

Progress Not Perfection

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Progress Not Perfection

by [PeaceLilies](#)

Summary

Shane's anxiety has been getting worse. He has no idea why but it's impacting his game and that's a problem.

Notes

Happiest of birthdays, bubbleomatic!!! I hope you enjoy this fic and have an absolutely wonderful birthday!! You're amazing! 🥳🥳

Huge shout out to sileycrunch for the beta read!! You're the best!! 💖💖

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

December - Ottawa

It had started with a change in line combinations.

It wasn't anything that Shane hadn't experienced before. Coaches would mix lines up sometimes, just to see how things would go if the team needed a shake up. New players onboarding from trades or just rookies new to the League needing adjustment time and it was useful to see how people clicked.

Shane hadn't thought anything of the change at first. It was normal, especially during a practice, until he was placed on the third line, playing between Tanner Dillon and Colton Young, both players who were steadily on the third and fourth lines.

This wasn't usually something that bothered Shane. Coaches had so many reasons for changing combinations and just because Shane was playing with a lower line, didn't mean anything about him and his capabilities.

But for some reason it was *really* getting to him.

There were a lot of things that had been getting to him lately.

He felt so much more self-conscious about his play, about what sports media was saying about him, about his place on the team. He was second guessing himself in ways he never had before, hyperfocusing on mistakes he was making.

His sleep had been horrible, too.

He found his mind racing, keeping him awake, and by extension, his play had begun to suffer.

It was ridiculous.

Shane had no idea why this was going on.

He'd always been obsessive about his game. Hockey was his whole life and he was one of the best at it. His skills had always been unquestioned.

It wasn't that he'd never had a bad season before. There had been injuries and he'd certainly made his fair share of mistakes, but things felt so much more glaring now.

And people were *commenting* on it.

Mostly the media. His mom, a little bit, which always made him feel worse.

His mom was his biggest cheerleader but she could sometimes be one of his harshest critics.

Shane knew that Ilya had noticed that something was going on.

He'd found Shane in the living room or their now shared trophy room, looking at video at 2am. He'd eventually coax Shane back to bed but that didn't always turn Shane's mind off.

He was exhausted and irritated, which made him short-tempered and sloppy.

"You alright, Hollander?" Wiebe asked quietly as Shane stood at the end of the drill line, bent over, leaning on his stick.

Shane shook his head. "I don't know."

He stood, looking at his coach. Brandon Wiebe was handsome. He was younger than any other coach Shane had ever had and his approach was gentler, too. He was considerate, kind, but observant and smart.

He didn't let anyone get away with anything and he would correct you if needed, but he had a sense of humor, willing to work with you, rather than punish you.

Shane wasn't surprised that he was checking in, that was just what he did, but it made Shane feel self-conscious. He flushed with embarrassment, cheeks going hot. He didn't need this kind of extra attention. He was a veteran player. One of the best. He should be able to shake whatever the fuck this was.

"Everything okay at home? Your parents? Everyone's good?"

"Yeah," Shane replied, stomach knotting. "Everything's great. I don't know why..."

He shook his head in frustration.

He was telling the truth. Things between him and Ilya were fine. They weren't fighting or anything, though Shane knew that he was certainly being bitchier as of late, and Ilya was being immeasurably patient with him. Probably more than he deserved, honestly. His parents were doing fine, no issues there.

Wiebe nodded.

"I think you're over complicating things," Wiebe offered. "You know this stuff, it's second nature to you. Just do what you do. You got it. Relax."

Shane nodded.

Right. Relax.

He didn't think he knew what that felt like any more.

After practice, Shane was one of the first in the shower. He didn't want to talk to anyone, really. His shoulders were bothering him so he was going to spend some time with Rick, one of their trainers, and maybe the discomfort would keep his mind off of why the hell he couldn't connect on passes or hit the fucking net.

They had a game against Boston in two days and they couldn't really afford to fuck anything up.

It wasn't that the Centaurs were doing poorly. In fact, they were doing very well. Ilya was on a point streak, Troy was on fire defensively, and Luca was really hitting his stride in his third season as a Cen.

It seemed that Shane was the only one who was really struggling and it was starting to get to him. Everyone else was doing so well... why couldn't he keep up?

"Alright," Rick said. "What seems to be going on today?"

"My shoulders are super tight," Shane explained. "I can feel it all in my neck, too."

Rick nodded. "Okay. Let's try some things out and see what works."

Sports massages were never comfortable. Shane was pretty used to how brutal they could be but Rick was really working him over on this one.

"You stressed, Holly?" Rick asked, digging into a particularly large and painful knot in Shane's upper back.

"Why do you ask?" Shane gritted out.

Rick laughed. "I hate to tell ya, but your upper back is a mess. You must hold a lot of tension here."

"Yeah," Shane breathed. "Probably."

Rick gave him some suggestions of things he could try, mostly stretching and some icy-hot patches. Shane figured he could probably ask Ilya to squeeze the hell out of his shoulders, too, that might help.

Once Shane was done, he found his husband waiting for him in the dining room at the practice facility. He'd grabbed food of some kind for Shane, all wrapped up nice and neat in tinfoil.

For some reason, this gesture made Shane's eyes prickle with tears.

"Hi," Ilya said, standing from his seat as Shane approached. Shane walked right into him, his forehead pressed to Ilya's chest.

"Hey..."

Ilya dipped his head, kissing into Shane's hair.

"Everything okay?" he murmured.

Shane let out a long sigh. "Yeah. I wanna go home."

Ilya hummed and kissed him again, then patted Shane's back. "Then let's go home."

Shane nodded and leaned away, looking up into Ilya's beautiful face. Ilya smiled at him, picking up Shane's plate of food, then his backpack, before sliding an arm around Shane's shoulders.

Shane leaned into him as they walked to the elevator to get back to the Mercedes.

"What did you get me?" he asked softly.

"The biscuits you like," Ilya explained.

That made Shane smile a little.

The ride home was quiet and Shane rested his head against the window, staring unseeing out at the familiar scenery as Ilya drove.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Ilya asked.

"Not really."

"Might be good."

"I'm okay, thanks."

"Okay."

Shane closed his eyes, arms crossed over his chest, held tight against his body. He knew that he should maybe talk about what was going on. Especially with Ilya. But he didn't want to. This was his thing to fix and he didn't need to get Ilya all wrapped up in it, too.

They were better about talking things through as a couple. It's you and me versus the problem. That kind of stuff. But it was different when it was whatever was going on in Shane's head.

He just didn't understand why this was happening. He didn't know why he couldn't turn his brain off or how to stop fixating on everything. Why was so much getting under his skin?

But he also felt like he *couldn't* stop.

Like if he stopped hyperfixating on his mistakes, he would keep making them. Or that if he wasn't hard on himself, his skills would just further deteriorate.

It didn't make sense, not logically, but emotionally, that was a totally different story.

Shane was used to being, well, perfect.

And right now he wasn't. Which meant that he was failing.

He'd never tolerated failure well but he'd always been able to bounce back. Now, however, he just... wasn't.

He needed to know why that was.

And it seemed that, in his mind, if he kept thinking about it, eventually he would uncover the reason.

Shane was pulled from his thoughts as Ilya rested a gentle hand on his arm. Shane opened his eyes and looked at his husband. They were home.

Ilya was looking at him in that assessing way he sometimes had; as if he was able to read Shane's mind.

"What?" Shane asked, a bit too testily for his liking.

"Let's make dinner together tonight," Ilya replied, apparently unbothered by Shane's tone.

Shane felt himself deflate and he offered Ilya a small, apologetic smile. "Yeah. I'd like that."

Ilya nodded and smiled back. "Me, too."

They went into the house, greeted excitedly by Anya. They let her outside into the backyard to run for a bit and use the bathroom, before coming back inside so they could feed her, and then start on dinner for themselves.

Shane always loved cooking with Ilya. It was nice to work on something together like this and they made a good team, working in tandem. They had gotten pretty good at cooking, too, and Shane had enjoyed hosting Troy and Harris and Bood and Cassie for dinners.

Anya ate her dinner while her dads pulled out ingredients for a honey glazed chicken and broccoli recipe with brown rice, and the biscuits Ilya had brought back.

Things were fine, at first.

Ilya put on some music, a series of songs that Shane was only familiar with because Ilya had been listening to them on repeat. One of the artists had released a new album, apparently, so there were a bunch of those songs, interspersed with some Russian artists.

They moved around each other in the kitchen like a well-oiled machine, mostly quiet, which was unusual, since Ilya was almost always talking.

They'd been practicing a lot more Russian since moving in together, sometimes speaking in nothing but Russian when they were home. Shane was improving and he appreciated when Ilya told him how much better he had gotten.

Shane did feel more relaxed when Ilya took his hands and danced with him around the kitchen while the broccoli and chicken sat in the oven, baking.

He laughed and felt warmed and comforted by Ilya being his silly self.

Shane gathered plates and utensils while Ilya placed the hot trays on the stovetop when everything had finished cooking.

Shane added food to the plates and Ilya kissed the side of his head, making him smile.

"Smells good," he said, one hand resting on Shane's back.

"It does. Hope it came out okay..."

"Will be delicious. We made it."

Shane smiled and leaned his head on Ilya's shoulder for a second. "True."

Shane felt a little better after eating and actually chatting with Ilya about non-hockey things. The holidays were coming up and they had plans to host a Christmas party for the team and then spend Christmas Eve with Shane's parents. Christmas Day they would have together, just the two of them, and Anya.

They packed away leftovers and loaded the dishwasher when Ilya broached the subject Shane *always* dreaded.

He came up behind Shane, wrapping his arms around him, face tucked against Shane's neck. His thick stubble tickled Shane's skin, his breath warm, lips soft as he pressed a lingering kiss to the spot where Shane's neck met his shoulder.

"Today was tough for you." Ilya's voice was soft, tender, and Shane closed his eyes for a moment, resting one hand on top of Ilya's.

"Yeah."

"What is going on?" Ilya rested his chin on Shane's shoulder and Shane opened his eyes, looking at their reflections in the window across from the sink.

"I don't know," Shane replied honestly. "I just... I can't stop my thoughts from spiraling. Overthinking. Getting in my own head."

Ilya nodded a little, quiet, turning his head down to kiss the top of Shane's shoulder.

"You put a lot of pressure on yourself..."

"Well, yeah. I mean... that's the whole point, isn't it? I have to be good. That's why I'm here, right? To be the best."

"You *are* the best."

Shane shook his head.

"I don't feel like it. I feel like the worst. I've been playing like absolute shit."

"You are not shit."

Shane huffed.

Ilya went quiet and pressed another kiss to Shane's shoulder.

"Maybe talking to someone will help," he suggested. "A sports psychologist? Is a little different than what I do with Galina but their job is to help with this stuff, like, performance things for athletes..."

Shane bristled in Ilya's arms.

There was no problem with therapy, Shane knew that. Ilya had been in therapy for a few years now and Shane saw how much it helped him, how far he had come because of it. Shane was proud of him and happy for him.

Shane just felt like his problems were so much smaller. He should be able to manage them on his own. He shouldn't need professional help...

Every time Ilya brought it up, it made Shane feel worse. Like he was judging him, telling him he wasn't capable. Shane knew, logically, that wasn't true, but he couldn't help feeling irritated.

He stepped out of Ilya's arms and Ilya let him go. Shane glanced over his shoulder at Ilya, frustrated at his suggestion, and the way his chest got tight, stomach clenching.

"I don't need someone to tell me I'm being dumb."

"Shane."

Shane shook his head. "I don't want to talk about this."

He turned, not bothering with a second glance, and went to the stairs and up to his and Ilya's bedroom, closing the door behind him.

He made a frustrated noise, pacing around their room, needing to release all the pent up energy he was holding.

Fuck.

It must be really, really bad if Ilya was suggesting that Shane see someone about this.

They'd talked about it before but Ilya bringing it up again... it was like it just hammered home how badly Shane was doing. How much he was fucking up.

He needed to fix it. He needed to figure out what the hell he needed to make happen for all of this to just... go away.

He wanted to feel comfortable on the ice. He wanted to feel comfortable in his skin again. He wanted to feel comfortable with his husband.

Shane felt like he was dropping all of the balls he'd been so delicately managing to juggle.

You're so fucking weak, Hollander. Pathetic. Can't even get your shit together. What is wrong with you?

Shane lay on his and Ilya's bed, curling up in a little ball, tears stinging his eyes.

There had to be a solution.

He'd find it.

And it would all be fine.

It would be.

It *had* to be.

Shane wasn't sure he stayed like that, eventually getting up to blow his nose, and wash his face.

He was coming out of the bathroom when there was a gentle knock on the door.

"Shane?"

Shane sagged, his irritation dissolving as he walked over to the door, and opened it.

"Oh sweetheart," Ilya murmured, and Shane fell into his arms.

"I'm sorry," Shane sighed, tucking his face against Ilya's neck. "I shouldn't have gotten upset."

"Is okay," Ilya replied, strong arms wrapping around Shane, holding him close. "I would never make you do anything you do not want..."

"I know."

"I just worry."

Shane nodded. "I know. I'm sorry. I'm working on it."

"Let me help. I cannot do anything if you do not tell me what is wrong."

He nodded again and Ilya kissed into his hair.

"I love you."

"I love you, too. And I'm sorry."

Ilya squeezed him. "Come on. We can watch more videos of that pet groomer you like. Will be a good distraction."

Shane leaned back to smile softly at Ilya. "But you hate her."

Ilya shrugged. "She is fine. The animals are cute."

Shane chuckled softly and Ilya kissed his mouth, then his cheek.

"Come."

Shane let Ilya take his hand and lead him back into their bedroom and into bed, feeling a little better knowing that at least *they* were okay.



Two Days Later...

Shane had never been this anxious for a game since Juniors.

It had been years since he'd had sweaty palms and heart palpitations and an uneasy stomach.

He managed to keep it together, though he'd fucked up a few things during the game, and he'd spent his time on the bench beating himself up about it, waiting for one of the coaches to ask him what the hell he was thinking.

By the time the third rolled around, he was frustrated. The game was tied, time ticking down, and with three seconds left on the clock, Boston managed to sneak one past Hazy to score.

"Fuck!" Shane yelled, slamming his stick against the net, sending one half flying onto the ice.

"Hollander."

Shane looked up at the sound of Ilya using his Captain's voice. Normally that voice would turn Shane on but hearing it now made his cheeks heat with shame and embarrassment.

"Easy," Ilya continued and motioned toward the bench.

Shane grabbed the other half of his stick and skated after Ilya, going hastily down the tunnel. He tossed off his gear as soon as he was in his stall, swearing again, and sat down, leaning his elbows on his knees, hands in his hair.

How could you be so fucking stupid?

That was an avoidable goal.

If you'd been just a little faster. You weren't even in the right position where you should have been.

You could have stopped that fucking puck!

Blood was rushing in his ears. He didn't even hear what anyone was saying or talking about. He'd managed to take off his skates and his pants, leaving him in his compression gear as he slid into shoes and left the dressing room.

Shane walked down the hall, unseeing, past staff and crew, to the workout room.

He got on a stationary bike and just started pedaling.

You're a fucking idiot.

What good are you to this fucking team if you can't perform? Can't produce?

Piece of shit.

Shane rode the bike hard until his quads were screaming and he was laying on the floor, unable to catch his breath. His heart felt like it was going to hammer out of his chest. He felt queasy. Shakey.

Was he having a fucking heart attack? Was he going to die?

He *felt* like he was dying, like something terrible was happening, or going to happen.

He rolled over onto all fours, leaning back on his feet, breathing hard.

"Shane."

Shane felt hands grip his shoulders and he looked up into Ilya's worried eyes.

"I can't breathe."

Ilya's eyes searched Shane's face, his hands squeezing Shane's upper arms, a surprisingly grounding sensation.

"Take a breath, Hollander."

Shane squeezed his eyes shut. "I can't— Ilya—"

"You are having a panic attack."

Shane's brows furrowed.

Of course. That's what this was. Panic.

He was panicking.

"Fuck."

He leaned forward, forehead on Ilya's shoulder, and tried to breathe through his nose and out his mouth. He tried to summon all of the years of yoga he had been doing, remembering his breath.

Ilya's cheek rested against his head, his hand smoothing up and down Shane's spine.

"Just breathe, sweetheart."

Shane shook, his whole body drenched in sweat. He was horribly nauseous. He could hear Ilya talking, someone else was here, but Shane couldn't focus on anything. He felt disoriented. Disconnected.

"Here. Sit," Ilya said and Shane sat, legs up, knees bent, head between them.

"Drink this."

Shane accepted the Gatorade that was passed to him and sipped from it.

It was just him and Ilya again, in the training room. Ilya was in his compression gear, too, his curls sticking to his forehead from sweat.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

Shane swallowed. His hands were clammy and they shook.

"No," he replied, shaking his head. "I'm not."

Ilya's expression softened, dark brows furrowing with concern. Shane's eyes welled.

"I think you're right," he whispered. "I need to talk to someone..."

Ilya didn't say anything. He just gathered Shane up and held him as he cried.

When Shane was finished, Ilya wiped his cheeks gently with his thumb, and kissed his forehead.

"Come on. We need to go home."

Shane nodded, letting Ilya help him up, both of them heading back to the dressing room.

No one was really around besides Coach, Troy, and Bood.

"You didn't need to stay," Ilya said to the alternate captains.

"We wanted to," Bood replied. "Everything okay?"

"Now it is."

"I'm so sorry, guys," Shane chimed in. "I'm not normally like this, I just—"

"It's okay." Troy had stood from his stall, dressed in sweats. "We were just worried about you. Wanna make sure you're okay, y'know?"

Shane offered a wobbly smile and nodded. He didn't feel like he deserved the kindness.

"Thanks, Barrett."

"Anytime, man. Take care of yourself, okay?"

Troy held out a fist and Shane fist bumped him.

"Everybody deserves looking after, Holly. Even you," Bood added, resting a hand on his shoulder and giving a reassuring squeeze.

Shane swallowed and nodded, trying to prevent himself from completely falling apart again.

"Let me know if you need anything, Roz," Bood said.

"Just text," said Troy.

Ilya nodded his head once and fist bumped their two teammates, before they left the room.

Wiebe smiled, hands in the pockets of his suit pants.

"All the guys care about you a lot, Hollander," he said. "You're an integral part of this team and we're damn lucky to have you. Everyone goes through rough patches. I'd rather you focus on feeling your best than anything else."

Shane nodded. "Yeah. Thanks, Coach."

Wiebe smiled. "You're good. Everything's good. Day off tomorrow. Decompress. And you let us know what you need, okay?"

"Okay."

Wiebe patted Shane's upper arm before he turned to Ilya.

"You good, Captain?"

"Yes. Thank you," Ilya replied. Wiebe gave him a pat, too.

"Take care of each other, boys. We need ya."

Once they were alone, Ilya hustled Shane into the showers so they could clean up before the facilities shut down.

They got dressed and went out to the car. They'd taken the Jeep and Ilya drove them home.

"I can help you find someone," he said later when they were curled up in bed together.

Shane nodded, buried in Ilya's chest, under their comforter. He wanted to disappear into Ilya and never come out.

He wished it had never gotten to this point. He wished he had been able to be better. To just... *handle his shit*.

But he'd take this 'L', especially if it meant being better for Ilya, for the team, for himself.

"Hey."

Shane lifted his head, peeking out at Ilya from under the comforter, feeling sad and pathetic.

Ilya chuckled fondly, reaching up to brush his thumb over Shane's cheek.

"I love you, moy lyubimyy."

"I love you, too."

Ilya kissed him gently. "Get some sleep."

Shane nodded, turning his head down to shove his face back into Ilya's chest, feeling his husband laugh, his arms holding Shane a little tighter.

Shane closed his eyes.

He'd get a fresh start tomorrow.



Two weeks later...

Shane bounced his leg as he sat in the small waiting room outside of the door that, according to the plaque on it, belonged to his new therapist.

He and Ilya had spent some time looking for someone who Shane thought would be a good fit. He'd decided to see a regular psychologist, not a sports one, because he was pretty sure, after some introspection, that his anxiety had been with him beyond just hockey.

Hockey had probably exasperated it but it had been there for pretty much his entire life.

Plus, he wanted a therapist who was also queer, or at least supported queer people.

Dr. Robert Jensen seemed to fit the bill.

He was gay, a former collegiate athlete, and had experience working with athletes, though not specifically in sports psych.

Shane had had a consultation with him and he seemed nice and knowledgeable and like he wouldn't make the fact that Shane was, well, *Shane Hollander*, a big deal.

Shane checked his watch and looked up as the office door opened.

Dr. Jensen peeked out.

He was in his forties, tall, with light brown hair, brown eyes, and glasses. He spotted Shane and smiled. He had a kind face.

"Come on in," he said.

Shane nodded and stood, heading into the office.

It was a small but tastefully appointed room with windows, the blinds drawn, a comfortable looking loveseat and an armchair across from it.

"Hi, Shane. I'm Rob."

Rob held out his hand and Shane shook it, smiling.

"Hi. Nice to meet you."

"Feel free to take a seat."

Shane sat on the loveseat, his jacket in his lap, and Rob sat across from him in the armchair, a notepad in his lap.

"So, I know when we had our consult we talked about that this is your first time in therapy and you were looking to talk about your anxiety."

"Yes. That's correct."

"Okay. Great. I'm going to ask some questions to kind of get to know you and your concerns better and then we can talk about any questions or concerns you have. Sound okay?"

"Yeah. Sounds great."

"Perfect."

For the next hour or so, Shane talked about himself. His upbringing, his experiences in hockey, his struggles with being gay, his relationship with Ilya, and where he was now, including the good and the bad.

It was surprisingly hard to talk about being gay. Shane kept stopping and starting. He'd mostly come to terms with his sexuality but maybe there was more there, too.

"Ilya is great," Shane said, his cheeks heating. "I love him and I love being with him. Our life is pretty wild and amazing. I'm really happy where we are. But I just thought... when we come out, I'd feel better. I thought all of my anxiety was about our relationship and keeping it a secret, which it was, for a long time, but it's more than that. A lot more, I think. And I just didn't realize..."

"That certainly makes sense," Rob replied, looking at Shane with understanding. "That's a huge secret to have to hide. I'm sure it took up a ton of brain space and now that all that space is freed up, all the other stuff that got pushed to the side is coming forward. It can be overwhelming."

Shane nodded. "It is."

"It'll probably help to talk about anxiety and how anxiety works, the different ways it can impact us, and how to cope with it."

"I think that would be really helpful."

Rob smiled. "That's what I'm here for."

By the end of the session Shane was feeling hopeful but exhausted.

He kind of wished he'd been given more tools right off the bat but he supposed that that wasn't realistic. They were called coping skills for a reason and he'd only just met Rob. It was

like working with a new coach, you had to learn each other first before you could start talking about skills, and then you had to train.

Shane knew this was going to be tough. He worried a bit about what would happen if he wasn't feeling all of this pressure and stress.

If he wasn't pushing himself, would he succeed?

Sometimes it felt like the only way to keep the momentum going was because he was anxious. Fearful.

But he supposed it wasn't healthy to live your life in a constant state of fear.

Shane didn't know what would work or what wouldn't but he knew he needed to do something. The only way to find out what worked was to actually do it and see what happened.

By the time he got home, all he wanted was for Ilya to hug him, and to take a nap.

Shane was greeted by Anya as soon as he stepped through the door and leaned down to give her some pets and let her smell him.

"Where's Papa?" he asked her, as she waited for him to hang up his coat and put his shoes away.

Shane followed Anya into the living room where Ilya was on the couch, reading. Shane smiled, coming around the couch, and then onto it, right on top of his husband.

"Rude," Ilya grumbled, having to move the book out of the way to accommodate the fact that Shane was using him as a mattress.

"Hi to you, too," Shane sighed, kissing Ilya's scruffy chin.

Ilya smiled, bookmarking his page, and placed the book down, wrapping his arms around Shane and kissing him in greeting.

"How did it go?" he asked softly.

"It was okay." Shane sighed. "We'll have to see how things progress, I guess, but I like him. He seems great."

"Good." Ilya kissed Shane's nose. "I believe in you."

Shane smiled, resting his head on Ilya's chest. "Thanks. Someone has to."

"Mm. I can believe enough for both of us. Don't worry."

Ilya kissed Shane's forehead and Shane closed his eyes, snuggling against Ilya.

"Thank you for all of this. I'm sorry I've been a mess."

"No problem. And do not be sorry. Nothing to be sorry for. I'm your husband, yes? This is the deal."

Shane huffed a soft laugh. "I guess you're right."

"I'm always right."

"Fuck off."

Ilya chuckled, pressing a kiss into Shane's hair.

"You love me," he sang.

Shane sighed, smiling a little. "I do."

Ilya hummed, smoothing his hand up and down Shane's back. Shane closed his eyes, letting his body go lax.

"I'm gonna fall asleep on you."

Ilya laughed. "Is okay. Sleep."

Shane sighed, grateful for Ilya's patience and understanding. He didn't think there were words enough to express how thankful he was for all the support. He knew he hadn't been easy to live with for the past few months but Ilya had always been better at rolling with the punches.

"Stop thinking," Ilya hummed. "Sleep."

Shane huffed a laugh. "Okay, okay."

Ilya kissed the top of his head again and Shane settled.

He'd done hard things before and he could do them again and it helped to know that he wasn't alone.



March

"Let's fucking go, baby!" Bood hollered, his body colliding hard with Shane's against the boards as they celebrated.

Shane smiled, laughing as Luca, Nick Chouinard, and Evan Dykstra joined them, congratulating him.

Shane couldn't stop smiling as he went down the bench to high five his teammates, watching as the ice crews came out to gather all of the hats that had been tossed onto the ice for his hat trick.

His second in under a week.

Shane knew that he was on fire. The weird slump he'd been in at the first half of the season had all but disappeared and he'd hit his stride.

Two hat tricks, third most points on the team behind Ilya and Troy, but he was gaining momentum.

"Show off," Ilya said beside him on the bench, bumping up against him.

"Shut up, Rozanov," Shane shot back, squirting Gatorade into his mouth. "You're just jealous that you've only gotten one hat trick this season."

Shane turned his eyes to look at his husband, who shrugged.

"I still have more points than you."

Shane wrinkled his nose and bumped Ilya back, hard, making him laugh.

It was a great game.

Shane felt good and comfortable on the ice. He was clicking with his line and being on the power play with Ilya felt amazing.

Things were so much better than they had been the first half of the season and he was relieved.

In all honesty, Shane was feeling better than he had in years. It wasn't all perfect. He still had anxious days and things still bothered him but he was much better at managing them than he'd ever been before.

He hadn't had any more panic attacks and he was better at talking things out with Ilya, asking for help or support.

It was wild how much he had learned about himself during his time in therapy; how much pressure he had been under, how he had learned to manage and navigate his mom's anxiety as a child, internalizing it.

He wasn't angry at his mom for that. It had been hard for his parents to have kids. He was their miracle baby. They loved him and he had never once doubted that. But Mom had been, well, a bit of a helicopter parent.

She'd worried constantly and so Shane had taken that on.

If he was perfect, never making any mistakes or doing anything wrong, then she wouldn't be afraid.

Not to mention the pressure of representation as an Asian-Canadian in hockey. Being gay. It was a lot. He was under a lot of scrutiny and there was judgment, especially if he wasn't "squeaky clean and perfect."

He was getting better at understanding and internalizing that what other people thought didn't matter. He would be judged and critiqued because he was in the public eye but what mattered was what the people closest to him saw, what his team saw.

Shane was a hard worker. He loved his people and his team. He worried because that was just in his nature but he was coping with it.

Relieving that pressure, knowing that he didn't have to make the whole world happy, helped a lot. He still had work to do but working with Rob over the last few months had been a game changer, quite literally.

Shane's mind was clearer, he could focus better, and he was, overall, happier.

Ilya had seen the difference, too, and Shane was glad. Their relationship was better off, now that they were both properly taking care of themselves. Shane was less preoccupied with his own thoughts, paying more attention and being more present with Ilya at home. They joked and laughed and flirted.

It was nice. More balanced. Comfortable again.

At the end of the game, they all got on the ice to give Hazy some love, before heading off back to the locker room. Ilya stood by the bench, fist bumping each teammate, and telling them he loved them and that they had done a good job.

"I love you. I love you. Good job..."

When it was Shane's turn, he beamed up at Ilya, who winked at him, gave him a fist bump and said, as he always did, "I love you most."

Dykstra, who was behind Shane, groaned.

"C'mon, Roz! Stop playing favorites!" he complained and Shane laughed as he hustled down the tunnel to the dressing room.

Shane talked to the media, answering questions about his hat trick, and how the team had played as a whole. He'd been open about going to therapy and how much it had helped him, making sure to give the work he'd been doing there and his team's support credit for his current successes.

After the media chat and taking pictures for social media, it was finally time to dress down.

Shane showered and changed back into his suit, waiting for Ilya to finish changing so they could leave.

He said goodnight to the boys, laughing as they teased him for "hogging all of Roz's love," and getting his hat trick.

Shane sat in his stall, feeling happy, and pleased.

"What are you smiling about?" Ilya asked when he came out of the shower.

Shane stretched out his legs, leaning back in his stall, watching Ilya as he got changed.

"Nothing."

He watched Ilya hang up his towel, casually naked in the locker room, which wasn't an unusual experience but definitely did something to Shane because it was just them at the moment.

"No? Not even feeling smug about your performance tonight?"

"I can enjoy having a good night."

Shane's eyes trailed down the length of Ilya's back, down to his perfect ass. He licked his lips, biting his bottom lip as Ilya slipped into his boxer briefs, and started getting changed.

"I can feel you checking me out."

Ilya hadn't even looked at Shane, which made Shane blush.

"You don't know that."

Ilya glanced over his shoulder then, smiling wickedly, and winked.

"I know *you*."

Shane blew a raspberry at him and Ilya laughed.

He finished getting changed, adjusting his suit, before grabbing his coat, sliding into it, and slinging his bag over his shoulder.

Shane watched as Ilya turned, approaching him. He had a hand in his pocket, looking casual and sexy, like he'd walked off the cover of a magazine or advertisement.

Shane looked up at him.

"Well..." Ilya drawled.

"Do I get a reward tonight?" Shane asked softly.

Ilya smiled crookedly at him and Shane's heart flipped as it always did when he saw that smile.

"So cocky, asking for a reward."

Ilya dropped his bag, resting a hand against Shane's stall, leaning in to loom over him. Shane looked back at him. He liked playing games like this. It was sexy and fun, the two of them teasing and antagonizing each other.

"I think I earned it. A natural hatty and two apples."

Ilya's face said that he was considering this.

"Maybe."

"Fuck you!"

Ilya grinned.

"You will just have to see when we get home..."

Shane narrowed his eyes at Ilya and Ilya leaned in, stealing a kiss, before he straightened, and grabbed his bag.

"Let's go, Hollander."

They got back to the house, greeted by an excited Anya, letting her out in the backyard for a bit, before bedtime.

They had a dogwalker come by on game days, which made things infinitely easier, and Anya loved her, which was great.

Shane went into the kitchen as Ilya pet the dog, grabbing a glass of water, looking out at the backyard, leaning against the kitchen island, and the huge moon in the sky over the river.

He heard the familiar tread of Ilya's feet on the wood floors as he made his way into the kitchen. He came to stand in front of Shane and Shane looked up at him.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Shane laughed in surprise as Ilya hefted him easily onto the island, standing between his legs, their foreheads pressed together.

"I am so proud of you," he said, dragging the backs of his fingers over Shane's cheek, the caress tender and soft. "You played so beautifully today."

"Oh yeah?" Shane asked, looking up at Ilya through his lashes, smiling, his cheeks warming.

"Yes. I know it has been hard for you for a few months but you have been amazing. I'm impressed."

"Impressed? Really? Wow. That's quite the compliment coming from you, Rozanov."

Ilya chuckled, nipping at Shane's bottom lip, and Shane hummed, wrapping his arms around his husband's neck.

"You want your reward?" Ilya murmured against Shane's mouth.

"Yes."

Ilya slid his hands under Shane, lifting him off the counter, and Shane wrapped around him, letting Ilya carry him upstairs, making out the entire way, not even pausing on the landing.

They were laughing by the time they were falling into bed together, working at tossing away ties, unbuttoning shirts, and tugging down pants.

They were a tangle of limbs and loose clothing, finally naked with Shane straddling Ilya, his husband laying back against the pillows.

"What do you want?" Ilya asked, sliding his hands up Shane's thighs.

Shane bit his lip, squeezing Ilya's pecs in his hands.

What *did* he want? It was hard to nail down just one thing. He wanted everything. All at once.

His and Ilya's sex life was pretty robust but had slowed down a little during Shane's slump. It felt nice to feel good about himself again, recharged. He was a better partner now that his head was screwed on a little straighter. He showed up better for Ilya. He felt like he could give him all the love and attention that he deserved, without Shane psyching himself out.

"Okay?" Ilya asked and Shane nodded his head slightly, smiling down at Ilya, and leaning in to kiss him.

"I think I want to watch you," Shane murmured against Ilya's lips. "Can I fuck you?"

Ilya practically purred, his body rippling against Shane's.

"Yes."

Shane smiled and kissed him some more, running his hands into Ilya's curls, scrunching them between his fingers, making a pleased noise as Ilya's hands squeezed his ass.

Shane finally pulled away, rolling onto his side next to Ilya, making himself comfortable, propped against the pillows.

"Like this?" Ilya asked. "Seems familiar."

Shane chuckled and nodded, watching as Ilya leaned over to grab the lube from the bedside table, eyes sliding over his body, fascinated by the way he moved.

"Are we role playing? You are in Montreal and I am in Moscow?"

"No," Shane replied. "I just like this."

"Okay. Is your reward so." Ilya shrugged, then stretched out. A few joints popped, making both of them chuckle, and Shane let his eyes wander shamelessly.

He loved watching the way the muscles in Ilya's chest and arms pulled taut and then relaxed. Ilya was big but always carried himself with an elegant grace. Even now, lounging against the pillows, facing Shane, he looked like a painting.

Shane sometimes wished he was an artist, able to capture Ilya's beauty on canvas or paper or film.

Shane's eyes slid to Ilya's hand, watching it wrap confidently around his cock, focusing on him stroking with familiarity and comfort. They'd watched each other do this plenty of times, in plenty of ways, but it never got old.

"I missed you," Shane said, unable to help the words as they fell out of his mouth. It was the truth. He'd been so wrapped up in his own head that he felt like he'd barely had time for Ilya and that wasn't fair.

"I missed you, too," Ilya replied, his tone soft. "But you had some work to do."

Shane nodded, shifting his eyes to look into his husband's face.

"I'm here now."

"Good," Ilya replied. "Pay attention. You asked for a show."

Shane smiled and laughed, his heart clenching. "I guess I did."

And Ilya didn't disappoint. It was enough for Shane to just watch him, taking all of him in, from his broad shoulders to his twitching pecs, to his strong forearm, and the sure, easy way he moved his big hand over his cock.

"God you're beautiful," Shane breathed. "I could watch you all day."

Ilya chuckled, his eyes meeting Shane's. He curled one arm under his head and Shane followed the curve of his bicep, the stretch of his obliques.

"I'll never get over how good you look doing... anything. Playing hockey or doing the dishes or jerking off."

"Keep going," Ilya hummed, his hand speeding up just a bit.

Shane shook his head a little.

He hadn't even touched himself, despite being hard. He was too wrapped up in giving Ilya his full attention, and knowing how much his husband enjoyed it.

Ilya was such a fucking show off. And he knew how hot he was. Shane used to be infuriated by it, mostly because it was hot, and he didn't understand why. But it was that self-assuredness, the knowledge that Ilya knew exactly what he was doing. Shane fucking loved that about him.

"You're just so perfect. Handsome and self-assured and *competent*. Fuck, Ilya. I love when you know exactly what you're doing."

Shane bit his lip as Ilya inhaled, his eyes closed.

"I feel so lucky getting to watch you every day. It's so fucking sexy. And I love that I get to have you. That you're mine."

He finally wrapped his hand around himself, trying to go slow. He did actually want to fuck Ilya, so he had to be careful.

"Yours." Ilya opened his eyes. "Fuck, Shane."

"Open yourself for me?"

Ilya grinned wickedly. "Afraid you're going to come?"

"Fuck *off*, Rozanov."

Ilya laughed. Shane loved that sound. Deep and rich and happy.

Ilya reached for the lube, slicking his fingers, and shifted on the bed. Shane moved from his spot next to Ilya, to in front of him, wanting the better view.

It really was impossibly sexy to watch Ilya open himself, long fingers just as dexterous as knowledgeable as they were when he was opening Shane up.

"Like what you see?" Ilya asked, a little out of breath, not quite in control.

Shane licked his lips. "Yes." He lifted his eyes to look into Ilya's face. "I said I could watch you all day."

Ilya groaned then, eyes falling shut, head tilted back as he kept working his fingers into himself.

Shane's eyes shifted from watching Ilya's fingers to watching his face. His eyes were closed, red, plush lips parted, cheeks flushed, and he made the most amazing soft little noises.

"Ready?" Shane asked when Ilya removed his fingers. It was like watching in slow motion and Shane had to swallow.

"Yes."

Shane nodded, taking the lube when Ilya handed it to him. Shane leaned over him to kiss him, before slicking himself, and shifting closer.

Entering Ilya was mind bogglingly good. He was tight and warm and perfect and Shane needed a second, always a little overcome every time he did this.

Ilya made a pleased noise, wrapping around Shane.

"Okay?" Ilya murmured.

"Yeah. Fucking amazing. You okay?"

Ilya hummed and nodded and Shane kissed him again before pulling out and pushing back in. He went slow at first, adjusting, searching for the right angle.

"Oh fuck, Shane. *Yes.*"

"Yeah?"

"Just like that. Keep going."

Shane listened, starting a faster, firmer rhythm, hands planted on either side of Ilya's head, watching his eyes. His eyes were half-lidded, involuntarily little moans and pants escaping past his lips, arms tightening around Shane.

"You're so perfect, Ilya. So beautiful. I love you so much."

A little smile curved Ilya's mouth. "I love you."

Shane kissed him again, open-mouthed and sloppy, wanting to make his husband feel so good and so loved and so appreciated.

It didn't take much longer for Ilya to be swearing and speaking in Russian, telling Shane how good he felt, how incredible, how he didn't want Shane to stop.

He reached between them, wrapping a hand around himself.

"Fuck, Ilya. Yes. Come on."

Shane fucked him harder, watching the way Ilya fell apart beneath him before he was coming, his body clenching and spasming around Shane.

"Oh shit. Fuck. Ilya—!"

Shane came a moment later, emptying himself into him, eyes locked on Ilya's face as Ilya looked up at him with sex drunk eyes.

Shane collapsed onto him, kissing him messily, Ilya's legs squeezing him.

Shane tucked his head against Ilya's neck, floating on cloud nine.

"That was so fucking hot."

Ilya chuckled. "Yes. Very."

Shane pulled out of Ilya carefully since he didn't enjoy when Shane lingered as much as Shane enjoyed when Ilya lingered.

He paused to pepper kisses all over Ilya's face, before he got out of bed, cleaning up in the bathroom, and then bringing a cloth back to clean Ilya up, too.

His husband was all loose-limbed and relaxed, watching Shane through sleepy, half-lidded eyes, a contented smile on his lips. He was unfairly gorgeous and Shane took his time, using

clean up as an excuse to just keep touching and admiring Ilya.

Shane kissed him when he'd finished and Ilya pulled him close just so they could kiss some more, slow and sweet and tender.

They curled up under the comforter together and Shane stroked Ilya's curls.

"I am very proud of you," Ilya murmured, kissing Shane's neck.

"I'm proud of me, too."

Ilya shifted so they could look at each other and Shane gently brushed some of Ilya's curls from his face, stroking his cheek.

"Thank you for being so patient with me."

Ilya blinked slowly, leaning into Shane's touch. "Always."

"I love you very much. And I appreciate you."

Ilya closed his eyes for a moment and smiled. "I love you, too. Very much. I know."

Shane kissed his forehead.

"Progress not perfection."

He leaned away to look at Ilya, seeing his husband's expression, so soft and adoring.

"Yes. Exactly."

Shane smiled and snuggled down against the pillows, sighing as Ilya leaned away to turn off the bedside lamp.

He wrapped his arms around Shane, holding him close, and Shane settled against him, feeling safe and peaceful.

He'd come a long way and he could only go up from here.

FIN

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading!

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