And the Hart Trophy Goes To… The Guy In Labor

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by JustMeAndLife (CaramelCreamCoffee)

Summary

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Another pain slammed into Shane so hard his vision whited out.

“…Shane Hollander.”

The room exploded with cheers and applause . People rising to their feet.

Shane barely heard any of it. His father hugged him first. Then Yuna. “Sweetheart,” she whispered against his ear, “you don’t look well. I don’t think you should be going up there alone..”

He couldn’t answer. He stood carefully. Ignoring the concerned look both of his parents threw his way.

The pressure between his hips was unbearable now. Every step toward the stage felt wrong. Painful. Wet. Why was it wet?

Or Shane goes into labor at the NHL awards with a son they didn’t even know existed.

Notes

Hiii! So this idea came from the amazing @imbihesgay over on twitter! All credit to them because .. chefs kiss! Just a quick one really to state that this does not follow cannon at all and the NHL awards take place in Toronto rather than Las Vegas because I had to make the plot work okay? Leave me alone :) Oh, also! There is a point midway were it flips POV so it goes from Shane to Ilya and then back to Shane. I do break it up with ———- but just incase anyone thinks I messed up the time line! Love yaaaa :)

See the end of the work for more notes

The pain started at sometime around six that evening.

At first, Shane ignored it. He stood in front of the mirror in the hotel suite, one hand braced against the marble counter while the other worked clumsily at the buttons of his dress shirt. The NHL Awards were always exhausting. There were too many cameras, too many people staring at him, too many questions he didn't want to answer—and the twisting ache low in his stomach felt like one more thing to tolerate.

"Shane?"

Yuna's voice drifted from the sitting room.

He swallowed hard. "Yeah?"

"Are you alright sweetheart? You've been in there twenty minutes."

"Yeah- I- I'm fine. I'm just getting ready."

A sharper cramp hit him suddenly, stealing the breath from his lungs. His body bent forward instinctively, fingers digging into the countertop as heat flashed across his skin.

Jesus Christ.

"Shane?" This time closer. The sound of her voice even more concerned.

The bathroom door opened a crack before he could stop her.

Yuna took one look at her son and frowned immediately. A sinking feeling hitting her gut.

He was pale beneath the warm bathroom lights. Sweat dampened the edges of his dark hair despite the cool air-conditioning. His normally steady posture had folded inward slightly, protective without him seeming to realize it.

"Honey," she said carefully, "are you alright?"

"I'm fine."

"You don't look fine."

He straightened too quickly and immediately regretted it when another pulse of pain rolled through his abdomen. He forced himself not to react. "Just some indigestion," he muttered. "Something I ate this morning I think."

Yuna crossed her arms. "Indigestion doesn't usually make people look like they're about to faint."

"I'm okay."

The words came automatically. Sharp. Defensive. Because he had to be okay.

Tonight mattered.

Tonight was one of the only nights all year he and Ilya would be in the same building without suspicion. They don't exactly have a chance to talk at their games , they have a role to play.

Yuna's expression softened with worry. "We don't have to go tonight if you're sick."

"I'm going."

Before she could argue, David's voice floated in from the suite. "Should I run to the store and grab some antacids?"

Shane nearly laughed from relief. "Yes," he called immediately. "Please."

David appeared a second later already grabbing his wallet from the side of the sink. "I'll be back."

Yuna still looked unconvinced.

Shane forced a smile. "Mom. Seriously. I'm okay."

Another cramp twisted viciously through him. The pain is a never ending ache now. Though he somehow managed to keep smiling through it.

By the time they arrived at the awards venue, Shane was regretting every decision he'd ever made.

Lights flashed constantly around him as players and celebrities moved across the carpet. Reporters shouted questions. Cameras tracked every expression.

The pain hadn't stopped. If anything, it had gotten worse. Laying heavy now. Every step he took felt like it were a move of torture. Radiating through his lower back and stomach in pulsing waves that left him nauseous and dizzy.

He kept one hand subtly pressed against his abdomen while smiling for pictures.

He told himself it was food poisoning.

Stress.

A stomach bug.

Anything else would be ridiculous. He's an athlete for Christ sake, he knows his body inside and out. This will work itself out,

His phone buzzed in his pocket as they were finally escorted inside.

Lily

The contact name alone eased something in his chest.

He opened the text immediately.

Lily- You are here?

Shane typed back quickly beneath the tablecloth once they reached their seats.

Jane- Bathroom near west hall. 5 mins.

Three dots appeared almost instantly.

Lily- Coming.

Shane exhaled shakily.

Then another pain hit so hard he nearly doubled over in his chair.

“Shane?” David murmured.

“I’m fine.”

Lies. It was all lies. Seemed to be all he was capable of these days.

He slipped out during a commercial break.

The hallway outside the ballroom was blissfully quiet compared to the chaos inside. Shane pushed into the bathroom and immediately grabbed the sink as another cramp of agony—because that’s what it felt like now, wasn’t it?—ripped through him.

His knees nearly buckled.

What the hell was wrong with him?

The bathroom door opened behind him. Shane looked up into the mirror.

Ilya froze almost instantly. All six-foot-three of him went rigid with alarm. “Shane? What is wrong?” The Russian crossed the room in seconds. “You look terrible.”

“I missed you too.”

“Shane-”

Ilya’s hands landed on his waist instinctively, and Shane sucked in a breath from the sudden pressure against his abdomen.

Ilya noticed immediately.His expression darkened. “You are hurt?”

“No.”

“You are lying.”

“Ilya-”

“You are pale. You are shaking.” Ilya frowned. “Is not okay Shane!”

Another wave hit.

Shane gasped quietly before he could stop himself.

Ilya’s eyes widened. “Jesus Christ.” His accent thickened sharply with panic. “What is happening?”

Shane surged forward before Ilya could keep talking and kissed him hard.

It worked exactly as intended.

Ilya made a startled sound against his mouth, hands tightening automatically at his hips.

For one brief moment the pain faded beneath familiar warmth. The familiar safety of being wrapped in the Russians arms.

Shane pulled back first, breathing unevenly. “I want to see you after,” he whispered.

Ilya still looked deeply unconvinced. “You are not okay. I am not falling for this-”

“I’m fine.”

“Shane-”

“Please.” The word cracked.

That got to him. It always got to him.

Ilya sighed softly and rested his forehead briefly against Shane’s. “I have to present award in ten minutes.”

“I know.”

“We should leave.”

“I know.”

Neither moved.

Another sharp pain tore through Shane violently enough that he physically jerked.

Ilya caught him immediately.

“Shit,” Shane hissed.

That scared Ilya.

Shane could see it happen in real time. The panic. The confusion. The instinctive protectiveness.

“We go hospital.”

“No.”

“Shane.”

“No hospital.” He grabbed Ilya’s wrist desperately. “Not tonight.”

The Russian stared at him for a long moment.

Then finally nodded once.

“After ceremony,” he said quietly. “No arguments.”

Shane managed a weak smile. “Deal.”

The second Ilya disappeared backstage, Shane realized he’d made a catastrophic mistake.

Pain exploded through him. Not just simple cramping anymore. But pressure. Immense pressure low in his body that made it hard to walk.

He stumbled against the hallway wall with a strangled breath. People passed him without noticing. The world blurred at the edges.

Something wet trickled down his spine beneath his suit. Sweat, he thought hysterically. Please be sweat.

He forced himself upright and somehow made it back to his table just as the ceremony resumed.

Yuna touched his arm immediately. “You’re freezing.”

“I’m okay.”

His mother looked like she absolutely did not believe him.

Onstage, presenters moved through awards while Shane concentrated entirely on surviving.

Every few minutes another agonizing wave hit him. His breathing became shallow. His vision swam.

He barely registered categories being announced.

“And now,” the announcer said warmly, “the Hart Memorial Trophy for League MVP…” Applause erupted.

Shane’s stomach dropped.

Oh God. He’d forgotten about that. He’s up for nomination for fucks sake!

Onstage, Ilya stepped into the spotlight.

Beautiful and composed. Devastatingly elegant in a dark tailored suit. And immediately distracted. Because the second his eyes found Shane in the crowd, his expression shifted.

Concern. That same fear from the bathroom filling his blue eyes instantly.

Ilya gripped the envelope tighter. “The MVP,” he began slowly, still staring directly at Shane, “is…”

Another pain slammed into Shane so hard his vision whited out.

“…Shane Hollander.”

The room exploded with cheers and applause . People rising to their feet.

Shane barely heard any of it. His father hugged him first. Then Yuna. “Sweetheart,” she whispered against his ear, “you don’t look well. I don’t think you should be going up there alone..”

He couldn’t answer. He stood carefully. Ignoring the concerned look both of his parents threw his way.

The pressure between his hips was unbearable now. Every step toward the stage felt wrong. Painful. Wet. Why was it wet?

Ilya met him at center stage.

Up close, the Russian looked terrified.

Shane grabbed his hand too tightly trying to stay upright.

Ilya’s eyes narrowed immediately. “What-”

That’s when one of the most humiliating moments of Shane’s entire life took place. A sudden gush of warmth soaked through his underwear and down his thighs.

He froze. Horror flooded him instantly.

No. There’s no way that just happened.

The audience laughed lightly when Shane’s face turned crimson, assuming it was nerves.

Ilya did not laugh. Because he’d seen it. The wetness. The panic. The unmistakable puddle spreading slowly beneath the podium lights.

His expression went completely white.

Shane reached the microphone on trembling legs. “Uh- w-well, thank you,” he managed shakily. “This is… an incredible honor…”

Another cramp ripped through him. Hard enough that he audibly choked on the words.

A few people laughed again uncertainly. Thinking it was emotion. Thinking it was some sort of joke. The typical skits most players do when they're up on stage. Something to break up the evening.

Shane gripped the podium with both hands. "I-" Breathless now. "I actually really need to- er pee."

Pressure crashed downward violently. "Oh my God- Sorry! I-erm yeah, bye!"

He barely got the words out. Then he ran.

The audience burst into confused laughter and scattered applause.

But Ilya didn't hesitate even for a second. Because behind the podium, shining clear as day beneath the bright stage lights, was a puddle of fluid on the floor. And suddenly every piece clicked together in horrifying clarity.

Ilya abandoned the stage mid-applause.

Someone called after him. He ignored them completely.

"Shane!"

The bathroom door slammed open.

Shane was bent over beside the sinks, one hand braced against the wall while the other clutched desperately at his stomach. "Ilya-"

Another pain took over. This one managed to drop him to his knees with a startled cry. A noise Shane swore he would never make. A noise of weakness within the hockey world.

Ilya reached for him instantly.

"Oh God," Shane gasped. "Something's wrong-"

Ilya grabbed his face firmly. "Shane." Calm despite visible panic now. "Listen to me carefully." Shane shook uncontrollably."I think-"

Another cry tore from Shane's shaken frame.

Pressure. There was so much damn pressure, he felt like he couldn't breathe. His entire body forcing downward.

Ilya's eyes widened further as realization fully settled in. From the second he saw that fluid shine in the light he had his suspicions. Not illness. Not food poisoning. Not injury. "Shane," he said, voice shaking for the first time all night.

"You are having baby."

"Don't be ridiculous!" Shane's voice cracked sharply through the bathroom.

He shoved weakly at Ilya's chest, panic making him wild-eyed and furious despite the tears already gathering in his lashes. "That's not funny, Ilya!"

"I am not joking."

"You have to be joking-" Shane doubled over suddenly with a strangled gasp as another - what? A contraction? Tore its way through him. "Fuck-"

Ilya caught him before he hit the tile.

"You are okay," he said immediately, even though his own face had gone nearly colorless. "Easy, easy."

"No!" Shane shoved at him again harder this time. "I'm not pregnant! You're being stupid Ilya!"

The word sounded hysterical coming from him. Pregnant? Him? Shane Hollander?

"No," Shane repeated breathlessly. "No, we're careful-we're always careful!"

Another wave of pain crashed through him.

He cried out this time. There was no stopping the sound.

Ilya wrapped both arms around him automatically as Shane trembled violently against his chest. "Shane-"

"I haven't missed a cycle," Shane gasped desperately. "I haven't."

"Surprise pregnancies can happen."

"No!"

"They happen more often in male carriers," Ilya said carefully, voice shaking despite how calm he was trying to sound. "Especially athletes. Heavy training can mask symptoms. Irregular cycles are common-"

"I'm not pregnant!" His voice broke completely. Fear flooding through every inch of him now.

Not just fear in fact. Pure terror.

Because deep down, beneath the denial and panic and pain. Some horrible instinct inside him already knew. Knew something was wrong. Knew this pain wasn't normal. Knew his body was doing something it wasn't prepared to do.

Another wave of agony slammed into him so violently that his knees gave out entirely. He collapsed against the wall with a cry.

The bathroom door burst open at the same moment. "Shane!"

Yuna rushed forward first. David right behind her. Both of them froze dead at the sight in front of them. Their son crumpled on the bathroom floor. Ilya Rozanov kneeling beside him with his arms wrapped tightly around Shane's shaking body.

For one stunned second, nobody spoke.

Then Shane cried out again. The sound shattering the moment instantly.

Ilya moved first. "Careful," he murmured urgently as Shane curled forward against him. "I've got you, love, I've got you."

Love.

Yuna's eyes widened sharply at the word. David looked equally stunned. Love , it wasn't a pet name Shane would use lightly. They wanted to ask questions, figure out what the hell was going on, ask why the hell Rozanov was comforting their son.

But Shane suddenly grabbed fistfuls of Ilya's suit jacket with desperate strength. "Ilya!" Another cry. His breathing had become frantic now. Too fast for anyone's liking. Panic spiraling visibly through him. "Something's wrong," he gasped. "Something's seriously wrong-"

Ilya pressed a shaking hand against the back of his neck. "You are okay."

"No, I'm not!"

Tears spilled down Shane's face. "I don't-" He sucked in a sharp breath as pressure crushed downward through his body again. "I don't understand what's happening!"

Yuna dropped beside him instantly.

"Oh my God." She reached for his face. "Shane, honey, talk to me."

Shane looked at her helplessly.

Completely terrified.

"I think…" His voice cracked. "I-Ilya thinks I'm pregnant. B-but if I am this pain isn't okay is it? T-that can't be what's wrong with me mom it can't."

Yuna blinked at him in silence, her mouth fishing for the right words as she looked to her husband for some form of support. David only stared.

Then both parents slowly turned toward Ilya.

The Russian looked sick with worry. "I-I think he is in labor," he admitted quietly. "H-he-there was fluid on stage, is why he ran here."

Yuna made a strangled sound as he spoke. David went pale. The sweat gathering at his hair line was noticeable to anyone who looked.

“What?” Shane snapped immediately, tears still streaming. “No! Stop saying that!”

The pain ripped right through him once again before he could keep yelling. His entire body seized. A broken groan tore from his throat as he folded hard against Ilya’s chest.

“Shh,” Ilya whispered immediately, cradling him close. “Breathe for me.”

“It hurts-”

“I know.”

“It hurts so bad!”

Yuna’s face crumpled.

David was already pulling out his phone with shaking hands. “I’m calling an ambulance.”

“No hospitals,” Shane gasped immediately.

“You don’t get a choice right now,” David said firmly, though his voice wavered badly. “Shane, if you are pregnant-”

“I’m not!”

“If you are,” David repeated carefully, “then we’ll handle it.”

Shane shook violently.

“No…”

“We’ll support you,” Yuna whispered immediately, taking his hand. “Whatever’s happening, sweetheart, we’re here.”

Shane looked completely overwhelmed by that. Like he couldn’t even process the words through the agony consuming him.

The pain continued to flood him. Getting stronger and more concentrated as time went on.

Shane cried out openly, clutching desperately at Ilya as pressure built unbearably low in his body. “Oh God-” His entire frame trembled. “Ilya.”

“I know, love.”

“Make it stop.” His voice shattered completely into panic. “Please make it stop!”

Something inside Ilya visibly broke at the plea. He pulled Shane closer instinctively, one hand cradling the back of his head while Shane shook against him. “If I could,” he whispered hoarsely, “I would.”

Shane buried his face against his shoulder with a sob. The pain was relentless now. Every few minutes another crushing wave tore through him. His suit was ruined. His hair stuck damply

to his forehead. He felt humiliated.

He was terrified and completely out of control.

This was his worst nightmare.

And worst of all— A tiny horrible part of him was beginning to realize Ilya might be right.

Because his body kept pushing downwards. Harder every time. Like it was trying to force something out.

The ambulance sirens sounded faintly outside moments later.

Shane started crying harder the second he heard them. “I don’t want this,” he whispered brokenly. “I don’t want a baby…”

Ilya closed his eyes briefly. Then kissed his forehead softly. “We will figure everything out,” he promised. Even as fear consumed him too.

Shane could hear the commotion coming from outside. The security and the gathering of people who had stopped short at the sound of his cries.

He didn’t want people to find out about him and Ilya this way, they had a plan. They’d spoken about the plan over and over again ever since that night at the cottage. They’d built the charity they’d both dreamed of, Ilya had moved to Ottawa. It was all set in motion.

This was going to ruin everything.

“Alright! Were the paramedics!” A voice called through the crowd. “Can you let us past! Let’s clear the hallway alright?! I’m sure whoever is in there would appreciate a little privacy!”

Shane heard the mutters of displeasure, but whimpered in relief as he finally heard the shuffling of feet being pushed further and further away from the door.

“Hello?!” The voice spoke once again, two young men rushing into the room, Shane couldn’t really register their faces. But he could hear the sharp intake of breath one of them took in.

“Holy-”

“John! Get the supply’s ready.” The voice from before moved closer to Shane. His eyes finally focusing in on the man with ginger hair and pale green eyes. “Hi Shane, can I call you Shane?”

The hysterical man nodded, his head rubbing against Ilya’s chest as the Russian tried to hold him closer.

“Great! Well Shane I’m Callum, the idiot over there is John.” He said kindly, nodding to the tall blonde. “We’re gonna take care of you okay? The call said you’re experiencing a lot of pain and you think it may be pregnancy?”

“Da.” Ilya responded for him. “He is in a lot of pain, every two minutes his muscles tense and there was a lot of fluid around twenty minutes ago.”

Callum nodded in understanding. “Right okay, well it sounds like it could be labor or pregnancy related to me Shane, so do you mind if I examine you real quick?”

“N-no! No please- do not do that- I- god that’s so humiliating.” Shane rambled.

“Shh.” The paramedic soothed. “There’s nothing to be embarrassed about, okay? I just want to confirm our suspicions and get you the help you need alright?”

“It will be okay moya lyubov'.” Ilya breathed into his sweat soaked hair. “I have you.”

Shane nodded shakily. Allowing the two paramedics to ease him out of his soaked pants and underwear. John quickly laying a blanket over his lower half to protect his parents from seeing anything south of the equator.

“Okay buddy,” Callum began, fixing his gloves as he rubbed at Shane’s blanket-covered shins. “It’s not going to be very comfortable, I am assuming you know you’re a carrier yes? Well it’s much like your routine checks every month. Except there’s a lot more pressure and a hell of a lot of pain.”

Ilya winced, clutching at Shane’s hand.

“I’m going to start now.”

Shane moaned in agony as Callum did what was needed. The ginger paramedics eyes full of sympathy as he made quick work of his examinations.

“W-well?” Yuna stammered, her heart lodged in her throat.

“Give him a chance, Yuna.” David spoke, clutching his wife’s shoulder.

“Shane?” Callum called, grabbing the crying man’s attention. “You’re most definitely in labor bud. Your cervix is fully dilated and I’m feeling the top of baby’s head okay? I know it’s a shock but we don’t have time to move you. We’re going to have to make sure we get baby here safely and quickly.”

“B-baby?” Shane hiccuped. “Ilya, w-we can’t have a baby.”

“Da, of course we can.” Ilya cooed. “Will be messy yes, but we have no choice now.”

The bathroom floor was freezing beneath Shane’s back.

Someone had shoved his discarded suit jacket under his hips at some point, but it barely helped against the hard marble tiles. His suit trousers were tangled in a pile next to his thighs, dress shirt half-unbuttoned and plastered to his skin with sweat. The sharp smell of cologne, antiseptic wipes, and panic hung thick in the air of the luxury awards-show bathroom, painfully out of place against the gold fixtures and spotless mirrors.

Another contraction crashed through him without warning.

Shane cried out hoarsely and grabbed blindly for something solid, fingers scraping against the base of one of the sinks. “Please-” he choked. “Please, I can’t-”

“You’re doing better than you think.” Callum knelt between his knees, medical kit open beside him on the floor. His sleeves were rolled up now, gloves streaked from constant checks. “Your contractions are strong and close together. That’s good. It’s exactly what you need to get this baby out.”

Shane shook his head frantically. “It hurts!”

“I know.” Callum’s tone stayed even, controlled. “But your body’s doing exactly what it needs to do. When the next contraction comes, work with it instead of tensing against it.”

Behind him, Ilya sat on the floor braced against the wall, supporting Shane upright against his chest. He hooked his arms beneath Shane’s knees and helped hold his legs back despite the way Shane trembled violently every few seconds.

“You are safe,” Ilya whispered near his ear, voice strained with worry. “Stay with us, okay? Concentrate on my voice malysh.”

Yuna knelt at Shane’s side, one hand constantly brushing damp strands off his forehead while the other held tightly to his wrist. Her face had gone pale long ago, shock and fear barely held together beneath the composure she was trying desperately to maintain.

Then Shane turned toward her suddenly, eyes wide with terror and pain. “I- M-mom. D-don’t leave me please.”

The words broke apart halfway through.

Yuna’s face crumpled instantly. “Oh, baby…” Her voice shook as she cupped the side of his face. “I’m right here. I’m here.”

Shane let out another sob, almost childlike now. “I can’t do this…”

“Yes, you can,” Yuna whispered fiercely, tears filling her eyes. “You hear me? You can.”

David stood near the doorway of the public bathroom, trapped between wanting to help and barely being able to look directly at what was happening. Every scream made him flinch.

Then Shane’s body suddenly locked tight again.

Callum noticed immediately.“Contraction’s starting,” he warned. “Deep breath in first.”

Shane sucked in air shakily before the pressure hit full force. He screamed. The muscles in his abdomen clenched hard beneath the ruined white shirt as he curled forward instinctively, head falling back against Ilya’s shoulder.

“That’s it,” Callum coached. “Push down with it now. Good.”

“I can’t breathe!”

“You can. Slow breath in, now push again.”

Shane bore down with a strangled cry, face flushed dark with effort. Tears streamed continuously now, disappearing into his hairline and collar.

Callum shifted position slightly to examine him. Then his expression sharpened. “Okay,” he said carefully. “I can see the baby’s head.”

Shane stared at him in horror. “No-n-no.”

“You’re crowning.” Callum kept his voice calm and grounded. “You’re going to feel a sharp, stretching sensation now. That’s normal. It means the head is right there. You take it slow once you feel it okay?”

As if the words triggered it, Shane’s entire body jolted. A raw scream tore out of him. “It burns-ow! It’s burning- holy- burns! Shit!”

David turned sharply away at the sound, one hand covering his mouth.

“The burning is expected,” Callum said immediately. “Try not to do any big pushes right now. Short breaths. Let your body stretch slowly.”

Shane was crying too hard to control his breathing properly. “I can’t! P-please get it out! G-get it out!”

“You are getting the baby out,” Callum corrected firmly. “And you’re doing it safely.”

Another involuntary push overtook Shane before he could stop it. He cried out brokenly, shaking from head to toe.

Ilya tightened his grip around him to keep him steady.

Callum supported the emerging head carefully with one gloved hand, watching the baby’s coloring closely. Training in full swing.

“Good,” he murmured. “Baby’s tolerating labor well.”

Yuna covered her mouth as she looked down, tears finally spilling over.

Shane made a shattered sound in the back of his throat. “It hurts so bad…”

“I know,” Callum answered softly. “But you’re almost through the hardest part now.”

Another contraction built rapidly before Shane could recover.

Callum looked up at him steadily. “Alright, Shane. I need one more firm push for their head.”

Shane cried out as the force of the contraction tore through him. Every muscle in his body locked tight as he bore down firmly, fingers slipping uselessly against the marble floor.

“I can’t!”

“Yes you can,” Callum urged. “The head’s almost out ! You need to keep going!”

Shane screamed.

The sound ripped itself raw from his throat as the pressure suddenly changed completely.

Callum caught the baby’s head carefully in both gloved hands just as it emerged, shoulders turning quickly after with the force of Shane’s push.

A few seconds later the rest of the baby slipped free into Callum’s arms in a rush of fluid and shaking relief. The little one wasn’t waiting around.

For one strange second, the entire bathroom went silent.

Shane collapsed backward against Ilya immediately, trembling violently, breath catching in painful gasps. He looked dazed more than anything now, tears still running unchecked down his face. “Oh God…” he whispered hoarsely. “Ow… ow”

Callum moved fast, instinctively rubbing the baby’s back with firm strokes whilst checking their airway.

The baby was frighteningly small.

And quiet. Too quiet.

David noticed first from where he stood frozen by the doorway. “Why isn’t it crying?”

Nobody answered immediately.

The newborn’s skin still looked dusky, tiny chest fluttering weakly without a proper breath catching.

Callum adjusted the baby carefully, suctioning the mouth and nose with practiced speed. “Come on,” he murmured under his breath.

Shane barely seemed aware of it. He was shaking uncontrollably now, staring unfocused at the ceiling lights while trying to drag air into exhausted lungs.

Then Ilya finally spoke.

He had barely said a word through the entire delivery, too focused on keeping Shane upright, holding him together piece by piece whenever panic overtook him. Now his composure cracked completely. “You did so well,” he whispered against Shane’s damp hair before pressing a firm kiss to the side of his head. Then another. “Shane… breathe now. It’s over. You are okay.”

His voice broke halfway through the sentence.

Shane made a weak, frightened sound.

“Ilya…”

“I’ve got you.” Ilya tightened both arms around him carefully. “I’ve got you.”

Across from them, Yuna stood rigid beside Callum, hands clasped tightly together beneath her chin as she stared at the tiny unmoving infant.

David looked pale enough to faint.

The silence stretched for what felt like an eternity. Then finally— A soft, raspy cry filled the bathroom.

Tiny and frail. But real in a way that cemented the reality of what had taken place.

Everyone inhaled all at once.

Yuna covered her mouth with a sob. David physically sagged against the wall in relief.

And Ilya broke completely.

A strangled sound escaped him as he buried his face briefly against Shane’s temple, pulling him even closer.

“There he is,” Callum said softly, still rubbing the baby’s back as the cries strengthened. “Good boy… there we go.”

The newborn squirmed weakly in his hands now, color slowly improving from bluish-grey to flushed pink. Callum glanced up with a relieved smile. “It’s a boy.”

Shane blinked at him blankly. “A… what?”

“A tiny baby boy,” Callum repeated gently.

The words didn’t seem to be landing properly.

John wrapped the infant quickly in one of the clean towels from the medical kit before carefully moving toward Shane. “Here,” he said softly. “Let’s get him onto your chest.”

But Shane recoiled instantly. “No.”

Everyone froze.

Shane’s breathing became sharp and panicked again as he shook his head hard. “No, no-I can’t-”

“Shane,” Ilya started quietly.

“I can’t hold him.” Terror flooded his face all over again. “What if I hurt him? He’s too small- I can’t- I don’t want a baby-I- no-” His voice cracked into another sob.

Yuna stepped in immediately before anyone else could answer. “It’s okay,” she said gently, reaching out for the baby. “It’s alright, sweetheart.”

John transferred the newborn carefully into her arms. Immediately crouching back down to help Callum who was scrunching the blood flow from a tear Shane had received.

The baby gave another tiny cry, face scrunching weakly against the towel. Yuna cradled him instinctively despite the tears still streaming down her face. “See?” she whispered to Shane. “He’s okay.”

But Shane only stared at the baby in open shock, shaking so hard Ilya had to keep both arms firmly around him.

“He was inside of me,” Shane whispered faintly, horrified by the reality of it now. “Holy shit… I feel sick”

Yuna looked completely head over heels in love.

The tiny baby boy rested against her chest wrapped in white towels from the paramedic kit, his cries finally settling into weak little snuffles as exhaustion overtook him. Damp curls, thick already, unbelievably thick and dark blonde stuck against his tiny head. “Oh,would you just look at him…” Yuna whispered tearfully. Her entire face had transformed.

Fear was still there, shock too, but underneath it was something warm and dazzled and almost disbelieving. She carefully adjusted the blanket beneath his chin with trembling fingers. “He has your nose,” she said softly to Shane. “And that little scrunch between his eyes when he cries… that’s you too.”

Shane didn’t answer.

He had rolled halfway onto his side against Ilya, one arm wrapped tightly around his own stomach as violent tremors kept overtaking him. His face had gone grey beneath the sweat. He gagged roughly.

David lunged forward just in time to grab one of the small clinical waste bags from Callum’s kit before Shane threw up hard into it, body jerking painfully with each retch.

“Easy,” Callum warned immediately, one gloved hand steadying Shane’s shoulder. “Easy. That’ll be the adrenaline crash.”

Shane coughed weakly afterward, shaking so badly his teeth knocked together. “I’m so cold,” he whispered.

“That’s normal after delivery,” John assured him while reaching for another foil emergency blanket. “You’ve lost some blood, your hormones are crashing, and your body’s been through major trauma.” He draped the thermal blanket carefully over Shane’s shoulders before checking the bleeding again.

Callum’s expression tightened slightly as he took a glance. “We need to get him to hospital soon,” he said quietly to the others. “Bleeding’s stable for now, but he’s sustained a third-

degree tear."

Yuna winced instantly in sympathy. "Oh, sweetheart…"

Shane stared at Callum blankly.

"A what?"

"A third-degree perineal tear," Callum explained carefully, keeping his tone clinical but calm. "The tissue tearing extends into the muscle around the rectum. Baby came really quickly towards the end there. It couldn't be helped. It'll probably need surgical repair and stitches under proper lighting at the hospital."

Shane went completely still. The panic flooded back into his face. "No! N-no, I can't-"

"Shane," Callum interrupted gently, "listen to me. You're stable. This is treatable. But you do need medical care. I can't do this here okay?"

Shane's breathing turned shallow again.

Across the bathroom, security staff murmured urgently into radios outside the locked doors. The muffled noise of the awards show beyond the corridor felt surreal now. The distant applause, music, voices completely unaware of what had just happened on the marble floor.

David rubbed both hands over his face. "The press are still outside the main entrance," he muttered. "If they see this-"

"We'll use the service exit," one of the security guards said quietly from the doorway.

Shane latched onto that instantly. "We need to leave now."

"Okay," Ilya agreed automatically, though his attention remained fixed almost entirely on Shane. "We'll get you to the ambulance."

But Shane kept spiraling.

"They can't see me like this," he whispered frantically. "Jesus Christ, I'm covered in blood-"

"We'll handle it," David said firmly.

Shane swallowed hard before glancing vaguely toward Yuna and the baby in her arms, then immediately away again. "You should stay behind," he said suddenly to Ilya.

The words hit the room oddly.

Ilya blinked." W-What?"

Shane rubbed a shaking hand across his face.

"Wait here," he clarified weakly. "I'll go with the paramedics first and- and we can deal with everything later- t-the baby can wait- it- let's just deal with it later okay? Y-you can't be

seen-”

Ilya stared at him like he’d been slapped. “Deal with everything later?” he repeated quietly.

Shane looked exhausted, overwhelmed beyond coherent thought. “I just mean-”

“He is our baby.” Hurt cracked visibly through Ilya’s voice now for the first time all night. “He is not something to deal with.”

The silence afterward hurt worse than the shouting earlier.

Shane looked stricken immediately. “I-I didn’t mean-”

“I know you’re scared,” Ilya interrupted, visibly trying to steady himself. “But why would you think I would leave you? Why would you want that?”

Shane opened his mouth, then closed it again helplessly.

David stepped in before either of them spiraled further.

“Hey.” His voice softened as he crouched beside them both. “Nobody’s leaving anybody, alright? Everyone’s exhausted and freaking out. Speaking on instinct isn’t helping anyone.”

Shane swallowed hard, eyes glassy with tears again.

Ilya looked away briefly, jaw tight.

Callum kept working as they spoke, efficiently checking Shane’s pulse and blood pressure again while preparing absorbent pads beneath him to manage the bleeding during transport. “Okay,” he said after a moment. “We need to move carefully. Shane, when we stand you up, you’re going to feel pressure and probably dizziness. That’s expected.”

“I don’t think I can walk,” Shane admitted faintly.

“You won’t have to do much.”

With security clearing the back corridors, the process became a blur of motion.

Callum and David carefully helped Shane into a wheelchair after replacing the soaked towels and securing blankets around his waist for privacy. Shane cried out weakly when he had to shift his weight, one hand immediately grabbing Ilya’s sleeve in panic.

“I know,” Callum soothed. “The tear’s causing a lot of pain. We’re almost there. Hopefully we can get the placenta delivered in the ambulance. The sooner it’s out the better.”

The service hallways behind the awards venue were cold and industrial compared to the glamour out front. Security guards moved ahead of them quickly, blocking sightlines anytime staff appeared nearby.

Yuna stayed close behind, still carrying the newborn securely against her chest.

The baby made another tiny sound halfway to the ambulance, squirming sleepily beneath the blankets. Her face softened all over again. “Oh, he’s so, so beautiful…”

When they finally reached the ambulance parked outside, rain hit the pavement in silver sheets beneath the flashing emergency lights.

Callum climbed in first to prepare the stretcher.

Yuna hesitated only briefly before carefully turning toward Ilya. “Here,” she said gently. “Take your baby, honey.”

The moment the baby settled into his arms, Ilya melted completely. All the fear and tension in his face broke apart at once.

“Oh…”

His voice cracked on the single syllable.

The newborn looked impossibly small against his chest, little face scrunched beneath the blanket, dark blonde curls still damp against his scalp.

Ilya stared at him like the world had stopped moving.

“Hi,” he whispered shakily. “Hi, malen'kiy chelovek. Da, that is you.. our little man.”

The baby’s tiny fingers flexed weakly against the towel. A wet laugh escaped Ilya before tears followed immediately after. “I’m your papa,” he whispered, pressing a careful kiss against the baby’s forehead. “I’m your papa.”

Shane looked over despite himself.

Just one glance.

And immediately his expression twisted with something complicated and frightened and raw. He looked away again almost at once, breathing unevenly as Callum guided him carefully onto the stretcher.

But the image stayed there anyway.

Ilya holding their son like he already loved him enough to break apart from it. Like his whole heart was living and beating outside of his body.

By the time the ambulance doors burst open, Shane was barely coherent from exhaustion. The adrenaline that had kept him upright through the birth was draining rapidly now, leaving him pale, shaking, and frighteningly weak beneath the blankets covering his bloodstained suit.

The hospital swallowed them in a blur of fluorescent lighting and fast-moving hands.

“Shane Hollander , Age twenty eight. Cryptic pregnancy delivery in a public bathroom,” Callum rattled off as they pushed the stretcher through the maternity emergency entrance. “Baby struggled for a few minutes but other than that he seems okay. Dad has a third-degree tear, significant pain, bleeding currently controlled. Placenta not yet delivered.”

The phrase seemed to catch everyone’s attention immediately.

“Still retained?” one of the doctors asked sharply.

“Yes, no signs of it detaching in transit,” Callum confirmed. “I pushed Oxytocin and gave Misoprostol under the tongue around five minutes ago. Still nothing.”

Shane made a miserable sound at the word.

They transferred him quickly onto a hospital bed beneath painfully bright examination lights. Nurses moved around him with practiced speed. Attaching monitors, checking blood pressure, replacing the soaked pads beneath him.

Shane flinched hard when another cramp rolled through his abdomen. “Oh God…”

A female obstetrician stepped beside the bed, already pulling on sterile gloves.

“Shane, I’m Dr. Harrison. This placenta of yours still needs to come out, alright? Your uterus is trying to contract down, but it’s struggling.”

Shane looked terrified. “W-What happens if it doesn’t?”

“We help it,” she said calmly. “But we need to do this now because retained placental tissue can cause severe bleeding.”

Ilya stood glued to Shane’s side despite the nurse trying repeatedly to direct him elsewhere. He still held the baby awkwardly but protectively against his chest, eyes darting anxiously between Shane and the doctors.

Another contraction-like cramp seized Shane suddenly.

He cried out weakly, body curling instinctively.

“Okay,” Dr. Harris said. “I’m going to massage your uterus externally to encourage separation.”

Shane didn’t understand what that meant until her hands pressed firmly against the top of his abdomen. The pain was immediate. He screamed loud and broken. His entire frame shaking from the shock of it.

“Holy shit! P-please stop-!”

“I know,” she soothed while continuing the firm rhythmic pressure over the fundus of the uterus. “Your uterus needs to contract harder.”

The massage became more forceful. Shane writhed against the bed with a broken cry, clutching blindly for something to hold onto. “Ilya-!”

“I am here.” Ilya instantly caught his hand. “I am here, solnyshko.”

The baby startled at the sudden movement and noise, fussing weakly in Ilya’s arms.

A kind-looking neonatal nurse stepped forward carefully. “I can take him for his checks while you stay with your boyfriend,” she offered gently. “I’ll bring him right back once we’re finished,I promise.”

Ilya hesitated visibly.

His arms tightened instinctively around the baby.

But Shane was sobbing now, terrified and overwhelmed, and the nurse’s expression stayed soft and reassuring.

“I promise he’ll be safe with me.”

Reluctantly, Ilya handed the newborn over.

The second his arms were empty, he moved fully to Shane’s bedside and grabbed both his hands tightly.

“You’re okay,” he whispered urgently as Shane shook beneath another painful uterine massage. “Breathe, Shane. Look at me.”

Dr. Harrison applied more pressure. The retained placenta finally began separating properly. “There we go,” she murmured.

Shane cried out again as one final contraction rolled through him. Then finally the pressure released all at once.

A nurse quickly collected the placenta into a metal tray while Dr. Harrison immediately checked for completeness. “Placenta intact,” she announced with obvious relief. “Bleeding’s slowing.”

Everyone in the room visibly relaxed.

Shane collapsed back against the pillows, tears leaking silently now from sheer exhaustion. “I hate this,” he whispered hoarsely. “I wasn’t supposed to be doing this today.. I wasn’t supposed to do this ever…”

“I know,” Ilya said quietly, brushing damp hairs back from his forehead.

Dr. Harrison removed her gloves before pulling a stool closer. “Alright,” she said gently. “Next we need to repair the tear.”

Shane looked instantly alarmed again. “H-How bad is it?”

“You sustained a third-degree perineal tear,” she explained carefully. “The muscle around the anal sphincter has partially torn. I’ll repair it in layers using dissolvable sutures.”

Shane swallowed hard. “How many stitches?”

“Likely seven or eight.”

His face drained completely of color. “No…”

“We’ll numb the area first,” Dr. Harrison reassured him quickly. “You’ll feel pressure and pulling, but we’ll manage your pain as best we can.”

A nurse administered local anesthetic carefully around the tear site while another adjusted the overhead surgical lamp.

Even numb, Shane still flinched repeatedly during the repair.

The sensation of suturing , the tugging, pressure, occasional sharpness when the anesthetic missed deeper tissue, made him grip Ilya’s hand so tightly his knuckles turned white.

“Breathe through it,” Ilya murmured every time Shane tensed.

At one point Shane’s eyes filled helplessly with tears again. “I’m sorry…”

“What for?”

“For ruining everything.”

Ilya looked genuinely stricken. “You did not ruin anything.”

The repair took nearly forty minutes.

By the end Shane looked half-asleep from exhaustion, emotionally wrung out and trembling every time he shifted even slightly.

Eventually he was transferred upstairs to a private room in the maternity unit. The silence there felt surreal after the chaos downstairs.

Soft lighting. Warm blankets. The distant cries of newborns echoing faintly through the corridor.

Shane sat propped carefully against the raised hospital bed in a fresh gown, still sore enough that every movement made him wince.

Around an hour after they arrived at the hospital , David and Yuna arrived, themselves carrying bags.

“We brought clothes,” Yuna said softly.

She unpacked them one by one onto the chair nearby: fresh joggers and hoodies for Shane and Ilya, toiletries from the hotel , phone chargers.

And several tiny pastel blue baby onesies.

Shane stared at them. The sight clearly unsettling him. “Why did you buy those?”

Yuna blinked. “Oh-erm. For the baby?”

Shane rubbed both hands shakily over his face. “But I don’t even know if…” His voice faltered. “I don’t know if we’re keeping him.”

The room went completely still.

Ilya looked up sharply from beside the bed. “What?”

Shane looked miserable. “It might be too complicated,” he whispered. “We weren’t prepared for this. We don’t even know what we’re doing. We had a plan for our future, Ilya, it was working!”

“He’s our son,” Ilya said immediately.

Shane shook his head weakly. “You don’t understand-“

“No, you don’t understand.” Hurt and disbelief flashed openly across Ilya’s face now. “We are not giving up our baby boy.”

Shane’s breathing became uneven again. “I’m scared.”

“So am I,” Ilya admitted. “But that changes nothing.”

“What if we can’t-”

“We can.”

Shane looked away, overwhelmed.

Yuna stepped in gently before emotions escalated further. “Hey.” She sat carefully on the edge of the chair beside them. “Nobody has to decide anything tonight.” Neither one of them answered. “Right now,” she continued softly, “the only thing that matters is that both of you rest and that little boy is healthy.”

As if summoned by the words, a soft knock sounded at the door. The neonatal nurse stepped back inside carrying the baby.

Immediately, the tension in the room shifted.

“He’s doing beautifully,” she announced with a smile.

Ilya stood so quickly the chair scraped loudly against the floor. The nurse carefully transferred the tiny bundle into his waiting arms. “Your son was approximately thirty-six weeks gestation,” she explained. “That makes him a little early and on the smaller side, but he’s healthy.”

Shane looked over despite himself.

The baby slept soundly against Ilya's chest now, swaddled tightly in hospital blankets, curls still visible beneath the little striped newborn hat.

"He weighs five pounds, six ounces," the nurse continued. "And his APGAR score was ten."

David blinked. "Ten?"

She smiled warmly.

"Completely perfect. Especially after the difficult start."

Relief visibly swept through the room.

Yuna pressed a hand to her chest with a shaky laugh. "Oh, thank God."

Ilya looked down at the baby like he hung the moon itself.

Meanwhile Shane just sat and stared silently from the hospital bed, emotions moving across his exhausted face too quickly for even him to understand.

The room suddenly began to feel too crowded.

Not physically, the maternity suite was large and quiet and softly lit — but emotionally. Every glance toward him carried expectation now. Concern. Hope. Questions Shane couldn't answer yet.

The baby slept peacefully in Ilya's arms while David and Yuna sat nearby speaking quietly with the nurse about feeding schedules and monitoring because of the early delivery.

Shane felt like he was underwater listening to all of it.

Finally, he swallowed hard.

"Can I…" His voice came out rough from screaming earlier. "Can I have a few minutes alone with him?"

The room fell quiet immediately.

Ilya looked up first.

"With the baby?"

Shane nodded faintly.

"I just…" He rubbed tiredly at his face. "I haven't really looked at him properly yet. Everyone keeps talking and I can't think."

There was no accusation in it. Just exhaustion.

Ilya's expression softened instantly. "Of course."

He stood carefully from the chair beside the bed and approached slowly, cradling the tiny bundle securely against his chest.

Shane panicked slightly the second Ilya started lowering the baby toward his arms.

"N-no-wait."

Ilya stopped immediately.

Shane looked embarrassed by his own reaction.

"My arms kinda hurt," he admitted quietly. "Can you just… lay him against my legs instead?"

"Okay."

Ilya adjusted the blankets first, moving with incredible care before gently settling the baby across Shane's bent thighs. The newborn barely weighed anything there , warm and impossibly small beneath the hospital blanket.

Still sleeping.

Still real.

Ilya tucked the blanket securely around both of them before brushing his knuckles softly against Shane's cheek. "We'll be right outside," he murmured.

Then he stepped back.

It was Yuna who lingered the longest. Her eyes flicked between Shane and the baby with visible worry, but eventually she pressed a kiss to Shane's forehead and followed the others out alongside the nurse.

The door clicked shut.

Silence settled over the room.

For a while Shane just stared. Not really thinking. Just… looking. The baby's face looked softer asleep somehow. Tiny eyelashes rested against flushed cheeks while little breaths puffed rhythmically beneath the striped hospital hat.

Shane found himself focusing on details automatically.

The shape of his nose. That definitely belonged to Shane's side of the family. But his mouth and everything else— A weak laugh escaped him unexpectedly.

"Oh, that's unfair," he whispered.

The baby stirred slightly at the sound.

“You come out terrifying me half to death and you still end up looking exactly like your papa.”

His throat tightened painfully around the words.

Carefully, almost nervously, Shane reached down and loosened part of the hospital blanket wrapped around the baby.

Tiny arms emerged first.

Then little legs.

So small his chest physically ached looking at them.

The baby’s fingers flexed weakly in his sleep, translucent little nails no bigger than grains of rice. Shane felt emotion rise suddenly and violently in his throat.

Not love exactly. Not the immediate overwhelming certainty everyone else seemed to have fallen into so naturally.

Fear.

Guilt.

Confusion.

He wanted to feel what Ilya felt. Wanted to look at this tiny person and immediately know how to become someone’s father.

Instead all he could think about was blood on marble floors, screaming until his throat tore raw, doctors stitching him back together under hospital lights.

It frustrated him horribly.

The baby shifted again with a tiny sleepy sound.

Shane swallowed hard.

“I’m trying,” he whispered immediately, like it was some way of apologizing to him. “I swear I’m trying.”

Tears burned suddenly behind his eyes. He rested one shaking hand lightly over the baby’s stomach, barely any pressure at all. “You deserve people who are excited you’re here.”

His voice cracked.

“And they are. Your nana already loves you so much. And grandpa. Then there’s your papa…” Shane let out another weak laugh. “God, he was gone the second he looked at you.”

The baby’s face scrunched briefly before relaxing again. Shane stared down at him for a long moment. “I think…” He inhaled shakily. “I think I might need a little time.”

Saying it out loud made him feel awful.

But lying felt worse.

He brushed one fingertip carefully against the baby's tiny wrist. "I'll figure it out though," he promised softly. "Okay? Even if I need a little help."

The words came easier after that.

More honest.

"If your papa needs to take over for a while, and you need to go live with him alone.. then we'll do that." Shane blinked hard against fresh tears. "You should have your family around you, even if I'm scared."

The baby stirred again, this time blinking slowly awake. Deep blue-grey newborn eyes opened blearily beneath the hospital lights.

Shane froze and for a single second they just looked at each other.

Then the baby made the smallest little frown.

Something inside Shane cracked quietly at the sight. "Oh," he whispered. His hand trembled as he adjusted the blanket around the baby's chest.

"Hi."

The newborn blinked once slowly, lips pursing sleepily.

Shane laughed weakly through tears. "This is really weird timing," he admitted softly. "I was supposed to be at an awards show tonight.. I only got to stay for a couple of awards- including my own. Seems selfish of me huh?."

The baby stared up at him with unfocused newborn eyes.

Shane swallowed hard. "My name's Shane," he whispered after a moment. "And… I'm your dad."

The word felt terrifying.

Huge.

But yet somehow , it didn't feel wrong.

The baby made another tiny sleepy noise and flexed one hand against the blanket. Shane carefully offered him a finger. A second later those impossibly tiny fingers wrapped around it weakly.

And for the first time all night, Shane stopped shaking quite so hard.

The room was dark by the time Ilya finally came back inside. Only the small lamp beside the hospital bed remained on, casting everything in soft gold instead of harsh hospital white.

Somewhere down the corridor, a newborn cried briefly before falling quiet again.

Shane hadn't moved.

Not really.

He still sat propped carefully against the raised bed, blankets pooled around his waist, hospital gown loose against his skin. Their son remained stretched across his thighs exactly where Ilya had left him earlier, swaddled warmly and sleeping deeply.

One tiny hand was wrapped stubbornly around Shane's finger.

And Shane was crying silently.

Not the violent, panicked sobbing from earlier.

Just quiet tears slipping steadily down his cheeks while he stared at the baby like he was trying to memorize every detail at once.

Ilya stopped in the doorway.

His chest physically tightened at the sight.

For a moment he simply watched them together. The way their baby boy's dark blonde curls peeked from beneath the tiny striped hat, Shane's exhausted face softened by something painfully vulnerable.

Then the floor creaked lightly beneath Ilya's step. Breaking up the tender moment.

Shane looked up immediately.

The second he saw him, whatever composure he'd managed to build shattered completely. A broken sob escaped him.

"Oh no, no…" Ilya crossed the room instantly.

He carefully climbed onto the edge of the bed beside Shane, mindful of the baby and Shane's stitches, before gathering him close with one arm.

Shane folded into him immediately, shoulders shaking hard now.

"I'm sorry," he whispered desperately. "I'm so sorry."

"For what?" Ilya pressed a kiss against his temple, his Russian accent thicker now beneath emotion. "Malysh, what are you apologizing for?"

Shane cried harder instead of answering.

Ilya rubbed slow circles against his back carefully.

“I thought about what you said earlier,” he admitted quietly after a while. “About giving him up.”

Shane went still against him.

“I understand why you thought it.”

Shane pulled back slightly, eyes red-rimmed and horrified.

“No.”

“Shane, I get it, I do-”

“No, I was being an idiot.”

Ilya blinked in surprise at the sudden force behind it.

Shane scrubbed angrily at his face with his free hand.

“We live in complete insanity,” he said hoarsely. “There are possibly a few hundred photographers outside the hospital right now probably trying to figure out why I disappeared halfway through an awards ceremony looking like I got hit by a truck the same time an ambulance crew ran into the building.”

Ilya let out a small breath that was almost a laugh.

Shane continued before emotion could overtake him again. “The press would destroy him. They’d destroy us. Every mistake we make as parents will end up online. Every move we’ve ever made for our careers would be pulled into question. This getting out , it would change everything Ilya.”

“That is true,” Ilya admitted carefully.

“But giving him away…” Shane looked down at the sleeping newborn immediately, expression crumpling. “The second I thought about actually doing it I felt sick.”

The baby stirred faintly at the sound of his voice but didn’t wake.

Shane brushed his thumb carefully over the tiny fingers still wrapped around his own. “I think I have a plan.”

That got Ilya’s attention fully.

“A plan?”

Shane nodded slowly.

“You have to take him home to Ottawa with you.”

Ilya frowned slightly. “What?”

“You will take him. You’ll have my parents there too.” Shane forced himself to keep speaking despite how emotional he already sounded. “You go home with him for a while. Or somewhere quiet. Somewhere safe. The cottage maybe?”

“And you?”

Shane swallowed hard.

“I will go back to Montreal for the summer.”

Silence.

Ilya stared at him carefully now.

Shane kept his eyes fixed downward on the baby as he spoke. “I’ll get counseling,” he whispered. “I’ll… figure my head out. Because I want this, Ilya. I do. I just think my brain hasn’t quite caught up with what happened just yet.”

His voice shook harder.

“One minute I’m getting ready for an awards show and the next…” He glanced helplessly at the baby. “I gave birth on a public bathroom floor.”

Ilya’s expression softened immediately.

Shane continued quietly. “I’ll come visit every couple of weeks. And when the summer is over and I’m ready…” He inhaled shakily. “I will move to Ottawa and we can live in the cottage together, permanently. It wouldn’t be too long of a drive for me to get to training everyday and- and we could finally make a proper go at this. Tell the world on our own terms and keep him safe at the same time.”

Ilya was quiet for a long time after that.

Not out of anger or disappointment. Just because he was thinking. Thinking hard.

Finally he spoke softly. “I think you do not realize how hard it will be.”

Shane looked up.

“To leave him.”

The words landed heavily between them.

Ilya glanced down at the sleeping newborn with open tenderness. “You already look at him differently than before,” he pointed out quietly.

Shane’s eyes filled again instantly. “I know.”

“You will miss things,” Ilya continued gently. “Eight weeks of summer is long time. His first smile. The first time he recognises color. Maybe his first laugh..”

Pain flickered visibly across Shane’s face at each example. But he still nodded. “I know. I know it’s a risk.”

“Then why?”

Shane looked down at the baby for a long moment before answering. “Because I’m terrified.”

The honesty of it seemed to hollow the room quiet.

Shane’s fingers trembled slightly against the baby’s hand. “I need time to become someone he deserves.”

Ilya’s face crumpled a little at that. “You already are.”

“I don’t feel like it.”

Ilya leaned forward slowly until their foreheads touched. “You survived tonight,” he whispered. “You protected him before you even knew he existed. You are not failing already, Shane.”

Shane closed his eyes hard. “I just want to love him the way you do. And I’m sorry to say that right now I don’t-I don’t know how I feel.”

The words nearly broke Ilya completely.

He kissed Shane softly then, lingering and gentle and full of emotion neither of them could properly carry right now. When he finally pulled back, his eyes were wet too. “Okay,” he whispered reluctantly. “We try your plan.”

Shane visibly sagged in relief.

“But,” Ilya added firmly, “the second you want to be home with us, we come get you.”

A weak laugh escaped Shane. “Deal.”

For a while neither of them spoke.

They simply sat together listening to the tiny newborn breaths between them.

Then Shane suddenly sniffed and wiped at his face. “I-er - I actually came up with a name.”

Ilya smiled immediately at that. “Oh yes?”

Shane looked down at the sleeping baby carefully before answering. “I want to name him Logan.”

Ilya tested it softly under his breath. “Logan…”

A smile spread slowly across his face.

Shane looked almost shy suddenly. “Logan David Hollander-Rozanov.”

Ilya stared at him.

“David?” Shane nodded.

“He’s the most important man in my life,” he said quietly. “Even when he was terrified he stuck around. He’s a great guy to be named after.”

Emotion flickered across Ilya’s face again.

Then he looked down at their sleeping son and smiled softly. “Logan David,” he repeated gently. “It is perfect.”

As if hearing his name, the baby shifted sleepily between them with a tiny sigh.

And this time, when Shane looked at him, the fear still remained. But something warmer sat beside it now too. Something that felt less like pulling him down and more like lifting him up.

Seven days later, Shane was finally discharged.

By then the hospital room no longer smelled unfamiliar to them. They had settled into a strange temporary routine there . The nurses checking vitals every few hours, Logan’s feeding schedule written on the whiteboard beside the bed, Ilya half-asleep in uncomfortable chairs with the baby against his chest.

The only thing that remained the same as that first night was that Shane still looked exhausted.

The bruising beneath his eyes had darkened over the week despite the rest he’d been ordered to take, and every movement he made remained careful and stiff because of the stitches. Sitting for too long hurt. Standing too quickly hurt. Even laughing pulled painfully through the healing muscles in his pelvis.

Dr. Harrison reviewed his discharge paperwork one final time while Shane sat perched gingerly on the side of the bed in grey sweats and one of Ilya’s hoodies.

“Your tear is healing well,” she explained, flipping through the chart. “But recovery from a third-degree tear can take several weeks, sometimes even longer.”

Shane nodded weakly.

“You absolutely cannot overexert yourself,” she continued. “No heavy lifting beyond the baby, limited stairs, lots of fluids. No training until at least four weeks postpartum and continue the stool softeners exactly as prescribed.”

Shane visibly grimaced.

Dr. Harrison noticed immediately.

“I know,” she said sympathetically. “But avoiding bowel movements will only make recovery worse.”

The idea alone made Shane pale slightly.

Over the past few days he’d developed genuine fear around the subject . Every shift in pressure around his stitches made him tense instinctively.

“You need regular bowel function to prevent complications,” Dr. Harrison explained gently. “At least two comfortable bowel movements a week initially while the tissue heals and swelling decreases.”

“Comfortable seems optimistic,” Shane muttered under his breath.

That earned the smallest smile from her.

“The first few weeks are the hardest. Use the peri bottle, don’t strain, and if pain suddenly worsens or bleeding increases, you come straight back in.”

After she left, Yuna immediately crossed her arms.

“You should not be going back to Montreal alone.”

David nodded in agreement from beside the window. “At least stay with us for one week son, it might do you some good.”

Shane shook his head carefully. “I need my own space for a little while. I explained this to you guys, you said you’d respect it. I will be fine.”

Yuna looked unconvinced. “And what if you’re not fine?”

“I’ll call,” Shane promised quietly. “And Ottawa’s only a couple hours from Montreal. If I panic or… whatever, I’ll just drive myself there.”

He glanced toward Ilya then. “Or you can bring Logan to me.”

The baby slept peacefully in the hospital bassinet beside the bed, bundled in one of the pastel blue onesies Yuna had bought earlier that week. Tiny curls escaped around the edges of the hat.

Ilya looked completely torn.

Over the last five days he had tried repeatedly to convince Shane to reconsider the plan. And every single time Shane held firm.

He needed time. Needed therapy. Needed to stop feeling like he was drowning every time he looked at their son and realized how completely his life had changed in one violent night.

Eventually Ilya stopped arguing outright.

But the worry never left his face.

While Ilya went to finish the remaining paperwork at the nurses' station, Shane slowly stood from the bed with a wince and lifted Logan carefully from the bassinet.

The baby fit so naturally against his chest now it frightened him sometimes. Tiny, warm and real.

Shane sat back down carefully in the chair by the window, settling Logan securely in the crook of his arm while rubbing gentle circles against his back. "Hi, Logiebear."

The baby made a sleepy little noise.

Shane smiled faintly despite himself. "So…" He glanced down at the tiny face peeking from the blanket. "You're going on a very long car ride today."

Logan blinked slowly up at him.

"You'll probably hate it," Shane informed him softly. "Honestly, I'll probably hate it too. But unfortunately we can't fly just yet."

Across the room, Yuna quietly wiped at her eyes while pretending to organize bags.

Shane continued, pretending not to notice. "You're going home with your papa after you drop me off." His voice thinned slightly. "And he's gonna take such stupidly good care of you."

Logan yawned.

The sight nearly broke Shane's composure instantly. He swallowed hard before continuing. "I'm gonna come see you all the time, okay? Like…loads. Probably enough to annoy you eventually."

The baby's tiny fingers flexed against the fabric of Shane's hoodie.

Shane kissed the top of his head impulsively. "You're just…" He laughed weakly through the emotion clogging his throat. "You're really little. M' gonna miss all these snuggles."

When Ilya came back into the room a few minutes later, the discharge folder finally tucked under his arm, he stopped quietly at the doorway again.

Shane looked heartbreakingly natural holding their son now. That was what hurt most.

Ilya leaned against the frame watching them with visible concern. "You know," he said softly after a moment, "you already look like a natural father."

Shane glanced up immediately. “Don’t.”

“Is true.”

Shane looked away again. “I’m still scared.”

“I know.”

Ilya crossed the room and crouched beside the chair carefully. “But fear does not mean you are incapable.”

Shane blinked hard. “I just don’t want him growing up resenting me because I messed him up. Or because I spent the first few months of his life in a blur of post partum depression. It wouldn’t be fair to him.”

Ilya’s face softened painfully. “Shane.” He brushed gentle fingers beneath Logan’s tiny socked foot. “Children are not ruined because their parents are scared or because they feel unlike themselves. As long as they are loved, is all okay for them.”

Shane didn’t answer.

A few minutes later they carefully made their way out of the hospital through a private underground exit arranged by security.

Toronto was grey and drizzling outside, the streets slick with rain as David loaded the last of the bags into his SUV waiting at the curb. He and Yuna were driving ahead with Ilya and Logan’s things.

Everything hurt by the time Shane lowered himself carefully into the passenger seat.

The stitches throbbed constantly now from the movement, and the pressure from sitting upright for too long made him wince every few minutes despite the cushion the nurses had given him.

Logan decided almost immediately that he hated being strapped into the car seat.

By the time they merged onto the highway, the baby’s tiny cries had escalated into offended little wails.

“I’ve got him,” Shane said immediately. Reaching back to tap against the car seat. The steady thump settling the newborn slightly.

At the next service stop, Ilya carefully lifted Logan from the car seat and passed him over.

Shane settled awkwardly into the backseat with the baby against his chest, instinctively swaying despite the pain pulling sharply through his healing body. “It’s okay, buddy,” he murmured softly. “You’re okay.”

Logan’s cries slowly quieted into hiccupy little noises.

Ilya watched from the driver's seat with that same complicated ache twisting through him.

Shane looked exhausted.

Terrified. Still physically recovering from a traumatic birth. And yet every single time Logan cried, Shane responded immediately without hesitation. How the other man couldn't see he was good enough was beyond Ilya. But he wouldn't push, he knew Shane better than that. Pushing would only make things worse.

Hours later, somewhere between Toronto and Montreal, Logan finally fell asleep again Shane's hand clutched close to his chest.

Shane carefully shifted his weight slightly, reaching over towards his discarded bag before immediately pulling out his phone.

Ilya glanced over briefly from the road.

"What are you doing?"

"Planning."

"For what?"

Shane opened his notes app and started typing. "Visits. Weekends. Which days work around your training schedule. That won't matter for me as I can't train until I'm four weeks post delivery." He glanced over tiredly. "If we're doing this then I want structure. I also need to contact Coach Theriault and explain the situation to him.. pray for me with that one."

Ilya stayed quiet.

Shane kept typing.

"Every two weeks minimum," he muttered. "And video calls every day."

Something emotional flickered briefly across Ilya's face again. "You really think you can do this? You can stay away from him?"

Shane looked down at Logan sleeping peacefully against him. His expression crumpled slightly. "No," he admitted softly.

Then after a pause:

"But I think I need to learn how to accept my new reality before I give him my all. It's only fair to him to do this right Ilya. I won't be a half assed father to him."

By the time they reached Shane's apartment in Montreal, it was almost eight thirty at night.

The drive had exhausted everyone.

Logan had slept through most of the final stretch curled against Shane's hand, waking only occasionally for feeds or soft fussy cries that immediately sent both Shane and Ilya into motion without thinking.

Now that he was back here, the apartment felt painfully quiet compared to the hospital to Shane. No monitors. No nurses. No constant movement. Just soft city light spilling through the massive windows and the faint sounds of traffic far below. It was all so unsettling.

Ilya stood near the kitchen island packing the last of Logan's bottles and blankets back into the diaper bag while Shane sat curled carefully into the corner of the couch with Logan asleep in his arms.

He hadn't let go of him since they arrived. He'd been the one to ask Ilya to come up and stay with him for a while.

Every few minutes Shane would glance down like he was checking the baby was still real.

Or maybe making himself remember why he was doing this.

Logan stretched sleepily against his chest with a tiny grunt. Shane's face softened immediately. "There you are buddy," he whispered.

The newborn blinked slowly awake beneath dark blonde curls, blue-grey eyes still unfocused and sleepy.

Shane swallowed hard. God.

Leaving him felt impossible now that the moment had actually arrived.

Ilya approached quietly after finishing packing the last bag. "We should probably go soon," he said gently. "I do not want to worry your parents."

Shane visibly tensed at the words. "I know." But he didn't move.

Ilya sat beside him carefully instead. And for a while they just looked at Logan together. Their son. The thought still felt surreal.

Finally Shane spoke quietly. "I'm sorry by the way."

Ilya frowned slightly.

"For what?"

"My parents." Shane gave a weak laugh without humor. "They're going to ask you about a thousand questions once you finally get to Ottawa."

"I can survive Yuna," Ilya teased softly. "David, he is boring so he will be easy too."

Shane huffed out the tiniest laugh.

“My mom is going to interrogate you.”

“Good.” Ilya’s expression softened. “I am excited to know them properly.”

Shane looked up at him then, genuinely relieved by the answer.

“Yeah?”

“Of course.” Ilya brushed careful fingers through Logan’s curls. “My son is their grandson too. We will be important part of eachother’s lives Da?”

Emotion rose sharply in Shane’s throat again. Before he could overthink it, he leaned forward and kissed Ilya hard.

Not gently this time. Desperate.

Full of apology and fear and gratitude all tangled together.

Ilya kissed him back immediately, one hand cupping the side of Shane’s face while the other stayed protectively against Logan’s back between them.

When they finally separated, Shane’s eyes were glassy again. “I hate this.”

“I know.”

“I feel like I’m abandoning both of you.”

“You are not.”

Shane shook his head weakly. “It feels like it.”

Ilya looked at him carefully for a long moment. Then he spoke very softly. “You are trying not to drown.”

That nearly broke Shane again. He looked down quickly at Logan before tears could properly spill. “I just…” His voice cracked. “I need to get my head straight before I do this properly.”

Ilya stayed quiet.

“I don’t want to end up resenting him because I was too scared and overwhelmed to admit I wasn’t coping,” Shane admitted shakily. “And I don’t want him growing up feeling like I regret him.”

Logan made a tiny sleepy noise against his chest.

Shane’s expression crumpled instantly. “Because I don’t,” he whispered quickly. “I don’t regret him.”

“I know.”

“I just don’t know how to become somebody’s dad overnight.”

Ilya leaned forward and rested his forehead gently against Shane's. "You already are his dad," he whispered. Praying this emotion would be enough to make Shane realise how silly his plan was.

Eventually though, the goodbye still came.

Shane delayed it as long as possible. One more cuddle. One more kiss against Logan's forehead. One more adjustment of the tiny blue blanket around him.

But eventually Ilya stood and carefully reached for the baby.

The second Shane started transferring Logan into his arms, panic flared visibly across his face. His grip tightened instinctively. For one horrible second it looked like he physically couldn't let go.

Ilya's face softened painfully. "Shane…"

Shane closed his eyes briefly. Then finally loosened his hold. Logan settled easily against Ilya's chest, still sleepy and warm and impossibly tiny.

Shane immediately missed the weight of him.The silence afterward hurt.

"I'll call tomorrow," Ilya promised quietly.

Shane nodded.

"And you call me if things get bad."

Another nod.

Ilya lingered by the apartment door for several long seconds like he didn't really want to leave either.

Then finally. "Come here."

Shane crossed the room immediately and Ilya pulled him into one last tight embrace, careful of the healing injuries but firm enough that Shane nearly lost his nerve completely.

"You are not alone in this," Ilya whispered fiercely into his hair. "Do you understand me? I will allow you time if is what you need. But you are never alone Hollander."

Shane nodded against his shoulder.

Then they were gone.

The apartment door clicked shut softly behind them. And the silence afterward felt enormous.

Shane stood frozen in the middle of the room long after the elevator doors downstairs had probably already closed. His body still instinctively expected to hear tiny newborn noises somewhere nearby.

Instead there was nothing.

The first night alone was the worst. He barely slept. Every ache from the stitches felt sharper without distraction and his hormones still crashed unpredictably, leaving him crying suddenly over stupid things like finding one of Logan's tiny socks under the couch cushion.

But he kept going. He had to keep going.

A few days later he had his first proper counselling session over FaceTime.

Mila Perez was soft-spoken and observant, probably in her forties, with dark curls and endlessly patient eyes. "You experienced an extreme physical and emotional trauma," she explained gently during their second session. "Your brain is still trying to process what happened."

Shane sat curled sideways on the couch listening quietly. "It scares me that I don't feel what everyone else feels."

Mila tilted her head slightly.

"What do you think everyone else feels?"

"Love." Shane laughed weakly. "Instantly. Like the second he came out of me they all fell head over heels."

"And you think love can only exist if it arrives immediately?"

That question stayed with him long after the call ended. Because did he think that? It would explain why he felt like he'd let Logan down so badly. He didn't have that instant click. It took him a week to even feel okay and confident enough with the baby. He wasn't sure whether or not he had time to acknowledge the love he felt for him.

He just knows it wasn't there that night he was born. And that made him feel like the worst father in the world.

The daily FaceTimes with Ilya helped a little too. Even if they hurt sometimes.

Logan changed constantly already.

At barely three weeks old he seemed more and more awake every day, tiny expressions appearing more frequently, little noises turning louder and more opinionated.

"He hates diaper changes," Ilya informed him during one call while bouncing Logan carefully against his shoulder.

Shane smiled despite himself. "I mean, that's fair. I wouldn't want somebody tryna clean me with cold wet wipes either."

"And he only falls asleep if I walk around holding him like this. Or if I lay down with him against my chest. He is contact baby."

“Also fair. He probably gets that from me huh? You know I love a cuddle.”

“Da, yes. You really love a cuddle.”

Sometimes Shane cried after the calls ended.

Sometimes he smiled for hours afterward.

Mostly it was both.

Finally, two whole weeks after returning to Montreal, he actually agreed to meet up with Hayden, Jackie, and Rose.

They cornered him immediately the second he entered Hayden and Jackie’s place.

“Where the hell have you been?” Hayden demanded. “You vanished halfway through the awards show and then went radio silent for like a week. The team and I have had no idea what’s going on! Coach said you had a stomach bug or something?”

Rose looked horrified. “We thought you’d had a breakdown.”

Jackie narrowed her eyes suspiciously. “You look weirdly… emotional.”

Shane laughed once under his breath and sat carefully onto the couch with a soft wince. “There’s kind of no normal way to say this.”

The three of them exchanged concerned looks.

Then Shane inhaled deeply. “So I guess I should start with ah- M- me and Rozanov are together.”

Three small seconds of silence passed.

“I knew it!” Jackie shouted. “I knew you were seeing someone!”

Hayden looked scandalized. “THAT’S the secret you start with?”

Rose blinked rapidly. “Wait, together, together? He’s the guy you told me about when we broke up?!”

Shane rubbed awkwardly at the back of his neck. “Yeah.”

Hayden pointed accusingly.

“We will get back to this part, because Rozanov? Seriously dude?!” He pulled an appalled face. “But we are absolutely not changing the subject that easily. Why did you disappear? As your best friend and team mate I fear it is vital information.”

Shane went quiet. Deciding the best way to say was to just put it out there. “I had a baby.”

The room exploded.

“A WHAT?”

Jackie nearly dropped her drink.

Rose looked like she stopped breathing entirely.

Hayden simply stared.

Shane laughed weakly despite himself. “Yeah. That was kind of my reaction too.”

“You’re kidding.” Hayden stated.

“I’m not.”

“Shane.”

“I’m serious.”

Nobody spoke for several stunned seconds. Before Jackie broke the silence once more. “You literally left an awards show out of nowhere and came back to us as a father?”

“When you say it like that it sounds insane.”

“Because it IS insane!”

Eventually Shane pulled out his phone with shaking hands and opened his camera roll. The second he showed them a photo, everything changed.

“Oh my God,” Rose breathed immediately.

Jackie physically clutched her chest. “He’s tiny. It’s a boy right? The blue?”

Shane nodded in confirmation. “His name is Logan David. I had no idea I was pregnant. He kinda came out of me in the middle of the public bathroom at the awards show.”

“Jesus Christ.” Rose winced in sympathy. “Are you okay?”

“Honestly? No. I-I haven’t been with him since he was seven days old. I’ve been trying to process things. Ilya’s been amazing with him though.”

Jackie nodded reassuringly. “I get it honey. When I had the twins I struggled for a few months. If I could have ran away I most certainly would have.”

“I-I mean I’m not running away.. I’m just-”

“You don’t have to explain yourself Shane. It’s okay.” Rose soothed him. “I’m sure you’re an amazing dad when you’re with him.”

“Yeah, we know you’d never abandon him like that man. You’re too good.” Hayden leaned closer. “Jesus, he has Rozanov’s entire face. Did he get anything from you?”

Shane laughed properly this time.

“Unfortunately my nose.”

The three of them crowded around him on the couch looking through photos and videos while Shane quietly narrated little details without even realizing he was doing it.

“That one was the one Ilya sent me after his first bath at home.” Shane snickered, the photo showing Logan screaming the place down. “He apparently hates being cold.”

“Oh! And when I’m on FaceTime he makes this weird grumpy face before he sneezes.”

Every time he spoke about Logan, the fear still existed. But now something else existed too. Something growing slowly and carefully underneath it. It felt nice to finally open up about everything he was holding in.

It wouldn’t be long until he felt like himself again. Time healed everything.

———————————————————————————-

The cottage felt way too quiet and empty without Shane in it.

Not silent. It was never silent now , not with a newborn involved — but it still felt wrong somehow. Like the walls themselves knew someone was missing.

Warm summer air drifted through the open screen door, carrying the scent of lake water and pine trees into the living room. Somewhere outside, cicadas buzzed lazily in the late evening heat.

Ilya stood in the middle of the cottage with Logan cradled awkwardly against his chest, staring at the bassinet beside the couch like it was a puzzle designed to break him.

“Okay,” he whispered hoarsely. “We do this.”

Logan answered with a sharp cry.

Ilya immediately bounced him on instinct, panic flaring hot in his chest. “No, no, malysh, I know. I know. Is okay, papa is here.”

The baby’s tiny face scrunched red with fury.

God.

How had Shane made this look easy?

Only two days earlier they’d been sat together in the hospital room, exhausted and overwhelmed and terrified. Shane took to parenting like a natural, Ilya only wished he could see that for himself.

I can’t do this.

He'd said it so quietly Ilya almost hadn't heard him.

I'm going to ruin him.

No matter how many times Ilya told him otherwise, Shane had looked at Logan like he was holding something impossibly fragile. Something too good for him to touch.

By the time they made it to Montreal late the other night, Shane had kissed Logan's forehead with shaking hands, kissed Ilya hard enough to break his heart, and left to deal with his thoughts alone.

Not because he didn't love them. No , never that.

But because he loved them too much.

And now Ilya was here alone in Ottawa, standing in a cottage Shane had built, with their son.

Their son.

The thought nearly knocked the air from his lungs every time it surfaced.

Logan cried harder, snapping him out of his daze of memories.

"Shhhh, I know. I am sorry. Papa is trying," Ilya whispered desperately.

He checked the bottle temperature again even though he'd already checked twice. Changed the diaper even though it barely needed it. Walked circles around the living room until his legs burned.

Nothing worked.

By midnight, Ilya was sitting on the kitchen floor crying almost as hard as the baby. "I cannot do this," he choked into his palm. "Shane, I cannot-"

But Shane was hundreds of kilometers away, drowning in fears Ilya didn't know how to fix.

And Logan needed him.

So Ilya forced himself back up. One thing at a time. Make his bottle, burp him, change his diaper, rock him to sleep and repeat. Over and over again.

Simple.

The hours blurred together into exhaustion and dim golden lamplight and tiny hiccupping cries. Ilya learned quickly that Logan hated being put down while awake. Hated the bassinet. Hated silence.

But he loved warmth.

At around three in the morning, after another failed attempt to transfer him into the bassinet, Ilya collapsed onto the couch in defeat with Logan tucked against his chest.

The crying stopped almost immediately.

Ilya froze.

Logan gave one tiny sigh, cheek pressed over Ilya's heartbeat. Then he fell asleep.

"Oh," Ilya breathed.

Carefully, ridiculously carefully, he adjusted the blanket around them both. Logan wriggled once before settling deeper into him, tiny fingers curled against the fabric of Ilya's t-shirt.

The weight of him was impossibly small. And so impossibly important.

Ilya stared down at him for a long time. "Your daddy is just scared," he whispered shakily. "You were very big surprise and his brain does not work like mine and your grandparents. He will need some time to accept his new normal. But he already loves you so much. You understand someday, yes?"

Logan slept on. Ilya liked to think that somehow he still heard. That he was agreeing with every word spoken.

Outside, lake water lapped softly against the dock while summer wind stirred through the trees.

Ilya leaned his head back against the couch and closed his burning eyes. For the first time all night, he wasn't panicking.

By early morning, he'd figured out enough of a routine to survive. Feed Logan before he got too hungry. Walk while burping him. Keep one hand on him when he slept.

And if all else failed?

Chest.

Always lay him on chest.

The knock on the cottage door came just after eight.

Ilya startled awake immediately, one arm tightening protectively around Logan before he even opened his eyes. The baby squirmed sleepily against his chest beneath the blanket.

Another knock.

"Ilya?" Yuna's voice called gently. "It's us."

Relief flooded through him so fast it hurt. "Come in," he croaked.

The door opened carefully.

Yuna stepped inside first wearing denim shorts and an oversized Montreal sweatshirt, stylish for her age. David close behind carrying iced coffees and grocery bags as he stumbled in.

Both of them stopped instantly.

Ilya realised belatedly what they must see.

Him sprawled half sideways on the couch, hair a disaster, eyes swollen from exhaustion and crying. Logan tucked against his chest in only a tiny blue sleeper, wriggling sleepily beneath the blanket.

David's entire expression softened. "Oh," he murmured. "Rough night kiddo?"

Yuna actually pressed a hand to her heart. "You poor thing," she whispered.

Ilya let out a tired laugh that sounded dangerously close to another cry. "He hates bassinets."

Yuna smiled gently. "A lot of babies do."

Logan made a tiny squeaking noise and stretched against Ilya's chest.

David set the coffees down quietly. "How much sleep did you get?"

"…Maybe forty minutes?"

They exchanged a look.

"Jesus Christ," David muttered sympathetically.

Yuna moved carefully toward the couch. "Can I?"

Ilya hesitated only a second before transferring Logan into her arms. The loss of warmth was immediate. So was the sudden ache in his chest.

Yuna noticed.

Her expression softened even more as she adjusted Logan expertly against her shoulder. "You're already attached."

Ilya rubbed at his eyes. "I think maybe from the second I saw him."

Logan blinked sleepily up at Yuna, entirely calm.

"Traitor," Ilya muttered.

David barked out a laugh.

For the first time since the hospital, the knot in Ilya's chest loosened.

They only stayed for a couple of hours. But it was long enough to make real food, clean the kitchen a little, and sit around the living room talking while Logan dozed between them.

And finally…finally. They talked.

They talked about things that had happened and asked the questions that had been shoved to the side the second Logan was born.

David leaned back in his chair after a while. “So how long?”

Ilya looked down into his coffee. “How long have me and Shane been together?”

David nodded.

A soft smile pulled at Ilya’s mouth despite his exhaustion. “Unofficially, since the summer before our rookie season.”

Yuna’s eyebrows lifted. “That long?”

“We met at prospects cup 2008.” Ilya laughed quietly. “He annoyed me immediately. So awkward and insistent on me not smoking outside of arena.”

David snorted. “That sounds about right.”

“He talked too much. Smiled too much. Tried too hard to make me be nice.”

“But it worked? You liked him huh?”

“Unfortunately.”

Yuna smiled warmly.

Ilya’s expression softened with memory. “He kept finding new ways to torture me, even without knowing ,” he admitted quietly. “Like going in sunlight and making his freckles stand out. It used to end me.” His eyes grew distant. “I think maybe I knew we would be something from that moment , maybe even before he did.”

“And then what?” Yuna asked gently. “You confessed there was more between you?”

Ilya hesitated. “Ah , no. Not exactly.” The warmth faded slightly from his face. “In Russia…” He swallowed hard. “You learn very young to hide if you are person like me or Shane.”

The room went still.

“You hide from men like my father especially.” His voice flattened carefully, emotion buried beneath years of practice. “He was not kind.”

Yuna’s face tightened immediately.

David looked furious on his behalf.

“If he suspected…” Ilya shook his head faintly. “I spent years terrified someone would figure it out. Terrified, I would ruin Shane’s life too. Terrified, I would end up buried next to my

mother." His hands trembled slightly around the coffee cup. "In hockey is…" He laughed once without humor. "Not exactly safe either."

Yuna reached across the couch and squeezed his wrist gently. "We understand," she said softly. And somehow, she really did.

That nearly undid him.

Ilya looked down quickly, blinking hard. "I loved him for years before I ever said it out loud. We kept missing one another, acted like assholes."

David leaned forward slightly. "When did you know it wasn't just hooking up anymore?"

Ilya laughed quietly through his exhaustion.

"Oh, I believe Shane knew immediately," he said. "I think after the second time we slept together he looked at me like I hung the moon."

David burst out laughing.

Yuna grinned. "That also sounds about right."

"But me?" Ilya exhaled shakily. "Last summer. Here." His eyes drifted around the cottage. "This place changed everything for me." The room grew quiet again. "We came here after a terrible season," he said softly. "Media pressure. Injuries. Hiding constantly. We were both exhausted."

He could still remember it perfectly.

Shane standing barefoot on the dock at sunset. Wind in his hair. Lake water glowing gold around him. Looking at Ilya like there had never been anyone else in the world.

"I realised I couldn't survive losing him," Ilya admitted. "That scared me more than anything else ever had. I did not care anymore. I was free, I was - I was me."

Yuna listened silently.

"So, I told him."

David smiled faintly. "Just like that?"

"No." Ilya laughed tiredly. "I panicked first. For several hours."

That earned another laugh.

"But eventually…" His expression softened into something achingly vulnerable. "I told him I loved him. And he cried. I also cried a little. Manly tears though."

Yuna visibly melted. "Of course you did," she whispered.

Ilya smiled to himself.

“We stayed up all night making plans for our future. What city we wanted to live in eventually. Kids maybe someday after we retire.” His eyes flicked toward Logan sleeping against his chest again. “Funny how fast ‘someday’ become now.” Emotion thickened his voice unexpectedly. “We - er- David, you actually almost caught us. When you came for phone charger? I had to hide behind rock over there.”

David snickered. “I remember that. I thought Shane was just being his usual obsessive self when he practically shoved me out of the door. I thought I must have interrupted his special yoga routine.”

Ilya smiled softly at the memory. “I thought I would spend my whole life hiding who I truly am,” he admitted quietly. “Then Shane happened.”

Silence settled softly around the room.

Much to Ilya’s surprise it didn’t feel uncomfortable. No, not at all. It felt …

Safe.

For perhaps the first time in years, Ilya felt entirely accepted. No judgment. No fear. Just warmth.

By early afternoon, Yuna kissed Logan’s forehead, David squeezed Ilya’s shoulder, and they headed home.

The cottage grew quiet again after they left. Not quite as lonely this time.

Just peaceful.

Late sunlight spilled through the windows in warm golden stripes while Logan slept sprawled against Ilya’s chest again, tiny mouth parted softly in sleep.

Ilya sat curled into the corner of the couch, one hand resting protectively along Logan’s back when his phone buzzed.

Shane.

Something inside him softened immediately. He answered before he even managed a full blink.

Shane appeared onscreen looking wrecked. Red eyes and messy hair. He had an old hoodie pulled over his head. It looked to Ilya , like he hadn’t slept at all.

The second he saw Logan sleeping against Ilya’s chest, his entire face crumpled. “Oh my baby,” Shane whispered.

Ilya adjusted the phone carefully so he could see better. Logan made a tiny sleepy noise without waking.

Shane covered his mouth with his hand. “I miss him.” The heartbreak in his voice nearly split Ilya open. “God Ilya I miss him so much, I didn’t think I’d feel this way.”

“I know.”

Shane stared at the screen like he was trying to memorize every inch of them both. “You shouldn’t be doing this alone,” he whispered after a moment. “I-I’m so sorry, you look exhausted babe.”

“I am fine. And you are allowed to feel however you want. You gave birth to surprise baby, is a lot for anyone.”

Shane shook his head hard immediately. “No, you don’t understand. Ilya, I looked at him and all I could think was what if I screw him up? What if I’m bad at this? What if he deserves someone better?” His voice cracked completely. “I didn’t even know how to hold him properly.”

“You held him fine.”

“I was terrified.”

Ilya’s chest ached.

Because this was Shane.

Beautiful, loving Shane who cried over rescue dogs and tucked blankets around sleeping people and remembered everyone’s coffee order.

And yet somehow he still believed he could fail at being loved.

“Shane,” Ilya said quietly, “he stopped crying when you talked the other day.”

Shane blinked in confusion.

“W-What?”

“In hospital. Remember?” Ilya smiled faintly. “You said hello and he calmed down immediately.”

Shane stared at him silently.

“You already make him feel safe. You are enough my love. You just need a little time to process and I know you will see that.”

The tears came instantly. Shane looked down, shoulders shaking once. “I miss you,” he whispered. “I miss you both so much.”

Ilya’s own eyes burned. “We miss you too.”

For a second, nobody spoke.

Then Logan stirred against Ilya's chest with a tiny sleepy sound.

Shane's entire expression transformed.

There he is. There's the Shane Hollander, Ilya knows and loves. The man that was always full of pure love and wonder.

And within that FaceTime of quiet smiles and whispered I love yous, their world just shifted back into place.

He was now officially three weeks postpartum and Shane still felt like his body didn't belong to him.

The examination room he was currently sat in smelled faintly of antiseptic wipes and stale coffee. The paper crinkling beneath him every time he shifted on the table. Summer sunlight streamed through the blinds in narrow golden stripes, warming the pale blue walls of the clinic.

Shane sat in an oversized hoodie and athletic shorts, nervously picking at the seam near his thumb while he waited.

His stomach twisted harder every second. He these types of postpartum appointments. Though he'd only had two so far and both had been at the hospital.

He didn't hate them because of the pain. No, he hated them because they made everything so real.

The birth.

The fear.

The fact that he'd left his baby to live in Montreal alone for a few weeks because he'd been too overwhelmed to think straight.

A soft knock came at the door before it opened.

Dr. Celia Parkins stepped inside with her tablet tucked against her chest. "Hi, sweetheart," she said gently.

Shane immediately relaxed a fraction.

Celia had been his doctor since he was sixteen years old and terrified out of his mind after learning he was a carrier. She had explained everything to him back then — what it meant, what pregnancy could look like someday, what risks existed, what options he'd have.

She'd held his hand through hormone treatments, consultations, panic attacks, and every terrified question he'd ever had.

Even after the complete insanity of Logan's birth, she'd still been the one coordinating his follow-up care afterward. She'd been the first person he wanted to call after everything.

"You look exhausted," she observed kindly.

Shane laughed weakly. "I feel exhausted."

"That's usually how this works."

She washed her hands at the sink before pulling over a stool.

"How's the pain been since we last talked?"

"Better." Shane shifted carefully. "Still sore sitting certain ways. The er- the part where I had stitches still pulls tight sometimes."

"Bleeding?"

"Yeah, but it's lighter now."

"Any fever? Sharp pain? Discharge with odor?"

He shook his head.

"Good." Her expression softened. "Now, how are you emotionally?"

Shane looked away immediately.

Celia noticed, of course. She always noticed. "That bad?" she asked quietly.

His throat tightened. "I left my baby with his other father so that I could be alone for a while. Like- I left him , left him, not just for a few hours…"

There it was.

Saying it aloud still made him feel sick.

Celia stayed calm. "Okay."

"I just-" Shane rubbed hard at his eyes. "I panicked after everything happened at the awards. Giving birth was enough of a sensory overload and suddenly everything else around it felt too huge and I couldn't stop thinking about how easy it would be for me to ruin him." His voice cracked embarrassingly.

"So I came back to Montreal for a few weeks and left Ilya alone with him at the cottage and now I feel like the worst person on earth."

"Shane."

"I didn't even know I was pregnant until I was literally giving birth on a bathroom floor," he whispered miserably. "One second I thought I was dying and the next my mom was crying

and dad was freaking out and some poor paramedic named Callum was telling me to push-"

Emotion closed painfully around his throat.

"And now everyone else seems to know exactly what they're doing except for me."

Celia's expression didn't change even slightly.

No judgment in her expression.

Only understanding.

"That is not unusual after a traumatic birth," she said gently.

Shane swallowed hard.

"You experienced an extreme medical and emotional shock. Your body went through labor unexpectedly with no preparation, no prenatal care, no time to process what was happening. Then your hormones crashed immediately afterward." She paused carefully. "And honestly? Becoming a new parent is terrifying even under ideal circumstances."

A shaky laugh escaped him. "You don't think I'm an awful human being?"

"No." Her voice softened further. "I think you've been very overwhelmed and now you're ready to face up to your responsibilities."

Shane looked down at his hands.

"Everyone processes trauma differently," Celia continued. "Some people cling tighter immediately. Some need space to breathe before they can fully settle into it." She tilted her head slightly. "That doesn't mean you love Logan any less."

The knot in Shane's chest loosened just slightly.

"And I'm guessing Ilya agreed to this plan of yours?" she asked.

Shane nodded immediately. "Yeah. We talked about it together. I made sure he was comfortable with it."

"Then trust your partner enough to believe him when he says this was okay. That he isn't angry or upset with you. It may help you move forwards if you trust in that honey."

Emotion climbed suddenly into Shane's throat.

God.

He was so tired.

Celia gave him a moment before gently continuing. "Now. Let's check on your healing, okay?"

Shane nodded and shifted awkwardly back on the exam table.

The physical exam was still humiliating no matter how many doctors appointments he'd had over the years.

Celia stayed professional and calm while guiding him through it. "Okay, slide down a little for me." The paper crinkled loudly beneath him. "Relax your knees."

He tried and failed.

She noticed immediately. "Breathe, Shane."

"Trying."

The examination itself wasn't exactly painful anymore, just deeply uncomfortable pressure, tenderness and the strange pulling sensation of healing stitches.

Ceila had explained to him that because Logan's birth had happened so suddenly and without medical preparation, the tearing had been worse than it should have been. Callum and the emergency team had stabilised him at the scene to the best of his heir abilities before transport, but the actual repair work had happened a lot later on after delivery, that meant a longer healing process.

Celia checked carefully for swelling and signs of infection, explaining things as she went like she always had. "External tearing is healing very well," she said. "Minimal inflammation. Sutures have all dissolved properly now."

Shane exhaled shakily.

"Any pain during bowel movements still?"

"Erm…Little bit."

"Normal at this stage." She finished the examination and let him sit up again. "No signs of complications," she assured him. "Physically, you're healing beautifully."

Beautifully.

Shane almost laughed at the absurdity of that word attached to any part of postpartum recovery.

Celia handed him tissues before he even realized tears had slipped down his cheeks again. "You're doing better than you think," she said softly.

Shane wiped at his face with a miserable little laugh. "I don't feel like it."

"You don't have to feel okay with the situation you've been dealt to be a good father."

That hit him square in the chest.

He looked down quickly.

“When are you going to Ottawa to be with them?” she asked.

“Today actually.”

Something warm flickered through her expression. “Are you excited?”

And suddenly Shane was smiling before he could stop himself. So helplessly in love it almost hurt.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “I really am.”

The drive from Montreal to Ottawa felt longer than usual. Not because of traffic. More so because Shane’s entire body thrummed with nervous anticipation.

His hands tightened on the steering wheel every few minutes. What if Logan didn’t recognize him? Ridiculous. He knew that was ridiculous. Logan was three weeks old. He barely knew the sound of his own name.

Still.

The fear lingered anyway.

By the time he finally turned down the familiar dirt road toward the cottage, the late afternoon sun hung low over the lake, turning the water molten gold.

Shane’s heart slammed painfully against his ribs.

Home.

He barely remembered grabbing his duffel bag from the back of the car before climbing the porch steps. The all glass windows giving him comfort as he stared into the open plan.

The cottage door creaked softly open as his keys rattled in the lock.

It was quiet and warm inside. The scent of lake water and coffee and baby soap wrapped around him instantly.

Right as he passed through the kitchen Shane stopped breathing.

Ilya was laying fast asleep on the corner couch, sprawled on his back beneath the thin summer blanket, one arm curled protectively around Logan.

And Logan— Oh God.

Logan was tucked against Ilya’s chest in a tiny sage green onesie with little white mittens covering his hands.

Tiny and completely perfect in a way Shane never knew was possible.

His dark blonde hair was slightly mussed from sleep, cheek squished against Ilya's shirt whilst one of his little legs kicked lazily beneath the blanket.

Something inside Shane shattered completely.

"Oh baby," he whispered.

He dropped the duffel quietly by the top of the steps and walked down into the room carefully. Like Logan might disappear if he moved too fast. The couch dipped slightly as Shane knelt beside it.

Up close, Logan looked even smaller than he remembered.

Shane reached out hesitantly before smoothing one trembling hand over the baby's tiny back. Warm. Real.

His son.

A broken sound escaped Shane before he could stop it. "Hi, my baby."

Logan barely reacted beyond a sleepy wriggle.

Shane laughed wetly through instant tears. "Yeah, okay. Ignore me then."

Carefully, he slid his hands beneath Logan and lifted him gently from Ilya's chest.

The baby made one tiny protesting noise before immediately settling again against Shane's shoulder.

Like he belonged there.

Like he'd always belonged there.

"Oh, sweetheart," Shane whispered shakily.

Emotion overwhelmed him so fast he almost couldn't breathe. He kissed Logan's forehead once.

Twice.

Again.

"You're so handsome," he whispered into the baby's hair. "You're so handsome, my little guy."

Logan yawned.

Actually yawned.

Shane nearly started crying harder. "I missed you so much."

A sudden movement behind him startled him slightly.

Ilya jerked awake on the couch, disoriented for half a second before his eyes landed on Shane. Immediately, all that sudden tension left his body. “Oh,” he breathed.

Shane looked at him helplessly, Logan still tucked tightly against his chest. “Sorry,” he whispered instantly. “Didn’t mean to wake you.”

Ilya just stared at him for a second. At Shane holding Logan. At the tears still shining in his eyes.

And then Ilya smiled. He smiled a smile that Shane had come to understand was reserved just for him. A smile that showed how he truly felt.

Completely and utterly in love.

“You came home.”

The words nearly undid Shane entirely. “Of course I came home, I told you I would visit.”

Ilya sat up slowly, still half asleep, and Shane leaned down automatically so he could kiss him.

It was soft at first. Then deeper. Relief pouring silently between them. When they finally pulled apart, Shane rested his forehead briefly against Ilya’s. “I love you,” he whispered shakily.

Ilya’s hand came up immediately to cup the side of his face. “I know.” Another kiss. “And I love you too.”

Between them, Logan made a tiny sleepy sound and snuggled closer into Shane’s chest.

For the first time since the birth, Shane finally felt like maybe he was exactly where he was supposed to be in life.

———————————————————————————-

The town just outside of Ottawa was quiet in the way only small places could be at dusk. The sidewalks glowed gold beneath the sinking sun, the air still warm from the day but softened by the cool promise of evening. Somewhere farther down the main street, someone was playing music from an open garage, and the smell of pine drifted in from the trees surrounding the lake.

Logan slept peacefully in the stroller, bundled beneath a pale blue blanket, one tiny hand curled near his cheek.

Shane walked on one side of the stroller with his hands shoved into the pockets of a dark hoodie, sunglasses still on despite the fading light. Beside him, Ilya wore nearly the same thing, hood up, baseball cap low, trying not to laugh at how ridiculous they probably looked.

“We look like criminals,” Ilya muttered under his breath.

Shane smirked. “You look like a criminal. I look mysterious.”

“You look like a nineteen-year-old trying to buy beer with a fake ID.”

Shane barked out a laugh loud enough that Logan stirred for half a second before settling again.

The sound hit Ilya square in the chest.

God, he loved him.

The past few days at the cottage had felt unreal. Quiet mornings. Coffee on the dock. Logan asleep on Shane’s chest during movies neither of them actually watched. It had started to feel dangerously normal.

Dangerously permanent. Ilya didn’t want to get his hopes up. Shane might decide that a few days was enough for him.

They turned down a quieter residential road where the trees arched overhead and painted the pavement in shadows.

Shane slowed a little beside him. “I’ve been thinking,” he said carefully.

Ilya glanced over immediately. “That sounds serious.”

“It is serious.”

Now Ilya was nervous.

Shane nudged the stroller gently forward with one hand, eyes fixed ahead. “I don’t want to leave.”

The words landed softly but heavily.

Ilya blinked. “Leave… the walk?”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Idiot.”

A grin tugged at Ilya’s mouth anyway.

“I mean after this. After everything.” Shane swallowed once. “I know we said this was temporary until things calmed down, but…” He glanced toward Logan. “I wake up every morning and he’s there. And you’re there. And it feels right.”

Ilya stopped walking completely.

Shane noticed a second later and stopped too.

The evening light caught against the edge of his sunglasses, warm and amber.

“I’m ready,” Shane admitted quietly. “Like… fully ready. I’ll stay here with you both until summer’s over. Until training starts again and then we will figure out a plan on how to move to Montreal. All of us.” His voice softened. “I want this Ilya. For real. Just me, you and him. Our family.”

For a moment, Ilya genuinely couldn’t breathe.

All the fear he’d been carrying since Logan was born, the uncertainty, the waiting for reality to collapse around them, went painfully quiet. “You really mean that?” he asked, almost too quietly.

Shane looked offended. “Obviously I mean it.”

Ilya laughed shakily.

Then he did something reckless.

He reached for Shane’s wrist and tugged him closer.

Shane came willingly, smiling before Ilya even leaned in. The world narrowed to sunset light and warm skin and the feeling of finally exhaling after months underwater.

Their foreheads brushed.

Then their lips did.

It lasted barely a second.

But in that second, Shane’s hood slipped backward. His glasses slipped off of his face as he giggled and chased after Ilya’s mouth.

And halfway down the street, unbeknownst to them, someone sitting in a parked car froze.

“Oh my God,” the stranger whispered, already grabbing their phone.

Click, click, click.

A side profile. Shane Hollander’s side profile.

A stroller, was that a newborn? .

A blonde haired man beside him.

Another shot as Shane pulled away smiling.

The Hockey update accounts had uploaded the photos within minutes.

By the time Shane and Ilya got back to the cottage, the sky had turned navy blue and Logan was awake, blinking sleepily up at them whilst Shane carefully lifted him from the stroller.

Neither of them had checked their phones the entire walk. Shane had made it clear he wanted a phone free afternoon and left them both plugged in on the kitchen counter.

Ilya stepped inside first, kicking the door shut behind them while Shane carried Logan toward the living room.

Thats when both their phones exploded simultaneously.

Buzzbuzzbuzzbuzz.

Shane frowned immediately. “What the hell?”

Ilya already had his phone in hand.

His stomach dropped. “Oh fuck.”

“What?”

Ilya turned the screen toward him.

At the top of Hockey Twitter was a grainy photo of Shane’s unmistakable profile beside the stroller.

“WHO IS SHANE WITH???”

“IS THAT A BABY???”

“NO WAY???”

“secret girlfriend?? boyfriend?? sibling??”

“that is literally shane’s side profile i’d recognise him anywhere”

“someone zoom in on the stroller”

Shane stared in horror. “Holy shit, Ilya...”

Ilya kept scrolling, face draining of color with every second.

More photos were appearing. Different angles. Cropped close-ups. Speculation threads multiplying by the minute.

One tweet already had over fifty thousand likes.

Shane sat down hard on the couch beside Logan’s bassinet. “This is bad.”

“Very bad.”

Another buzz.

Incoming call: Mom.

Shane groaned instantly. “I’m so dead.”

“Answer it,” Ilya said.

“She’s gonna kill me.”

“She’s definitely gonna kill you.”

Shane reluctantly accepted the call and immediately held the phone away from his ear.

“SHANE HOLLANDER.”

He winced. “Hi Mom.”

“What did I say about keeping a low profile whilst out huh? Everyone has been out looking for you honey. The last anybody seen of you, you were running off of stage at the NHL awards!”

“I know, I know! But we tried mom! We were wearing disguises!”

“You are six foot two and nationally recognizable! Sun glasses and a hoodie aren’t going to cover it honey!”

Ilya snorted despite himself.

Yuna continued without pause, full manager mode already activated. “How many photos are there?”

“I don’t know yet.”

“Has anyone identified Ilya?”

“No.”

“The baby?”

“I don’t think so.”

A pause.

Then, calmer but sharper.

“Listen to me carefully. This can still be controlled before the media gets a hold of it properly.”

Shane rubbed his forehead. “Okay.”

“You need a statement. Immediately. Something simple before speculation gets worse.”

Ilya’s eyes widened slightly.

A statement.

That made this real in a terrifyingly public way.

Shane looked over at him then, really looked at him and whatever he saw on Ilya's face made his own expression soften.

"We don't have to confirm everything," Shane said quietly, mostly to reassure him.

But Ilya surprised himself. "No," he said after a second. "Maybe… maybe we stop hiding a little. Will be good for Logan if we are honest."

Shane stared at him. "You sure? It's going to change everything Ilya. Possibly ruin our careers…"

Ilya looked toward Logan sleeping peacefully beside them, completely unaware that the internet was currently trying to dissect his existence. Then back at Shane. "I am very tired of feeling scared every time someone looks at us interacting with one another. We deserve to show our love malysh… I do not care about hockey. I care about us."

The silence between them deepened.

On the phone, Yuna sighed knowingly. "Well," she said, "that answers that."

Shane laughed weakly. "You already drafting PR plans?"

"I had three drafted before you picked up."

"That's concerning."

"That's motherhood."

The cottage became silent after that, except for the soft tapping of Shane's thumbs against his phone.

Outside, the lake had gone dark beneath the night sky, and the windows reflected the warm yellow glow of the living room lamps back at them. Logan slept in Shane's arms completely unaware that the internet was currently unraveling around him.

Ilya sat beside him on the couch, one knee pulled up against his chest as he watched Shane.

His boyfriend groaned quietly. "I sound insane."

"You are insane," Ilya said gently.

"That's not helping."

"Is true."

Shane gave him an exhausted look before glancing down at Logan again.

Everything in his face changed instantly.

The baby was tucked against his chest in a little knitted sleeper, one tiny fist resting under his chin. Logan's cheeks were flushed pink with sleep, soft curls sticking up in every direction from where Shane had kissed his head about fifty times already.

Shane visibly melted every single time he looked at him.

It still destroyed Ilya to witness.

A month ago, Shane had been one of the biggest stars in hockey. All muscle and honour.

Now he was sitting barefoot in a cottage wearing oversized sweatpants whilst holding their newborn son like he was the most precious thing in the universe.

Maybe he was.

Shane inhaled slowly and looked back at the phone. "Okay," he murmured. "I'm posting it. I'll tag you so you can read it."

Ilya reached over immediately, squeezing his wrist once.

"You don't have to explain everything."

"I know." Shane looked at him quietly. "But after ten years, I'm getting kinda tired of hiding you."

That hit harder than Ilya expected. Because that is exactly what it had been for the last ten years.

Hiding.

Careful hotel rooms. Separate arrivals. No lingering touches in public. No photos. No honesty.

Because hockey wasn't kind to men like them. The culture was improving slowly, but not enough. Not safely enough. One wrong headline could ruin careers, sponsorships, locker rooms, everything they'd built since they were teenagers.

So they became experts at secrecy.

And somehow, in the middle of all that secrecy, they fell hopelessly in love.

Then Logan happened. He had been their turning point. He was their reason to be free.

Shane looked down one final time at the statement.

Then he hit the post button.

The internet exploded almost instantly. As though every single hockey fan in the world had been sat hovering over his socials waiting for this moment.

The statement appeared on both Instagram and Twitter beside a soft photo of Logan sleeping against a cream-colored blanket. Only the side of his face was visible, his tiny hand adorably smushed against his cheek while his lips parted slightly in sleep.

The caption read:

I wasn't exactly planning on sharing any of this just yet, but after photos were taken of me earlier tonight I think it's important the story comes from us.

Ilya Rozanov and I have been together in a romantic relationship privately for a little over ten years.

We chose to keep our relationship a secret because professional hockey isn't always a welcoming place for LGBTQ players and their families.

Over time we learned how to separate our real lives from the version people saw publicly. It wasn't ideal, but it felt necessary.

Recently our lives changed forever in a way neither one of us expected.

Our son Logan was born the night of the NHL Awards.

The reason I ran off stage during my acceptance speech was because my water broke live on stage. Neither of us knew I was pregnant before that night, and honestly we're still trying to process everything that happened ourselves.

The past few weeks have been overwhelming, emotional, terrifying, beautiful, and completely life changing. Recovery hasn't been easy and I have no plans to return to the ice as of yet.

We're going to have to continue to learn how to be parents while also figuring out how to suddenly live publicly as a family now. I'm asking everyone to please respect our privacy and give us some grace while we adjust.

And just for the record—Ilya has been the best partner and the most incredible father to our baby boy. I couldn't ask for anyone better. I love you Ilya , here's to our new , crazy adventure.

Anyways, we'd like you all to meet…

Logan David Hollander-Rozanov

5lbs 6oz

💙

For a minute or so there was nothing but silence. Then the comments began flooding in so quickly neither of them could keep up.

"HE GAVE BIRTH AT THE NHL AWARDS?????"

“OH MY GOD????”

“the poor man’s WATER BROKE MID SPEECH???”

“logan’s little HAND 😭😭😭”

“TEN YEARS??? secretly??? i’m actually emotional”

“this is the cutest baby i’ve ever seen”

“i hope they know how loved they are right now”

“the fact that they hid because hockey culture scared them makes me so sad”

“Shane saying ‘our son’ just healed me spiritually.”

Current players started commenting too.

“Proud of you both ❤️”

“Welcome to the dad club”

“Tell Logan his uncles are buying him skates immediately”

Then of course, came the hate comments. Not as many. But enough. Enough for Shane to take notice. They hurt in a way you could never explain to an outsider.

One account wrote:

“keep the politics out of hockey assholes”

Before either Shane or Ilya could even react, Hayden had already replied.

brother two men having a baby is not politics. hope this helps

Another wrote:

“this is unnatural”

Hayden answered:

“you spend 14 hours a day arguing about sports on twitter. let’s not discuss unnatural behaviour”

And when somebody commented:

“that poor kid”

Hayden responded:

“yeah imagine being raised by two millionaires who adore you. tragic”

Ilya burst out laughing so suddenly Logan startled awake in Shane's arms.

"Oh no, we're sorry baby," Shane whispered immediately.

Logan blinked sleepily up at him, confused and offended by consciousness itself.

Then his tiny face crumpled. A little squeaky newborn cry escaped him.

Both men reacted instantly.

"I got him," Shane said automatically, already rocking him against his chest.

"Hungry?"

"I don't think so, he's just startled."

Shane carefully adjusted Logan higher against his shoulder, kissing the side of his tiny head while murmuring soft nonsense under his breath until the crying quieted into little sniffling noises.

Ilya watched them with his chest aching. His family.

His actual family.

Then his own phone started ringing loudly on the coffee table. He glanced down absentmindedly before freezing.

Svetlana ❤️

"Oh no."

Shane looked up immediately. "What?"

"I forgot to tell Sveta about Logan."

Shane stared at him.

"You forgot to tell your best friend you had a baby?"

"In my defense—"

"There is no defense."

"I've been busy emotionally and physically!"

"No shit Sherlock! So have I , but I'm not the one who forgot to tell his best friend of his child's existence!"

Ilya groaned while the phone continued ringing insistently.

"She's going to murder me."

“Deserved honestly.”

The call ended before immediately starting all over again.

Shane laughed so hard he nearly woke Logan a second time. “You’re absolutely dead.”

“I hate you.”

“No you don’t.”

Unfortunately it was true.

Still smiling, Shane stood from the couch and carefully transferred Logan into Ilya’s arms. The baby fit so impossibly small against his chest, warm and sleepy and smelling faintly like baby lotion.

Logan immediately grabbed onto the collar of Ilya’s hoodie with surprising determination. Shane leaned down first to kiss Logan’s forehead. Then kissed Ilya softly too. “Good luck,” he whispered against his mouth. “I’m showering. Try not to get disowned.”

“Very funny.”

Shane grinned and disappeared upstairs.

Ilya took one steadying breath before answering the FaceTime.

Svetlana appeared instantly.

She looked furious.

“Ilyusha Rozanov—”

Then she saw Logan and any word of Russian profanity she had in store for him was lost in the wind. Her expression shattered completely. “Oh wow,” she whispered.

Ilya’s irritation vanished immediately.

Logan blinked up at the screen with enormous sleepy eyes, one tiny fist still tangled in Ilya’s hoodie string.

Svetlana looked seconds away from crying. “That,” she said emotionally in Russian, “is the most beautiful child I have ever seen.”

Ilya smiled helplessly. “His name is Logan.”

“Logan,” she repeated softly. “Ilya, he’s amazing.”

Logan yawned dramatically.

Svetlana clutched her chest. “I cannot believe you forgot to tell me you created an entire human being.”

“It was chaotic.”

“You vanished for weeks!”

“Shane literally gave birth unexpectedly at an awards show.”

“That somehow makes this worse!”

Ilya laughed quietly, rocking Logan gently when the baby started making sleepy little noises against his chest.

Svetlana’s expression softened more and more the longer she watched him hold the baby. “You look happy,” she said finally.

The words caught him off guard.

Because he did. Exhausted. Terrified and overwhelmed beyond comprehension. But happy in a way he had never experienced before. “I am,” he admitted softly.

Svetlana smiled sadly then. “Your mother would be so proud of you.”

The air left Ilya’s lungs. Instantly his eyes burned. He looked down at Logan tucked safely against him.

Tiny eyelashes.

Tiny fingers.

Tiny breaths puffing softly against his neck.

Emotion hit so hard it physically hurt. “She always wanted grandchildren,” he whispered.

“And now she has the most beautiful grandson imaginable.”

A tear slipped free before he could stop it.

Upstairs, Shane could be heard singing horribly off-key in the shower.

Svetlana laughed softly through tears of her own.

“Your mother would have loved him too,” she added gently. “Anyone who makes you sound this happy.”

Ilya smiled shakily.

Then Logan made a tiny squeaking noise in his sleep and pressed his little face deeper into Ilya’s chest. The Russian man moving the phone out of his way.

Svetlana gasped dramatically. “Oh absolutely not. Move that camera closer again, immediately. I need to inspect this baby properly.”

“Okay, okay..”

Logan’s first smile happened at sometime around three in the morning.

Which honestly felt unfair.

Shane had been awake for almost two hours already, pacing the living room with a fussy, overtired six-week-old tucked against his chest while Ilya slept upstairs after a brutal travel week.

The cottage was dark except for the soft kitchen light glowing over the sink.

“Buddy,” Shane whispered tiredly, bouncing him gently. “Please. Please sleep.”

Logan blinked up at him with enormous blue-gray eyes.

Then suddenly— He smiled.

Not gas.

Not reflex.

A real smile.

Tiny and crooked and impossibly bright.

Shane froze completely. “Oh my God.” Logan did it again and Shane nearly started crying on the spot. “Baby,” he whispered desperately, fumbling for his phone one-handed. “Baby keep smiling!.”

Upstairs, Ilya answered the FaceTime half-consciously.

“What? Is he okay?”

“He smiled.”

Silence.

“…what?”

“He smiled at me, Ilya!”

Ilya disappeared from the screen immediately.

Thirty seconds later he came sprinting downstairs in sweatpants looking genuinely panicked. “Make him do it again,” he demanded.

“I can’t control him!”

Logan stared at both of them. For a split second they believed he may actually understand. But then he sneezed directly into Shane's face.

Ilya laughed so hard he had to sit down on the floor.

"Yeah, yeah laugh it up! I'm the one who got his first smile!"

—

By four months old, Logan had discovered giggling.

Unfortunately for Shane, the thing Logan found funniest in the entire world was watching his father dramatically fake sneeze.

Every single time Shane went, "Ah-ah-ah-CHOO!" Logan absolutely lost his mind.

Tiny squeals.

Full body wiggles.

Hiccups from laughing too hard.

Ilya had nearly two hundred videos of it on his phone.

"You're encouraging him," Shane accused while Logan cackled in his lap.

"I'm documenting history."

"You're mocking me."

"Also true."

Logan grabbed Shane's nose with shocking violence.

"OW! What are you doing tiny dictator?! That hurts daddy!"

Logan shrieked happily.

"He is very boisterous." Ilya commented calmly.

"Oh yeah, I wonder who he gets that from huh?" Shane snickered sarcastically.

"Your father."

—

His first word happened during Sunday breakfast at Yuna and David's house.

Everyone had gathered around the kitchen island whilst Logan sat in his highchair violently destroying a banana with both hands.

David sat beside him pretending to read the newspaper while secretly feeding Logan tiny pieces of toast every few seconds.

“I can see you doing that,” Yuna informed him.

“He likes me better.”

“You’re teaching him bad habits.”

“I’m teaching him joy.”

Logan squealed happily and slammed both sticky hands against the tray.

Yuna shook her head fondly. “He has Ilya’s curls. They’re getting thicker and thicker as the months go by.”

“I know,” Shane groaned from across the kitchen. “He’s his twin! I don’t see how that’s very fair. I’m the one who pushed him out of me.”

“Hmm, well, he got your cheek freckles.”

“I know.”

“And your dramatic personality.”

“That one’s genetic trauma.”

David snorted into his coffee.

Then suddenly Logan looked directly at Yuna and yelled proudly, “NANA!”

The room froze.

Yuna gasped so loudly Logan startled himself. Then he grinned. “Nana!”

Yuna burst into tears instantly.

“Oh my God.”

David immediately started laughing while reaching for his phone.

“No no no, say it again,” Yuna begged emotionally.

Logan happily smashed more banana between his fingers. “Nana!”

That completely destroyed her.

“My grandson loves me,” she cried dramatically.

“He also threw mashed sweet potato at your face earlier,” Shane reminded her.

“That was affection.”

David looked at Logan proudly. “Smart kid. First word wasn’t even dada.”

“Traitor,” Shane accused his own child.

Logan responded by throwing banana at him.

“Are we sure he is saying Nana for Yuna?” Ilya frowned. “He is eating banana… nana might be…”

“Don’t ruin it!”

—

At seven months old Logan learned to crawl.

Which ultimately ruined everyone’s lives.

One second he was stationary. The next he moved with terrifying speed and absolutely no survival instincts whatsoever.

“WHY IS HE SO DAMN FAST?” Shane yelled one afternoon while sprinting across the living room.

Logan shrieked delightedly as he escaped toward the fireplace.

Ilya intercepted him at the last second, scooping him up upside down while Logan giggled hysterically.

“You’re raising a menace,” Ilya informed Shane.

“He’s literally your clone.”

“That’s slander.”

Logan reached down from Ilya’s arms and grabbed Shane’s hair triumphantly.

“See?” Shane said. “Violence. That is all you Rozanov.”

“Hmm I don’t know, you can be very feisty too Hollander.” Ilya winked, walking away from his flustered boyfriend.

“Such an asshole!”

—

At nine months old, Logan learned to stand on his own.

It happened accidentally, they were all gathered in the living room whilst Shane sat building blocks with him on the rug.

Logan pulled himself upright using the edge of the couch, wobbling dangerously while both of his fathers froze in fear.

“Oh my God,” Shane whispered.

Logan stood there proudly, tiny hands gripping the cushions while his curls bounced wildly around his face.

Then slowly and carefully.

He let go.

Both Shane and Ilya gasped simultaneously.

For three whole seconds Logan stood completely on his own, looking unbelievably pleased with himself. Then he dramatically sat down with a thump and started clapping.

Shane actually put a hand over his heart. “No. Absolutely not. You can not be growing up on us!”

Ilya was already grabbing his phone. “Did you see that? Did you SEE that?”

“He’s getting too big,” Shane said emotionally, scooping Logan into his arms immediately.

Logan squealed proudly and smacked both hands against Shane’s cheeks.

“I know, buddy,” Shane whispered, kissing his forehead. “You’re very impressive.”

—

At eleven months old, hockey broke Shane’s heart in a way the man never knew could happen. It was a heartache like no other.

The trade news had hit the press early in the morning.

Montreal was swapping him out.

Rumors had existed for weeks, but seeing it confirmed still felt like someone had kicked the air from his lungs. The backlash online was worse.

Fans were furious. Analysts dissected him publicly. Some blamed his personal life. Some blamed the team. Some blamed both. It was a whirlwind of mixed opinions and emotions.

Shane sat at the kitchen table staring blankly at his phone while article after article refreshed across the screen.

Ilya quietly took the device from his hands. “Is enough now Shane.”

Shane rubbed at his face tiredly. “I gave everything to that team.”

“I know.”

“They hate me now.”

“No,” Ilya said firmly. “They are pathetic little boys who cannot make own opinions so they listen to some loud people online who are angry. That is not the same thing as hate.”

Still, Shane looked devastated.

Then tiny socked feet banged against the hardwood floor.

Both men looked up.

Logan had shuffled his way into the kitchen clutching one of his stuffed dinosaurs against his chest.

He immediately noticed Shane’s expression.

And without hesitation, he moved directly over to him and pulled himself up to hold onto Shane’s thighs. “Dada,” he said softly.

Shane visibly cracked.

Logan climbed clumsily into his lap and pressed both tiny hands against Shane’s cheeks. Then he gently leaned forward and gave him the sloppiest baby kiss imaginable.

Right on the mouth.

Ilya nearly started crying on sight.

Shane laughed shakily, eyes glassy. “That was nice of you baby boy,” he whispered.

Logan cuddled into his chest afterward like it was the most natural thing in the world. Tiny arms wrapped around Shane’s neck. Stuffed dinosaur squished between them.

And somehow that hurt even more, in the best possible way.

“You are okay?,” Ilya murmured quietly.

Shane nodded against Logan’s curls.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “I think I am.”

—

The night before Logan’s first birthday, Shane sat on the bathroom counter trying unsuccessfully to tame their son’s curls.

“Stay still,” he pleaded.

Logan absolutely refused. His dark blonde curls bounced wildly in every direction no matter what Shane did.

“He looks like you after game overtime ,” Ilya commented from the doorway.

“Not helpful.”

Logan grinned at his reflection while Shane tried to smooth down one stubborn curl with water. It sprang back almost instantly.

Shane stared at it in betrayal. “You’re doing this on purpose.”

Logan slapped his wet hand directly against Shane’s cheek.

Ilya burst out laughing.

“Oh. He is most definitely my child I fear, Hollander.”

“Why are both of you teamed against me constantly huh? It doesn’t feel very fair!”

Logan leaned forward suddenly and rested his forehead against Shane’s.

The fight left Shane instantly. “There he is,” he whispered softly. “There’s my tiny boy.”

Ilya watched them quietly from the doorway.

A year ago they had been two twenty nine year olds terrified their entire lives were falling apart.

But instead, somehow they ended up here.

Together. Still standing. Still in love.

With this loud, beautiful, impossible little boy.

The next morning, exactly one whole hour before officially turning one, Logan walked properly for the first time.

No wobbling.

No crashing after one step.

Real walking.

It happened in the living room while sunlight poured through the windows.

Shane sat cross-legged on the rug holding out his hands while Ilya steadied Logan near the couch.

“Ready?” Ilya asked softly.

Logan grinned. Then he marched straight across the room.

Five steps. Six. Seven.

Straight into Shane's arms.

Shane caught him with a startled laugh before immediately tearing up. "No no no," he whispered emotionally. "There is no way you're walking buddy! Oh my- holy- you did so good!"

Ilya was already crying too.

Logan looked between them in confusion before clapping proudly for himself. That somehow made it worse.

Shane buried his face against Logan's curls while laughing through tears. "He's getting so big."

"I know."

For a while neither of them spoke.

The room glowed warm around them, Logan happily babbling between them while trying to chew on Shane's hoodie strings.

Finally Shane looked up at Ilya. "Can you believe we survived this past year in one piece?"

Ilya took a moment to think about everything.

From the fear and secrecy. To the confessions of love. The impossible pregnancy. The birth. The media storm. The trades. The sleepless nights.

The terrifying overwhelming love of becoming parents.

Then he looked at Shane sitting on the floor holding their son like he was the center of the universe.

And maybe he was.

"Da.. I always knew we would survive all of it," Ilya said softly.

Shane smiled then.

Not the polished public smile from interviews or magazine shoots.

The real one.

The one that belonged only to them.

Logan reached for both of their hands at once with a delighted squeal.

And sitting there together in the sunlight, with curls impossible to tame, toys scattered everywhere, and their son laughing between them, everything finally felt safe.

Home had never been the cottage, or the city, or the team they played for.

Home was the sound of Logan laughing in the next room.

It was the moments of Shane reaching for Ilya's hand without hesitation.

It was surviving every impossible thing they thought would break them.

Because in the end, Shane had learnt that anxiety was a powerful feeling, but it was never more powerful than the life they had managed to build together.

Love was precious. Even if it didn't arrive on schedule, it would always win you over in the end.

End Notes

Don’t forget to comment! I love hearing all of your thoughts and feelings <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!