

“I do.”

His thumb brushes softly against Shane’s side.

“But I love you more. And I love the family we are creating.”

Shane’s breath catches.

Ilya looks toward the SUV again.

And for once—

He doesn’t see something ugly.

He sees Shane in the passenger seat.

A car seat in the back.

Tiny fingers.

Late-night drives.

Family.

He looks back at Mark.

“We’ll take another look inside,” he says calmly.

Then, quieter—

Mostly for Shane.

“This is our car.”

“This is the car I bring my family home in.”

-

The house is quiet.

Not empty quiet.

Warm quiet.

The kind that settles gently into the walls after midnight conversations, shared dinners, sleepy laughter, and soft music drifting from another room.

It's been a week since the dealership.

A week since everything changed.

The SUV is already parked in the driveway.

Shane still catches Ilya staring at it sometimes through the kitchen window like he can't believe it's real.

Like he still can't believe any of this is real.

The pregnancy.

The nursery.

The future.

The room upstairs that used to hold nothing but storage boxes now slowly becoming something else entirely.

A crib catalog sits on the floor.

Paint samples line the dresser.

Tiny folded baby clothes—bought impulsively by Ilya three days ago after panicking in the children's section of a store—rest carefully in a basket.

Ilya spends a lot of time in there.

Sometimes organizing things that don't need organizing.

Sometimes just sitting quietly.

Thinking.

Shane notices it every time.

Tonight, when Shane climbs the stairs carrying two mugs of tea, he pauses outside their bedroom.

"Ilya?" he calls softly.

No answer.

The bathroom is empty.

The office too.

Shane already knows where he'll be before he reaches the nursery door.

It's cracked open slightly.

Warm yellow light spills into the hallway.

Shane pushes the door open carefully.

And stops.

Ilya sits in the corner of the room beside the window, knees drawn up slightly. The unfinished nursery stretches around him in soft shadows and half-built dreams.

But that's not what makes Shane's chest ache.

It's the photograph in Ilya's hands.

An older picture.

Worn at the edges from being held too often.

His mother.

Shane has seen the photo before.

Dark hair. Gentle eyes. A soft smile Ilya inherited completely.

Ilya doesn't notice Shane at first.

He's staring at the picture so intensely it almost looks painful.

Shane quietly sets the mugs down near the door and walks over.

"Ilya?"

That finally pulls him out of it.

Ilya lifts his head slightly.

His eyes are already red.

And Shane's heart sinks instantly.

Without a word, Shane crosses the room and lowers himself directly into Ilya's lap, legs folding around his waist naturally after years of fitting together this way.

The second he settles there, Ilya's arms wrap around him tightly.

Desperately.

Like he's been holding himself together for hours.

Then Ilya buries his face into Shane's neck.

A sob breaks out of him immediately.

Shane closes his eyes.

“Oh, baby...”

“I’m sorry,” Ilya chokes out. “I didn’t mean—I just came in here and then I started thinking and—”

“You don’t have to apologize.”

Ilya grips him tighter.

Shane can feel him shaking.

“I miss her,” Ilya whispers brokenly. “God, Shane, I miss her so much.”

The words crack something deep inside him.

Shane slides one hand into Ilya’s hair, holding him close while the other rubs slowly up and down his back.

“I know.”

“I wish I could tell her.”

Another sob tears through him.

“I wish I could go home.”

Shane’s throat tightens painfully.

Because home isn’t possible.

Not really.

Not safely.

Not anymore.

“I can’t even visit her grave,” Ilya whispers. “I can’t bring flowers. I can’t sit with her. I can’t tell her she’s going to be a grandmother.”

His voice breaks completely on the last word.

Grandmother.

Shane feels guilt crash into him immediately.

Because this entire week has been full of joy.

His parents crying when they found out.

Yuna screaming loud enough to nearly burst everyone's eardrums before throwing herself at Shane sobbing.

David pulling Ilya into one of the tightest hugs Shane had ever seen.

-

Shane had been terrified walking into his parents' house with trembling hands and the ultrasound tucked carefully into his jacket pocket.

Yuna cried immediately.

Actually cried.

One second she was staring in confusion, the next she was clutching Shane's face with shaking hands while David looked openly stunned beside her.

"A baby?" David had repeated faintly.

Ilya had looked terrified for exactly three seconds before David pulled him into a crushing hug.

"My son," David had whispered fiercely against his shoulder. "You're going to be a father."

Ilya had nearly cried right there.

-

Hayden and Jackie had been even worse.

Jackie screamed.

Then cried.

Then screamed again.

Hayden had looked genuinely stunned for almost a full minute before grabbing Shane into a crushing hug.

"You're having a baby?" he kept repeating like he physically couldn't process it.

And when Shane and Ilya awkwardly handed them the tiny gift bag with godparent? written inside—

Jackie burst into tears.

Hayden had to sit down.

"Yes," Jackie sobbed immediately. "Yes, obviously yes, are you kidding?!"

Hayden looked equally emotional.

"You trust us with your kid?"

“With our lives,” Shane answered honestly.

Jackie cried harder.

-

Cliff had been different.

Quiet.

He had stared at them for a solid ten seconds after the announcement.

Then:

“Huh.”

Shane had blinked. “That’s your reaction?”

“No, hold on, I’m processing.”

Then Cliff looked directly at Ilya.

“You? A dad?”

Ilya had glared. “I hate you.”

“You’re gonna buy cargo shorts next.”

“I’ll kill you.”

Cliff had laughed so hard he nearly choked before eventually pulling both of them into a hug.

Then quietly, sincerely:

“You’re gonna be amazing parents.”

-

They had people.

Family.

Support.

Love.

And through all of it—

Ilya had smiled.

Laughed.

Held Shane’s hand.

Accepted congratulations.

But Shane realizes now—

Every single time someone hugged him or congratulated him or talked about grandparents and family—

Something shadowed behind Ilyas eyes.

Because Shane had everyone.

Parents.

Friends.

People who loved them.

Ilya had people too now.

But not his people.

Not the one person he wanted most.

And now Shane sits in his lap inside the nursery while Ilya quietly falls apart over a photograph.

Guilt crawls painfully through Shane's chest.

"I'm sorry," Shane whispers before he can stop himself.

Ilya pulls back slightly, confused. "For what?"

Shane looks at the photo in his hand.

"She should be here."

The pain in Ilya's eyes deepens instantly.

"Shane—"

"I keep thinking about my parents. Hayden. Jackie. Everybody." His throat tightens painfully. "And you don't have anyone."

Ilya's expression softens immediately despite his tears.

"I have you."

But somehow that makes Shane feel worse.

Because it isn't enough.

Not for this.

Not for a grief this deep.

Carefully, Shane reaches for the photograph.

“I have an idea,” he says softly.

Ilya looks confused but lets him take the frame.

Shane sets it gently against one of the unpacked nursery boxes so the picture faces them clearly.

Then he gets up briefly.

Ilya watches through watery eyes as Shane moves around the room gathering random things.

A tiny pair of baby socks they bought impulsively.

The ultrasound picture tucked inside a folder.

One of the paint samples.

Finally Shane sits back down beside him.

“What are you doing?” Ilya asks quietly.

Shane looks toward the photograph.

Then softly—

Like she’s really there—

He starts talking.

“Hi, Mrs. Rozanov.”

Ilya freezes.

Shane smiles nervously at the picture frame.

“I know we haven’t officially met.” He clears his throat awkwardly. “But your son says I talk too much, so honestly you probably already know enough about me.”

A startled laugh breaks through Ilya’s tears.

Shane continues carefully.

“We wanted to tell you something.”

He picks up the ultrasound photo gently and places it beside the frame.

“You’re gonna be a grandmother.”

Ilya makes a broken sound beside him.

Shane keeps going anyway.

“This is your grandbaby,” he whispers to the photo. “They’re really tiny right now. And apparently already causing emotional damage.”

A wet laugh escapes Ilya unexpectedly.

Shane glances back at him briefly before looking at the picture again.

“We found out a few weeks ago.” His voice softens. “And I know Ilya wishes he could tell you himself.”

Tears spill silently down Ilya’s face now.

Shane gestures toward the nursery around them.

“We’re turning this room into the baby’s nursery. Ilya’s pretending he’s not already emotionally attached to every paint color.”

“I hate you,” Ilya whispers tearfully.

Shane smiles.

“He picked the safest car possible even though he pretended he wanted a sports car.”

“That’s not what happened.”

“It absolutely is.”

Ilya lets out another shaky laugh-sob mixture.

Shane reaches for his hand without looking away from the photograph.

“Your son is already an incredible father,” he says softly. “He worries about everything. He talks to the baby when he thinks I’m asleep. He keeps researching strollers at three in the morning.”

“I do not—”

“You absolutely do.”

Ilya covers his face with one hand, crying harder now.

But it’s different.

Not as sharp.

Not as lonely.

Shane's own eyes burn as he looks at the photograph.

"I know you can't be here," he whispers. "But we'll make sure they know you. I promise."

Silence fills the nursery.

Soft.

Heavy.

Beautiful.

Then suddenly Ilya grabs Shane and pulls him tightly into his chest.

His face buries against Shane's shoulder as another sob escapes him.

But this time Shane understands.

It isn't just grief.

It's love too.

Too much love for one heart to hold cleanly.

"I love you," Ilya whispers brokenly into his neck. "I love you so much."

Shane wraps his arms around him tightly.

"I love you too."

"Thank you." Ilya cries into his shoulder. "For doing this, for this."

Shane holds him tighter.

"I just didn't want her left out."

That somehow makes Ilya cry harder.

He presses desperate kisses against Shane's temple, cheek, jaw—unable to stop touching him.

"You are so good," he whispers brokenly. "You are so unbelievably good to me."

Shane shakes his head quickly, emotional himself now.

"No."

"Yes," Ilya insists fiercely. "You gave me this family."

Shane pulls back enough to cup his face gently.

“You built this family with me.”

Ilya looks toward the photograph again.

The candle flickers softly beneath it.

For the first time since walking into the nursery—

The grief in his expression eases slightly.

Not gone.

Never gone.

But softer.

Like maybe, somehow, she’s part of this too.

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