

He's Going the Distance

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He's Going the Distance

by [SpiderMan69](#)

Summary

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me, Rozy.” That was a lie; he knew perfectly well what was wrong with him, he just wouldn’t admit it to himself. “I thought therapy would help, and I also thought winning the cup would help, but I guess we’re both just too fucked in the head for that.” Ilya laughs softly, nodding.

or

Shane Hollander studied through conversations, interactions, and therapy.

or

Shane accidentally gets diagnosed with autism

Chapter 1: Reluctantly Crouched At the Starting Line

Chapter Summary

Shane starts therapy

Chapter Notes

Hiiii,

Ok, so this is kinda garbage, but I cannot stop thinking about Shane being autistic.

This is very dialogue-heavy, and beware of homophobic/ableist language, mostly just Shane using it towards himself. Also, a warning for vomiting in this chapter, and lots of discussion of nausea related to anxiety.

I found it really interesting how angry and defensive Shane gets when he's uncomfortable, which kind of channels into this cause, bro is highkey pissed at everyone all the time.

*Some changes have been made after I re-read The Long Game and realized some errors that didn't line up with the book.

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

Ilya had been the one to bring therapy up first.

They were at the cottage, hair wet and fingers numb from an ice hockey game out on the lake. It was the perfect texture at this time of year to skate on, and the first winter that Shane had taken Ilya out to play.

Hayden and J.J. were visiting, and they'd been in the middle of a 2 v 2 when Shane found himself sitting off to the side, stomach churning. He'd been in a faceoff against J.J. when he broke off and skated to the side of their makeshift rink with a gag, positive that he was about to throw up. The three men had 'benched' him until he felt better.

The ice was hard and numbingly cold under his ass as he watched J.J. and Hayden play against Ilya. It was a lazy match, nothing like the heated moves he saw when the Centaurs played against the Voyagers. Slow glides across the ice, barely working to get the puck from each other. Shane couldn't tell if it had turned into a half-assed 1 v 1 v 1 game, or if they were all just passing the puck to each other until Shane joined them again.

His stomach churns again at the thought of getting back on the ice, and he rests his head against his knees, breathing heavily through the sudden wave of nausea. He looks up when he feels a tap on his shoulder to find Ilya standing above him.

"Come, we are going inside." His eyes move past Ilya to see J.J. and Hayden pulling the nets off the lake, propping them against some trees. Ilya extends a hand, pulling Shane up with a slight wobble.

The four of them work to untie their skates, sitting on a bench beside the lake. J.J. and Hayden make smalltalk, shooting unsubtle glances in Shane's direction. Shane ignores it, pulling off his skates and shoving his feet into his cold boots. His thick strands of hair had started to freeze together.

"You alright, Shane?" Hayden asks with a clap on his back as the four men trudge up the stairs to the cottage. Shane nods with a smile.

"Yeah, man, I'm alright. I think I might have just eaten something that doesn't agree with me." Hayden nods, easily believing him. Shane sees the look on Ilya's face as he walks past him and knows he doesn't believe it even a bit.

The rest of their morning was lazy, Shane's stomach settling with each hour that passed until J.J. and Hayden packed up to leave.

"Bring Barrett and Haas next time or something, yes? Give us an actual challenge." J.J. jokes as they step out the door. Ilya blows a raspberry, waving them off with a lazy flick of his hand before retreating into the warmth of the cottage. "Feel better, Hollander," J.J. says, pulling him into a tight hug. Hayden pulls him into a hug once J.J. lets go, leaving with a face-splitting smile and a wave.

Shane loved it when they visited the cottage, and he especially loved that the two were now civil enough with Ilya to coexist in their home. He sighs contentedly as he makes his way to the living room, throwing himself over the back of the couch and swinging his legs into Ilya's lap.

"Did you have fun?" Shane asks, poking Ilya in the arm. Ilya nods with a hum, working his hands under the tight hem of Shane's joggers to stroke the skin on his shin. "Have you ever played pond hockey before?" Ilya rests his head on the back of the couch, looking at Shane. He knew Ilya wasn't checked into the conversation, but was humouring him because he knew Shane liked to talk about hockey.

"No, that was my first time. Is fun, different texture of ice, much more bumpy." Shane nods, turning to face the television. Ilya had an IIHF game on in the background, the volume low. Shane remembers when the two of them had been at that level. Freshly 18, with rosy cheeks and pimples, skating faster than they could ever imagine skating now. "You throw up before games against Montreal." Shane almost doesn't catch it, turning towards Ilya with a raised eyebrow.

"What do you mean?"

"Both times that we have played against Montreal since you joined Centaurs, you threw up in the hotel room before game, and in the locker room after game." Ilya grips Shane's shin, squeezing gently with a soft smile.

"I don't think I understand what you're getting at."

"You almost threw up when you were going against Jean-Jacques outside." Since becoming closer, Ilya had taken to calling J.J. by his full name. Shane didn't notice it at first, but when he finally registered what Ilya was saying and asked about it, his husband's explanation was, "I need a new way to get under his skin, he is starting to like me too much." It made Shane's mouth twitch with a slight smile. "You do not do this with any other team." Shane thinks about it for a moment, tilting his head.

"No, I guess I don't." He brings a thumb up to his mouth, biting at the skin around his nail, before Ilya grabs the hand, pulling it into his own. He runs his thumb over the raw skin around his thumb nail, bitten down and calloused from years of stress.

“I think leaving Montreal left you with problems, and that is why you throw up.” Shane nods, entertaining Ilya’s theory. “Have you considered going to therapy?” Shane almost scoffs, catching himself when he remembers how much therapy has helped his husband. He’s reminded of how defensive Ilya had gotten when Shane first told him to seek professional help.

“I don’t need therapy, Ilya.” He makes sure his voice is kind when he says it, further trying to emphasize to his husband that there’s no issue with needing therapy; he just doesn’t need it. Ilya sighs and goes back to stroking his shin.

“Will you think about it?” His voice is quiet when he says it, as it always is when he’s being vulnerable. Shane squeezes his hand.

“Sure.” The two spend the rest of their night curled up on the couch, watching IIHF games and talking about who they thought could win gold.

It was March when they finally played against Montreal again, and Shane had almost completely forgotten about their conversation until he was in the locker room before the game.

He and Ilya had made it out of the hotel room, their suits crisp and an anxious tick to both their walks. Ilya chewing on his chain, and Shane shaking his hands to his side as they got out of the car and entered the rink. The smell of the Montreal rink, once welcoming and homey to Shane, immediately made his stomach clench when they entered the warmth of the rink.

His feet faltered long enough for Ilya to notice.

“Shane?”

“I’m good, all good.” He rushes out, continuing his path to the changeroom.

“Hollander!” Wyatt exclaims when they step into the changeroom. Ilya sighs behind him.

“Ah, I see, I do not matter anymore.” He jokes, hoping to lift Shane’s falling spirits. It seems to work, Shane’s mouth quirking in the telltale sign he’s about to dog on Rozanov.

“Clearly. Time to hand over the captain's jersey.”

“Har har, go get ready for game, *assistant captain*.” Ilya jokes with a small shove to Shane's shoulder. Shane had no problem getting ready for games; it was methodical and routine, had been the same since he’d picked up a stick as a kid. It was between getting ready for the game and warm-up that his nerves started to get the best of him. He could barely hear what Wiebe was saying before he blinked, and the locker room was empty except for him and Ilya.

“Shane, are you going to be sick?” He was standing by the door, half in, half out of the locker room, keeping an eye on his team on the ice and his husband, who was paralyzed in his stall.

“Probably.” He takes a deep inhale, closing his eyes. Breathing work helps. “I hate when you’re right.” He says it with a shaky exhale, turning to look at Ilya.

“I know. If you’re not out in five for warmup, I’m going to make Wiebe bench you.” He warns, knowing it would get a spark going in Shane. Shane huffs, staring up at his husband.

“Not helpful.”

“No, but you know what is helpful? Therapy.” He walks over, towering over where Shane sat, his skates adding extra height. Crouching down so he was at Shane’s level, he pats his cheek with a gloved hand. “Five minutes.” With one final peck on the lips, Ilya stands up, fastening his helmet on before leaving the locker room to go warm up.

Shane throws up with two minutes left on Ilya's given timer, rinsing out his mouth before forcing himself out on the ice before he could get worked up enough to throw up for a second time.

They had won, of course, much to Hayden and J.J.'s dismay. Their handshakes were especially passionate when they shook Shane and Ilya's hands, a welcome contrast to the barely there finger touches and dirty looks that Shane received from the rest of his ex-teammates. He was grateful for the Montreal rookies who at least grasped his hand with awe and thanked him for a good game.

The one downside to a win like that was the adrenaline crash. He'd made their Uber pull over on their way back to the hotel so that he could heave on the side of the road, hoping that no one recognized him and took a picture of him, bent over, trying his best not to puke on his new dress shoes.

Ilya was quiet for the rest of the drive, looking anywhere but at Shane, who was resting his forehead against the cool window, breaths fogging up the glass. It wasn't until they had both showered and changed and were lounging in their hotel bed that Shane's phone lit up with a notification from Ilya.

"Ilya, I am right next to you; you don't have to send me stuff," Shane grumbles, opening the link anyway. It was a short list of sports psychologists in their area, and he recognized a few of the names from passing conversations with other players over the years. "Ilya-

"Shane." Ilya cuts off his protest. "I do not like seeing you like that, so worried that you are sick. Is not good for you." Shane sighs, digging his palms into his eyes and rubbing until he starts seeing shapes in the darkness of his eyelids.

Phosphenes. He remembers someone telling him once that those shapes were called phosphenes.

"We don't have any more games against Montreal this season, unless we both make it to the playoffs, which is unlikely." He leaves the 'unlikely for them' hanging in the air, knowing

that, out of the two, the Centaurs were the team with the highest likelihood to make it to the playoffs, considering the players they had right now.

“No, but we will play against them next season, and season after that, and likely season after that. Do you really want to feel like you will puke every time we play pond hockey with Hayden and Jean-Jacques?” Shane peels his hands away from his eyes, turning his head to the side to stare at his husband, an unimpressed expression clear on his face. “Just one appointment, please, Shane? If you do not like it, you do not have to keep going.” Shane rolls his eyes, burying his head in Ilya’s neck.

“Fine, fuck. If this goes terribly, I blame you.”

Which is how he ended up sitting in the front office of a sports psychologist twenty minutes from his and Ilya’s home. The office was nicely decorated, with minimalistic art hung throughout the small room and aerodynamic furniture lining the walls. The plant in the corner was glaringly fake, and Shane wrinkled his nose at it.

“Shane?” He turns his head, finding a tall, slim woman standing to his left, dressed in what was a poor mix of business attire and athletic leisure. Shane clears his throat, realizing he was staring.

“Um, yes, hi.” He stands up, wiping a sweaty hand on his pants before extending it. The woman, Dr. O’Reilly, smiles, taking a few steps closer to shake his hand. “I’m Jen, it’s wonderful to meet you. If you’re ready, you can join me in my office.” She steps out of the way, and Shane enters the small office. It’s even more sparsely decorated than the waiting room was.

Two chairs facing each other in the middle of the room, and a desk tucked in the corner with another stupid fake plant. The sheer blinds were drawn closed, and Shane could just see the outline of Ilya’s car. He’d insisted on driving Shane and waiting in the car for him to finish.

The door clicks shut behind Dr. O’Reilly, her sneakers squeaking quietly against the floor as she moves to her desk to grab a notepad and then to one of the two seats.

“Please, make yourself comfortable.” She says with a kind smile, motioning to the chair across from her. The worn leather creaks under Shane when he sits, his back rigid and his leg bouncing. “So, tell me a bit about yourself, Shane.” She clicks her pen, resting the tip against the paper in anticipation of the boring, PR trained things that would come out of Shane’s mouth.

“Where would you like me to start?” She lifts the pen to her chin, thinking.

“Well, you mentioned on your intake that you’re a hockey player for the NHL. What is that like?” Shane can feel the warm tug in his chest at the mention of hockey and feels himself unwind slightly.

“Well, it’s amazing, of course. I’ve been in the league for over ten years and have no plans of retiring anytime soon.”

“Would you say you’re a good player? Should I be keeping an eye on your team?” She says it with a wink.

“I’d say I’m pretty good... My husband says that I’m the best, but it’s hard to believe coming from him.” He says, feeling his face flush. He notices the slight furrow in Dr. O’Reilly’s brow before it smooths out again.

“I don’t believe you mentioned a husband in your intake form. Have you two been married long?” Shane’s face somehow heats up more, now feeling ashamed that he’d failed to mention Ilya in his intake form.

“We’ve been together for several years, but our first wedding anniversary isn’t until the summer.” Dr. O’Reilly opens her mouth to speak, but Shane continues. “I figured you would know about us, considering your involvement in the sports world. That’s why I didn’t bring him up. That, and the fact that I don’t have any issues in my marriage, I’m just here for sport reasons.” He cuts off his rambling with a click of his teeth, looking off to the side of Dr. O’Reilly. She simply smiles.

“I try not to look into my clients before I meet with them. I believe a blank slate is important. I’ve heard vague things about your relationship with your husband from the media, but I’d rather hear about your relationship from you.”

“Hear it from the horse's mouth.” Shane supplies. It was a phrase that Ilya had recently learned, and one that he found absolutely hilarious. Similar to when Ilya hears it, Dr. O’Reilly laughs with a nod.

They spend most of the first session discussing his history with hockey, growing up as one of the few Asian players, and how he maintains a positive relationship with hockey. By the time he remembers why he was even there, their time is up.

“We can meet again in a week, if you would like.” Dr. O’Reilly prods, noticing the deflated look that Shane has when she tells him they were finished for the day. “The first appointment is always strange; there’s a lot of foundation that needs to be built before a person feels comfortable talking about something that is bugging them. You did very well today, Shane.” Shane, in turn, swells at the compliment.

“I would like that... Meeting in a week.” He books an appointment between games and leaves the office feeling somehow the same as he did when he entered the appointment.

“How did it go?” Ilya asked when Shane had climbed back into the car.

“Fine. Weird. I don’t know. I’m going back next week.” That gets a smile out of Ilya.

“Yes? That is good.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, folks, that was chapter one. Let me know what you think. I hope you enjoyed it :)

Chapter 2: Fuel Burning Fast On an Empty Tank

Chapter Summary

Shane continues with therapy

Chapter Notes

Warning for ableist language and discussions of food aversion/difficulty eating.

His mom, surprisingly, brought therapy up next.

Shane's parents were over for dinner, having brought a veggie casserole of sorts that had turned to mush where Shane was pushing it around on his plate. He'd lost their game that afternoon, and with it his appetite.

He'd been tetchy with Ilya the whole drive over, and Ilya, as gloriously patient as he is, let him. Ilya carried on the conversation with his parents, a soothing thumb rubbing circles against where his hand rested on Shane's upper thigh.

"Shane, honey, do you want to go lie down?" Yuna suddenly asks. Shane looks up, oblivious to the fact that he was zoned out, staring at the disassembled casserole in front of him.

"Sorry?" He feels three sets of eyes on him and fights not to shrink back further into the uncomfortable dining chair.

"You're looking a little wan. Go lie down, we'll clean up." Shane opens his mouth to argue, but Ilya's grip on his thigh tightens.

“Go lie down.” He whispers. Shane simply nods, pushing his chair back and wincing as it scrapes against the worn wood of the floor. He moves on autopilot to the couch, flopping down to bury his face in one of the decorative pillows. It itches his skin, but he feels too bone-dead to bother turning over.

He’s not sure how long he lies there, eyes lazily following the hockey highlights playing on the TV, before his mom joins him. She props herself on the edge of the couch, back resting against him as she strokes her hands through his hair.

“What’s up, Shaney?” He smiles at the nickname, turning to face his mom. He could hear Ilya and his father laughing in the kitchen, dishes clattering as they cleaned.

“Just bummed about the loss, I guess.” He half shrugs against the couch. His mom clicks her tongue, a sad smile on her face.

“I know, but you have to eat something.” His mom had conditioned him his whole life for hockey. She’d prepared him to be the best of the best when it came to training, practices and games, but she was never hard on him about food. He remembers going to training camps and hearing about kids whose parents weighed out their portions, parents who would hire nutritionists, or sometimes personal chefs.

He’d never experienced that.

His mom gave him his supplements and vitamins and made what he wanted to eat when he wanted to eat it. She would tweak recipes to accommodate his growing and moving body, teaching him what to sub and what to add when he began to cook his own food, but she never *ever* talked to him about food in a way that made him hate it, the way his teammates so often did.

He’d grown over time, on his own, to have a strange relationship with food. He’d read sports nutrition books once he was old enough to buy them, read blogs and articles about the best diets for athletes and then try them out. His mom made sure he had fun trying out these different diets, though, that it would be something new for the whole family to experiment with.

That didn't stop the niggling in his brain every time he ate. Cooking these intricate, protein-filled meals took up time, time that he could use to work out or practice. When he would lose a game, miss a shot, not push himself hard enough, he would be convinced that part of it was due to whatever stupid sports diet he was trying that year.

So, sure, he sometimes 'forgot' to eat or didn't have an appetite after a game loss, but he'd be fine the next morning after shaking and gagging through a workout on an empty stomach.

"Is this an anxiety thing?" His mom asks, with a squeeze to his shoulder. His parents knew that he had his issues; they'd raised him for fucks sake, but he always shook his head when they suggested he may have anxiety. Shane sighs, flopping further into the couch.

"Mom-"

"I'm just saying, you have a lot of emotional dependency when it comes to your games." Shane furrows his brows, confused. "You barely ever eat after a loss." Shane sits up, propping himself on a shaking arm.

"You barely see me after games. What are you talking about?" He says it loud enough that the noises from the kitchen stop.

"Ilya told me that you've been throwing up before your games against the Voyagers." Shane scoffs, shaking his head.

"Ilya doesn't know what he's talking about."

"Shane!" His mom warns.

"Sorry, sorry, you're right. I'll eat some leftovers later." He grumbles, hoping his mom will drop it. Judging by the look in her eyes, his deterrent didn't work.

“I know you’re an adult, and you can make your own choices, but I think you should try therapy.” Shane groans, resting his head against the back of the couch.

“Why does it upset you so much when people tell you to try therapy?” Dr. O’Reilly asks in response to his complaint. Shane immediately feels himself grow defensive at the question, and almost replies with ‘I don’t know.’

“I guess...” He starts, digging in his brain for something that would make him sound more put-together than someone who needs therapy would be. He somewhat hopes that if he gives her the right answer, Dr. O’Reilly will let him go, stop digging in his brain and tell him that he was the healthiest person she’d ever met. “I just feel that I don’t need it. I don’t see any problems with my behaviour. I’ve been feeling the same way about hockey and stuff for years, and it’s never been a problem until now.”

“Why do you think it’s become a problem?” There’s an emphasis on the word ‘become’ that lets Shane know she doesn’t believe him. Shane wants to say it’s because he’s let people in, dropped his guard enough for Ilya to see that he’s not the ‘perfect Canadian boy’ that the media portrays him as.

“Because I’m different.” Is what he settles on.

“Everyone is different.”

“Yes, but I’m *different*.” He waves his hands vaguely, hoping this time the word will convey everything he doesn’t want to say. It reminds him of Fantastic Mr. Fox, and his lips turn up in the slightest smile.

“And why is your being different a problem? Is it being different from Ilya, from your teammates?”

“Everyone, I’m different from everyone. Teammates used to dislike me because they thought I was strange and boring. I can see it in the way my parents look at me, the way Ilya looks at me, everybody knows that I’m *different*.” He’d never forget the word kids used growing up, poking fun at him in the locker room when he wouldn’t partake in conversations.

Retard.

“So you believe that the only reason people are telling you to go to therapy is that you are different from them, and not because you could have real, and valid, issues surrounding hockey.”

Shane purses his lips. When she puts it that way...

“I don’t see a problem with therapy. My husband’s been going to therapy, and it’s good for him. I run a hockey camp that donates proceeds to mental health. I’m perfectly fine with people going to therapy because of any issues they have; I just don’t think I need it.”

“Why did you come back if you don’t think you need it? Perhaps to make Ilya happy?”

Shane laughs at that. She was good.

“Yes, actually.”

“Do you feel like it’s your responsibility to make him happy?”

“Well, yeah, I’m his husband.” Dr. O’Reilly hums, nodding as she writes that down, and Shane panics. “I mean, I like to do things that make him happy, so if that means going to therapy, then I’ll go to therapy. We have good benefits, and I don’t have much else to do.” Dr. O’Reilly’s lip twitches up as she looks back up at Shane.

“Do you feel like it’s your responsibility to make me happy?” Shane falters, confused enough for the anxious pit in his stomach to disappear.

“What?”

“In the past two sessions we’ve had, whenever I go to write something down, you will change your answer.” Shane worries his lip between his teeth; he’d been caught. “It’s going to be hard for me to help you if you only tell me what you think I want to hear, Shane.” She clicks her tongue before checking her watch. “We have about five minutes left. If you would like to join me again next week, I’d like to send you home with a question.” Shane sighs before nodding. “I want you to think about what you do that is different, and why that might warrant other people telling you to seek therapy. Could you do that for me?”

“Sure.”

They book again for next week, and Shane slinks out of the office, hopping in Ilya’s passenger seat again.

“How did it go?” Ilya asks, once again. Shane ignores it, rifling around in the center console for a piece of gum to chew on. The only gum he finds in there is Ilya’s fruity nicotine gum. Ilya reaches down to his side, pulling a bag of the minty vegan shit Shane likes out of his door and handing it to him. It was gross, and hard, and lost flavour within minutes, but it was nice to keep his mouth busy.

“Why do you think I need therapy?” If he was given homework, he was going to get as many answers as he possibly could before the next session. Maybe he couldn’t get away with giving Dr. O’Reilly half-assed answers, but if she was giving him a week to come up with an answer for her question, then she would be getting the perfect answer.

“Um, because you are anxious, no?” Ilya asks, eyebrows knit in confusion as he turns out of the parking lot.

“Can you give me specific reasons?” He pulls out his phone, opening up a note to write down what Ilya would say. He intended to ask his mom and dad the same question, maybe some of

his teammates, and write down what each of them said.

“Well, you get sick to your stomach with worry when we play against Voyagers, and you do not eat when we lose.” Shane sighs dramatically, thumping his head against the headrest.

“Great, now my mom's got you on that, too.” Ilya shakes his head.

“No, we just come to the same conclusion. We lose, you sulk, you do not eat, is not healthy.” Shane wants to get defensive and poke at Ilya’s eating habits.

Eating habits that were probably healthier than his own at this point.

“Fine, what else?”

“You bite nails a lot.”

“Lots of people bite their nails,” Shane argues. Ilya turns to look at him, mouth agape in annoyance.

“Oh my god, Hollander, do you want me to answer your question or will you get defensive at everything I say?” Shane purses his lips.

“I’m sorry, keep going.”

Ilya lists things off for the whole twenty-minute drive home.

By the time they’re pulled into their massive garage, Shane is a bundle of nerves, flavourless gum smacking between his teeth anxiously.

“Am I too much?” Shane blurts out as Ilya is getting out of the car. Shane is still seated, seat belt clicked around him. Ilya turns around, looking him over once before getting back in the car and closing his door.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, you just gave me a whole list of problems that I have, which is fine-” he tacks on when he sees Ilya open his mouth to argue, “I asked you a question, and you answered it. I just, do you ever get sick of how...” He’s not sure what word to use, shrugging to show it.

“Shane, you are my husband; I cannot grow sick of you. Sure, you are boring, and you rarely put out when we lose, which our team does a lot-” Shane shoves him, and Ilya smiles, “but I love you, even if you are...” Ilya mimics his shrug.

“Thank you for always being patient with me,” Shane whispers, picking up Ilya’s hand to place a gentle kiss on it.

“Come, let’s go have some dinner.” Shane follows his husband inside, feeling like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders after hearing the confirmation that, yes, even though he was different, his husband still loves him.

Chapter 3: He's Haunted By Something He Cannot Define

Chapter Summary

Shane comes to terms with how the Voyagers' reaction to his and Ilya's relationship affected him

Chapter Notes

I used the Voyagers instead of the metros cause I'm stickin w book lore a bit more

Mild homophobic language and internalized homophobia

Shane was over at Hayden's house, lounging on the couch, enjoying what Hayden had dubbed 'boys night'. Jackie was out with their daughters, and Ilya was off somewhere entertaining Arthur. As much as Hayden complains about him, he always makes sure to mention how much Arthur comes out of his shell after hanging out with Ilya.

Arthur barely spared Shane a look whenever he visited, only stopping to ask where Ilya was if he wasn't there. That boy was obsessed with Ilya.

"Y'know, he wrote down that Rozanov was his role model for a school assignment?" Hayden had complained one night. "Allbeit, I could barely tell what it said, Ilya Rozanov is hard for anyone to spell, let alone a first grader, but for fuck sakes, Shane, he has a dad in the NHL, and he picks Rozanov as his role model? You guys can take him home with you."

Shane looks over to where Hayden is focused on the Boston game, opening up his notes. It had grown substantially since his therapy appointment last week, with lengthy answers from Ilya and his parents, and a few vague responses from his new teammates.

"Hypothetically," Shane starts, getting Hayden's attention, "if I were to go to therapy, what do you think I would need to talk about?" Hayden stares, confused at the left field question.

“You don’t go to therapy?” He asks, cocking his head.

“You think I’m in therapy?” Shane prods, equally confused.

“I mean, yeah. You got outed by your best friend-”

“By accident,” Shane interjects.

“By accident,” Hayden tacks on. “Were benched for being gay, rejected by your team of a decade for dating Rozanov, and threatened by the suits, all of which, I’d say, would warrant therapy.” Shane considers this for a moment, leaning back against the plush couch. “Not to mention being in a secret relationship for ten years, that couldn’t have been healthy for your anxiety either.”

“I don’t have anxiety. Why does everyone think I have anxiety?” Hayden’s eyebrow quirks up.

“Dude, you always stick to a routine with... well, literally everything you do so that you don’t lose your mind.”

“Okay, so? That’s OCD or something, which I also don’t have.” He picks and plays with the string of his sweater before moving it to his mouth to chew on.

“You hate talking to people, you sweat so bad, whenever you’re on camera. All the PR training in the world can’t hide that you’re a nervous wreck.” He spits out his sweater string with a scoff.

“Gee, thanks, asshole.”

“I’m just being honest, man. Maybe therapy could be good for you.” He says it enthusiastically, which is a welcome change from the worrying recommendations his family voiced. He types out the points that Hayden gave him, happy with the answers he received.

He shows up to his next appointment with the list printed off, confidently handing the jot notes over to Dr. O’Reilly. She looks at him with an unreadable expression as she grabs it.

“What is this?” She asks, flipping through the pages, neatly paperclipped together.

“I asked people why they think I need therapy and wrote it down for you.” She lets out a surprised laugh.

“Well, this is a first.” She waves the pages before tucking them into her notebook. “I’ll read through this after our appointment. I appreciate the hard work you put into it. Were you surprised by any of the answers?”

“Most of them.” *All of them.*

“Why is that?” She prods. Shane’s eye twitches, wishing she’d just read through his damn notes and see how unserious some of the answers are.

“I mean, a lot of the answers were things that wouldn’t warrant therapy if anyone else were doing it.”

“Such as...” She prods.

“Ilya said I bite my nails too much. I don’t bite my nails, they’re too short for that.”

“You bite around them?” Dr. O’Reilly observes, eyes flicking down to the dry, irritated skin around Shane’s fingertips.

“Sure, but plenty of people do, you don’t see them in therapy.” Irritated, Shane brings his hand to his mouth, teeth sinking into the tough skin around his thumbnail. Dr. O’Reilly raises a brow, and Shane flushes, moving to sit on his hands. He grinds his teeth together instead.

“Why do you bite your nails? The skin around your nails.” She corrects when she sees Shane’s eyebrow twitch.

“I don’t know, it calms me down, I guess.”

“The pain does?”

“No!” He says it with a raised voice, desperately hoping he didn’t give off the impression that he was intentionally harming himself to feel better.

“Doing something with my mouth.” He clarifies. Dr. O’Reilly nods, understanding. She writes it down, and Shane chews on his lower lip.

“What else do you chew on to calm yourself down?” Her eyes flicker to where Shane is running his tongue over his bottom lip. He thinks about it for a moment, mind going to the pencils he brought to school as a kid, teeth marks puncturing through the yellow paint.

The strings on sweatshirts that he’s frayed over the years from chewing on them. Ilya could always tell which of his own sweaters Shane preferred to wear based on how worn down the strings were.

The wet spots he’d have on the collars of his shirts from grinding the fabric between his front teeth.

All of the pull tops on water bottles that he’s had to replace because of him chewing them to pieces.

He thinks about the bags of gross vegan gum that he had stashed around their house, and his parents' house, and the Pike's house, and in the Centaurs locker room. Hell, Harris even carried around a bag of the shit for Shane to chew on when they were doing social media stuff.

“Um, a lot.” Shane laughs, not realizing just how often he chewed on things.

“Sticking with orotactiles, is it just chewing that calms you down?” Shane thinks about it for another moment. For the most part, it *was* just chewing on items that calmed him down. Shane flushes, swallowing loudly.

“Um, no, oral sex also calms me down, I guess.” He cringes at the sentence, knowing that if Ilya were in the room, he would have laughed at Shane referring to blowjobs with such a clinical term. Dr. O'Reilly marks it down with a neutral expression. As if to taunt him, she mumbles the words out loud as she writes them down.

“Oral sex calms him down.”

“I thought you were a sports therapist. Why are we talking about my sex life?” Shane complains.

“One of my specializations is athletics, but I have many qualifications. We're also not talking about your sex life, we're talking about your oral fixation.” Shane crinkles his nose at the phrase. “We can talk about your sex life if that's something you would like to talk about. Plenty of athletes find that their sex life takes a toll when they are stressed about their sports performance.” Shane thinks back to Ilya's joke from the other night and shakes his head. He didn't need to talk about their sex life with this lady.

“No, I'd say that my sex life is the least of my worries.” Which is true. He and Ilya communicated well in the bedroom; they had clear boundaries, and both felt that sex was helpful when either of them was struggling with something. He didn't want to toot his own horn, but Shane could say with full confidence that he and Ilya had a pretty healthy sex life.

“Okay, so you feel that your oral fixation doesn’t warrant therapy.”

“Do you have to call it that?” That gets a laugh out of Dr. O’Reilly.

“That is the term for it, so yes, I’d say I have to call it that. Oral fixations and oral sex are two different things, Shane. Sure, there is some overlap, but just because someone has an oral fixation doesn’t necessarily mean they enjoy oral sex.” Shane nods. It made sense.

“Let’s try something else. Was there anything in here that you feel validates you being in therapy?” Shane thinks about his conversation with Hayden and nods again.

“Yeah, um, I guess my last year with the Voyagers wasn’t great.” Dr. O’Reilly motions for him to continue. “They were fine with me being gay, which was a relief, but I couldn’t really be out; I was kind of told by higher-ups not to come out. I didn’t plan on coming out until I retired, but that changed a bit when I proposed to Ilya. He didn’t like being kept a secret, and I didn’t like having a secret. We were outed by my best friend, by accident, it was a total accident, I don’t blame him for anything,” Shane adds on when he sees the concerned furrow in Dr. O’Reilly’s brow. “Ilya and I were benched for a little while, and my team kind of stopped talking to me when they found out that I was dating Rozanov... Ilya, that I was dating Ilya. One of my closest friends was really upset with me for a while, which sucked.” Shane lets out a shaky laugh, bringing a hand up to his face to wipe at his wet eyes.

His hands were uncomfortably numb from sitting on them, but he shoved them back under his thighs when he was done rubbing at his eyes, grounding himself.

“So I left the Voyagers to play for the Centaurs. Ilya talks so highly of the team. I loved the Voyagers, fuck, I loved them so much, but even when I was their captain, even before they found out I was with Ilya, I never felt as close to them as Ilya is with the Centaurs. The Centaurs are a great team, well, no, actually, they’re not the best at hockey. What I mean is that they’re a great group of people. A bunch of them were at our wedding, and I somehow felt more supported by them than I did by my own best friends who attended.” He stops talking, slightly breathless. That was the most he’s said to a person in a long time.

Not even Ilya can get that much out of him at once.

“I’m sorry that you were treated that way, Shane. You gave a lot to your team, and it hurts when that isn’t appreciated.” Shane feels the sudden weight of it, realizing just how fucked up his situation was.

“I can’t play against them without throwing up. That’s what started Ilya’s whole obsession with me going to therapy.” Shane was aware that obsession was an aggressive word to use, that it was just gentle suggestions, but Shane didn’t want to be here, sitting in the truth that he gave his all to a team that hates him. “Even when I’m just playing pond hockey against my best friends, I feel like throwing up.”

“Feelings of stress can often manifest physically, especially due to our gut-brain connection. When a person feels intense anxiety, their vagus nerve may be affected, which can lead to, in your case, nausea and vomiting. You went through a traumatic event, being rejected by your team, which seems to have left you with a physical response to this trauma. Seeing your old team jogs your negative memory, causing you anxiety, which makes you throw up. Does that make sense?” Shane nods. That was also the most he’d heard out of Dr. O’Reilly since they’d met.

“So how do I stop myself from reacting like that?” That’s what Shane was here for: answers to his ‘problems’.

“Unfortunately, it’s not that easy, Shane. You can’t just stop your body from reacting to something up here without sorting out what it is that’s bugging you up here.” She taps at her temple with her pen. “There are coping mechanisms that can help, but I can’t say you’re going to walk out of here and suddenly stop feeling like throwing up when you play against the Voyagers.”

Dr. O’Reilly stands up, walking over to her desk. Shane observes her when she puts down her designated ‘Shane’ notebook and ruffles through an organized binder. “I’m going to send you home with some of these to read over. They might be able to help. I want you to try some of them out and report back to me next time we meet. Can you do that?” Shane nods, grabbing the papers with shaking hands when she hands them over. “While you do that, I’ll go over the notes that you gave me.” She smiles softly, looking towards the door. “Do you have someone driving you home?”

Shane nods, toying with a small rip in one of the pages. “Yeah, Ilya waits in the car for me.”

“And you are comfortable with where we’ve ended off today?”

No, he wants to say. *Fuck you for making me come to terms with what my teammates did.*

“Sure.” Is what he ends up whispering.

“Shane, I don’t want you to leave in distress.”

“Yeah, I’m fine.” It’s short and clipped, and Shane stands up, leaving with a promise to email and book once he’s looked at his schedule. He knows his schedule, has his games for the next three months memorized, but he had to get out of that fucking office.

The car is warm when he gets in, suffocatingly so.

“How did it go?” Ilya asks his usual line, eyeing Shane. Shane, in turn, balls up his fists, throwing the stupid papers Dr. O’Reilly gave him into the backseat of the car. His whole body was shaking, his throat tight. “Shane?”

“Just gimme a sec.” He hides his face in his knees, willing himself not to cry. He’d cried in front of Ilya more times than he could count; Shane was fine with crying, he was raised by parents who promoted healthy displays of emotions, both positive and negative.

The tears that were threatening to spill over this time, though, were not the gentle ones Ilya was used to seeing when they would have hard conversations. He felt the car rumble beneath him as Ilya began their drive home, one hand resting gently against Shane’s back.

“Can you please not touch me right now?” Ilya’s hand immediately retreated. It had been so long since he’d told Ilya not to touch him, so used to saying it when they were in public, afraid of the wrong person discovering their secret. Guilt twists in his gut at pushing away his husband, and he clenches his hands over his ears, fingers curling in his hair.

No one spoke the rest of the drive home; the only sounds Shane could hear past his covered ears were the echoes of his rapid breathing and the rumble of the garage door opening as they arrived home. The car shuts off, the incessant hum from the engine gone.

It was quiet.

Slowly, Shane pulls his hands away from his ears, keeping his forehead pressed against his knees.

“Shane, are you okay?” All of the progress Shane had made to calm himself down flew out the door at Ilya’s question. His crying began with quiet hitches of his breath, fat tears falling to the plush carpeted mats of the car. “Shh, is okay, Shane.” Ilya doesn’t touch him, but his presence next to Shane is a welcome warmth. Shane’s next breath catches in his throat, coming out as a strangled sob.

He’s not sure how long he sits in the car, hunched over and sobbing like an idiot, before the tears subside. Shane finally turns his head, looking up at Ilya. The other man’s expression was a perfect mix of confusion and concern. Shane laughs at it, delirious, before lifting his head and shaking it.

“I gave them so much, Ilya.” His voice is shot, cracking at the end. “I gave them the best years of my career, I gave them three fucking cups, I gave them everything.” He knows he sounds pretentious, but he can’t help the words that spill out of his mouth, stomach burning and limbs shaking with anger. “And what, so that they could treat me like dirt as soon as something other than hockey makes me happy? They were all perfectly fine with me being a faggot as long as I didn’t act on it?” His voice continues to rise through his rant, words coming out as tight shouts.

“Shane.” It was the first time Ilya had ever heard him use the word, and he could hear how shocked he was.

“Why didn’t I do anything?” It’s barely a whisper, and Shane bites his bottom lip as it starts to wobble. He was not going to cry again. “I just let them walk all over me for years. I’ve got

no fucking backbone. I don't fight when I play hockey, I don't stick up for myself when my own fucking teammates turn against me."

"Shane, stop. You are being too hard on yourself." Ilya's own voice is low. Shane can tell that he's angry; he was always more upset with the Voyagers than Shane ever was. "How your team reacted, is not your fault; you cannot blame yourself for it." Ilya rests his hand on his own stomach. "The anger, in here, is good. Makes us better players, is why we always beat Montreal. You stick up for yourself by showing up on ice, even though playing against them makes you sick. You stick up for yourself by getting up when they hit you, by scoring against their lousy goalie. The person you wish you were, that is not you. Shane does not fight; unlike his dumb husband, he is smart enough to know it only makes things worse." Shane snorts, nodding.

"Remind me of this whenever I question your captain abilities. That was a good motivational speech." Shane jokes.

"I am serious, Shane. What they did, that was not fair. Is why I always drop my gloves when we play against them. I hate them. Especially Pike." That gets a louder laugh out of Shane. "Now, can we please get out of the car? It is cold." Shane nods, unfastening his seatbelt and climbing out of the car on wobbly legs. He rounds the car, pulling Ilya into a hug. Ilya hugs him back, the way Shane always likes when he's an emotional mess; arms wrapped tight, suffocatingly so.

Chapter 4: Churning and Burning, They Yearn for the Cup

Chapter Summary

Shane finally has a good therapy session

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shane, stupidly, believed he was going to be miraculously fixed after his breakdown. It had been long enough since the last one that he forgot just how draining it was.

Waking up the next day, Shane felt a strange mix of nothingness and everything all at once. The bed was empty next to him, which was unusual. Shane was typically the first one up. Rolling over to check his phone, he saw that he'd almost slept till noon. His heart drops.

They had a home game tonight, and sleeping in had totally fucked with his schedule. Throwing himself out of bed, Shane pads down the stairs on heavy feet. Ilya was sitting at the dining table with a smoothie, reading over crumpled papers. Another smoothie rests on the table across from him, condensation creating a ring around the bottom of the glass.

"I didn't know you could read," Shane grumbles, plopping himself in the seat across from Ilya, taking a large gulp of the smoothie. Ilya looks up, making a mocking face before looking back down.

"I am looking over the pages you threw in my back seat. You really shouldn't make such a big mess in someone else's car." Ilya puts the page he was reading down, reaching for his own smoothie and finishing it off. Shane grabs for the pages, reading them over. Each of the pages outlined different sets of coping strategies for different stressors, decorated with colourful graphics that matched each strategy. He scoffs.

"Does she think I'm a child or something? What's with the pictures?" He flicks one of the pictures before dropping the pages back on the table. Ilya reaches across, dragging the pages back towards himself.

“I like it, makes it easier to read. The words are also good, simple.”

“At least half of those ‘strategies’ are already part of my daily routine; I’m the spitting image of health.” Ilya rolls his eyes, ignoring Shane to continue his reading. Shane drinks his smoothie, absentmindedly tapping his foot against Ilya’s under the table. “I’m going to go work out, are you gonna join me?” Ilya shakes his head, standing up from the table and grabbing their glasses.

“I already worked out, gyms all yours.” Shane’s lip twitches. He wasn’t used to Ilya being ahead of him in their routine.

Quickly changing into athletic wear, Shane retreats to the gym. He makes it just past the doorway before he stops. It felt like someone had filled his limbs with concrete, and the thought of using any of their equipment made his stomach tighten.

He pulls on his headphones, hoping that music will distract him from his sudden lethargy. He makes it halfway through his workout before Ilya enters the room. Shane pauses his blaring music, pulling his headphones around his neck.

“You have been down here so long, I thought you dropped a weight on your head and died.” Shane smiles, checking his watch with a frown. He’d been down there for two hours and had barely broken a sweat. He would have usually been long done with his workout by now.

“You are not all here today?” Ilya asks, walking over and sitting next to Shane on the bench.

“I guess not.” He doesn’t have the energy to lie.

“Will you be okay to play tonight?” Ilya breaks into a toothy grin as soon as he asks it. Unless forced to, the thought of skipping a game never crosses Shane's mind.

“You’re hilarious, now let me finish my workout.”

He doesn’t finish his workout.

He sits on the bench staring at the floor until he can bring himself to do his stretch routine. Would he be okay to play tonight?

The question sits heavily on his shoulders until they enter the arena. His headphones were a comforting pressure on his head, soft instrumental music doing wonders to calm him down. *Look at that, Dr. O’Reilly, I’m using one of your stupid coping mechanisms.*

His teammates clap him on the back as he enters the change room, aware of the headphones and that he wasn’t in the mood to talk, instead moving to converse with Ilya. He keeps them on as he’s getting dressed, sitting in his stall with closed eyes as he waits for one of Ilya’s dramatic motivational speeches. His gear pinched him uncomfortably, underclothes rubbing his skin raw.

“What’s he doing?” He hears Wyatt ask from across the room.

“Meditation,” Ilya responds for him.

“I’m not very good at meditating; there is too much going on in my brain.” Luca tacks on.

“Yes, well, lucky for Shane, there is not much up there.”

“I heard that jackass,” Shane says with a smile, eyes still closed. He feels Coach Wiebe tap on his headphones as he enters the room, and he slips them off to listen. Where Wiebe is calculated, sharing stats and plays to boost the team, Ilya is positively crazy. He points and yells, swinging his arms with emphasis as he proves to everyone that they’re better than whatever team they were playing against.

“Is Buffalo!” The team boos and jeers. “We will be laughing after game because of how easy the win was. Whoever gets first goal will get free drinks next time we go out, courtesy of Shane.” The men in the changeroom clap, laughing at Shane, who just rolls his eyes. Electricity crackles between all of the players as they enter the rink, making quick work of their warmups.

Shane doesn’t feel the electricity.

He reties his laces twice, convinced that maybe his skates were causing his issues. He checks the tape on his stick and then stretches for far longer than he needs to stretch.

“What’s wrong?” Troy asks, skating up next to him when he misses a practice shot against Wyatt. Shane looks at him, chewing lazily on his mouthguard.

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been checked out since you got into the changeroom.” Shane shrugs.

“Yeah, I don’t know. Just an off day, I guess.” Troy nods, not pushing further.

“Don’t be so hard on yourself. Your off days seem like my typical on days.” He bumps his shoulder against Shane’s with a reassuring smile before skating off to talk to Luca.

Finally, it’s time for the first puck drop, and Ilya lets Shane have it. In his entire career, Shane has never lost a first puck drop to Buffalo. It’s not a stat many people talk about, or frankly care about, but Shane reminds himself of it every time he plays against them. If he was good at chirping, he’d maybe bring it up, shake Buffalo enough to let him win yet another faceoff.

He loses the faceoff.

He's so stunned that he almost forgets to skate after the puck, knees locking. As soon as he does have possession of the puck, he's checked into the boards, and Buffalo makes quick work to score the first goal of the game. Shane skates over to the bench, eyes locked on Wiebe.

"I need you to bench me, I don't think I can play." He barely registers the words coming out of his mouth, and judging by Wiebe's face, he's equally as shocked.

"Are you injured?" He asks once Shane is seated. Shane can feel Ilya's eyes on him from his position on the ice.

"No, I just... my head's not in the game." He can only imagine the reaction his last coach would have to those words, how he would probably refuse to bench Shane for a whole game just because he was a little bummed out from a shitty therapy session. Wiebe simply nods, clapping him on the back before his attention goes back to the game.

Shane sits in silence the whole game, chewing on his mouthguard. He shuffles down the bench with each shift, ignoring the looks from his teammates when he wouldn't join them on the ice.

They'd won, thank god, with Ilya scoring the first goal only moments after Buffalo.

"Guess I owe you a drink," Shane says to Ilya as they change.

"You owe me more than just one drink. I promised that first goal got multiple drinks."

"You're my husband, so it doesn't count. Haas got the real first goal in my eyes." At the sound of his name, Luca perks up, smiling goofily at the promise of drinks. He and Ilya change and shower quickly, both desperate to head home. Wiebe pulls him to the side when they exit the changeroom, though, and Ilya falters, looking between the two men.

“All good, Rozy, go get the car warmed up.” Ilya nods curtly, turning on his heel to do as Shane instructed. “What’s up, coach?”

“Just wanted to double-check that you’re okay. I know you haven’t been with us long, but it’s important to me that my players are all well.” Shane smiles, warmth growing in his belly. His last coach had been a scary, traditional man, and any positive attention from him would have Shane preening, riding on the high for weeks. He really appreciated how Wiebe was always positive, and that his feedback and kindness never wore down with use.

“Yeah, I’m all good, just need some rest.” His coach is hesitant when he nods, knowing that there was more behind what had happened today than just being tired.

“Okay, well, I’ll let you go then. If you still feel like your head’s not in the game next time we play, please let me know.” The warmth in his stomach shrivels, fist clenching momentarily at his side. Wiebe was going to bench him again if he kept performing like he had today. Shane was a liability to the team if he wasn’t on top of his game, and Wiebe was now aware of that.

“Sure, coach, have a good one.” Shane turns with a small wave over his shoulder, speed walking out into the cold to find that Ilya had pulled the car up, idling by the door as he waited for him. Shane smiles softly at the gesture before climbing in. Ilya opens his mouth to talk, but Shane cuts him off, frantically pulling his seatbelt on.

“That game was total bullshit. What the fuck is wrong with me today?” Ilya’s eyes dart to the backseat, nervous, and then back to Shane, who keeps going. “I’m not going back to therapy, fuck that. Fuckin’ sports psychologist, my ass, I’ve been playing even worse since I started going, and for what? For me to realize that maybe I do have anxiety and everyone else knows me better than I know myself.” He scoffs, shaking his head. “And now Wiebe wants to bench me next game... It’s total bullshit.”

“We are driving Haas home.” Is all Ilya says in response. Shane’s head whips around fast enough for it to leave a lingering burn. Luca Haas sits in the backseat, cheeks red and eyes wide. He waves sheepishly.

“What, his mom couldn’t come get him?” Shane complains, turning back towards the front, slouching. He knows he looks immature, but he’s too far past the point of return. Luca has already seen his erratic behaviour, knows that Shane is fucking crazy.

“C’mon, man, my car’s in the shop,” Luca responds, lightly kicking the back of Shane’s seat. The car is silent as Ilya drives, tension suffocating.

“I was in therapy for a while.” Luca finally interrupts the silence, and Shane stifles. “I had a bad relationship in high school, and my parents made me go to therapy. I hated it because I would have to miss part of practice to be there, but it did help me. I did not realize it then, but I definitely needed it.” When Shane looks back at the younger boy, he’s looking out the window, passing streetlights casting shadows on his face that make him look far older than he was.

Shane’s not exactly sure what to say in response. He barely knew the kid, had probably a total of three conversations not involving hockey with him, and yet he was comfortable enough to tell Shane this to try to make him feel better.

“I also did not like therapy at first. It does not feel good to think of all the bad things in your life, especially when your career relies on you being present and energized.” Shane hears Luca hum in agreement.

“I probably would not be here if it weren’t for therapy.” Luca doesn’t sound sad when he says it; if anything, he sounds hopeful, grateful that he was here. Ilya purses his lips, reaching back to pat Luca comfortingly on the knee. Shane looks between the two, knowing that Ilya’s *same* would go unspoken, but that it was still there.

“Well then, I am glad for therapy, because now you get to smoke Shane and me on the ice.” They drop Luca off at his apartment building, and Shane rolls down his window as he watches him approach the foyer.

“Luca.” He calls. The lanky man turns around, stepping closer to the car. Shane, once again, is at a loss for words. “Have a good night.” The kid, in turn, smiles, nodding.

“You as well.” Shane covers his face with a groan once they pull away, and Ilya starts laughing.

“Oh my god, that was humiliating, Ilya. Why didn’t you tell me he was in the car?” He hisses.

“I was about to, but then you started your angry blabber.” Ilya laughs again, shaking his head. “Is true that Wiebe is going to bench you?” The contrast between his laughter and his suddenly serious tone almost gives Shane whiplash.

“I mean, no, I was just being dramatic. He told me that I should talk to him if I still feel like this next game.”

“Do you think you will still feel like this?”

Like this.

There isn’t a word either of them knows that can describe how Shane is really feeling. He’s angry, but also not, hyper but also drained, sad but pumped. He’s in the midst of inventing a new emotion.

Shane shrugs, bringing his thumb to his mouth to chew on.

“I don’t know. It’s like I’ve suddenly realized that my entire life has been, and continues to be, dedicated to a sport whose foundation and fanbase hate my existence. It makes it a bit hard to play knowing that no one sees me the same way they used to.”

It’s hard to play knowing that no one cheered as hard as they used to, that he was rarely asked to do interviews, or asked to sign whatever object a fan could frantically grab at if they had the chance to run into him in public.

“It feels... it feels like I’ve already retired. It feels like I’m old and fading away. I’m not in the spotlight anymore. There are probably kids out there opening their stupid hockey card packs, asking each other who I am when they pull my card. No one wants the gay guy's hockey card.”

“No, but they want the guy with the best stats, and if that just so happens to be the gay guy, then they will have to suck it up. I would be very happy if I pulled your hockey card.” Shane snorts, pulling his thumb from his mouth and resting his hand on Ilya’s muscular thigh. “We are going to retire one day, Shane, you realize this.”

“Yeah, I know, and I’ll be ready for it then. I’ll be old and sore and sick of all the rooks outskating me, but I’m still one of the best fucking players. I’m one of the best fucking players, and that’s discredited all because no one in the league can handle the fact that I’m gay.”

“It sounds to me like a lot of your confidence in hockey relies on how other people view you.” Shane looks up from the speckled ground to look at Dr. O’Reilly, a knowing smile on her face.

It had taken him a month to feel comfortable enough to book another appointment with her. He was out of his funk and back to his usual playing style.

Just in time for the playoffs.

It was his first time in the playoffs playing on the same team as his husband, and he was positively giddy. He’d been over the moon whenever the two of them got to play in the All-Star games together, but being on the same team for the Stanley Cup Playoffs was a completely different story.

“I guess you could say that.” He’d never forget his first game as captain, the thrum of blood in his ears and the cheers that erupted around him when he stepped on the ice.

It rivalled the small buzz of applause that he’d heard when he stepped on the Centaur’s ice the first time. The arena was smaller, the fans more sparse. The first thing he felt was regret.

Regret for leaving a fanbase that cheered at everything he did. He could breathe, and someone would scream.

It took a lot more work to get that reaction out of the Centaur's fanbase. It took a lot more work to get that reaction out of people since he'd come out.

"I don't want to sound vain."

"You don't sound vain, Shane," Shane smirks at the rhyme.

"I know I don't have an inflated ego, I've seen players that do, but I also have this voice in my head that can't stop switching between telling me I'm the best and telling me I'm the worst, and I can't tell which I hate hearing more."

"Do you always hear this voice?" Shane observes her as she brings her pen down to the notebook, balancing it on her crossed leg. She writes *imposter syndrome* underneath the neat notes she'd already written, adding a question mark at the end, and then underlining it for good measure. She was so blunt sometimes it made

Shane's skin crawl. Shane averts his gaze when Dr. O'Reilly looks back up at him.

"No. It's quiet when I play. Everything is quiet when I play. It's after a game when the voices are loud, especially when I lose."

"Do these voices tell you not to eat when you lose?" Shane furrows his brows. He didn't remember telling her about the eating thing. "I read through your notes."

"Ah, right. I forgot about those. No, nothing is telling me not to eat; I just lose my appetite sometimes. It's moreso critiquing my game. Like, Ilya and I rewatch all of our losses to figure out where things went wrong. Lots of players do that, though."

“Would you say that you take losses harder than Ilya does?” He liked the way she said Ilya’s name. There was nothing behind it, total neutrality. Shane was so used to hearing Ilya’s name being spat like an insult, or sang like he was some God needing worship. His therapist was completely indifferent to his husband.

He wasn’t used to it.

“Yes. He used to take losses a lot harder when his dad was still alive, but after he passed, I guess Ilya wasn’t so scared of disappointing people. He sees losses as a learning opportunity; it’s why he’s such a good captain.”

“You were a captain too.”

“Yeah, a shit one. I have no clue why they made me captain. In all honesty, it should have gone to J.J., he’s way better at hyping up the team than I ever was.”

“When you were captain, what would you do after a loss? Were you hard on your team? Did you comfort them?” Shane thinks about it for a moment, comparing all of his lousy speeches to the ones he’d seen from Ilya. Ilya, for what it was worth, had a way with words that left Shane breathless.

Shane is sure it had something to do with English being his second language, the fact that he had to process everything he had to say before it left his mouth. There was a purpose behind it all, an intention for every word he used.

It reminded him of his grandmother, who only ever spoke English to David. Shane had been, and continues to be, pretty shit at understanding Japanese, which meant he never conversed with his grandparents as often as he should have. He loved it when he would catch his grandmother talking with his dad, though. She only ever had nice things to say to him, and she sounded like she meant every single word.

“I was a hypocrite.” Dr. O’Reilly cocks her head. “I said a lot of what Ilya says, about losses just teaching us about what to do next time, that we shouldn’t take it so hard. I was soft on

them, which I don't think they appreciated. I also think they could tell that I wasn't really practicing what I was preaching."

"That you were being hard on yourself when you lost?" Shane nods. "You say Ilya was only scared of losing because it would disappoint his father. Are you scared of disappointing people?"

"Well, yeah, nobody wants to lose."

"No, but think about it, really think about what happens when you lose. Is anyone on the Centaurs disappointed in you? Do your parents get upset, Ilya?"

"No, none of them get upset; they all see losses as opportunities, and I know that I should too. It's just... hard, I guess. There's been so much pressure for me to be the best for my entire hockey career."

"Pressure from who? Coaches will guide you to be your best; that's what they do. Teammates will work with you, and your family will support you no matter what. Where is this pressure coming from?"

"Fans. Crowds, audiences. They want to see good games, they want to see players that will knock their socks off, and experience once-in-a-lifetime hockey. I want to give them that."

"You don't know these people, Shane. You don't owe fans anything. You love hockey, yes?"

"More than anything. I mean, not as much as I love Ilya, but yeah, more than anything."

"So don't let these strangers ruin what you love... Let that apply to your relationship with Ilya as well. Don't let people who don't know you tell you how to do what you do best."

And something clicked.

It was like a tiny gear in Shane's head had received some much-needed oil and began to turn again. She was right, and he fucking hated to admit it.

Damn, maybe she was good at her job.

Shane was enthusiastic when he booked again for the following week, finally leaving an appointment with a sense of dignity.

"How did it go?" Shane answers the question with a hard kiss, pulling Ilya in by the back of his neck. Ilya is wide-eyed when he pulls away, cheeks slightly flushed. "I take it you had good session?"

"Very. I'm so fucking ready to win the cup." Ilya laughs, nodding at his enthusiasm.

"This is what I like to hear, let's go win cup then."

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to explore Luca's character a bit in this chapter. Rachel Reid discussed original plans for book 7 to be about Luca, and a potential like evil ex or smth (ok Scott Pilgrim)

Of course, that never happened, and instead, we're getting a glorious third Shane and Ilya book, but in my mind, Luca is this disastrous bisexual with a messy ex. We love Luca Haas in the SpiderMan69 household <3

Chapter 5: Bowel-Shaking Earthquakes of Doubt and Remorse

Chapter Summary

Shane hates therapy again

Chapter Notes

Slight warning for ableist language

They won the cup.

Shane had, honest to god, sobbed as soon as he got in the car. He was hunched over in the passenger seat, crying hard enough that he kept gagging. Ilya couldn't help but laugh, rubbing Shane's back in an attempt to calm him down.

They'd celebrated in the locker room harder than Shane had ever celebrated something in his life. He kissed Ilya in front of his teammates, completely unashamed. Their faces were sticky from the drinks people had dumped on them in celebration. Ilya tasted like champagne and Gatorade and success. Shane couldn't stop telling him he loved him.

They fucking won on home ice.

"I take it this win was especially important to you?" Dr. O'Reilly asks.

"It was everything I needed," Shane says with a sigh. He can feel himself relaxing into the seat, something he'd never allowed himself to do before this appointment.

He was still good at hockey; he could still win.

“Do you feel like part of you needed this win to prove yourself to your old teammates?” Shane flushes, stuttering.

“I, I mean, I guess. I don’t want to be a gloating asshole, but I wouldn’t be lying if I didn’t say it felt great that we won and they didn’t.” The Voyagers didn’t even make it to the playoffs, just like he’d predicted.

“How did your friends react to this win?”

“Hayden and J.J. were obviously stoked. They lost hope for their team as soon as they didn’t make it to the playoffs, and they were great supporters. I really appreciate them.” Dr. O’Reilly smiles.

“I’m really happy for you, Shane. This is a big moment, and you definitely deserve it. You look like you’re glowing.”

“I feel like I’m glowing.” He was going to be riding on this high for the whole summer. Dr. O’Reilly looks back down at her notes, flipping through the pages.

“I did want to touch on...” She pauses as she searches through the book, “Ah, coping mechanisms. I gave you some sheets back in, oh, what was it, March, I believe, and I didn’t check back on it. Considering we’re in a good place, I think it would be suitable to talk about some tools that could help keep this good mood going.” Shane almost groans.

He didn’t want to talk about coping mechanisms.

He wanted to talk about how it felt to fuck his husband under the same roof as the Stanley Cup.

How Ilya's lips had tasted like the cold metal after he'd kissed the trophy back in the Centaur arena.

How he'd won four fucking Stanley cups and felt like he could consume an entire solar system.

"Sure." Dr. O'Reilly smirks at Shane's change in demeanour.

"Did you try any of them?"

"I already use most of them in my daily routine."

"Such as?"

"Exercise, meditations, diets and supplements, music, socializing, reading, y'know, the big ones."

"Okay, and when you use those strategies, are you mindful of how they help you?" Shane shrugs, tugging at a loose string on his sweatpants. "How about when you are feeling stressed, are you mindful of how they help you then?"

"Since I've read your papers, yes. I'm almost hyper aware of it now."

"Because you know that they are supposed to help you?"

"Yes."

"Are you hyper aware of it when you're carrying out your daily routine?"

“No, cause those are just part of my routine, I’m not doing them to calm myself down.” Dr. O’Reilly purses her lips, head tilted. Shane now recognized this as the telltale sign that she was thinking, concocting an answer to something in her head. It was the same expression she’d made when she concluded that he had an oral fixation, when she’d written down that he probably has *imposter syndrome*.

“Why are they included in your routine if not to calm you down?” Shane falters.

“I don’t know, my routine has just been like that for years.”

“What if you were to change your routine, take something out? What if you woke up tomorrow and instead of meditating, you decided to go for a hike?”

“Hiking would be an exercise.” Dr. O’Reilly lets out a short laugh.

“Okay, well then, what if instead of reading, you watched a movie?”

“I can just do that when I have free time during the day; I don’t understand what that has to do with me breaking my routine.”

“Sorry, what I mean is, what would happen if you didn’t follow your routine?”

Shane’s confused by the question. He can tell she’s setting him up for something, that his next answer will give her enough fuel to tell him what else is wrong with his fucked up head.

“Nothing! Nothing’s going to happen if I break my routine!” He snaps. “Sorry. Nothing’s going to happen, I just prefer to follow my routine because it’s what I know, and it keeps me calm.”

Dr. O'Reilly is quiet for a moment, eyes scanning over Shane, calculating. Shane feels small, his shoulders rising up to his ears under the gaze. He brings a thumb up to his mouth and bites at it.

"Shane, have you ever heard of autism spectrum disorder?" Shane feels his stomach knot, his mouth freezing around his thumb.

"What are you getting at?" His first instinct is to, of course, deflect. "Are you trying to fuck with my head or something?" Dr. O'Reilly's smile this time is pitiful, and Shane very much wants to be swallowed by the floor.

"My whole job is sort of to fuck with people's heads."

"Well then, you're doing great, 5 stars... Yes, I know what autism spectrum disorder is." He continues chewing on his thumb, teeth digging deep enough to taste a hint of blood.

"Well, Shane-" she's talking slower, annunciating her words in a way that Shane can't help but understand. There was no way he could avoid what she was saying, no opportunity for plausibly deniability. "Throughout our time together over the past few months, I've come to believe you may be on the autism spectrum. I'm not a psychiatrist, so I can't actually diagnose you, but if this is something you're interested in having diagnosed, I have connections with excellent psychiatrists who specialize in working with people on the spectrum."

Shane gawks. He was aware that there was spit rolling down where his thumb hung against his lip, long forgotten. Chewing his finger down to the bone wouldn't do anything to fix what Dr. O'Reilly had just told him.

"Are you serious?"

"I have met many, many people in my career, Shane, which means I am quite attuned to certain patterns in behaviour. You've discussed with me your inadequacy when it comes to communication-" ouch "-and through our own conversations, I've observed social skills that

I've also observed in those with ASD." Shane finally pulls his thumb away from his mouth, wiping the cold saliva on his pant leg. He huffs out a breath, processing.

"What else?" Dr. O'Reilly furrows her brows.

"Pardon?"

"What else do I do? What have you observed in me that makes you think I'm autistic?" Shane has never been able to stump her before, and he feels a sort of accomplishment in how Dr. O'Reilly's mouth hangs ajar.

"You want me to list off my observations?"

"Please." She scans her eyes over him once again before flipping through their notes.

"Well, for one, oral fixations are often a form of self stimulating behavior in autistic people, also known as stimming. The processing of chewing or sucking serves as a sensory regulation tool to help when stressed or overstimulated."

"Mhm, what else?" He feels like he's egging her on, waiting for something to happen, for the woman to lose her composure for even a second and slip up.

Slip up and tell Shane that he's not actually autistic. That she was just being funny, that she made it up to test him, and that he was completely normal.

"You've told me you often wear your headphones when you don't want to socialize with people, even if you're not listening to music. Covering your ears is an excellent repellent to auditory stimuli that may overwhelm you." Shane nods again, eyeing her notes. "You're meticulous about your routine, you have an almost paralyzing aversion to change, you often fail to hold eye contact, you're intensely fixated on hockey, to the point that your career often dictates how you carry yourself, you shut down when you're upset... What do you want,

Shane? Do you want me to keep listing things off because I can?" She sounds almost sad when she says it, and Shane feels suddenly guilty for being so short with her.

"I want you to be wrong?"

"You want me to be wrong about what?"

"About me having autism!"

"Shane, I don't know if you have autism; that's not for me to decide." Her voice is strained, exasperated.

"Well, you sound pretty fucking sure, so just come out and say it. Shane, you're different. Shane, you're autistic. Shane, you're a fucking retard who can't socialize with anyone, and that's the reason your career is failing. Shane, you can't do anything right. Shane, you'll never catch a break because everything I say is just going to keep piling up on top of you until it crushes you because you refuse to acknowledge anything about yourself if it doesn't make you perfect!" He's not sure when he started crying, but his face is wet when he stops yelling. Dr. O'Reilly is scarily composed across from him. Shane takes a deep breath, composing himself. "I'm sorry."

"No, Shane, it's okay. I could have approached this better, and I apologize. Would you like to do some breathing exercises before you go home?" Shane nods, rubbing the rough fabric of his sweater over his eyes. Dr. O'Reilly has him join her on the floor, groaning as she lowers herself from her seat.

"Alright, close your eyes." Shane does, resting his head against the chair. The seat is still warm from when he'd been sitting in it, and it feels nice against the skin on his neck. "Take a breath in for four and then hold it for seven." He follows, taking a stuttering inhale. He was familiar with box breathing; he could do this easy-peasy. "I want you to think about your win as you exhale for eight. Think about how it felt when your husband passed you the cup." He exhales with a smile.

“Think about your skates gliding on the ice as you do your round. The burn in your arms as you lift the cup, and the applause from the crowd around you.” Shane follows her guidance, visualizing as he breathes. “Think about all of the work you put into hockey, and all of the reward. Take a moment to be grateful for everyone who’s taught you. Everyone who’s worked with you and under you. The people you’ve guided and inspired. And finally, thank yourself, Shane. Thank your body for playing and moving, and your mind for being dedicated to everything you do.”

The two of them sit in silence for a moment, Shane’s tailbone digging into the hard floor, his back twinging from the lack of support. “Alright, eyes open.” When he opens them, he’s immediately aware of how visually quiet the room is. The lights were less bright, the edges less sharp. The ringing in his ear had dissipated. He lifts his head from the chair, looking over at Dr. O’Reilly. “Feel better?”

“Yes. Thank you. I’m really sorry for how I reacted, Dr. O’Reilly.” She smiles softly.

“Please, Shane, you can call me Jen.”

He wasn’t going to, but it was nice of her to say.

“Would you like me to email you the names of some psychiatrists?”

“Sure.”

Chapter 6: The Sun Has Gone Down and the Moon Has Come Up

Chapter Summary

Shane talks to his mom

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shane was grateful that it was one of the rare days that Ilya didn't drive him to his appointment.

When he leaves the office, his email inbox fat with resources from Dr. O'Reilly, Shane feels overwhelmingly lost.

He didn't want to go home.

He didn't want to have to face Ilya and act like his entire life hadn't been changed because of one stupid therapy session.

He drives to his parents' place and stays parked in the driveway for almost twenty minutes before his mom knocks on the car window. He startles at the gentle tap, turning to find his mom's concerned face staring back at him. She motions for him to roll down the window.

"What's up, Shaney?" His bottom lip wavers. His face felt hot, skin tight. "C'mon, honey, hop out of the car." Shane nods, rolling up the window and stopping the car. His mom pulls him into a tight hug when he steps out, and he hides his face in her neck.

He remembers when he was tall enough to nestle his face in the delicate crook of his mother's neck when they hugged, how it fit there like a puzzle piece. He'd loved being carried as a

child, forehead resting against his mother's collarbone, hidden by her thick hair falling around him like a curtain.

He always felt most at home here, in his mother's arms.

Her skin grows wet with his tears, slick under his cheek. She strokes his hair, fingers scraping at his neck when he lets out a shuddering breath.

“Let’s go inside. I’ll make you some tea.” He nods, pulling away and wiping at his eyes. He follows her inside, hugged by the warmth that is his parents' house. The floorboards creak under his feet, and the lingering smell of maple cinnamon candles fills the air. Shane throws himself against the worn leather of the couch.

Worn from love, unlike the way Dr. O’Reilly’s office chairs were worn from worried picking and anxious shifting. His mom disappears into the kitchen, dishes clattering softly. The kettle barely gets the chance to whistle before his mom removes it from the heat. It was a habit from his childhood that she couldn’t kick, so used to little Shane slapping his chubby hands over his ears to shield himself from the sound.

It’s quiet until his mom joins him on the couch, putting down two cups of tea and a plate of cut-up vegetables on the coffee table in front of them. Shane sits up, grabbing for a carrot. It snaps between his teeth, and he chews meticulously until he can’t chew anymore, thinking of what to say.

“I’ve been going to therapy.” There, that’s a good neutral start. His mom’s eyebrows shoot up.

“That’s amazing, Shane. How’s that been going?”

Amazing! It’s fixing all my problems! He knows that’s what she wants to hear, but he can’t bring himself to keep lying to her.

“Terrible. I fucking hate it.” His mom sputters on her sip of tea, wiping at her mouth with a cough.

“Sorry, sorry, I was not expecting you to say that. Do you have a bad therapist? I’m sure I could help you find a different one. Therapy really does work wonders when you find someone you click with.”

“No, my therapist’s fine. She’s just really good at getting under my skin. I honestly can’t tell if I hate her or not.” His mother gives him her signature concerned look, a hand coming to rest on his knee.

“I don’t think you’re supposed to hate your therapist.” He sighs.

“No, I know. I don’t think I actually hate her; I think I just hate what she tells me. She’s like this perpetual bearer of bad news.” He rests his head against his mom's shoulder, and it digs uncomfortably into his forehead. He doesn’t want to see the expression on her face when he tells her what Dr. O’Rielly said today.

Doesn’t want to see her realize that her son wasn’t the perfect person that she’d put on a pedestal.

“She thinks I’m autistic... had this whole list of stupid things I do, told me I should get diagnosed.” His mom freezes for a second, and Shane cringes.

Her arm slides up his back, wrapping him into an awkward side hug.

“Your teachers used to say that to me all the fucking time.” She says it with a shaky laugh, and Shane can tell she’s about to cry, the way someone smells rain in the air before it falls. Shane lifts his head, too surprised to comfort her.

“Really?” She nods, wiping gently at her eyes before the tears could fall.

“They were constantly calling me, my god, telling me that I should get you tested for Asperger’s. Your marks for collaboration and self-regulation were always shit, and I would always, always, fight your teachers on it. I never believed them, though. I only ever saw you in your element, and I thought you were perfect. I didn’t care if you didn’t socialize like the other kids did, I didn’t care that you only pitched in when you wanted to talk about hockey because you were happy.” She looks at the ceiling, willing the tears away, her face scrunching up in the exact same way Shane’s did when he tries not to cry.

He’d never noticed the similarity in the mannerism until Ilya had pointed it out to him after their wedding.

“God, you were such a happy kid, Shaney. You could entertain yourself for hours, you would talk and talk and talk about hockey and play mini sticks with the neighbourhood kids and your teammates from sunrise to sunset, and I just didn’t understand what they were talking about. How could my perfect little man refuse to participate in team settings, or go days without talking in class?”

“So you knew then?” She tilts her head from side to side, not a nod, but not a denial.

“I guess it was always kind of there, this guilty feeling that maybe you were different, and I didn’t do anything to help you. I just didn’t know what to do. These teachers would beg me to get you tested and then wouldn’t tell me where to find help, and your father was just as confused by their comments as I was. It was my first time being a mom, and heaven knows none of the parenting books in the nineties covered how to get your child tested for autism.” Shane laughs, and his mother smiles softly at him, bringing a hand up to stroke his face. Her thumb traces over his freckles the same way Ilya always does.

“See, my happy boy.” She’s choked up, nostrils flaring. “I never cared that you were different because I created you. How bad could something I made really be?”

“I’m just scared mom. I’m scared of what comes with this, what happens if I go see a psychiatrist and they tell me that I am autistic.”

“I think that a lot of good can come with it. Having a name to put with the feelings. If you need me, I’ll be with you through the whole thing, Shaney, like I should have when you were little.”

“No, mom, please don’t do that.” She nods, and Shane brings his own hand up to wipe at a tear that slipped out of her eye.

“You’re right, I’m sorry. I’m just feeling some parental guilt. You’ll understand one day.” Shane smiles, cheeks heating the way they always do when people talk about him becoming a parent.

“Can this just stay between us? I don’t think I can handle telling Ilya right now.”

“You know I don’t like keeping things from Ilya.”

“You don’t like it? I’m his fucking husband!” She laughs and nods. “I just, I don’t know how to tell him, or if he even knows what it means.” That had been the first thing he’d done before driving to his parents' house. He’d sat in the parking lot of Dr. O’Reilly’s building, Googling what it was like to have autism in Russia, trying to gauge how Ilya could react, if he was raised to harbour a negative perception of it.

“Alright, alright. It’s between us, but please don’t keep this from him if you do get a diagnosis.” Shane nods, promising he wouldn’t. The two of them hang out on the couch until the sun goes down, Shane resting his head in his mom's lap as they watch a movie, her fingers carding through his hair.

His phone lights up on the coffee table a few times with messages from Ilya, and Shane doesn’t answer. He’d told him he was going to his parents for a bit, that he’d be home before bed. He feels guilty as hell about it, but the thought of responding to any text messages sounds exhausting.

When he leaves, his mother hugs him long enough to make him uncomfortable, repeating a mantra of support, how much she loved him, how proud she was, that she was only a short drive away.

The drive home is grating, nothing dulling out the noise in his brain. He couldn't be autistic. He couldn't add another thing under his belt that further ostracised him. Being one of the few Asian players in the NHL had been hard, being one of four out NHL players, almost impossible.

Being autistic in the NHL? Unheard of.

He huffs out an anxious breath when he parks the car. The house was dark, but he knew Ilya was home. It was too early for him to be in bed, too late for him to be bunkered down in the basement doing a workout. Shane makes quick work to get out of the car and inside.

Anya doesn't meet him at the door, which usually means that she's hiding somewhere with Ilya. Shane flips on a side table lamp as he enters the living room, scanning the large space to find his husband.

It reminded him of the summer he'd gotten a job as a lifeguard, spending day on end sitting and scanning the large pool for anything that could be wrong. He loved that job.

When he deems the living room empty, he pokes his head into the kitchen. It was rare that he would find Ilya in here, but he'd never forget the one time he'd nearly tripped over Ilya, where he was sitting on the ground. Ilya had found it funny, of course, laughter breaking through his tears before Shane joined him on the ground, and he'd gone back to crying.

Making his way up the stairs, he picks up the steady thump of Anya's tail against their bedroom floor. When he enters the room, Ilya is tucked in bed, an arm hanging over the side to pet Anya where she sat next to the bed.

"Hey," Shane whispers, shucking off his sweatshirt and pants before folding them and placing them on his dresser. He could wait to shower until he knew Ilya was okay, but there was absolutely no way he was climbing into his bed wearing 'outside' clothes.

"Hi." Ilya turns towards Shane's side of the bed, and Anya whines when his hand leaves her silky fur. Shane peels back the covers and slides in, pulling Ilya into his grip. He can

immediately feel the tension in both their bodies dissipate, letting out twin sighs. “How is Yuna?” He smells like cigarettes when he speaks.

“She’s good. Sorry for getting home so late, we were watching a movie.” He twirls his fingers in Ilya’s hair, gently pulling the curls straight and then letting them go, watching them spring back against his head.

“Is okay. What movie?”

“Breakfast Club, I haven’t watched it in a while.” Ilya hums.

“I did not like, is boring movie.”

“I like it.”

“Yes, well, you are boring, so it makes sense.” Shane laughs, shaking his head and squeezing his husband.

“What did you do today?” Ilya shrugs. “C’mon, what did you get up to?”

“Troy came over, brought his dog to hang out with Anya. They ran around in the yard for hours. It was nice weather, we sat on the porch and smoked a cigarette. I’m sorry.” Shane shushes him, rubbing his arm.

“It’s alright, we all have setbacks sometimes.” Ilya had been going strong, hadn’t mentioned wanting a cigarette since before the playoffs started in April. “Did you buy a new pack?” Ilya shakes his head.

“Troy had an unopened pack in his car that I gave him the last time I tried to quit. He was not happy, but he knew I needed it.”

“What happened?” Shane’s been home more than usual because of the summer season, but he’d been so checked out with his own problems that he’d failed to notice if something was going on with Ilya. He was such a shitty husband. He pulls Ilya impossibly closer, as if that would make up for it.

“My therapist keeps suggesting I start taking real pills. Antidepressants.” Shane huffs out a long breath, cheeks puffing out. He wasn’t expecting him to say that.

Ilya hates pills.

Hates taking them, hates seeing people take them, hates talking about them. Without Shane's voice of reason, Ilya would rather wince through an injury or headache before even considering taking a pill. They were kept in a strange spot in their house as well, somewhere Ilya wouldn’t check. Shane can count on both hands the number of times he’s had to help someone find the Advil that they kept in a box on Shane’s bookshelf.

He'd been trying, though. After their wedding, Ilya started taking sugar pills to get more comfortable with the process of taking tablets. He'd mastered those, could swallow them dry without a second thought when Shane reminded him.

He'd had a setback in the late summer.

It was a week after one of their hockey camps, and the Irina Foundation had raised close to triple their goal for the camp season. Ilya couldn't have been prouder. Shane, usually the one to handle interviews and news coverage, let Ilya take the wheel, knowing how important it was to him. There had been one too many questions about his mother, which Ilya handled with grace, before crashing *hard* when they got home. He'd stopped taking sugar pills after that, despite both Shane and his therapist protesting.

“And I don not think I want to fight her on it anymore.” Shane furrows his brows.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I think I am ready to try again. I thought that winning the cup would fix things, but I feel so bad. I still get up and go out, I am happy, I can see my friends and be with my husband and his parents, who love me more, but everything is always foggy and heavy. Does not feel like I am in control.”

“Autopilot.” Shane supplies. Ilya nods. “That’s a big step, babe. You can’t even take an Advil when you have a headache.”

“Yes, my therapist says same thing. I’m going to start small, I am going to take a pill if I need it and then when I feel ready, I will see doctor and try antidepressants. My therapist also suggested trying those, ah, fake pills again. I forgot what it is called?”

“Placebo?”

“Yes, placebo.” Shane likes the way he pronounces it. His accent was always thicker when he used new words, the sound of it tingling in Shane’s brain. “I will need your help. I do not like to ask for help, as you know, but I want to try this time. I really want to try this time, Shane, but I do not want to do it alone. I don’t want to go through what I did last time.” His voice drops as he continues to talk, and Shane can’t tell if it’s because he’s ashamed of his vulnerability or if he’s trying not to cry. His question is answered in the form of a teary-eyed Ilya, looking back at him when Shane pulls him far enough away that they can make eye contact.

“I will always help you. God, Ilya, you should never feel like you can’t come to me. I’m so proud of you for trusting me to help you take this step.” Ilya rolls his eyes.

“Do not be so mushy, it makes me sick.” Shane laughs, pulling his husband back down to his chest.

“Shut up, you love how mushy I am.”

“Yes, is true.”

Shane falls asleep without showering. He broke his routine, and he doesn't feel guilty about it. Take that, Dr. O'Reilly.

Chapter End Notes

Yuna Hollander fanclub, rise up

Chapter 7: He's Fighting and Biting and Riding On His Horse

Chapter Summary

Shane and Ilya go to the cottage

Chapter Notes

Mild sexual content

Shane, like he'd become aware of the coping mechanisms, Wakes up suddenly hyperaware of his routine. He'd woken up the morning after his therapy appointment with Dr. O'Reilly and stopped himself when he reached for his book.

He reads for ten minutes every morning to wake his brain up, avoiding looking at his phone screen for at least an hour after he wakes up.

Shane grabs his phone. He doesn't need it, doesn't even know what he's going to do with it, he just wants to change his routine, prove that he can do so without freaking out. He did it last night just fine.

He stares at the screen for a moment before deciding to do the Wordle. Ilya grumbles beside him five minutes later, eyes blinking open as he works on the Connections.

"I slept in." It's not a question, but Shane still checks the time. He was actually awake early.

"Nope." Ilya props himself up, face scrunched up, tired and confused.

"You are on phone already?" Shane nods, smiling as he gets the Connections right in one try.
"Naughty." Ilya smirks, resting a head on Shane's pec, eyebrows raised suggestively.

“I can be.” Shane smiles back, placing his phone on his nightstand.

Sometimes they fucked in the morning.

Or before bed.

Or in the middle of the day.

Sometimes all three.

Shane had worked it into his schedule. He’d even found that during the playoffs, he would intentionally schedule time for Ilya and him to just be together, uninterrupted. Which often meant they fucked, but regardless, it was nice that they could spend the time together without having to worry about anything.

Shane grimaces; his husband was four fingers deep in his ass, and he was thinking about schedules.

Maybe he did have a problem.

“Hurts?” He hears Ilya ask, nosing along the smooth skin of his inner thigh. Shane shakes his head, gasping softly as Ilya spreads his fingers, making an obscenely wet sound in the process.

Shane loved the sounds his husband made when they had sex, the dirty things he would whisper that would turn Shane’s whole body red if he’d even thought of saying them.

Shane, however, hated the sounds of sex. The wetness, the skin on skin.

He'd never told Ilya that, certain that he would have some dumb retort, and he really didn't mind it *that* much, he would just focus on the sounds his husband made instead, and everything was great.

But today, he could not focus.

His face was buried in the pillows, his husband bent over his back, sweating and panting, and all Shane could think about was how long he'd be on a psychiatrist's waitlist before he found out what was really wrong with him.

He gasps when Ilya flips him, holding his wrists tightly against the bed. Ilya's hands are fucking massive, thumb and ring finger almost overlapping where they wrap around Shane's wrists. He can feel his own heartbeat against Ilya's palm.

"You are quiet today." As if to prove a point, he thrusts into Shane. And to prove a point back, Shane whines. Ilya smiles one of his signature toothy grins before ducking down to hide his face in Shane's neck, biting at Shane's shoulder. The pain always grounded him, brought him back to the moment. Shane swore that Ilya had almost come in his pants when he told him that he could be more rough, that he enjoyed it.

What if Dr. O'Rielly was right? What if he bit the skin around his fingers because the pain grounded him, and he totally is fucked in the head? No, that wasn't it; he'd bitten at the skin so much that it was too tough to really feel any pain.

"Shane." Shane blinks, eyes focusing on where Ilya hovers above him. Shane had his legs lazily slung over Ilya's hips. He was still hard, thank god. He'd be mortified if his inner turmoil had made him soft.

"Yeah?"

"Do you need me to stop?" His thumb runs over a hickey he left near Shane's clavicle, his dick twitching softly inside of Shane.

“No. I’m sorry, I’m just having an off day. You can keep going.” Ilya’s eyebrows furrow.

“What, no. That is crazy. You are not in right headspace for this.” He moves his hips back, pulling out. Shane locks his legs around him.

“Please, keep going.” He wasn’t sure how to tell his husband that everything in his life was falling down around him, and he desperately needed this; needed something that didn’t come with any problems.

They didn’t have any issues with sex, they were healthy, they fucked and fucked and fucked and never got sick of each other, and it was great every time. Shane felt most normal when he and Ilya were intimate.

“I just, I need this, please. I’m sorry if I seem out of it, I just really feel like everything's falling apart right now, so can you please fuck me so I can feel normal?” Ilya’s mouth gapes, a surprised look in his eyes.

“Is me that’s making you feel this way? Our conversation last night?” And god, of course, he’d think it’s his fault. Shane never shared anything with him. How was Ilya supposed to know that Shane was his own worst enemy, that he was the sole purpose for everything being wrong?

“Oh my god, no! Never, Ilya, you never make me feel this way.” Ilya looks down, and Shane follows his gaze. He was soft.

Ilya was too.

Shane groans, frustrated, covering his eyes with an arm. He couldn’t even have sex with his husband like a normal person without ruining it. Ilya pulls out, moving off the bed to throw away the empty condom. In the short time his husband was gone, Shane started to cry. It’s soft enough that Ilya wouldn’t know as long as he keeps his arm over his eyes, but his silence would be telling enough.

Ilya returns with a warm washcloth, wiping Shane down.

“I’m sorry.” He whispered, hoping his husband couldn’t tell that he was crying.

“Is okay, Shane, it happens sometimes. I was with girl once, and we drank so much I could not get hard.” Shane laughs softly, lip quivering. He feels Ilya’s hand on his wrist, fingers gentle this time as they grip him. He tries to pry Shane’s arm away, and he fights it. “Shane, please look at me.” Shane sighs, removing his arm. Ilya tuts when he sees his red-rimmed eyes.

“I don’t know what’s wrong with me, Rozy.” That was a lie; he knew perfectly well what was wrong with him, he just wouldn’t admit it to himself. “I thought therapy would help, and I also thought winning the cup would help, but I guess we’re both just too fucked in the head for that.” Ilya laughs softly, nodding.

“Winning seems to have lost effect. We are just too used to it now, yes?”

“I guess. Fuck man, I really hate feeling like this.” Ilya flops down in the bed next to him, sheets clinging to his still sweaty skin.

“Tell me about it.” Shane turns, looking at his husband. Sun crept through the crack in the blinds, and his hair glows in the sliver of light.

“Let’s go to the cottage.” Ilya’s head turns, confused. “We have lunch with Ryan and Fabian in a few hours, but after that lets just pack up and head to the cottage for a few days. It’ll be nice.” Ilya still looks confused, eyes flickering over Shane’s face. Shane also grows confused. “What?”

“Nothing, it’s just that you usually plan these trips.”

“Okay, well, I’m not this time, so let’s go to the cottage.”

“What are you doing, Shane?” Shane sits up, staring down at his husband.

“What do you mean ‘what am I doing’? I’m asking you to come to the cottage with me for a few days.” Ilya also sits up, squaring up to his husband.

“Are you high?”

“What the fuck, no?”

“You are being strange.”

“How am I being strange? I’m sorry I got soft when we were fucking. It’s like you said, it happens sometimes.” He can tell Ilya wants to say something, can see the gears turning behind his eyes, but he just blinks a few times before nodding.

“Okay, yes, sure. We can go to the cottage.”

Shane’s morning is ruined. Not because he didn’t follow routine, no, no, it’s ruined because he couldn’t fuck his husband, and then they slightly argued, and now he has to sit through lunch with Ryan Price and his perfect fucking boyfriend. He bets Ryan and Fabian never get erectile dysfunction while fucking because they’re too busy thinking about fighting off their impending autism diagnosis.

He bets they never taunt their therapists, or yell at their therapists, or try to prove them wrong. He bets they’re the perfect patients, A+, gold star. He bets-

“Your food is okay?” Shane looks over at Ilya. His own plate is practically untouched, a stark difference between the three other plates at the table.

“Yup. Yes, yeah, it’s great. Sorry, just-”

“Having off day, yes,” Ilya grumbles, turning back towards Ryan and Fabian. Ryan looks nervous, which isn’t unusual, but the furrow between Fabian’s eyebrows makes Shane’s stomach lurch. Shane stabs a bite of his chicken salad, shoving it in his mouth.

“Have you guys had your days with the cup yet?” Fabian asks, trying to smooth out whatever tension the two of them had. Ilya shakes his head, motioning for Shane to keep eating.

“Shane had his, I am saving for hockey camp. Wyatt Hayes is going to use his day with Ottawa, and I will use mine with Montreal.”

“I bet Hayden Pike’s going to have a fit over you using your day in Montreal,” Ryan says with a smile.

“Oh yes, is why I did it.”

The rest of lunch goes smoothly, with Ilya doing most of the talking and Shane only adding input where needed. He finishes his salad, relieved to have something in his stomach. He’d, *totally nonchalantly and not because he was intentionally fucking with his schedule*, missed breakfast, and his stomach felt like it was going to fold in on itself any second.

They’d packed up the car before lunch, stopping back home briefly to grab Anya and their cooler. After Shane had triple checked that they had everything, and Ilya had endlessly reassured him that “yes Shane, the car is packed, there is underwear at cottage if we forget, let’s go!” they were on their way.

“This is fun! Being spontaneous. It makes me feel like when we were younger.” Shane says excitedly, turning to look at his husband in the passenger seat. He’d been chatty with everyone but Shane at lunch, and was now sitting in the car, hunched in the corner, staring out the open window. His hair was blowing softly in the wind. He looks over at Shane.

“We are still young and spontaneous, do not act like we are so old. We are not boring old Scott Hunter.” Shane smiles, drawing a hand from the steering wheel and planting it on Ilya’s thigh. He squeezes it lightly, and Ilya grabs his hand, squeezing back. “Will you tell me now what the matter is? Why are we running away to the cottage?” Shane opens his mouth to protest, to tell him that there wasn’t anything wrong, and he just wanted to enjoy some time in the sun, and Ilya interrupts him. “Remember when you brought me to the cottage for the first time?” Shane smiles at the memory.

“Of course.”

“You asked me to be honest, you said that we should just tell each other what is on our minds. I am going to ask you the same thing. We are going to the cottage, and we are going to be honest.” Shane groans, thumping his head against his headrest.

“I hate when you use my own words against me.”

“I know, that's why I do it.” Shane stewes for a moment, eyes flickering over to his husband.

“Fine.” Ilya’s smile is worth his truth. “I had a bad therapy appointment yesterday, and I am, in fact, running away from my problems. I know the cottage won't help, I just thought maybe being there and being with you could distract me from them, like how I thought having sex this morning could distract me because that always seems to work.”

“I understand why you are always so mad after therapy, your therapist ruined our sex.” Shane laughs, shaking his head. “Why was the appointment so hard?”

“Um, she wants me to see a psychiatrist.” He was intentionally beating around the bush.

“Seems like we have same therapist, no? My therapist also wants me to see a psychiatrist.”

“For the meds?”

“Yes. Your doctor wants you to take medication?” Shane shakes his head.

“No, for like, an assessment or diagnosis or something.” He can feel Ilya’s eyes on him, and his hands start to sweat, the leather steering wheel growing wet under his palms.

“And then medication?”

“No, no, I don’t think you can medicate it.” He bites his lower lip, blinking rapidly. He was not about to cry. Anya whines in the backseat, and Ilya turns around to pet her.

“Shane, pull off, I am going to let Anya out.” Shane nods, turning onto a side road. Shane roots around in his center console as Ilya walks Anya next to their car. He needed gum, desperately. He could only find nicotine gum and was honestly considering it.

He’d popped one of Ilya’s nicotine gums by accident once and had been a shaking mess for the rest of the day. He was out of gum, shit, he was so out of gum. Shane brings his thumb up to his mouth, biting. Ilya preferred Shane chew gum rather than his own fingers, but he didn’t have any fucking gum. His chest hurt.

There's a tap on his window, and Shane turns. Ilya stands there, shaking a zip bag of his vegan gum. Shane lets out a relieved sigh. Anya hops back into the trunk, and Ilya rounds to his side, handing Shane the bag when he climbs in.

“Oh my god, you’re the best,” Shane says, popping a piece of gum into either side of his mouth. His jaw clicks when he bites down, tension dissipating from his limbs.

“Is why you married me. Now you understand why I kept smoking cigarettes, yes?” Shane nods, content with his wad of gum. “Why can you not medicate your...” He pauses, looking for a word.

“Problem.” Shane supplies with a short laugh.

“No, problem makes it sound bad, no part of you is bad. You cannot medicate your brain, like I can medicate my brain.” Shane shakes his head. “So then what is point of psychiatrist?”

“Honestly, I don’t really know. My mom says that it would be good to have a word to put to the feelings or something?”

“That is why you were with Yuna last night?”

“Yeah. We really did watch a movie, I didn’t lie about that, I just... I needed someone to talk to, and I was nervous to talk to you about it.” Ilya lets out a disbelieving laugh, shaking his head.

“Shane, we are married. I married you, for better and for worse. We are in same boat, no? We both have to go to psychiatrist because we have different brains. Why can you not talk to me about it? Why can you not tell me when you are struggling? It is like I have to force it out of you!”

“I don’t know!” Shane snaps, white-knuckling the steering wheel. “I don’t know, Ilya, I don’t know why I can’t tell you stuff.” He huffs, nearly choking on his gum. He was going to cry; he couldn’t avoid it. He was always fucking crying. “I just-” his voice cracks “I don’t know how. I can’t even admit this kind of stuff to myself. My therapist told me to get tested for autism, and instead of calling a psychiatrist, I thought I could break my fucking routine and go to the cottage to prove I didn’t have autism.” He’s not sure how much of that Ilya caught, breaking into tears halfway through his rant.

“And I probably do, and I don’t want to because I don’t want to be different. I’m so tired of people looking at me differently. I’ve dealt with it my whole life, Ilya, and it just keeps getting harder and harder. And I was scared to tell you because what if when we have kids we use my sperm or something, and then what if our kid has autism, and then they struggle with everything the way I do, and then you start to resent me. It’s so exhausting, Ilya. I’m so tired, I’m tired of the way my brain works, and I’m tired of people not understanding me, and I’m... I’m just tired.” Ilya is still quiet beside him, but he brings a hand up to wipe at Shane’s wet face, thumb brushing his cheekbone soothingly. “Sorry. I’m sorry, that was a lot. I didn’t mean to yell at you.”

“Is okay, Shane, always okay. I’m just trying to remember how it works. Autism. I am sorry that you felt like you could not talk to me. I am sorry if I ever made you feel different or like I judged you.” Shane can tell Ilya is thinking, reflecting on everything that he’s ever said to Shane. “I am sorry for calling you boring.”

“No, it’s- Ilya, I am boring. That’s just who I am; this is why I didn’t want to tell you, because the one thing worse than you hating me was you treating me differently. I don’t want to be coddled, I don’t want you to feel like you *have* to treat me differently because you have always been the person I could be myself around, and I don’t want that to change.” Shane dares a look over at Ilya and immediately regrets it.

His eyebrows are furrowed, eyes shiny and wet.

“I did not know you were feeling this. Please, can you talk to me, Shane? I will never see you differently, ever, no matter what you tell me. If that is who you are, it is still the Shane I love. I loved you before, I will love you after, I will love you always. I just, I want to be someone you can talk to. I do not want you to be alone because I get scared when you are sad. I get scared that I will lose you.” For the second time in the drive, Shane has to pull over. He can barely see past the tears in his eyes, and his heart was beating so fast that he felt it in his throat.

He unbuckles his seatbelt, turning in his seat to face Ilya. His husband stares back at him.

“Ilya.”

“I am being honest. I want you to be honest, so is only fair. You get so angry when you are sad, and I hate it. You shut down, and you will not talk, and I know sometimes you need that, but it cannot continue like this. We cannot continue like this because one of us is going to snap, and I am scared.”

“I think we should try couples therapy.” Ilya nods in agreement, moving to once again wipe at Shane’s eyes. He would always wipe away Shane’s tears before his own. “I’m sorry for bottling everything up. I don’t like who I am when I’m angry either. I yelled at my fucking therapist!” They laugh wetly. “Who yells at their therapist? God, I’m stupid.” Ilya pulls Shane in for a kiss. His lips taste like salt and nicotine gum. Shane’s not sure when he popped one.

They rest their foreheads together, eyes closed and cheeks wet.

“Okay, let's go to the cottage. You will call psychiatrist while you are there, I will call psychiatrist, we will get better together. Okay?” Shane nods, forehead rubbing against Ilya's own. They were getting wrinkles, age and stress wearing down their skin. Hairs greying, joints aching. But they were doing it together.

“Okay,” Shane whispers back.

They would do it together.

Chapter 8: He's Going the Distance

Chapter Summary

Shane gets his diagnosis

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Shane had been on a waitlist for four months before he got in with the psychiatrist. Four long months of waiting, and therapy, and couples therapy, which Shane enjoyed much better than his one-on-one sessions with Dr. O’Rielly.

Who knew that building a sexual relationship with someone before you built an emotional connection with them would have resounding consequences?

That was the main thing they talked about with their couples therapist, Dr. Holton. He was a short man and always wore pressed button-down shirts. He was kind, though, and patient, which Shane and Ilya desperately needed.

They also talked about how being in a secret relationship was a root for a lot of their struggles with communicating. When you keep someone a secret, you begin to feel that you need to keep secrets from them.

It had been good for them, healthy. It had even improved their sex life, which Shane didn’t even know was possible.

Ilya had a six-month wait to get in with a psychiatrist, which, according to Shane’s research, was considered a short wait in Ontario. Shane remembers finding out he had a shorter wait and how livid it had made him.

“You need medication, I don’t; this is completely unfair.” But Ilya assured him that it was fine, that it was fair. He still couldn’t take an Advil without throwing it back up. He needed time to work on it.

When Shane finally got the call for an appointment, he’d almost backed out of it, asked to be put back on a wait list that would span for years. His appointment was the same day the hockey season opened. He would miss his first game of the season just so he could drive to Toronto, of all places, and have someone question him until they deemed him crazy enough to leave with a diagnosis print off.

He had a mild panic attack after getting off the phone. Ilya was sitting and rubbing his back through it. After much back and forth, Ilya decided to take the day to drive Shane.

“We are playing against Vancouver, is no big deal. If you are going to miss any game, it should be game against Vancouver, you will fall asleep on the ice.”

“It’s the first game of the season, Ilya! Our team won the cup, everyone's going to tune in.”

“Eh, not for Vancouver game.”

Which brought them to today. Shane is curled up in the passenger seat, shoes off, sock toes hanging off the edge of the seat. He thinks one of them is Ilyas, judging by how loose it was around his ankle. He rests his chin on his knees, staring out the window. At least it was a scenic drive. They didn’t have to be back for three days, and Ilya wanted to make a trip of it, opting to drive instead of flying.

“What are you thinking about?” Ilya gently flicks Shane’s cheek, and Shane swats his hand away.

“What if they don’t figure out what’s wrong with me and I’m back to square one?” Ilya purses his lips, mock thinking.

“I may be wrong, but you said you do not want them to give you diagnosis.”

“Well, yeah, but like... What do I do if I walk out of this with no explanation for the way I’ve been feeling my whole life?”

“Then that is just who you are. You do not need explanation if that’s just the way you are built.” Shane turns to look at Ilya, smiling.

“You know you’re really good with your words. You could make a good therapist.” Ilya waves him off.

“Pfff, therapist is boring job, is why I am captain. They are basically the same thing.” Shane rolls his eyes.

“Sure, Rozy.” It’s a four-hour drive, giving Shane the perfect amount of time to overthink everything.

“I think I’m gonna throw up.” Shane finally says when they pull into the parking garage. “Oh god Ilya.” He hides his face in his knees, taking deep breaths. Ilya traces shapes against his back, and Shane turns to look at him. Ilya smiles.

“You are my brave boy, Shane. You can do it, and I will be sitting in the waiting area for you. I will be close.” Shane nods, steadying himself with a few more breaths before slipping his shoes back on and climbing out of the car.

The short walk to the practice was helpful, the warm autumn air blowing Ilya’s curly strands out of his face. He was glowing in the soft autumn sun.

“The weather is very nice today.” Shane smiles, grabbing his husband's hand. He still surprised himself with public displays of affection, not used to being allowed to hold and love his husband in public. He gives it a soft squeeze, and Ilya squeezes back.

“I was just thinking the same thing.” The relief from said nice weather and walk was temporary, Shane’s stomach twisting again as soon as they entered the front office of the psychiatrist’s office. He was really starting to hate medical offices.

The two sit down in stiff waiting room chairs, pointedly ignoring the gawking from a snotty-nosed child who sat across from them. The kid had some type of food on his face, outlining his mouth, and Shane felt himself cringe at it. Ilya leans over to whisper in his ear.

“When we have a kid, it will not have such messy face.” Shane purses his lips so as not to laugh, smacking Ilya’s leg. Ilya lets out a laugh, shaking his head.

“Mr. Hollander?” Shane looks up, as does the snotty-nosed kid. He meets the eyes of the receptionist, and she smiles. “You can follow me.” Shane looks back at his husband, who nods.

“Go, I will be here when you’re back.” Shane nods, standing up to follow the receptionist. He gives one last look over his shoulder before disappearing down a long, bland hallway.

“Well, Mr. Hollander, it was a pleasure meeting with you today, and if you have any questions, you have my card.” Shane looks up from the envelope he was handed to the psychiatrist’s outstretched hand. He shakes it firmly before standing.

“Thank you, sir. Have a great day.” The envelope contains only three pages of paper, but feel unbearably heavy in his hand, burning his skin where he’s holding it. Ilya looks up when he reenters the waiting room. The snotty-nosed kid is gone. Shane can’t walk towards Ilya because he knows he’ll start crying. He motions his head towards the door, leaving as Ilya stands to follow.

Once outside, Shane allows himself to shed the few tears he had been holding in since he’d sat down in the psychiatrist’s office, opening up the envelope to look at it. Someone runs into him as they walk by, and Shane mumbles out an apology. The diagnosis paperwork crinkles

in his hand, blowing around gently. A single teardrop lands on the page, smudging the practice name where it was printed in neat letters along the top of the page.

Dear Dr. O'Reilly,

Thank you very much for referring Shane to me. I had the pleasure of meeting Shane on October 7th, 2022, to provide an assessment of ASD and a possible case of panic disorder. The information provided from today's assessment came primarily from my interview with Shane. As Shane is known to you, I will not review the details of his presenting history here.

Based on the information provided during today's assessment, including my interactions with and observations of Shane throughout the assessment, Shane's primary diagnosis is Autism Spectrum Disorder -Without Language Impairment Without Intellectual Impairment, Level 1 Severity Overall.

Shane presents with persistent deficits in social communication and social interactions across contexts, including deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, in his understanding and use of nonverbal communicative behaviours used in social interactions, and in his ability to develop, maintain, and understand relationships at a developmentally appropriate level. Furthermore, he repeats a significant history of restricted and repetitive patterns of behaviour; interests, and activities, including stereotyped and repetitive movements, rigid and ritualized patterns of behaviour; interests that are abnormal in their intensity/focus, and hyperreactivity to sensory input (auditory, tactile, or oro-tactile).

With regards to his anxiety, it is worth trialling an anxiolytic medication. I cannot say with any degree of certainty that being on a trial of anxiolytic medication is going to help with the symptoms he is complaining of. There are potential inconsistencies with effectiveness and less predictability with the drug, and a higher risk for side effects, considering Shane's ASD. Individuals with autism may metabolize or respond to these medications differently, and careful consideration and monitoring by a professional should be done if Shane decides to move forward with a trial.

Medications are only used to treat specific target symptoms or co-morbid conditions if present. The diagnosis of an Autism Spectrum Disorder, in and of itself, is not an indication for pharmacologic intervention. If Shane is interested in pursuing a trial of an anxiolytic, starting him on an SSRI such as fluoxetine, sertraline, or Cipralex would be the best option to try. If he does not tolerate SSRIs or they are ineffective, the next best alternative would

probably be an atypical antipsychotic such as aripiprazole, as it does have some decent anxiolytic properties, especially among the neurodivergent population.

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in Shane's care. Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Shane lets out a shaky exhale, aware that at some point, Ilya had pulled him aside and began reading over his shoulder.

"Those are a lot of big words." Shane nods. He didn't even know that there were levels to autism. There was a lot to wrap his head around. He did not love the words antipsychotic. Ilya pulls Shane in for a tight hug, tugging his hat off so that Shane can hide his face in his chest. "Are you okay, Shane?" Shane shakes his head, hair growing staticky where it rubs against Ilya's sweatshirt. "Do you want to go back to hotel?" Shane nods.

The walk back to the hotel is quiet. Shane keeps his eyes on the ground, feet shuffling to avoid stepping on cracks in the sidewalk. Stupid. He stops, intentionally stepping on a crack. Ilya was carrying the envelope with his diagnosis, swinging it lazily by his side. His eyes were trained on the CN Tower, and it was honestly a wonder that neither of them had run into anybody. "We should have dinner up there tomorrow. The restaurant spins." Shane looks up at the tower. He'd gone up in the elevator once as a child, standing on the glass floor with his parents, staring down at the world before him. It made everything seem so small, like he was standing on top of the world.

"I feel like a restaurant that spins is a terrible idea. Would you not get sick to your stomach?"

"It spins slowly, Ryan and Fabian told me." Shane smiles, knocking their shoulders.

"Sure, we can go there for dinner tomorrow." He could tell Ilya was trying to distract him, his words even more carefully chosen than they usually were. "When you travel for games, do you have a favourite restaurant to visit?" It was a question his mom had asked him years ago, one that he remembered asking Hayden the next time he got the chance. It was a good question, Shane's go to for conversing with other hockey players. Ilya tilts his head for a moment, thinking.

“When I am in California, playing against LA, there is a cafe that makes sandwiches the size of your head. The crazy thing, they aren’t even known for their sandwiches. They just make them big because they can.” Shane smiles.

“I guess we’ll have to try it out next time we’re in LA.” Ilya looks over at him, eyebrows raised comically over his sunglasses.

“You will eat sandwich?” Shane shrugs.

“Maybe they have really good salads.”

“Ah, yes, they do. Very big serving sizes.”

Shane stares up at the ceiling of their hotel room. It’s a popcorn ceiling, delicately shaved down in certain areas to create intricate designs. It hurt his eyes. Shane sits up, staring down at his sleeping husband next to him. They didn’t talk about it all day; nothing changed between them. Shane was patiently waiting for the other shoe to drop.

He gets up out of bed, throwing on the nearest sweater he could grab before moving to sit on the balcony. On nights he couldn’t sleep, he understood Ilya’s complicated relationship with cigarettes the most. Sitting out on the balcony, staring at everyone living their lives down below, Shane wanted something to occupy his mouth with, something that would quiet his brain.

Ilya had described it to him once, like there was an itch he couldn’t find, no matter where he scratched, but having a cigarette immediately quelled it. Shane brings a sweater string up to his mouth, lodging it between his molars. Maybe he should take up smoking; it would look less weird than him chewing on his shirt and sweaters while in public.

He was grateful he had a job that basically required he chew on something. He would need to replace his mouthguard soon.

The balcony door slides open behind him, and Shane looks up. Ilya rubs at his eyes, still half asleep and in his underwear.

“Why are you awake?” He plops down next to Shane on the ground, hissing when the thin fabric of his underwear does little to shield him from the cold concrete.

“Couldn’t sleep, brains too busy.”

“Mmm, clearly I didn’t fuck you hard enough earlier.” Shane flushes. “Are you thinking about apointment today?”

“Yes. No. A lot is going on in my head, I can’t really pinpoint what it is I’m thinking about.” He lets a pregnant pause hang in the air, allowing himself to sort his thoughts. Ilya rests a head against Shane’s shoulder, unruly curls tickling his nose. “I guess I just expected to feel this immediate change. That all of a sudden, knowing I’m autistic would turn me into this different person.”

“Cinderella.” Ilya yawns. Shane laughs, shaking his head. He’s not too sure what Ilya meant by that. His English was always most muddled when he first woke up.

“Sure, Cinderella. I’m just... We put in all this work for me to get diagnosed, and now I don’t know what to do next. I don’t know how this is all supposed to help me.”

“Well, you can take medication to see if that will help with anxiety. We can take medication together like we are old couple. You can now understand why your brain works how it does, and not be so sad and confused because you don’t do things the same way that others do.” Shane nods, resting his cheek against the top of Ilya’s head.

“You don’t see me differently?”

“Never. You could murder man, and you would still be my Shane. I will be more understanding, I will be more patient, but you will never be different.” Shane stands up, extending a hand down to Ilya. Ilya grabs it, pulling himself up with a groan. Shane traces his fingers up Ilya’s bare arm, armhair raised from the cool midnight air. There are so many things he could say to him right now, face lit up from the city lights.

That he’s beautiful.

That he loves him.

That he’s seen.

He pulls him in for a gentle kiss, hoping that Ilya can pick up on everything he wants to say through the soft brush of their lips.

“Well, Shane, it’s been about a month since we last met. How have you been?” Dr. O’Reilly is perched in the seat across from Shane. She’d bought new seats, velvet. They felt nice under Shane’s finger as he traced shapes into the armrests.

“Fine.” She schools her expression into one of neutrality. Shane knows he gets on her nerves when he speaks in clipped sentences.

“Fine? That’s all I’m gonna get out of you.”

“You got the psychiatrist's notes, I don’t really have much to say.”

“I think you have a lot to say...” She pauses, crossing one leg over her other. “You got your autism diagnosis. I’m very proud of you, Shane.” Shane looks at her, an eyebrow raised. “I knew talking to you about it could be a gamble, that you would either go get a diagnosis or ignore what I’ve said. You’ve lived over 30 years without a diagnosis. What would that change?” She pauses, expectantly.

“Do you want me to answer that?” She nods, “I don’t know. Nothing?”

“And yet you did it... You put in the work, and you did it because you know it’ll help. And for that, I am proud of you. Your reaction to talking about being autistic is also miles above how you reacted the first time we discussed it.” Shane really could not form an opinion on this woman. He flushes.

“Thank you, that means a lot.”

“Now, Shane, how have you been?” He reanalyses the question, this time less defensively.

“I’ve been weird.” Dr. O’Reilly laughs.

“Okay, howso?”

“I can’t stop crying. I feel like a pregnant woman. Literally everything makes me cry.”

Fucking Ilya again after his meltdown and not getting soft? Monumental, he cried his way through an orgasm.

His first win back on the ice with Ilya? Crying in the car.

Watching Amber walk for the first time? Shane is a blubbering mess.

“Have you ever heard of the term masking?” Shane shakes his head. “Well, I’m not too sure if this is the reason why you’re crying more than usual, but oftentimes neurodivergent people will do something called masking. It’s a defensive behaviour that involves hiding your real emotions or traits to instead present in a ‘typical’ way. You’ve likely been masking for most of your life. This diagnosis, and your couples therapy, has most likely given you the confidence to stop masking so much, making you feel more comfortable expressing certain emotions, like crying.”

Shane nods, processing. He can’t even begin to count the number of times in his life that he’d been subconsciously masking. He and Ilya had argued, fought really, about something stupid the other day, and Ilya had said in passing, “You are acting more autistic, is getting stronger or something?” He, of course, immediately took it back and felt like a piece of shit for the rest of the day, but Shane could understand now why Ilya felt that way. He was masking around his husband less.

“It’s okay to cry. You’ve had a very emotionally heavy year. Therapy, winning the cup, helping Ilya with his own mental health, getting a diagnosis, that’s a lot, Shane. You’re feeling a lot of emotions and have no way of letting them out other than having a good cry; it happens to the best of us. It’s why we use coping mechanisms.” Shane groans, sinking against the seat.

“My god, you and your coping mechanisms.”

“Yes, yes, me and my coping mechanisms until the day I die. The reason I bring it up again is that we can work on different coping mechanisms now. Neurotypical coping strategies may sometimes focus more on social and verbal skills, whereas neurodivergent coping skills will focus on managing sensory input and self-regulation. We’ve seen that both of those things work for you, which means we can work on finding other neurodivergent specific coping strategies to help when your emotions feel too big.”

She finishes off their meeting with another handout, and Shane holds back a grumble. He flips through it in the car, Ilya driving and gabbing about something Anya had done with Troy’s dog that day. Shane had tuned him out after his first couple words. There were no pictures in the booklet. Graphs and charts and statistics and information littered the pages. It was almost the exact opposite of what she handed him last time and Shane almost paints the inside of his jeans.

“God this is so boring, I do not even know half of these words. I am glad I kept your last ones.” Ilya complained when he read over it that night. He was propped up in bed next to Shane, papers extended in front of him. He’d stolen Shane’s glasses at some point for shits, and yeah, Shane got it now. Ilya lays the booklet on his bedside table, turning to look at Shane. “But I am glad you like this one.”

“You look really good in my glasses.” Ilya smiles, cheeks crinkling against the wire frame. They were slightly too small for his face, the arms hugging right above his ears.

“I should get glasses then, yes?” Shane pulls his glasses off of Ilya’s face, being far less gentle than he is when removing them from his own face. He folds them, arms clicking together softly, and then places them on his own bedside table.

“I don’t think I’d be able to keep my hands off of you. We’d have to retire early.” He whispers it against Ilya’s lips, arm circling his hips. Ilya pushes him back, hovering above him.

“I would be okay with that.” They make out, lazily, and jerk each other off, even lazier, and they shower together, and climb into bed together.

It’s the exact same way it had always been. They’re the exact same way they’d always been.

Things had changed, of course. Ilya spoke more softly in the evenings; he wouldn’t pull Shane’s headphones off when they hung out together on the couch, or grab his hands to stop him from shaking them when anxious.

Their cars were now constantly stocked with gum, the fridge in the garage shelved with diet ginger ale.

Shane sat with Ilya in the mornings when he would take a sugar pill, taking his vitamins at the same time, so he wouldn’t feel alone. He would let Ilya work out alone when he needed it, and refused to leave his side when he could tell that Ilya needed it but wouldn’t ask.

The way they communicated changed and developed, their dynamics more mature with the help of therapy and medication, but nothing ever changed who they were to each other.

They saw each other for who they really were.

Chapter End Notes

Well, that's all, folks. I hope you enjoyed it!

I did take inspiration from my own diagnosis sheet for Shane's, because I, too, was accidentally diagnosed with autism. I'd gone to a psychiatrist to get an ADHD diagnosis, or some anxiety meds and bro took one look at me and went "mmm, no ADHD, no anxiety, definitely some autism."

I felt like it would be fun to explore Shane actually getting a diagnosis, considering Rachel Reid discussed how he would probably never get a diagnosis.

I rushed to post this before I went to work, so please let me know if there are any errors. Feedback is always welcome!

Also considering writing a sequel from Ilyas POV cause I lowkey wish I'd focused more on his depression, lemme know if that's something you'd like to see :)

Thank you for reading xxx

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