

grew up and learned the cost

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76637211) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76637211>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid , Heated Rivalry_(TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Autistic Shane Hollander , married hollanov , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , Mental Health Issues , Hurt/Comfort , Therapy , Not Edited , Not Beta Read , Protective Ilya Rozanov
Language:	English
Series:	Part 4 of Autistic Shane Hollander One-Shots , Part 2 of i had the shiniest wheels, now they're rusting
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-29 Words: 2,534 Chapters: 1/1

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by [only_the_golden](#)

Summary

Shane gets too in his head, weighing his options. Ilya helps him through.

Pt. 2 to "watch you lookin' at a broken wing" but can probably be read as a standalone.

Title from "Machines" by Jensen McRae

Notes

i'm back!! finals kicked my ass and i am fighting for my life to not fall into complete burnout. i'm so in awe by the response to my previous three fics, you guys have absolutely no idea. i truly have no words except thank you so much to everyone. sorry if this is a mess, i cannot be bothered to edit anything at the moment, and wrote this to ignore the impending burnout. also, i have not recovered from episode 6 at all. it was incredible. i feel so seen by shane's character it hurts. hence why i am not projecting my problems onto shane instead of dealing with them myself. enjoy!

The drive home is silent, still, peaceful from the outside. To anyone passing by things would seem completely normal. They wouldn't notice Shane's white knuckles, grip so tight on the steering wheel that his fingerprints will be left behind. They wouldn't see the storm swirling in his mind, dissecting everything the psychologist told him that he couldn't pay attention to. Ally's words melded together into nothingness, the weight of them hanging too heavy, crushing Shane beneath a blanket of guilt and shame and fear.

He tried to untangle what Ally had told him, tried to make sense of her words as he pulled into the driveway, but it was no use. His mind was racing, thoughts flying past like pucks sliding home right into the back of the net. Memories danced between tangles of clinical language and recommendations, Shane as a young boy with hands clutched over his ears when the world got too loud, the practiced smiles in the mirror, the forced eye contact that felt like a death sentence, the studying his classmates and teammates so he knew what to do and wouldn't get those *looks* anymore when he said the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong tone or whatever the fuck he was always doing wrong.

Shane's breath quickens, pressure growing in his chest and not letting any air in. Tears sting behind his eyes, desperate to fall but he can't let them. He won't.

Deep breath in. One, two, three, four. Breath out.

With the car in park, he forces the memories away. Blinks back any tears that had tried to burst forth. Slots the mask back in place. Tells himself everything is fine. Ally doesn't know what she's talking about. Sure, she was right on the money about Shane's anxiety, knew his triggers better than he knew them himself. And yes, she caught his issues with food from a throwaway comment, having caught his control issues from the first time they spoke. But *autism*? Shane was no expert, but that couldn't be right. That was something they found in children. Children with intense interests and sensory issues and patterns and poor social skills and—

He stops his thoughts there. *Not helping.*

Absent-mindedly, Shane's fingers drum on the steering wheel. The leather is cool to the touch. He presses each finger to it in series, focusing on the feeling of the smooth cold against his burning skin. Thumb to pinky, then back again. Over and over. He doesn't get out of the car. He can't. His mind has finally slowed, the repetitive behaviour giving him

something to direct his energy to, but he couldn't move. Legs made of stone, glued to the seat, he tapped his fingers like his life depended on it. Any time he slowed or missed a finger, the screaming in his mind came back in full force. Ally's words would ring in his ears each time he lost his place, some of the words finally untwisting from each other now that he was in the sheltered safety of the garage. The garage that connected to the house where his husband was certainly waiting for him.

Shane couldn't bring himself to care. Moving meant tearing his focus away from the rhythmic tapping of his fingertips, which meant letting the thoughts come in in full force, overwhelming him and sweeping him under until he was drowning in the current of his own mind.

"I think you would really benefit from a diagnosis," Ally had said, her mess of words starting to take shape. "It would help you to understand yourself and learn to accommodate yourself and your needs."

His *needs*. Shane doesn't need anything. Well, nothing besides food and water, air, rest, hockey, and Ilya. But nothing else. He is fine. He's working on his anxiety. He's *fine*. Sure, there are still bad days. Days when the world gets too much and all he can do is hide away and wait for it to get better. Days where he comes home utterly exhausted because he sat through too many conversations where he completely missed what the others were saying because he was too busy trying to match their movements and facial expressions, too fixated on having the right reactions to what they said that he ended up missing what he was even meant to react to.

Days where he felt so *othered*. Whether it be on the ice, at school when he was young, in team meetings, at sponsor events. Shane had always felt a bit like the odd one out, ever since he was little. It was hard not to when he was one of only two Asian kids on his hockey team, and now when he's one of a just small handful of people of colour in the hockey world. But that wasn't the only reason he felt different, trapped on the edges of every room he entered, unable to cross the invisible barrier that kept him just far enough away from others that he could see but not understand them.

Shane didn't want to think about what the reason for that was.

A sharp knock shakes Shane out of his head, his fingers stilling from where they had started to pound on the steering wheel, the force of each hit loosening the tension sitting tight

beneath his skin. His eyes dart to the source of the sound, landing on Ilya's concerned face. Even through the car door, Ilya can sense that something is wrong, his eyebrows drawn together in that way that's reserved just for Shane's eyes. He's only seen that look a few times, the most recent time being when he broke down in Ilya's arms and admitted that his eating was a problem, admitted that he needed help but was too scared to face it.

Eyes locked on Ilya's face, not his eyes but just below, Shane made no move to leave the car. He wanted desperately to leave the mess of his mind in here, to not let it spill out and take Ilya down with him. He didn't want Ilya to see him like this, see the tears he hadn't noticed had begun to slide down his cheeks.

The door clicked open anyways, Ilya's hands instantly finding their way to thumb away the tears. His mouth moves, clearly saying something, but all Shane can hear is Ally's voice in his head on a steady loop, trying to assure Shane that it's fine to be different as his world crumbled around him.

Strong arms wrap tight around him, a steady pressure he didn't know he needed. At that, in the warm and safe embrace of his love, he breaks. Shane has no words to share, just allows the sobs to burst through. Ilya's shirt is soon wet with Shane's tears but neither of them care. Shane's seatbelt comes undone and he is scooped up in Ilya's arms. They make their way into the house, Shane's feet never having to touch the floor as he is brought to be deposited on the couch. Ilya drops down after him, tangling the two of them together to share their warmth and love and comfort.

The sobs don't stop for a while, but neither of them mind. They've each had their fair share of breakdowns. It's become second nature for them to carry each-other through the tough moments. Everyone needs to break sometimes. It's okay, unavoidable. The least they can do is be there for one another to put the pieces back together after. That is an art they have mastered.

"Better?" Ilya asks once his fingers, trapped under Shane's strong frame, have started to go numb. He doesn't push, doesn't overload with long questions demanding effort and answers. He doesn't ask if Shane is okay. He doesn't ask what is wrong. Those aren't the answers he needs right now, and they aren't the questions that Shane needs to hear. He keeps it simple and to the point, leaves room for Shane to expand if he wishes, or to respond with just the move of his head if that is what he needs. How Shane is feeling can wait for when the words come to him, unsticking from where they often get lodged in his throat. What's wrong can be answered later when Shane understands it himself, when he's ready to share it. What matters right now is if he is better than he was before. Ilya can work from there.

“I think so.” Shane’s voice is barely above a whisper. It’s like he doesn’t trust himself to speak too loud. Like if he speaks up, everything will come tumbling out and there will be nothing he can do to stop it.

They leave it at that, enjoying just existing in each-other's company for a moment. Or they try to, at least. Ilya can practically hear the whirlwind of thoughts fluttering around his husband’s head. He wishes for nothing more than to be able to remove these thoughts that plague his love and take them up himself. To take away Shane’s struggles so he can get out of his head. If only it worked that way.

“I-” Shane starts. He’s not really sure what he wants to say. Not sure what he should say. He knows he should explain why Ilya found him freaking out like that in the car, why he broke down the way he did. Ilya would never demand an explanation from him, happy to let Shane come to him in his own time, but guilt gnaws at him anyways.

Ilya gives him an encouraging look. He tries again. “Ally wants me to-”

He pauses. Takes a steadying breath.

“You don’t need to tell me now,” Ilya comforts. He cards his fingers through Shane’s hair. Presses a soft kiss to the Canadian’s cheek.

“I want to. I just don’t know how you will take this. I don’t even know how I feel about it.”

“Is okay. We figure it out together, yes?”

Shane nods. He taps his fingers against Ilya’s back, the same way he did against the steering wheel. Thumb to pinky, then back again. “Ally thinks I might have autism. She wants me to get tested. Says knowing for sure could help me... fuck, I don’t know. Help me learn to live with it, not feel so fucking stupid all the time. Give me an explanation of why I feel and act the way I do.”

Autism. Ilya knows this word. He's heard it mentioned in hushed tones at charity events, adults with sad looks on their faces talking about children like pets. He doesn't quite know what it means, never had any reason to look it up.

He sees the glint in Shane's eyes. The fear in them. The ache. *Is it fatal?*

"You will... you will be okay? Yes?" Ilya asks, not quite sure to react. The way people talk about it, it sounds like it means certain death. He can't fathom losing the love of his life, especially not now that they can finally be in love and together and happy.

Shane lets out a quiet laugh. "God, Ilya, why do you look like I just told you I have three days to live?"

"I- I don't know what this means. At charity banquets I hear it and everyone sounds so sad. I just don't want to lose you."

Now Shane is really laughing. He doesn't mean to laugh, the scared look on Ilya's face breaking his heart a little bit. He feels terrible for worrying his husband like that. Hadn't even considered that Ilya might not know the word. His upper body still shakes as he speaks through his laughter. "Shit. Uh. No, Ilya. It's not like, fucking, cancer or something. I'm not sick, if that's what you're worried about."

Ilya sighs with obvious relief, breath ghosting Shane's neck.

"I don't really know how to explain it, I guess. It kinda relates to a bunch of things? Ally called it a 'neurodevelopmental disorder.'" Shane added, piecing more of her words together. "It affects communication a lot. And sensory stuff, like when I tell you that the lights are too loud." At that, Ilya lets out a light chuckle. "It just... it makes it a little harder for me to go about my day and exist in a world that doesn't understand me, that gets too much for me sometimes, I guess. That's how Ally explained it. It's nothing bad. Different, but not bad."

“Communication... like when you never get my jokes? Like when you thought I actually wanted to marry Svetlana?”

Shane rolls his eyes but his voice is playful when he says “Okay, you don’t need to keep bringing that up.”

“I kind of do,” Ilya retorts as he tangles his fingers with Shane’s and brushes against the ring that sits there.

“But it’s a lot of things. She gave me so much information, and how it related to me, and I just got so in my head. Like my morning routine? And how stressed out I get when it changes? Apparently that ‘rigidity’, as she said, is part of it. All those little things that feel so much bigger to me and stress me out like crazy, to the point I end up here, breaking down in your arms? She said it explains all of that.”

“Well this is good then, yes? To know why these things happen?”

“I mean, I guess? It’s just scary. A lot of people get really weird about it. Judgy. I don’t want people to treat me any differently just because of a word.”

“But is part of you. Who cares what other people think. If it helps you understand you, that is all that matters.”

Shane tries to meet Ilya’s eyes, but can’t quite manage it. His eyes land high on Ilya’s sharp cheekbones instead. A thousand words flit across his tongue. None of them stick. None of them are right. “Thank you,” he squeezes out instead, hoping it conveys everything he wishes he could say.

“I love you. Every part of you. The asshole parts. The boring parts. All of you. I want you to love all of you too. Maybe knowing this about yourself will help.”

They snuggle impossibly closer to each other. Ilya's head rests just above Shane's heart. His heartbeat is steady, pounding in his lover's ear.

Another tear slips from Shane's eye without permission. "If it's true, why did nobody know when I was a kid?" His voice comes out raw. "Why did I have to feel like this all this time?"

Ilya presses a gentle kiss to Shane's lips before pressing their foreheads together. He basks in the closeness for a moment, letting Shane's breath caress his cheeks. "I don't know, love. But you know now. We will figure this out together.

"You are so strong, so beautiful, so wonderful. I love you. I got you. We will figure this out. I know this is scary, but I think this explains a lot, like you said. I think knowing will be good. So you can be okay. Okay?"

Breathing in deeply, Shane just nods, no more words needed between them.

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