

An Eater

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An Eater

by [Sweettree](#)

Summary

It's the middle of playoffs and the Centaurs team doctor Terry is doing physicals to make sure no has sustained any injuries that would affect their play. He does Shane's and he sees Shane is slightly underweight then what is normal for him during playoffs. When he brings it up with Shane he brings up the fact that Shane is diagnosed with an eating disorder and tells him that he will have a chat with Shane's therapist and nutritionist on what to do.

Shane does not take this very well.

Chapter 1

The Centaurs' medical room always smelled like disinfectant and coffee.

It was the middle of playoffs which meant everything felt important.

Every ache mattered more.

Every bruise got examined twice.

The team rotated through physicals like clockwork, one after another, taped wrists and tired eyes and quiet tension.

Shane sat on the edge of the exam table, fingers laced together, foot tapping lightly against the metal leg. He felt fine. Or fine enough. A little tired, maybe. That was normal this time of year.

Dr. Terry glanced at the chart, then back at him.

"Any pain you're not reporting?" Terry asked.

"Nope." Shane said. "Nothing new."

"Sleeping?"

"Enough."

"Eating?"

Shane's shoulders tightened just slightly. "Yeah."

Terry hummed not quite convinced and made a note. He moved through the rest of the exam methodically. Reflexes, range of motion, checking for lingering strain. It was routine. Shane knew the rhythm of it by now.

"Hop on the scale for me Shane." Terry said.

Shane did.

He kept his eyes fixed straight ahead. Last thing he needed was to let it get back to anyone he was looking at the number.

There was a small pause.

Terry looked at the number, then at the chart again.

"Okay." he said slowly. "Step down."

Shane did, jaw tight.

Terry set the clipboard down. “You’ve dropped a bit since last check.”

Shane shrugged, aiming for casual. “Playoffs.”

“Playoffs usually don’t knock you below your baseline, Shane.” Terry replied.

Shane didn’t answer.

He could feel where this was going. The familiar dread settled in his stomach.

“Shane.” Terry said, gentler now. “Do you want to tell me what’s going on?”

“Nothing’s going on.” Shane said quickly. “I’m playing. I feel fine. It’s not affecting my game.”

“That’s not the only metric we look at.”

“I know.”

“Then you know why I’m asking.”

Shane looked away, jaw flexing. He hated this part. The explaining. The way it always sounded like excuses even when it wasn’t.

“I’m eating, Terry.” he said finally. “Three meals. Dessert on Fridays.”

Terry’s expression didn’t change, but something in his eyes sharpened.

“That’s the structure you’ve been working with?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And you’re sticking to it?”

“I’m trying to, every fucking day.” Shane said, and there was the crack in his voice.

Terry nodded once. “Okay. I appreciate you being honest.”

Shane let out a breath he didn’t realize he’d been holding.

“But.” Terry continued, “you’re still under where I’d expect you to be at this point in the season. Especially in playoffs.”

Shane’s stomach twisted. “I know.”

“I’m not saying this to criticize you.”

“I know.”

“I’m saying it because we need to make sure you’re supported.”

Shane’s hands tightened in his lap. Supported always meant more food. More eyes. More conversations about how he felt about his feelings. More fucking food.

“I’m already working with my therapist.” he said. “And my nutritionist.”

“I’m aware...” Terry fixing his glasses. “And I’m going to reach out to both of them. Just to check in. Make sure we’re aligned on what you need right now.”

Shane’s chest tightened.

“They’re going to want me to eat more...” he said quietly.

“Maybe..” Terry said. “Or maybe they’ll adjust something else. We won’t know until we talk.”

“I’m already trying.” Shane said, voice thinner now. “Like. I’m actually really fucking trying.”

Terry’s tone softened further. “I can see that. This isn’t about effort. It’s about making sure the effort is enough to keep you healthy through a very demanding stretch.”

Shane nodded, but the shame was already there, creeping in under his skin.

“Am I benched?” he asked.

“No.” Terry said immediately. “You’re cleared to play. This isn’t a disciplinary thing. It’s preventative.”

Shane swallowed.

“Okay.”

“Okay.” Terry echoed. “We’ll check back in after I talk to your team. In the meantime, keep doing what you’re doing. And if anything feels off, you come to me.”

“I will.”

The appointment ended like that.

Dinner that night was supposed to be normal.

That was the plan anyway.

Shane stood in the kitchen staring at the plate in front of him.

Chicken. Rice. Vegetables.

Exactly what he was supposed to be eating.

He'd made it himself. He always did, when he could. It made it easier to control. Easier to follow the plan.

Easier to not think about it too much.

Ilya moved around behind him grabbing a drink from the fridge.

"You cooked." Ilya said. "Smells good."

"Yeah, the chicken was-um. Baked and breaded perfectly...just like the recipe." That was Shane basically telling Ilya he didn't do any substitutions. That it had all the calories it was supposed to.

Ilya gave him a sweet crooked smile and Shane nearly ripped his eyes out for having to disappoint him.

They sat.

For a few minutes, it was quiet. Just the sound of forks against plates.

Ilya talked about practice.

About a play they'd been working on.

About something Luca had done that was either impressive or ridiculous depending on how you looked at it.

Shane nodded in the right places.

He took bites when he was supposed to.

His chest felt tight.

"You are quiet." Ilya said eventually.

"Just tired."

"Playoffs tired or something else tired?"

"Playoffs."

Ilya studied him.

"Shanya.." he said softly.

Shane's grip on his fork tightened.

"Don't." he said.

"Don't what?"

“Don’t do that voice.”

“What voice?”

“That voice where you already know something’s wrong and you’re waiting for me to say it.”

Ilya leaned back slightly. Setting his fork down and taking a sip of his coke.

“Okay.” he said. “Then I’ll ask directly. What is wrong?”

Shane stared at his plate.

“Me.”

Ilya didn’t respond right away.

“Shane.” he said after a moment, quieter now. “Talk to me.”

“I’m trying Ilya I really am...”

“I know you are, now can we calm down maybe breathe..”

“I am.” Shane took some exaggerated breathes

“You’re not eating much tonight..” Ilya said.

“I am.” Shane snapped, a little too sharp. “I’m literally eating right now.”

“You’re picking at it.” Ilya replied, just as quickly.

Shane’s chest tightened further.

“I’m trying..Jesus.” he said, and his voice wavered.

Ilya’s expression shifted immediately.

“Hey.” he said, softer now. He tapped Shane's sock covered foot under the table. “Hey hey hey. I didn’t mean it like that.”

Shane shook his head, eyes fixed on the table.

“I had my physical today..” he said.

Ilya stilled.

“And?”

Shane swallowed.

“I’m under..” he said. “A little.”

Ilya didn't react right away. Not outwardly.

"Okay." he said carefully. "What does that mean?"

"It means Terry noticed I'm losing weight despite me eating all this bullshit" Shane said waving at the plate below him and grabbing tufts of jet black hair, pulling on them firmly. "And he's going to talk to my therapist. And my nutritionist."

Ilya nodded slowly.

"Okay."

"They're going to make me eat more.." Shane added, voice barely above a whisper now.

"Maybe." Ilya said. "Or maybe they'll adjust something else."

"That's what he said." Shane muttered. "But it always ends up being more food."

Ilya watched him for a second.

"And that scares you." he said.

Shane let out a shaky laugh that wasn't really a laugh.

"Yeah." he said. "It fucking does."

He pushed his plate slightly away, appetite gone.

"I'm already trying so hard." he continued. "Like. I'm doing the three meals. I'm doing the Friday thing. I'm not skipping on purpose. It just... it's hard."

"I know sweetheart." Ilya said quietly.

"And now it's not enough." Shane said, voice cracking. "And I just...I don't know how to do more without feeling like I'm—"

He stopped, breath hitching.

Ilya leaned forward.

"Like you're what?" he asked gently.

"Like I'm losing control," Shane said, the words rushing out now. "Like everything's going to spiral if I push too far. Like it will start with eating one more snack then one more meal. Then they'll keep fucking feeding me until I'm too heavy to fucking play. They already make sure I can't work out too much so there's no way I can lose the weight they might make me gain and-and. And I know that sounds stupid but it doesn't feel stupid when I'm in it."

"It doesn't sound stupid. It sounds like you have a mental disorder that makes you think things that are not true. Just like me. That is why we help tell each other the truth." Ilya said immediately.

Shane shook his head, blinking hard.

“I didn’t want to tell you.” he admitted. “I thought you’d think I wasn’t trying. Or that I was...I don’t know. Failing.”

Something in Ilya’s expression softened in a way that made Shane’s chest ache.

“Shanya..” Ilya said, very quietly. “Look at me.”

Shane hesitated then did.

“You think I’d be disappointed in you for struggling with something I know is hard?” Ilya asked.

“I don’t know...” Shane said. “Maybe.”

Ilya shook his head.

“No.” he said. “Absolutely not.”

Shane’s throat tightened.

“You’re trying,” Ilya continued. “I see it every day. This isn’t about effort. It’s about a problem that doesn’t just go away because you want it to. I am never going to be mad at you for showing signs of the disorder you were diagnosed with.”

Shane let out a shaky breath.

“I hate that it’s still a problem.” he said.

“I know..” Ilya replied. “But hating it doesn’t fix it. Taking care of yourself does.”

Shane looked down again.

“I’m scared they’re going to push too hard.” he said.

“Then we tell them if it feels like too much.” Ilya said. “You don’t have to just accept whatever they say without talking about it.”

“They’re the professionals.”

“And you’re the one living in your body.” Ilya countered. “That matters too.”

Shane was quiet for a moment.

“I don’t want to mess up playoffs,” he said.

“You won’t.” Ilya said.

“What if I do?”

“Then we deal with it.” Ilya replied. “Together.”

Shane’s eyes burned.

“I don’t want you to worry, you have so much to worry about as captain.” he said.

“I’m going to worry a little.” Ilya said, honest. “That’s part of loving you. But I’m not worried about you failing. I’m worried about you being hard on yourself.”

Shane’s shoulders slumped slightly, tension easing just a fraction.

“I don’t know how to do more..” he said quietly.

“Then we figure it out.” Ilya said. “With your therapist. With your nutritionist. With Terry. And with me.”

Shane glanced up.

“With you?”

“Da.” Ilya said. “I’m part of your team too, remember?”

A small smile tugged at Shane’s mouth.

“Yeah..” he said.

Ilya reached across the table, resting his hand over Shane’s.

“Eat a little more.” he said gently. “Not everything. Just a little.”

Shane picked up his fork again.

“Can you...sit with me while I finish?” he asked.

Ilya’s grip on his hand tightened slightly.

“Always.” he said.

And he did.

Chapter 2

Shane knew something was wrong before anyone said it out loud.

He sat in the chair across from the desk, hands locked together so tightly his knuckles hurt. His knee bounced anyway. He tried to stop it. Failed. Tried again.

Beside him, Ilya was still. Shane could feel the tension in him without looking. He was begging Ilya not to look at him in his head, if he did Shane might cry.

Across from them, the nutritionist glanced at a tablet, then at Shane, then back again.

Shane's stomach dropped.

"I didn't mean to." he said quickly, before she could start. "I'm eating. I am. It's just the schedule, the travel, and playoffs are different and I've been—"

"Shane." she said, gentle but firm.

He stopped talking. His throat felt tight.

"We know you've been trying." she said. "This isn't about effort."

He stared at the edge of the desk. There was a scratch in the wood.

"Your weight has dropped more than we're comfortable with—" she put a hand out as Shane opened his mouth again to argue his case. "Not drastically. But given your history, even small changes matter."

History.

The word made his chest feel hollow.

She means the eating disorder that put him away for an entire summer. The one that he's been going to therapy for for months now. All those tears, all those nights laying in a generic inpatient bed wishing Ilya was there. All of it condensed into a history. A file sitting on her desk, telling her all she needs to know about him.

"I'm fine." he said.

Ilya shifted slightly beside him. Shane could feel his gaze now.

"You're not in trouble." the nutritionist said. "No one is upset with you."

That almost made it worse.

She was talking to him like he was a kid who got his hands stuck in the cookie jar. He is a grown man. There is no reason he is pathetically nervous sweating, talking about eating an

extra dessert on Thursdays.

“If this were any other player, we might just monitor,” she went on. “But for you, we don’t take chances. You’ve worked too hard to get here.”

Shane let out a breath through his nose. It shook.

“So what,” he said. “You want me to eat more.”

“Yes.”

he was gonna be sick. His whole body buzzed. He pressed his hand into his thigh, squeezing the meat there, his thumbnail pressing into it side. He could see his husband trying to reach for him under the desk, but he gave a slight shake of his head and the movement stopped. He felt like he was gonna die..

“We’re increasing your intake,” she said, tapping the tablet. “More calories, more consistency. We’re also adjusting your workout load slightly to reduce unnecessary strain.”

Shane just nodded numbly. He needed to go home and curl into a ball and never think about food again.

“Shane.”

He flinched.

He hated that tone. Soft, careful, like he might break.

Ilya’s hand moved then, resting lightly against Shane’s arm.

Shane didn’t pull away.

But he didn’t look at him either.

“We’ve also spoken with your therapist,” the nutritionist continued. “And the team doctor. This is a coordinated plan. You’ll have support.”

Support.

It felt like a trap.

Shane nodded softly, still not looking anyone in the eye.

“I understand that fear,” she said. “But this isn’t about changing your body. It’s about keeping it functioning.”

More food meant loss of control. Meant watching numbers shift. Meant noticing things he tried not to notice. Meant everything he had spent years learning to quiet getting louder again.

“We’re not asking,” she said gently. “This is a medical recommendation.”

Silence settled again.

Shane stared at the scratch in the desk until it blurred.

Beside him, Ilya's hand was still there.

Shane nodded firmly looking up for just a moment to meet her eyes.

Relief flickered across the nutritionist's face, quickly hidden.

"Okay," she said. "We'll go over the details."

Shane nodded, but he didn't really hear the rest.

Calories. Timing. Adjustments. Check-ins.

It all blurred together.

All he could think about was the number.

It would go up.

It always did when people said things like this.

The hallway outside felt too bright.

Shane walked ahead fast enough that Ilya had to catch up. He didn't want to talk. Not here. Not with people around.

His chest felt tight. Too tight.

"Shane.." Ilya said quietly.

"Mhpf."

"We go home now okay."

Shane gave a small nod before pressing his forehead against the window.

They finally made it home, and Shane went through the motions of settling back into their house.

He felt as though he just needed everything to stop. So that way he could take a deep breath and catch up.

He settled for sitting on the couch in the main living room and staring ahead at nothing, his husband been following him and sitting next to him shortly after he had gotten himself comfortable.

Silence.

Shane stared straight ahead.

“Talk to me, Shanya..” Ilya said.

“I don’t want to.”

“I know.”

A pause.

“But you need to.”

Shane let out a short, shaky laugh. “Yeah. Apparently I need a lot of things.”

“That is not what this is.”

“It is. I’m fucking up right? That’s gotta be it.”

He could feel it building now. The pressure. The tightness in his chest spreading upward, into his throat.

“They think I’m screwing up again,” he said. “They think I can’t handle it.”

“They think you are under pressure,” Ilya said. “Which is true.”

“I’m handling it.”

“You are trying to handle it alone.”

“I’m not alone.”

“You shut down when it gets like this.”

Shane’s hands clenched in his lap.

“I’m fine, I eat everything you put in front of me .” he repeated, but his voice was thinner now.

Ilya turned slightly toward him. “Look at me.”

Shane didn’t.

“Shane.”

“I can’t.”

“Okay,” Ilya said softly. “Then just breathe.”

“I am breathing.”

“You are barely breathing Shanya.”

Shane sucked in a breath to prove a point.

It caught halfway.

He tried again. Same thing. Too shallow. Too fast.

“Oh,” he said, a small, startled sound.

“It is okay,” Ilya said immediately. “You are safe.”

“I’m not,” Shane said. “I can’t do this right now. We have to go. We’re supposed to go to my parents’.”

“We are not going anywhere until you are okay.”

“I said I’m-”

“You cannot breathe.”

Shane’s vision started to blur at the edges.

His hands felt wrong. Tingling. Too light and too heavy at the same time.

“I hate this,” he said, voice shaking. “I hate this so much.”

“I know.”

“They’re going to make me gain weight,” he said. “I can’t do that. I can’t do that right now. I’m going to mess everything up.”

“You are not going to mess anything up.”

“I will. I always do when it gets like this.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

His breath hitched again. Sharper this time.

“Ilya, I can’t!”

“Yes, you can. Listen to me.”

A hand closed around his, firm now.

“Breathe in,” Ilya said. “Slow. With me.”

Shane tried.

It didn't work.

His chest spasmed, pulling in air too fast, then not enough.

"Again," Ilya said. "Look at me now."

Shane forced his eyes over.

Ilya's gaze was steady.

That helped. A little.

"In," Ilya said, demonstrating. Slow, controlled.

Shane followed. Not perfectly. But closer.

"Good," Ilya said. "Again."

They did it again.

And again.

The edges of Shane's vision steadied slightly.

"I can't go to my parents'," he said suddenly, the thought crashing through the haze. "I can't sit there and pretend everything's fine. My mom will notice. She always notices."

"Then we do not go."

"We're supposed to."

"We are not going."

Shane shook his head weakly. "She'll worry."

"She will worry more if you show up like this."

That was true. Yuna was perceptive to a fault. Well for the most part.

"I just," he started, then stopped. His throat closed again.

"You just got scared," Ilya said. "And that is okay."

"I hate that it still happens."

"It might always happen a little."

Shane flinched.

Ilya tightened his grip on his hand.

“But you are not where you were before,” he added. “You are here. You are talking. You told them the truth.”

“I didn’t,” Shane said. “I didn’t say a fucking thing like an idiot.”

“My husband is not an idiot. You agreed to help yourself. That is not stupid.”

Shane let out a shaky breath.

“I don’t want to lose control again..” he said quietly.

“You are not losing control,” Ilya said. “You are letting people help you keep it.”

Chapter 3

They didn't go to his parents'.

Ilya texted for him. Shane watched it happen without really processing the words. Something about not feeling well. Something about rescheduling.

His mom replied quickly. Of course she did.

Shane didn't read it.

Home was quiet.

Ilya didn't push him to talk.

Shane didn't.

Shane lasted maybe thirty more seconds before the silence got to him.

"I don't want to do this," he said.

"I know."

"They're going to watch everything I eat."

"No." Ilya said. "They are going to support you."

"That's the same thing."

"It is not."

Shane dragged a hand over his face.

"It feels like it," he said. "It feels like I'm back there again. Like every bite has something to do with my mental state. Like I'm not eating for myself. I'm eating to feel a quota and that's exactly what we're trying to avoid isn't it?"

Ilya shifted closer, not touching him yet.

"You are not back there," he said. "Back there, you were alone. You hid it. You lied. You pushed everyone away. And you are still in some ways eating for yourself."

Shane didn't respond.

Because that part was true.

"Now," Ilya continued, "you told them the truth. You have a plan. You have people who know what to look for."

Shane shook his head.

“It shouldn’t still be this easy to slip.”

“No one said it would ever be hard to slip,” Ilya said. “Only that it would be easier to catch.”

That didn’t feel comforting.

Shane curled slightly into himself, resting his elbows on his knees.

“I don’t want to gain weight during playoffs,” he said again, quieter now. “Everything feels so...good right now. Like I know exactly what I’m doing. And this is going to mess with that.”

Shane finally let his body rest and leaned into his husband.

“I’m playing well.”

“You are also not eating enough.”

“Ilya...”

“Not enough for my Shane.” Ilya pressed a kiss to his temple. “And my Shane is a greedy little thing so he must make sure he has more of everything he needs.”

Shane pressed his lips together.

“I don’t want to think about food all the time again,” he admitted.

“You already do..” Ilya said gently.

Shane’s shoulders slumped.

“Yeah,” he said after a moment. “I guess I do.”

“ but it is only because it is harder for you,” Ilya says “Your smart brain has to do so much work for you.”

Shane didn’t like that either.

But he couldn’t argue with it.

Silence stretched again.

Eventually, Ilya stood.

“I am going to make us something,” he said.

“I’m not hungry.”

“I did not ask if you were hungry.”

Shane glanced up at him.

There was no anger in Ilya's expression.

"You need to eat after that," he added.

Shane hesitated.

Every instinct in him said no.

Too much. Too soon. Not planned.

"Okay," he said finally.

Ilya nodded once and went to the kitchen.

Shane stayed on the couch, listening to the sounds of it.

Normal sounds.

They grounded him more than anything else had.

When Ilya came back, he set the plate on the coffee table, not handing it directly to Shane.

Less pressure that way.

"Just start," he said.

Shane stared at it.

It didn't look like much. It wasn't much.

But it felt like a lot.

His chest tightened again, not full panic this time. Just resistance.

"You can take your time," Ilya said, sitting back down.

Shane nodded.

He picked up the fork.

His hand shook slightly.

He took a bite.

Waited.

Nothing happened.

No immediate disaster. No sudden loss of control.

Just food.

He took another bite.

Ilya didn't watch him the whole time. That helped. He stayed present, but not focused in a way that made Shane feel observed.

When the plate was empty, Shane set the fork down carefully.

"There," he said, like it proved something.

Ilya nodded.

"There," he agreed.

Shane leaned back against the couch, exhausted again.

"That was stupidly hard," he said.

"I know."

"It shouldn't be."

"It is."

Shane closed his eyes.

For a moment, things were quiet.

Then his phone buzzed.

He tensed immediately.

"Probably your mom," Ilya said.

Shane didn't move.

"I can answer," Ilya offered.

"No," Shane said quickly. "I'll do it."

He picked up his phone, bracing himself.

Three messages.

All from his mom.

Momma:Are you okay?

Momma:Do you want me to bring you something?

Momma:Call me when you can.

Shane swallowed.

“She knows....” he said.

“She knows you are not feeling well,” Ilya said. “That is all.”

“She always knows more than that.”

“Then you can tell her what you want her to know.”

Shane stared at the screen.

His thumb hovered over the call button.

“I don’t want to explain it,” he said.

“Then do not explain it all,” Ilya said. “Just enough.”

Shane exhaled slowly.

Then he hit call.

She picked up almost immediately.

“Shane?”

“Hey, Mom.”

Her voice softened. “Hey, honey. What’s going on?”

Shane glanced at Ilya, then looked away.

“Just a rough day,” he said. “Team stuff. Nothing serious.”

A pause.

“You sound tired.”

“I am.”

“Did you eat?”

The question came so naturally it almost made him laugh.

“Yeah,” he said. “I just did.”

“Okay,” she said. Not fully convinced, but not pushing.

“We’ll come by another day,” Shane added.

“Of course,” she said. “You don’t have to push yourself...for me.”

“I know.”

Another pause.

“I love you,” she said.

Shane’s throat tightened.

“Love you too.”

He hung up before she could ask anything else.

“She did not interrogate you,” Ilya said.

“No,” Shane said. “She’s saving it for later.”

Ilya huffed a quiet laugh.

“That is fair.”

Shane leaned his head back.

“We have a roadie tomorrow,” he said. “And then media. And then game prep.”

“And we will do all of that,” Ilya said. “And you will follow the plan.”

Shane made a face.

“You make it sound fucking easy.”

“It is not easy,” Ilya said. “It is just necessary.”

Shane didn’t argue.

Because that part, at least, he believed.

Chapter 4

The room door closed behind them with a soft click.

Shane didn't say a word.

He toed off his shoes, stripped out of his clothes without looking at Ilya, without looking at anything, and climbed into the bed. He pulled the covers up and curled in on himself, back to the room, back to everything.

He felt hollowed out despite being so fucking full.

"Shane," Ilya said.

No response.

A few seconds passed. The bed dipped as Ilya sat down.

"Hey."

Nothing.

Ilya's hand hovered, then settled lightly on Shane's shoulder.

Shane didn't move.

"Talk to me."

He couldn't.

It wasn't that he didn't want to. The words just...weren't there. Everything inside him felt too tangled, too tight. If he tried to pull on any of it, it would snap.

"Okay," Ilya murmured after a moment. "You don't have to talk. Just—stay here."

Shane stayed exactly where he was.

Minutes passed. Maybe longer.

Ilya tried again, softer this time. "You're okay."

Shane shut his eyes tighter.

He wasn't.

All day has been meal after meal after snack after snack. And he wasn't allowed to do as much cardio now. Keeps gonna be slow and heavy on the ice and every single commentator would know it.

And he doesn't know why he didn't say no.

Shane is a grown man everything he does is voluntary. It's all his choice.

But for some reason, looking into his husband's eyes across the table from him took that choice away.

He had to eat what was on that meal plan.

The knock came at the worst possible time. Ilya stilled, then sighed under his breath.

"Stay," he said, like Shane had any intention of moving.

The door opened. Muffled voices. Laughter.
"Captain, we're heading out," LaPointe said.

"You coming?"

A pause.

Shane listened, every muscle tense.

"I can't," Ilya started.

"Come on, just for a bit. We'll get into trouble without you."

A weak joke. Half-true.

Ilya told them quietly to wait for one moment and closed the door to the hallway.

Shane felt it—the hesitation, the pull in two directions. Responsibility. Obligation.

He knew how much his husband adored the baby rookies and the same vice versa.

He'd love to play matchmaker and responsible dad for the night.

"Go," Shane said into the pillow.

His voice was rough, barely audible.

Ilya didn't move. "I'm not leaving you like this."

"I'm fine."

"You're not even—"

"Go."

It came out sharper this time.

Silence stretched between them.

“Lock the door,” Ilya said finally, voice low. “Do not open it for anyone.”

Shane didn’t respond.

A beat.

Then footsteps. The door opening. Closing.

Quiet.

The hotel room was too still. Too sealed off from everything else. Vancouver tomorrow loomed like a hard surface he was going to collide with no matter how much he prepared.

He had already done everything correctly. He had eaten what the plan said. He had not skipped anything. He had not added anything. He had followed it the way he was supposed to.

And still, his thoughts kept circling back, tightening.

He sat on the edge of the bed for a long time, hands resting on his knees, staring at nothing in particular.

His body felt like an equation he could not see the answer to.

The problem was simple, in the way problems always sounded simple when they were already too big to hold.

He did not know his weight.

He did not know what the plan was doing. Whether it was working. Whether it was enough. Whether he had already drifted too far in the wrong direction without realizing it.

It was not about vanity. It never had been, not really. It was about control. About not being surprised by his own body. About not waking up one morning and finding out something had changed without his permission.

Just take the scale

He shook his head and grabbed onto his hair. Trying to distract his mind by more powerful sensory input.

There was a scale in the bathroom when you first arrived. Find it. Fucking find it.

Shane pleaded with himself silently to just let it go.

To not bring Ilya more stress. To not act like an out of control child.

Once you know the number you will know exactly how much to eat. Nothing more and nothing less to get you too baseline. You have to do it. Do it. Cmon. You will feel so much better once you know.

He stood up.

He checked the bathroom first. Cabinets. Under the sink. Behind the towels. He moved methodically. Just certain that if he looked correctly, he would find it and the feeling in his chest would settle.

Nothing.

He opened drawers. Checked luggage compartments. The closet. The second suitcase he had not even fully unpacked.
Still nothing.

The certainty started to slip.

It did not become panic right away. It became something quieter and worse. A narrowing. A focus so tight it hurt. His thoughts stopped branching outward and started looping in on themselves, each one returning to the same point.

Find it! You need this! God you need this so fucking bad. You have to know so you can fix it. So you can be better again. So Ilya won't leave you.

If he did not know, then he could not be sure.

If he could not be sure, then the plan might not be working.

If the plan was not working, then he was already behind.

He stood still in the middle of the room, staring at the bedspread.

Then he moved again.

He pulled open drawers harder. Checked the minibar cabinet even though it made no sense. Shifted chairs. Looked behind the curtains.

The room began to look different when it failed to give him what he needed. Less like a place and more like a problem refusing to solve itself.

His hands were steady, but everything inside him was not.

After a while, he stopped pretending he was still searching calmly.

He checked everything again anyway.

When he finally stood up straight, the realization had already formed, unwelcome but clear. Ilya had not just hidden it. Ilya gotten rid of it.

He knew you would be too much of a freak to handle it being in the same fucking room as you. And now you're proving him right. Fucking pathetic. Least you could do is find out the number and be better for him.

Shane stared at the door for a long time.

Then he grabbed his room key.

The hallway outside was bright in the way hotels always were, lights too white for Shane right now.

He walked down it anyway, *Scale. Get the fucking scale.*

He knew where they were staying. Troy and Wyatt's room was across the hallway.

He stopped in front of it.

For a second, he considered going back. Turning around. Sitting down. Letting the feeling pass the way he usually tried to let things pass.

He knocked.

Footsteps inside. A pause. Then the door opened.

Earlier.

Ilya had the small bathroom scale tucked away under a jacket as he knocked on Troy and Wyatt's door.

Shane was thankfully getting in an extra nap. Adjusting to the time zones as one does.

Finally Troy opens the door with his face brightening as soon as he sees Ilya.

“Rozy! We just got 2k set up if you want rounds-“

Ilya looked at him with a fixed sterner as he saved for the ice.

Wyatt emerged behind Troy and the three men just looked at each other for a moment.

Then Ilya spoke.

“You are going to take this scale and hide it in your room. If Shane comes to ask for it, you are going to tell him you don't have one ,that it is gone. I genuinely do not care what you tell him, but you will not give it to him understood?”

Wyatt took the scale out of his hands and nodded.

No questions asked.

Ilya nodded to the both and turned back to his room.

Wyatt stood there first, hair slightly damp like he had just showered, posture relaxed in the way goalies always seemed to manage off the ice. Behind him, Troy Barrett was sprawled on one of the beds, a bag of Hot Cheetos open in his hand.

Shane's eyes flicked there immediately, before he could stop them.

The red dust on Troy's fingers registered too sharply.

That's how they want you to be. Disgusting.

Fuck. Troy is not disgusting fuck, he cringed at himself for half a second for even thinking of that.

He forced his gaze back up.

"Hey, Holly pocket." Wyatt said. "What's up?"

Shane kept his voice level. "I just need to borrow your bathroom scale."

Wyatt blinked. "The what?"

"The scale," Shane repeated. "Ours is... Broken."

From the bed, Troy paused mid bite. "We have a scale?"

Wyatt shot him a look. "Don't start."

Shane stepped forward slightly. "I just need to weigh my suitcase. Ilya bought too many snacks. I'm trying to see if I need to redistribute before we fly."

It was a lie. Not even a good one. But it was the only thing he could give the request that did not make it sound like what it actually was.

Wyatt's expression shifted. Not fooled.

"No, sorry don't have one." Wyatt said carefully.

Troy crunched another chip loudly, watching them now.

Shane's eyes flicked again before he could stop it. The movement. The eating. The sound. Everything his mind wanted to organize into categories he did not want to think about. He wanted to list out every nutritional fact to Troy and make him throw them out.

"I-am you sure. It might be in a cabinet or something."

"Nah Hollywood. Went in there for extra toilet paper. No scale. Sorry."

"It's fine. Forget it."

Wyatt did not look convinced. "Shane you could st--"

"I'm going to go back."

No one stopped him when he left.

The door closed behind him with a soft click the silence was worse than before.

He stood in the middle of it for a long time, hands hanging at his sides, staring at nothing.

His thoughts kept trying to complete the circuit they had started earlier, but there was nowhere for them to land.

No number. No confirmation. No anchor.

He walked to the bed and sat down.

For a while, he just sat there, elbows on his knees, eyes fixed on the floor.

Then he leaned forward further, until his forearms pressed against his thighs, until his posture folded in on itself.

He thought, briefly, of texting Ilya. Of saying something simple.

But Ilya already knew.

That was the problem.

Ilya already knew what he would ask for.

Already knew what it would do to him.

Already knew it was not about the number, not really, but about the relief that came from having it.

And Ilya had taken it anyway.

Shane exhaled slowly, but it did not loosen anything.

Minutes passed. Or maybe more.

Eventually, he slid down from the bed to the floor.

The carpet was slightly rough against his palms when he braced himself there. He sat with his back against the side of the bed, knees drawn up slightly, staring at the opposite wall.

His mind kept trying to solve the same problem in different ways.

If he could not weigh himself, then he could not confirm.

If he could not confirm, then he could not adjust.

If he could not adjust, then something might be wrong without him knowing.

The logic was circular. It always was. It always led back to the same place.

You're going to lose hockey and everyone will hate you.

He pressed the back of his head lightly against the bed frame.

The room did not change.

After a long time, his eyes stopped focusing on anything in particular. The wall became just a surface. The air became just air.

He stayed there.

Waiting for something to make sense again, even though nothing in the room was going to give him what he was looking for.

When Ilya finally came back the room was a mess.

Not a real mess, but a mess by Shane standards.

All of the drawers were open. The curtains were pulled apart. The bathroom door was wide open as well as every drawer there, the shower curtain was pulled back and pulled out of the tub.

He was looking for it.

Ilya immediately moved into the room.

His heart dropped when he saw Shane curled up on the carpet staring at nothing.

Okay. This is to be expected.

He can handle this.

“Hey, hey hey hey..Shanya...” He said beaming down towards his husband.

“I’m so full...” Shane said low and solemn. A way Ilya had never heard from his husband.

“That is good Shane, that is okay.” Ilya pulled the man onto the bed.

“I ate everything...” Shane murmured.

Ilya sighed “Yes Shanya, you did.”

Luckily, Shane was already showered and in his pajamas.

Ilya lifted the covers over him.

Shane didn’t go to sleep though he simply just. Turned off. He wasn’t there. Not really.

Ilya pressed a kiss on his husband’s cheek.

“У тебя все так хорошо. Я так горжусь тобой..” he said softly against Shane’s skin.

He texted Wyatt for unnecessary confirmation that Shane had come over to ask to borrow a scale.

His heart nearly skipped a beat when Wyatt said that he held out something Even Ilya had trouble doing when it came to his Shane's pouty eyes.

But Hayes held out.

Ilya finally stood up and started resetting the room, make it more organized.

Throughout the entire process, he'd glanced back a chain and see that his eyes were still open and glazed over.

he knew before he even left that Shane would freak out. Sometimes, if he couldn't do it in the comfort of his own home, it would be better to just do it alone. Ilya did a lot of research when he found out Shane might have been neurodivergent. he also did a lot of research on meltdowns and burnouts.

This seemed more like a burnout. and a part of him, criticized himself for not being there, but the more logical and sound part of him knew that being here wouldn't have made anything better and if anything, he would've made things worse, trying to make Shane's meltdown better for himself. Less scary for himself. And that's not what Shane needed. Shane needed to get through it.

to come out of the other end and be shaken and exhausted, but still through it.

And he knew his Shane would come back.

When it was better.

He knew they'd be ok.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Guess who's back, back again? I decided you know what they deserve some smut. Just as a little coming back gift.

The first few days back home were awful.

Shane followed the plan meticulously because he was stubborn to a pathological degree, but every meal felt like dragging himself uphill with weights attached to his ribs.

Playoff stress killed his appetite.

Some mornings he woke nauseated before practice with an anxiety induced headache.

Some afternoons he realized he had spent hours actively trying not to think about food because thinking about it made panic scratch at the inside of his chest.

Still, he ate.

Greek yogurt and granola before morning skate.

Protein bars between meetings.

Baked chicken and chili rice after practice.

Recovery shakes afterward even when his stomach twisted in protest.

Food food food.

Ilya helped without hovering.

Mostly.

"You need to finish smoothie," he said one morning. He was standing on the opposite side of the island. Wearing a Nike T-shirt and some sleep shorts. Looking impossibly sexy for having just woken up.

Shane glared at the half-full blender bottle.

"I'm trying." Even though he had just been looking at it, not even making a motion to try and take a sip.

"Shane."

“I know.” The frustration came suddenly and violently. “I know, okay?”

I know I’m fucking up.

Shane closed his eyes instantly. “Sorry.”

Ilya sighed softly. “No sorry.”

“I’m so fucking sick of talking about food.”

“Right.” Ilya crossed his arms over his chest and waited intently for Shane to finish.

“I’m sick of thinking about it.”

Ilya stepped closer carefully, like approaching a frightened animal.

“You are doing good.”

“It doesn’t fucking feel good.”

“No. But still doing it feels good right. I know how much you love to win Hollander. Is why I married you.” Ilya kissed Shane’s temple.

Shane looked down at the shake again.

Vanilla protein. Banana. Peanut butter.

It felt endless.

But he picked it up and finished drinking it anyway.

Ilya kissed the side of his head afterward like Shane had accomplished something monumental.

“Now reward.”

Ilya pulled his husband up and walked him to the couch.

Shane couldn’t help the smile that crept over his face.

“You-“ Shane was interrupted by his husband, smashing their faces together.

A constant dance of tongue as Ilya forced Shane down onto the couch.

“I love you Shane.” Ilya said while working off his husband’s pants.

“Love you too.” Shane groaned out rubbed Ilya’s hands as he freed Shane’s thick cock from its boxer, brief prison.

“You are so good Shane.” Ilya kissed the inner corner of his thigh.

Shane couldn't help but moan as Ilya suckled his way across his thighs and torso..

“Мой дорогой мальчик. Мое сердце. Боже, ты так драгоценен для меня.” Ilya murmured into his skin.

Shane was shaking this anticipation now.

The amount of pre that was leaking from him would have been astonishing if it wasn't Shane.

“Ilya, please. Touch me.”

Ilya lifted his head “I am touching you Hollander. See-“ Ilya placed a wet kiss.

Shane huffed “Suck my dick, please.”

Ilya was helpless against those big brown eyes looking down at him. Wide and begging.

He circled around the tip with his tongue, wiggling it into the slit of Shane's cock.

Shane had an instant reaction, throwing his head back and throwing an arm over his eyes.

“Jesus fuck Ilya...”

Ilya slid his husband's length down his throat, enjoying the salty taste.

The smooth expanse of Shane's shaft was perfect. Meaning every motion had zero resistance.

Ilya sped up and hollered out his cheeks. Holding Shane down with one hand to keep him from bucking up.

“Ilya oh god-oh fuck. I love you-I-fuck. M' gonna come.”

Ilya already knew the last part from the way Shane was pulling on his curls.

But Ilya wasn't done yet.

He slipped off and replaced his mouth with his hand, keeping the same pace.

“Jesus!”

“No Shane is me, you're husband.” Ilya dragged his tongue along Shane's length.

“Fuck-oh shit. Fuck.” Shane grabbed onto the pillow next to him to try and stabilize himself.

“You are good Shanya. You deserve to eat. Say it.”

Shane swore he was about to break his jaw from how hard he was clenching it too, lost in the ecstasy to say anything other than broken moans.

“Say it or I stop..” Ilya began to slow down.

Shane's eye shot open before he even knew he had closed them.

"No, no, I'm good. I-I." Ilya nodded and kissed the inside of his thigh.

"Say it all and you can cum.." Ilya said with a whisper and a soft smile, that was a little out of place for what they were doing.

"I'm good! I deserve-fuck-to eat! I deserve to eat!"

"Come for me."

Shane's back arched as he came all over his husband's fist with a shout.

Ilya placed a kiss on the flaccid tip of his cock.

"You are so good."

"Shut up..." Shane panted.

the Centaurs advanced to the Stanley Cup Final.

Everything intensified.

The entire city of Ottawa seemed electrified with hope.

Shane could barely breathe under it some days.

His eating became inconsistent despite his best efforts.

One day he managed every meal and both shakes and even dessert after dinner because Ilya grinned at him until he accepted a second cookie.

The next day he forgot lunch entirely until three in the afternoon and nearly cried trying to force himself through half a sandwich.

The problem was that success never erased the panic.

Every meal still felt deliberate.

He envied people who just...ate.

People who could feel hunger and answer it naturally instead of negotiating with their own brains every single time.

Sometimes he would just watch Ilya while they were watching a movie on the couch. Try to imagine himself nonchalantly crunching on a bag of chips without a care in the world.

After Game Two of the Finals, Shane sat in the locker room staring blankly at a container of pasta while the rest of the team filtered around him.

They had lost in overtime.

Everyone looked devastated.

“You gonna eat that?”

Shane looked up.

Troy nodded toward the pasta.

“Yeah.”

“You’ve been staring at it for ten minutes.”

Shane’s chest tightened. “I said I’m eating it.”

Troy immediately lifted both hands. “Okay. Sorry.”

Guilt crashed over Shane almost instantly.

“I know Ilya got you roped into my-our stuff. But I don’t need you watching me. M’ a grown fucking man.” he muttered.

“Man it’s fine, just..take it easy.”

Ilya sat beside him a minute later.

Without saying anything, he opened his own container and started eating.

Shane swallowed hard and picked up his fork.

Three days later something finally collapsed.

The Centaurs had won Game Four in double overtime.

The game ended after midnight.

By the time they got home, Shane’s body felt like it was vibrating apart from exhaustion.

Ilya heated leftovers while Shane sat motionless at the kitchen counter still wearing half his suit.

“You need eat.” Ilya said gently.

Shane stared at the marble countertop.

“I can’t.”

“You have not eaten since pregame meal.”

“I know.”

Ilya set a bowl of pasta in front of him anyway.

Steam curled upward. Resting his head against the granite countertop and taking deep breaths.

The smell hit Shane's stomach wrong. Giving him instant nausea.

"No."

"Кролик."

"I said no. I'm sorry okay. I give up."

Ilya sat beside him.

"Just a little."

Shane shoved the bowl away hard enough that sauce splashed onto the counter.

His thoughts were contradicting themselves in his head. One part of him chastise him for being so rude to his husband for not trying for giving up like a weakling. For shoving the ball away like a child. But that's what he was now a weak child.

Another part of him just justified everything. If he kept having to look at the food, smell the food, think about the food. He was going to throw up and die. He just wants to go to sleep and if he eats his stomach will be full and uncomfortable, and he won't be able to sleep. He just wants to sleep.

"I can't do it tonight."

Ilya's frustration flashed immediately.

"Shane."

"No."

"You need food."

"I fucking know that!"

His voice cracked sharply through the kitchen.

Shane pressed both palms against his eyes.

"I know," he whispered brokenly. "I know."

Ilya's expression softened instantly.

"Remember you are good and you deserve food...my Shane always deserves food."

But Shane could already feel himself shutting down.

The exhaustion had hollowed him out too completely. All the careful control he'd maintained for two weeks suddenly felt unreachable.

"I can't.." he repeated.

Ilya crouched beside his chair. "You can."

"No."

"Yes."

"Ilya."

"You are scaring me."

Shane looked away immediately.

"I'm fine."

"You are absolutely not fine."

"I just need sleep."

"You need food first."

Panic flared hot and sharp beneath his ribs.

"No."

Ilya stared at him.

Shane curled inward further beneath the weight of that gaze.

He hated this.

Hated how quickly fear transformed him into someone stubborn and frightened and irrational.

"I can't swallow it." he whispered finally.

Ilya went very still.

Shane's breathing started to shake.

"If I eat it I'll throw up because-fuck-because I'm freaking out. The more I think about it the worse it gets and now I can't stop thinking about it."

"Okay," Ilya said carefully.

“I know I should eat. I know. But my brain won’t shut up.” He brought his hands up to pull at his hair.

“What saying?” Ilya wrapped his hands around Shane’s wrists. Carefully bringing them back down to his lap.

Shane laughed once. “All kinds of things.”

Ilya reached for his hand.

Shane let him take it.

“You tell me.”

“I feel weak and disgusting.”

The confession came out so quietly it barely existed.

Ilya’s face twisted with immediate pain. “You are very strong.”

“I know, but my brain doesn’t care.”

Tears burned suddenly behind Shane’s eyes.

“I’m trying so hard. I have been for months now.”

“I know.”

“I spent that summer in that stupid clinic so this wouldn’t happen. So I wouldn’t have to fight myself for every bite.”

Ilya squeezed his hand tightly. “You are winning fight.”

“No.” Shane shook his head weakly. “I’m driving myself insane trying to act normal about everything.”

For a long moment neither of them spoke.
Then Ilya stood abruptly and grabbed his phone.

Shane frowned tiredly. “What are you doing?”

“I’m calling Leena.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Ilya, don’t.”

“She helps you.”

“I don’t need my therapist in the middle of the night because I skipped dinner.”

“You are not okay.”

Shane looked away.

Part of him knew Ilya was right. But another part felt deeply humiliated.

Weak little boy.

Ilya stepped into the hallway while the phone rang.

Shane sat alone in the kitchen trying not to cry.

Fifteen minutes later Lena appeared on their living room television wearing glasses and an oversized sweatshirt, her dark hair piled messily on top of her head.

“Hi, Shane.”

Mortification crawled through him instantly. “Sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“Because it’s midnight.”

Lena smiled gently. “I’m awake.”

“She was watching Love island of course.” Ilya said from the couch.

“Jeez that show is like crack.” Lena informed him.

A tiny unwilling laugh escaped Shane.

That had probably been her intention.

Lena settled back slightly.

“Ilya told me tonight is hard.”

Shane stared at his hands. “Yeah.”

“Can you tell me what’s happening?”

The answer should have been simple.

Instead it tangled painfully inside his chest.

“I’m tired,” he whispered finally.

“Mhm.”

“And I know I need to eat but I can’t make myself do it.”

“What feels hardest right now?”

Shane swallowed thickly. “The amount.”

“Okay.”

“It feels really um..overwhelming.”

Lena nodded calmly. “Did something specific trigger things getting worse tonight?” she asked.

“Maybe losing track of food earlier.”

“That can definitely make nighttime eating harder. Especially with how important rules are with us.”

At first, she thought it corny that she referred to Shane’s problems with plural nouns. ‘ we need to adjust our eating.’ ‘ we are going to try new breathing practices this week.’ ‘ we are trying our best.’ ‘ we need rules structure.’. But then she told him that they were a team. And recovery is very much a team sport.

Shane nodded weakly.

“And playoffs,” he admitted. “Everything feels...fucked.”

“Makes sense.”

“I feel like I spend every second thinking about food now.”

“That sounds really exhausting.”

“It is.”

Lena was quiet for a moment.

Then she said, “Do you think the goal tonight needs to be a perfect meal?”

Shane blinked.

“I mean...”

“Or does the goal just need to be caring for your body enough to get through tonight?”

He frowned slightly. “I don’t know.”

“That’s okay.”

She leaned forward a little. “Right now your brain is treating this bowl of pasta like a mountain. So we stop trying to climb the whole mountain. We find a place to set up camp, get ourselves a thermos and a sleeping bag and see if we can get up the rest of the mountain tomorrow.”

Ilya sat silently beside him listening carefully.

Lena continued gently, “What feels manageable? Not easy. Just manageable. What can we do tonight.”

Shane stared toward the kitchen. “I don’t know.”

“Could you drink something?”

“Maybe.”

“Could you eat a few bites while distracted?”

“...maybe.”

“Okay. That’s enough to start.”

Tears pricked unexpectedly behind Shane’s eyes again.

Because she wasn’t ever asking him to magically stop struggling. She was meeting him inside the struggle itself.

“I feel so weak.” he admitted quietly.

“You are not weak.”

“I’m a thirty-year-old man crying over pasta.”

“You’re a person with a history of disordered eating. You did the programs you got the certifications, you did everything you needed to do to get better. And even after you were out of the mandatory recovery program, you still continue to put in the work and you still continue to see me. Do you know how many people get out of rehab centers and never step foot in my office again? Who are too scared to continue to fight. You are still fighting Shane. That is incredibly brave.”

Shane looked down quickly.

“What would you say to Ilya if he was struggling like this?”

Shane answered immediately. “I’d tell him eating something is better than nothing.”

“Okay.”

“I’d tell him one bad night doesn’t erase progress.”

“Mhm.”

“I’d tell him he doesn’t have to earn food. Because he is good and he deserves it.”

Leena smiled gently.

“Those all sound true for you too.”

Shane laughed shakily through sudden tears.

“Yeah.”

Ilya wrapped an arm around his shoulders immediately.

“You do not have to do perfect,” he murmured into Shane’s hair.

Shane leaned against him heavily.

Exhaustion pulsed through every inch of him now.

Leena spoke again after a moment.

“Do you think we could try something small while we stay on the phone?”

Shane hesitated.

Then nodded once.

The pasta still felt impossible but Leena helped him narrow things down until impossible became merely difficult.

A protein shake. Half a banana. A few crackers.

Ilya assembled everything silently while Shane sat curled into the couch cushions trying to keep breathing steady.

“No pressure.” Lena reminded him through the television speakers. “This isn’t pass or fail.”

Shane nodded weakly. He took one sip of the shake.

His stomach twisted anxiously. But nothing terrible happened.

Another sip.

Then half the banana.

Ilya stayed close enough that their knees touched.

“You’re okay.” he said quietly.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

The food still felt heavy inside his body.

But the sharp panic had eased enough for him to think clearly again.

By the time he finished most of the shake and all the crackers, exhaustion had replaced adrenaline.

Leena smiled warmly.

“How do you feel now?”

“Full.”

“Right...”

“A little less insane.”

“You were never insane.”

Shane rubbed at his eyes. “Thanks for-uh answering.”

“Anytime.”

Before ending the call, Lena added gently, “Tonight wasn’t failure, Shane.”

He looked uncertain.

“It was a hard moment that you worked through with support. Those are different things.”

“Okay.”

“Get some sleep.”

After the call ended, silence settled softly through the house.

Ilya gathered the dishes while Shane sat motionless on the couch counting Anya’s soft breaths in her sleep.

Eventually Ilya returned and knelt in front of him.

“You scared me.”

Shane’s chest tightened instantly. “Sorry.”

“No sorry.” Ilya took both his hands carefully. “I just hate seeing you hurt.”

Shane looked down. “I hate it too.”

Ilya brushed his thumbs over Shane’s knuckles.

“You are still trying. Even when it is hard.”

“I almost quit tonight.”

“But you didn’t.”

Shane swallowed hard. “I wanted to, so fucking bad.”

“I know.”

Shane leaned forward slowly until his forehead rested against Ilya’s shoulder.

“I’m tired of fighting my own brain.”

Ilya held him tightly.

“I know, Shanya.”

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“I’m trying.” Even though he had just been looking at it, not even making a motion to try and take a sip.

“Shane.”

“I know.” The frustration came suddenly and violently. “I know, okay?”

I know I’m fucking up.

Shane closed his eyes instantly. “Sorry.”

Ilya sighed softly. “No sorry.”

“I’m so fucking sick of talking about food.”

“Right.” Ilya crossed his arms over his chest and waited intently for Shane to finish.

“I’m sick of thinking about it.”

Ilya stepped closer carefully, like approaching a frightened animal.

“You are doing good.”

“It doesn’t fucking feel good.”

“No. But still doing it feels good right. I know how much you love to win Hollander. Is why I married you.” Ilya kissed Shane’s temple.

Shane looked down at the shake again.

Vanilla protein. Banana. Peanut butter.

It felt endless.

But he picked it up and finished drinking it anyway.

Ilya kissed the side of his head afterward like Shane had accomplished something monumental.

Now reward.

Ilya pulled his husband up and walked him to the couch.

Shane couldn’t help the smile that crept over his face.

“You-“ Shane was interrupted by his husband, smashing their faces together.

A constant dance of tongue as Ilya forced Shane down onto the couch.

“I love you Shane.” Ilya said while working off his husband’s pants.

“Love you too.” Shane groaned out rubbed Ilya’s hands as he freed Shane’s thick cock from its boxer, brief prison.

“You are so good Shane.” Ilya kissed the inner corner of his thigh.

Shane couldn't help but moan as Ilya suckled his way across his thighs and torso..

“Мой дорогой мальчик. Мое сердце. Боже, ты так драгоценен для меня.” Ilya murmured into his skin.

Shane was shaking this anticipation now.

The amount of pre that was leaking from him would have been astonishing if it wasn't Shane.

“Ilya, please. Touch me.”

Ilya lifted his head “I am touching you Hollander. See-“ Ilya placed a wet kiss.

Shane huffed “Suck my dick, please.”

Ilya was helpless against those big brown eyes looking down at him. Wide and begging.

He circled around the tip with his tongue, wiggling it into the slit of Shane's cock.

Shane had an instant reaction, throwing his head back and throwing an arm over his eyes.

“Jesus fuck Ilya...”

Ilya slid his husband's length down his throat, enjoying the salty taste.

The smooth expanse of Shane's shaft was perfect. Meaning every motion had zero resistance.

Ilya sped up and hollered out his cheeks. Holding Shane down with one hand to keep him from bucking up.

“Ilya oh god-oh fuck. I love you-I-fuck. M' gonna come.”

Ilya already knew the last part from the way Shane was pulling on his curls.

But Ilya wasn't done yet.

He slipped off and replaced his mouth with his hand, keeping the same pace.

“Jesus!”

“No Shane is me, you're husband.” Ilya dragged his tongue along Shane's length.

“Fuck-oh shit. Fuck.” Shane grabbed onto the pillow next to him to try and stabilize himself.

“You are good Shanya. You deserve to eat. Say it.”

Shane swore he was about to break his jaw from how hard he was clenching it too, lost in the ecstasy to say anything other than broken moans.

“Say it or I stop..” Ilya began to slow down.

Shane's eye shot open before he even knew he had closed them.

"No, no, I'm good. I-I." Ilya nodded and kissed the inside of his thigh.

"Say it all and you can cum.." Ilya said with a whisper and a soft smile, that was a little out of place for what they were doing.

"I'm good! I deserve to eat! I deserve to eat!"

"Come for me."

Shane's back arched as he came all over his husband's fist with a shout.

Ilya placed a kiss on the flaccid tip of his cock.

"You are so good."

"Shut up..." Shane panted.

the Centaurs advanced to the Stanley Cup Final.

Everything intensified.

The entire city of Ottawa seemed electrified with hope.

Shane could barely breathe under it some days.

His eating became inconsistent despite his best efforts.

One day he managed every meal and both shakes and even dessert after dinner because Ilya grinned at him until he accepted a second cookie.

The next day he forgot lunch entirely until three in the afternoon and nearly cried trying to force himself through half a sandwich.

The problem was that success never erased the panic.

Every meal still felt deliberate.

He envied people who just...ate.

People who could feel hunger and answer it naturally instead of negotiating with their own brains every single time.

Sometimes he would just watch Ilya while they were watching a movie on the couch. Try to imagine himself nonchalantly crunching on a bag of chips without a care in the world.

After Game Two of the Finals, Shane sat in the locker room staring blankly at a container of pasta while the rest of the team filtered around him.

They had lost in overtime.

Everyone looked devastated.

“You gonna eat that?”

Shane looked up.

Troy nodded toward the pasta.

“Yeah.”

“You’ve been staring at it for ten minutes.”

Shane’s chest tightened. “I said I’m eating it.”

Troy immediately lifted both hands. “Okay. Sorry.”

Guilt crashed over Shane almost instantly.

“I know Ilya got you roped into my-our stuff. But I don’t need you watching me. M’ a grown fucking man.” he muttered.

“Man it’s fine, just..take it easy.”

Ilya sat beside him a minute later.

Without saying anything, he opened his own container and started eating.

Shane swallowed hard and picked up his fork.

Three days later something finally collapsed.

The Centaurs had won Game Four in double overtime.

The game ended after midnight.

By the time they got home, Shane’s body felt like it was vibrating apart from exhaustion.

Ilya heated leftovers while Shane sat motionless at the kitchen counter still wearing half his suit.

“You need eat.” Ilya said gently.

Shane stared at the marble countertop.

“I can’t.”

“You have not eaten since pregame meal.”

“I know.”

Ilya set a bowl of pasta in front of him anyway.

Steam curled upward. Resting his head against the granite countertop and taking deep breaths.

The smell hit Shane's stomach wrong. Giving him instant nausea.

"No."

"Кролик."

"I said no. I'm sorry okay. I give up."

Ilya sat beside him.

"Just a little."

Shane shoved the bowl away hard enough that sauce splashed onto the counter.

His thoughts were contradicting themselves in his head. One part of him chastise him for being so rude to his husband for not trying for giving up like a weakling. For shoving the ball away like a child. But that's what he was now a weak child.

Another part of him just justified everything. If he kept having to look at the food, smell the food, think about the food. He was going to throw up and die. He just wants to go to sleep and if he eats his stomach will be full and uncomfortable, and he won't be able to sleep. He just wants to sleep.

"I can't do it tonight."

Ilya's frustration flashed immediately.

"Shane."

"No."

"You need food."

"I fucking know that!"

His voice cracked sharply through the kitchen.

Shane pressed both palms against his eyes.

"I know," he whispered brokenly. "I know."

Ilya's expression softened instantly.

"Remember you are good and you deserve food...my Shane always deserves food."

But Shane could already feel himself shutting down.

The exhaustion had hollowed him out too completely. All the careful control he'd maintained for two weeks suddenly felt unreachable.

"I can't.." he repeated.

Ilya crouched beside his chair. "You can."

"No."

"Yes."

"Ilya."

"You are scaring me."

Shane looked away immediately.

"I'm fine."

"You are absolutely not fine."

"I just need sleep."

"You need food first."

Panic flared hot and sharp beneath his ribs.

"No."

Ilya stared at him.

Shane curled inward further beneath the weight of that gaze.

He hated this.

Hated how quickly fear transformed him into someone stubborn and frightened and irrational.

"I can't swallow it." he whispered finally.

Ilya went very still.

Shane's breathing started to shake.

"If I eat it I'll throw up because-fuck-because I'm freaking out. The more I think about it the worse it gets and now I can't stop thinking about it."

"Okay," Ilya said carefully.

“I know I should eat. I know. But my brain won’t shut up.” He brought his hands up to pull at his hair.

“What saying?” Ilya wrapped his hands around Shane’s wrists. Carefully bringing them back down to his lap.

Shane laughed once. “All kinds of things.”

Ilya reached for his hand.

Shane let him take it.

“You tell me.”

“I feel weak and disgusting.”

The confession came out so quietly it barely existed.

Ilya’s face twisted with immediate pain. “You are very strong.”

“I know, but my brain doesn’t care.”

Tears burned suddenly behind Shane’s eyes.

“I’m trying so hard. I have been for months now.”

“I know.”

“I spent that summer in that stupid clinic so this wouldn’t happen. So I wouldn’t have to fight myself for every bite.”

Ilya squeezed his hand tightly. “You are winning fight.”

“No.” Shane shook his head weakly. “I’m driving myself insane trying to act normal about everything.”

For a long moment neither of them spoke.
Then Ilya stood abruptly and grabbed his phone.

Shane frowned tiredly. “What are you doing?”

“I’m calling Leena.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Ilya, don’t.”

“She helps you.”

“I don’t need my therapist in the middle of the night because I skipped dinner.”

“You are not okay.”

Shane looked away.

Part of him knew Ilya was right. But another part felt deeply humiliated.

Weak little boy.

Ilya stepped into the hallway while the phone rang.

Shane sat alone in the kitchen trying not to cry.

Fifteen minutes later Lena appeared on their living room television wearing glasses and an oversized sweatshirt, her dark hair piled messily on top of her head.

“Hi, Shane.”

Mortification crawled through him instantly. “Sorry.”

“Why are you apologizing?”

“Because it’s midnight.”

Lena smiled gently. “I’m awake.”

“She was watching Love island of course.” Ilya said from the couch.

“Jeez that show is like crack.” Lena informed him.

A tiny unwilling laugh escaped Shane.

That had probably been her intention.

Lena settled back slightly.

“Ilya told me tonight is hard.”

Shane stared at his hands. “Yeah.”

“Can you tell me what’s happening?”

The answer should have been simple.

Instead it tangled painfully inside his chest.

“I’m tired,” he whispered finally.

“Mhm.”

“And I know I need to eat but I can’t make myself do it.”

“What feels hardest right now?”

Shane swallowed thickly. “The amount.”

“Okay.”

“It feels really um..overwhelming.”

Lena nodded calmly. “Did something specific trigger things getting worse tonight?” she asked.

“Maybe losing track of food earlier.”

“That can definitely make nighttime eating harder. Especially with how important rules are with us.”

At first, she thought it corny that she referred to Shane’s problems with plural nouns. ‘ we need to adjust our eating.’ ‘ we are going to try new breathing practices this week.’ ‘ we are trying our best.’ ‘ we need rules structure.’. But then she told him that they were a team. And recovery is very much a team sport.

Shane nodded weakly.

“And playoffs,” he admitted. “Everything feels...fucked.”

“Makes sense.”

“I feel like I spend every second thinking about food now.”

“That sounds really exhausting.”

“It is.”

Lena was quiet for a moment.

Then she said, “Do you think the goal tonight needs to be a perfect meal?”

Shane blinked.

“I mean...”

“Or does the goal just need to be caring for your body enough to get through tonight?”

He frowned slightly. “I don’t know.”

“That’s okay.”

She leaned forward a little. “Right now your brain is treating this bowl of pasta like a mountain. So we stop trying to climb the whole mountain. We find a place to set up camp, get ourselves a thermos and a sleeping bag and see if we can get up the rest of the mountain tomorrow.”

Ilya sat silently beside him listening carefully.

Lena continued gently, “What feels manageable? Not easy. Just manageable. What can we do tonight.”

Shane stared toward the kitchen. “I don’t know.”

“Could you drink something?”

“Maybe.”

“Could you eat a few bites while distracted?”

“...maybe.”

“Okay. That’s enough to start.”

Tears pricked unexpectedly behind Shane’s eyes again.

Because she wasn’t ever asking him to magically stop struggling. She was meeting him inside the struggle itself.

“I feel so weak.” he admitted quietly.

“You are not weak.”

“I’m a thirty-year-old man crying over pasta.”

“You’re a person with a history of disordered eating. You did the programs you got the certifications, you did everything you needed to do to get better. And even after you were out of the mandatory recovery program, you still continue to put in the work and you still continue to see me. Do you know how many people get out of rehab centers and never step foot in my office again? Who are too scared to continue to fight. You are still fighting Shane. That is incredibly brave.”

Shane looked down quickly.

“What would you say to Ilya if he was struggling like this?”

Shane answered immediately. “I’d tell him eating something is better than nothing.”

“Okay.”

“I’d tell him one bad night doesn’t erase progress.”

“Mhm.”

“I’d tell him he doesn’t have to earn food. Because he is good and he deserves it.”

Leena smiled gently.

“Those all sound true for you too.”

Shane laughed shakily through sudden tears.

“Yeah.”

Ilya wrapped an arm around his shoulders immediately.

“You do not have to do perfect,” he murmured into Shane’s hair.

Shane leaned against him heavily.

Exhaustion pulsed through every inch of him now.

Leena spoke again after a moment.

“Do you think we could try something small while we stay on the phone?”

Shane hesitated.

Then nodded once.

The pasta still felt impossible but Leena helped him narrow things down until impossible became merely difficult.

A protein shake. Half a banana. A few crackers.

Ilya assembled everything silently while Shane sat curled into the couch cushions trying to keep breathing steady.

“No pressure.” Lena reminded him through the television speakers. “This isn’t pass or fail.”

Shane nodded weakly. He took one sip of the shake.

His stomach twisted anxiously. But nothing terrible happened.

Another sip.

Then half the banana.

Ilya stayed close enough that their knees touched.

“You’re okay.” he said quietly.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

The food still felt heavy inside his body.

But the sharp panic had eased enough for him to think clearly again.

By the time he finished most of the shake and all the crackers, exhaustion had replaced adrenaline.

Leena smiled warmly.

“How do you feel now?”

“Full.”

“Right...”

“A little less insane.”

“You were never insane.”

Shane rubbed at his eyes. “Thanks for-uh answering.”

“Anytime.”

Before ending the call, Lena added gently, “Tonight wasn’t failure, Shane.”

He looked uncertain.

“It was a hard moment that you worked through with support. Those are different things.”

“Okay.”

“Get some sleep.”

After the call ended, silence settled softly through the house.

Ilya gathered the dishes while Shane sat motionless on the couch counting Anya’s soft breaths in her sleep.

Eventually Ilya returned and knelt in front of him.

“You scared me.”

Shane’s chest tightened instantly. “Sorry.”

“No sorry.” Ilya took both his hands carefully. “I just hate seeing you hurt.”

Shane looked down. “I hate it too.”

Ilya brushed his thumbs over Shane’s knuckles.

“You are still trying. Even when it is hard.”

“I almost quit tonight.”

“But you didn’t.”

Shane swallowed hard. “I wanted to, so fucking bad.”

“I know.”

Shane leaned forward slowly until his forehead rested against Ilya’s shoulder.

“I’m tired of fighting my own brain.”

Ilya held him tightly.

“I know, Shanya.”

Chapter 6

By the time the Centaurs reached the Stanley Cup Finals, Shane felt like his body no longer belonged to him.

Everything hurt.

His knees hurt.

His shoulders hurt.

His head hurt constantly from stress and exhaustion and the endless pressure pressing against the back of his skull.

Worst of all was the eating.

The thought of food made his skin crawl.

It felt violent.

Like every meal demanded he override every alarm system his brain possessed.

Eat.

Don't eat.

You have to eat.

You don't fucking deserve it.

Eat or Ilya will worry.

Eat or you'll lose more weight. Then they'll bench you like last time.

Eat or you'll disappoint everyone.

The thoughts layered over each other until Shane sometimes felt dizzy trying to untangle them.

And underneath all of it sat the worst feeling of all.

Ilya.

Because disappointing Ilya felt unbearable.

The thought of seeing fear in his husband's eyes again made Shane want to crawl out of his own skin.

So he lied.

At first, the lies were small. It was almost like second nature. He didn't even realize he was doing it.

"Yeah, I finished the shake."

"I grabbed a snack already."

"I ate after practice."

Little things.

Things that technically felt survivable because he wasn't fully restricting. He was still eating enough to function. Enough to avoid immediate concern.

And Shane knew exactly how to hide things now.

Recovery had taught him honesty.

But it had also accidentally taught him how to look healthy while struggling.

How to smile naturally while panicking.

How to make eye contact while lying.

How to eat just enough in public that nobody immediately sounded alarms.

He hated how good he still was at it.

One night after dinner at home, Ilya quietly set down his fork and said, "You keep looking at me while you eat."

Shane froze slightly.

"What?"

"You look nervous."

"I'm not nervous."

"You are absolutely nervous."

Shane stared down at his plate.

Ilya's expression softened immediately. "Shane."

The tenderness in his voice made guilt spike sharply through Shane's chest.

"I just..." Shane rubbed at the back of his neck. "Sometimes it's harder when people watch."

Ilya went still. "Harder how?"

Shane forced himself to answer carefully.

“Like I can feel every bite more.”

That part was true.

“Like I’m aware of being perceived.”

Also true.

“I know you’re trying to help, but sometimes it makes me panic more.”

Ilya’s face fell instantly.”Oh.”

Shane nearly took it back right then. But instead he pushed forward because some horrible desperate part of him realized this could work.

“I think I need a little more independence with it.”

Ilya stayed quiet for several seconds. Then he nodded slowly.

“Okay.”

The relief that flooded Shane made him feel sick.

“I can still check in sometimes?” Ilya asked carefully.

“Yeah, of course.”

“Just not stare at you.”

Shane forced a weak smile. “Basically.”

Ilya reached across the table and squeezed his hand.

“Okay, Shanya.”

God.

That almost made Shane confess everything immediately.

But he didn’t.

The first trick he used was the napkin.

Embarrassingly simple.

During team meals or media dinners, Shane would eat enough publicly to seem normal, then subtly scrape portions into folded napkins while everyone talked around him.

Nobody noticed.

Why would they? His food was the least interesting thing in the room.

The locker room was chaos during playoffs.

Guys inhaled food absentmindedly while reviewing game clips or arguing about missed penalties or chirping each other over terrible interviews.

Nobody monitored how many bites Shane Hollander took during dinner.

Especially not now that everyone believed he was managing things.

Then came the Ziploc bags.

That part made him feel genuinely a bit insane.

He started carrying sandwich bags tucked into hoodie pockets or doppel kits during road trips.

Half a sandwich disappeared there.

Pieces of chicken.

Protein bars.

Once, horrifyingly, an entire muffin.

Afterward he'd throw the bags away in hotel lobby trash cans or arena dumpsters before anyone could find them.

Every time he did it, shame crawled hot beneath his skin.

Every single time he promised himself it was the last one.

Then playoffs got harder.

The Final stretched on. The Centaurs lost Game One. Won Game Two. Lost Game Three in overtime.

The stress became unbearable and Shane got worse.

Ilya still checked in occasionally like promised.

Randomly opening the hotel fridge to grab them both something.

Quietly asking if Shane wanted him to make toast.

Popping into the kitchen halfway through meals.

Trying so desperately to respect the boundary Shane had asked for.

That made the lying feel monstrous.

Because Ilya trusted him.

Completely.

One afternoon after practice, Ilya handed him two protein bars before Shane headed for the players' parking lot.

"Eat one now and one after treatment." he said casually.

"Okay."

Shane tucked them into his bag.

An hour later, instead of eating them, he shoved both bars into the bottom drawer of his locker beneath an old Centaurs T-shirt.

His stomach twisted immediately afterward.

He stared at the drawer for a long moment.

Don't.

You have to eat this.

You deserve it.

You deserve to eat.

Don't.

He shut it.

The next day he did it again.

Then again.

Soon the entire bottom of the drawer filled with hidden food.

Protein bars. Trail mix packets. Fruit snacks.

Jerky. Crackers. Lunch cookies.

The stash grew faster than he realized because Ilya was relentless about snacks during playoffs.

"Take this."

"Eat after skate."

"You need to have this."

Shane accepted everything with practiced ease.

Then hid most of it.

He cleared out the drawer completely one morning before practice, pushing spare tape and extra gloves elsewhere.

Then he lined the bottom with hidden snacks and tossed an old gray T-shirt loosely across the top to conceal everything.

The worst part was how calming it felt.

That terrified him.

The hidden food became proof that nobody could force him.

Proof that he still had control.

Even while another part of him screamed that this was exactly how things used to start.

Still, he kept doing it.

Because stopping felt impossible.

The dopamine rush he got every time he got away with another lie.

The way that incessant screeching voice in the back of his head finally quieted.

It felt too good to stop.

It fell apart on a Thursday afternoon.

Two days before Game Six.

Weezer played too loudly through somebody's speaker. Young and Dillion argued over some missed drill while LaPointe dug through his stall for clean socks.

Shane sat at his locker pretending to retape his stick while nausea twisted steadily through him.

Then Luca walked over holding a half taped stick.

"Hey, Holly, you got extra tape?"

"Top shelf," Shane answered automatically.
Luca nodded and stepped toward the locker.

Everything happened too fast after that.

Luca reached for the wrong drawer.

The top drawer slid open.

Then the second one beneath it.

And suddenly—

Stacks of untouched snacks filling the drawer almost to the back.

Luca grabbed a handful and inspected them.

The room went strangely quiet around them.

Shane's entire body went cold.

"What the fuck?" Luca said softly.

Ilya looked over from where he was talking to Wyatt.

Shane would remember that look for a very long time.

Not anger.

God, Shane almost wished it had been anger.

It was hurt.

Immediate and devastating.

Ilya stared at the drawer like someone had punched him directly in the chest.

"Shane.." he said quietly.

Panic detonated instantly inside Shane's ribcage.

His brain stalled. "It's not—I was just—those are old."

Nobody said anything. Because the lie was fucking terrible.

The snacks were obviously recent. Different brands. Different packaging. Some still shoved haphazardly beneath others like they'd been tossed there hours ago.

LaPointe frowned slightly. "Why do you have enough food in there to survive a lockout?"

Shane laughed weakly.

Dillion looked unconvinced. "Dude, there's like thirty protein bars in there."

"I was gonna eat them."

Young glanced between Shane and Ilya with growing concern.

"Shaner..."

"I said I was gonna eat them." His voice cracked sharply.

Shane could hear his own heartbeat now.

Luca slowly closed the drawer. “I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

Because now everyone understood this was bad.

Shane’s thoughts started spiraling violently.

They know.

They know you’re lying.

They know you’re failing again.

Ilya thinks you lied to him.

You did lie to him.

His chest tightened painfully.

“I just...” Shane started. Okay he just needed to clear his name and provide a sound argument. A good excuse.

Words spilled out in fragments instead.

“ I just—I don’t know—I was gonna deal with it—”

Nobody interrupted him. That mercy felt unbearable.

“I’m good,” Shane finished weakly.

Ilya still hadn’t looked away from him.

That expression finally broke something inside Shane completely.

He stood abruptly. “I—air.”

Then he left before anyone could stop him.

The drive home was silent.

Shane sat rigid in the passenger seat staring out the window while Ottawa blurred past in gray evening streaks.

His entire body buzzed with shame.

He couldn’t stop replaying the locker room.

Luca opening the drawer.

Everyone staring.

Ilya's face. He'd seen fear in Ilya before.

Seen frustration.

Seen panic.

But disappointment from Ilya felt uniquely unbearable.

And underneath it all sat another horrible truth.

Part of Shane was relieved the hiding was over. Almost proud to show them he was in charge.

That realization made him feel sick.

Ilya parked in the garage and turned off the engine.

Neither of them moved immediately.

Finally Ilya said quietly, "How long?"

Shane's throat tightened. "I don't know."

"That is not answer."

"I know."

They sat.

Then softly, "Weeks?"

Shane nodded once.

Ilya closed his eyes briefly.

That hurt worse than yelling would have.

"I'm so sorry." Shane whispered.

Ilya swallowed hard. "You asked me stop watching because it made things harder."

"It did."

"But you lied, you tricked me."

Shane pressed both hands against his eyes.

"I know."

"You promised me." The words cracked slightly.

“I know.”

Shane couldn't breathe properly. Every instinct screamed at him to run.

Before Ilya could say anything else, Shane shoved the door open and climbed out of the car.

“Shane—”

But he was already moving. Fast through the garage.

Down the hallway.

Inside the house.

Past a tipping Anya.

He barely got his shoes off before panic fully overtook him.

His chest tightened violently.

He went straight to the bedroom and shut the door hard behind him.

His brain emptied itself completely.

Shane sat on the edge of the bed staring at nothing while shame hollowed him out from the inside.

You are pathetic. You can't do this.

If he could stay still enough then he could focus all his energy into organizing his thoughts as best he could.

Shane could hear faint movement elsewhere in the house.

He waited for Ilya to come in.

Part of him desperately wanted him to. Another part felt terrified of it.

Minutes dragged past.

Eventually the bedroom door opened quietly.
Ilya stepped inside.

Shane still couldn't look at him.

The mattress dipped slightly as Ilya sat beside him.

Neither of them spoke.

Then Ilya said very softly, “I was so proud of you.”

Shane's composure shattered instantly.
A broken sound escaped him before he could stop it.

"I know." God you need to throw yourself out of the window.

"I thought you trusted me."

"I do." You are a disgusting liar. The only way to make it better is to skip lunch and dinner. Show yourself you are in control. Challenge yourself and make yourself stronger for him.

"Then why hide?"

Tears blurred Shane's vision immediately.

"Because I couldn't stand you looking scared anymore."

Ilya went still.

Shane finally covered his face with both hands.

"The thought of eating made me want to tear my skin off," he whispered raggedly. "But disappointing you felt even worse."

The room fell silent again. Then suddenly strong arms wrapped around him.

Ilya pulled him close despite everything.

Despite the lies.

Despite the fear.

Despite the hurt.

Shane broke apart against his shoulder almost immediately.

"I'm sorry," he choked out. "I'm so sorry."

Ilya held him tighter. "You should have told me."

"I know."

"We would have handled it together."

"I know."

His entire body shook now with exhausted sobs.

Months of pressure finally collapsing inward.

"I tried," Shane whispered helplessly. "I really tried."

“I know you did.”

They sat like that until Shane wore himself out.

After a few minutes of silence Ilya offered to take them to the shower.

Shane nodded silently against him.

“Nice and warm for my sweet husband..” Ilya murmured as he washed Shane’s back.

Shane began to sob again. He wasn’t sweet. He was a pathetic liar.

“Shane, I love you. Okay, I love you so so much. Whatever brain says is wrong. I love you.” Ilya said holding the man tightly.

The crying stopped just as quick as it began. One moment Shane feels as though he will cry forever the next crying feels impossible.

“Is good, deep breaths.”

Ilya finishes washing the both, whispering sweet nothings into Shane’s neck.

They finally step out of their marble shower and Shane has enough strength to dry himself off.

He makes sure not to look into the mirror. He hopes Ilya didn’t notice the avoidance.

“My heart...my love.” Shane shakes his head lightly. “Shane no, you are my heart. I am not upset with you. You are sick, and your head makes you think bad things. I understand, I really understand..”

They managed to curl into bed together.

Ilya got up briefly to let Anya out and fill up her water.

Shane just layed there motionless. Face blank.

He felt nothing and everything at the same time.

Ilya finally came back inside the bedroom and layed next to him.

“I love you.” He whispered into the dark.

“No.” Shane said quietly.

“Shane I-“

“No!” Shane repeated firmer.

He was sobbing again now. His entire body shaking from his hyperventilating.

“I’m sorry!” He repeated over and over. Grabbing at his hair.

“Shane breathe. It will be okay.”

Ilya sat them both up and began to rubs Shane’s back.

Shane pressed his palms into his eyes “I can’t. I’m so sorry.”

“Shanya...”

Ilya began to rock them side to side. Never letting go of Shane. Slowly working him down.

Shane’s body eventually tired and his sobs dissolved into hiccups and light tears.

Ilya carefully layed them both back down.

“You are good. So good.” Ilya said wrapping his hands around Shane’s, squeezing tightly.

Shane’s hands eventually came down but Ilya kept the pressure.

“You are good here.”

Shane just looked at Ilya’s crucifix.

“You are good.”

Shane just closed his eyes as his husband reassured him.

“I have you, I am with you. I always will be.”

Chapter 7

Shane and Ilya were sat at the dining table for a change today.

Usually, they ate at the kitchen island and if they were feeling really crazy, the couch.

Shane couldn't shake the feeling he was being punished despite being a grown adult. It was just the way he was sitting at the head of the table anxiously petting Anya beside while Ilya was getting their plates.

It was the first big meal after the incident and Shane half wanted to run and lock himself in the bathroom

He got rid of all the door locks remember you crazy fuck.

Shane bit the inside of his mouth as he tried to school his expression. If he looked to upset this might become a 'taking dinner to Yuna and David's for reinforcements' type of night.

Stop being difficult for him. Just breathe.

Shane looked down at a tiring Anya as she pressed against his leg to encourage the petting. "You and I have that in common." Shane spoke, referring to their neediness.

Ilya finally came in with their lunches.

Grilled cheese with a side of chips. BBQ for Ilya, classic for Shane.

Shane swallowed, "See you went all out.." He said trying to fake nonchalance.

"Only for you Hollander." Ilya sat down next to him "Let me get us drinks." He stood again.

Shane tried to sit still once he left but god he hated looking at the food in front of him.

Not that it was unappetizing, Shane liked the simplicity of grilled cheese. But the nutritional value of it plus the chips had to be next to nothing.

Leave it to Ilya to leave not one green thing on the plate.

He couldn't have gotten some fucking celery-

Shane grabbed his hair fiercely then released it with a deep exhale. Willing the thoughts away.

Not true. Not true. Not true.

Ilya finally came back with their drinks.

He finally sat down and the began to eat.

"So Wyatt's birthday is coming up so, I say we get him that new light up case with his name." Ilya said with a mouthful of food.

Shane hummed while taking measured bites. Don't think about the food just eat it, it is not the focus you are.

He covered his mouth as he spoke "Yes, but we are not ordering it from Tiktok. I'm sure we can find an actual company to do it."

"Tiktok is fine! Got my custom bonnet from there."

Shane let out a chuckle. "Yeah and you've had to replace it like four times because it starts to fray."

Ilya leans back and rolls his eyes letting out a groan.

"Fine, get it. But Wyatt better not text me talking about the case falling apart after a month."

Ilya sits back up and smiles immediately whipping his pone out.

They are both done with their sandwiches and Ilya is steadily munching on his chips.

Shane has had a few of his but needed a break. The sandwich made him full and it was hard to get his brain to behave when he eats while full.

Anya brushes he small furry body against Shane leg and Shane smiles down at her.

The dog looks back up at him with sweet and manipulative little puppy eye's.

Shane knows Anya shouldn't be eating human food but what the heck.

He leans down and feeds her a chip from his plate. Anya greedily swallows the whole thing in one bite.

When Shane sat up his husband was not looking straight at him with a blank almost stern glare.

"What are you doing?"

"I just gave Anya a chip, I know she shoul-"

"How many?"

"Uh..one."

"Are you lying?"

Shane felt like a bucket of cold water had been poured over him.

"What the fuck!"

Ilya set his phone down and crossed his arms. "M' sorry but you have lied about eating before. Must ask."

Shane huffed "It was one fucking chip Rozanov.."

"And a dozen snacks, Hollander."

"I was-I...I know i'm.."

"Do not feed Anya your food again please."

They finished eating in silence.

Shane was not crying into the sink.

Nope.

It was the soap fumes or something for sure.

Not that he felt like a dangerous failure whom Ilya had to walk on eggshells around.

He was burning with shame and embarrassment.

Hot tears pouring down his face and into the soapy water below him.

Worst part is that all he wanted was Ilya.

He wanted Ilya to rub his back and kiss his neck and tell him its okay. But having Ilya around would also make him sob.

Lose lose.

Shane was in his office nook catching up on his latest hockey strategy podcast when Ilya walked in with his snack for the day.

Shane slid off his headphones and sat up. "I was just about to go and get that." he said.

Ilya shrugged and handed him the calorie dense bar, having a seat on the other end of the lounge couch.

Watching.

"Ilya.."

"I will scroll on phone."

He took out his phone and began to scroll on some app. Tiktok knowing him.

Shane was going to eat it. Really he was.

But he had such a big lunch.

So he just looked at it. And the stupid permanent marker covering the nutritional information.

"I am healthy.." He whispered out loud before opening it.

Ilya didn't speak.

"I am Shane fucking Hollander..." He whispered into the bar.

One bite, then two, then three.

Then it was gone.

He balled up the wrapper and got up to throw it away.

He was being good. He was fucking doing it.

He leaned over and threw the trash into the bin.

Make yourself sick, you are too full.

"Fuck!" Shane said from the pure whiplash of the statement.

He had thoughts of making himself throw up before. He knew he would never do it but still the thought was always there. Even before he got diagnosed, he would imagine eating all the foods that would break his diet and painlessly expelling them before the fatty oils could soak into his stomach lining.

He never would though.

Unless he totally had too.

"Shane!"

Shane finally came back into himself and found he was sitting on the floor.

"M' here."

"Shane what happened?"

Shane just shook his head and stared at the carpet.

"Shane talk to me...I am here."

"My brain told me to throw up." Shane said flatly.

Ilya's hand stilled where it was rubbing circles into Shane's back.

"I won't do it. Just-fuck it came out of nowhere."

Ilya simply nodded.

"You don't think I would do it right?" Shane looked up.

He could tell Ilya wanted to agree, wanted to please him but:

"We get up now." Ilya slinked his arms under Shane's to pull them up.

"I won't. I-"

"Shane is okay. You have done good today. I think we go into living room and pet Anya while watching stupid cooking shows."

Shane simply nodded and moved to follow Ilya as he left the room.

During a stupidly long commercial break Shane finally let something out.

Something that had only been heard by his therapist.

"I am trying so hard to like food."

Ilya looked at him with a softness that would usually make Shane want to cry but he had his momentum now.

"I don't care-*per se*. About my weight that is. And I want to gain weight. Of course. Muscle mass *is* in our job description. I have that I might be losing some, especially now. I think a part of me thinks that I have not lost any muscle and I'm actually losing fat and becoming leaner. That my doctors want me to have more fat. But fat does nothing for me with hockey. I want to find out my BMI so I can gauge if it is just me leaning out but-but no one will tell me anything. They just keep giving more food to eat and less cardio to do. I don't want to gain fat. I don't fucking need it."

Shane finally stopped his rant to look in into his husband's eyes trying to gauge his reaction.

"I know I sound crazy..ok." Shane said pressing his palms into his eyes.

Ilya shifted more to face him.

"No-no." Ilya pulled him into his chest "Thank you for that.."

"I'm going to keep trying. I swear. I can't conk out right before the finals."

"Yes-yes."

"I'll eat better at our next away game okay. Once my body knows that i'm burning the extra fat I-"

Ilya pulled Shane away from him, still holding his arms "No more food talk or...fat talk. Okay?"

Shane nodded.

You are scaring him

No-he just knows this thinking is not healthy.

They sit there for a while just breathing each other in, Anya dozing at their feet.

Shane and Ilya are pressed into each other later that night.

"You are doing so good" Ilya says kissing Shane's neck.

Shane relaxed into the touch nodding to himself.

"You ate all of dinner.."

"Yes.."

"Only took one break."

"Ilya.."

"Had all of the ice cream after."

"Yes..did.."

"My perfect boy, Shanya. So pretty and perfect for me. And only me."

Shane nodded against Ilya's mouth.

Ilya settled over his husband and relaxed his full weight onto him.

Shane let out a satisfied sigh and let his eye's drift fully closed.

Ilya was definitely gonna have to google some things later.

He always knew it was not much about body image for Shane rather than body function.

Ilya also knew that Shane was losing muscle with how little he had been eating. That was where the weight was coming from.

Hearing Shane swear he was just getting leaner made Ilya want to correct him so badly. But Shane can't know. That was what Terry and Leena had told him.

He hates treating Shane like he is incapable because he does not like thinking that Shane can't do something. But maybe this was how he learned.

Clearly with this last trip he needs to keep an eye out while also remaining calm and collected.

For his Shane. He will be whatever he needs.

Chapter 8

The hotel gym at away games always felt like a place that existed slightly outside normal life.

For most of the Centaurs, it was just routine. A way to burn off travel stiffness, keep rhythm, keep structure when everything else was airports and buses and late-night meals.

For Shane Hollander, it had become something more complicated lately.

He stepped onto the treadmill beside Young like it was nothing unusual.

It was supposed to be nothing unusual.

The team was there in fragments. A few players on ellipticals, two lifting, someone stretching on a mat while scrolling their phone. Harris Drover was nearby pretending not to watch anyone too closely, which meant he was watching everyone very closely.

Ilya was across the room.

Not on equipment yet. Just there.

He had that stillness he got when he was assessing something he did not like but was choosing not to intervene in immediately. His gaze flicked to Shane, then to Young, then back again.

Shane adjusted the treadmill settings and tried not to think about it.

Young grinned. "Race pace or are we being boring today?"

"No."

"Coward."

"I literally have two Stanley Cups."

"Then this should be light work."

Shane laughed despite himself.

Young grinned and bumped the speed higher on his treadmill.

Shane matched it automatically.

Across the gym, Ilya looked up from where he was doing mobility work.

The stare hit Shane immediately.

Don't do something dumb Hollander

Shane looked away.

Young kept chirping. “Come on, Hollywood. Thought cardio was your thing.”

“My thing is winning.”

“Not today.”

The pace climbed again.

Shane matched it again.

He knew he shouldn't. He really did. But God did he miss the blood rush. The adrenalin.

The way his mind goes blissfully.

Eighteen minutes.

Nineteen.

Twenty.

Young was still talking.

“You slowing down?”

“No.”

“Thought old men needed naps.”

“Thought fourth liners should be quieter.”

A couple guys laughed.

Ilya was not laughing.

Shane could feel him staring.

Twenty-three minutes.

His pulse started kicking harder for reasons that had nothing to do with running.

He knew what he was supposed to do.

Stop at twenty-five.

Get off.

But getting off first felt unbearable suddenly. It felt suspicious. Weak. Like everyone would know.

The old panic crawled under his skin.

Young hit another incline.

“Keep up, captain.”

Twenty-four minutes.

Shane’s brain split in two.

One side was rational. You know what this is.

The other side was louder. *Don’t quit first.* Ilya can be mad all he wants but the guys will respect you. You ate at least XXXX calories as breakfast anyway. You need more muscle to play. You need it too win and make everyone proud. *You have to win.*

Twenty-five minutes flashed on the screen.

Shane hit stop immediately.

The treadmill slowed beneath him.

Young barked out a laugh.

“Oh, there he is. Grandpa’s done.”

Shane stepped off carefully, trying to keep his face neutral.

“Enjoy your heart attack,” he muttered.

Young pointed at the treadmill screen. “I win.”

Shane stepped off the treadmill.

The belt kept moving without him, indifferent.

For a half second, he just stood there.

Young laughed. “Called it.”

It was not malicious in a clear way. That was the problem. It was casual enough to pass as harmless.

But Shane felt heat rise under his skin anyway.

He could not explain why he stopped beyond what had already been agreed and still sound normal. Not without turning the conversation into something else entirely.

Well actually I didn't stop because I was tired, I just have this stupid eating disorder thing, and I can't run for too long like i'm some weak child.

So he said nothing at first.

Young kept going. “All that talk and you tapped out earlyyy.”

Shane looked at him for a long moment.

The gym noise dulled slightly in his awareness. Everything narrowing to the space between them.

Then Shane lifted his hand and flipped Young off.

Young’s grin widened like he had won something.

Shane did not say anything else.

He grabbed his towel and walked out of the gym.

He looked at Ilya.

There happy?

He felt Ilya looking anyway.

Shane kept walking until the sound of the gym faded completely behind him.

Only then did his pace slow.

He leaned one hand against the wall briefly, exhaling.

It was not exhaustion exactly.

He replayed the moment in fragments he did not want.

The treadmill. Young’s voice. The moment he stepped off. The way it looked. The way it probably seemed.

He told himself it did not matter. You are making things up. No one cares. You are okay.

But his brain did not fully agree.

He straightened and kept walking.

Shane was really trying to relax.

Ilya was already sitting in bed.

He did not ask immediately. That was one of the things about him. He could sit in silence long enough that silence itself started to feel like a question.

Shane lay on his back, staring at the ceiling.

“I saw you leave..” Ilya said eventually.

Shane did not turn his head. “Yeah.”

Ilya spoke softly. “What happened?”

Shane hesitated.

There were a dozen ways to answer that question. None of them felt like they would be correct.

“It was nothing, just brain stuff.” Shane said.

Ilya did not respond right away.

Shane closed his eyes briefly.

“It was just Young being Young..” he added.

Ilya shifted slightly in bed. “And you?”

Shane exhaled. “I got off when I was supposed to.

Then Ilya, quieter. “But you did not want too.”

It was not a question.

Shane did not answer immediately.

“I handled it.” Shane said finally.

Ilya turned his head toward him now. Even in the dim light, Shane could feel the look.

“By walking out, with sour face and being pissy all night.” Ilya said.

Shane opened his eyes. “Yes, okay?”

Ilya did not like that answer. That was obvious.

But he did not push further yet.

Instead, he reached out and rested a hand lightly on Shane’s forearm.

Shane did not move away.

After a while, Ilya said “You are allowed to leave situations. You know that.”

“I know.” Shane said.

But he did not sound like he fully agreed with himself.

The room settled again into quiet.

Eventually Ilya's hand withdrew.

They both tried to sleep.

Around 2 a.m., Shane got up.

Carefully, he slipped out from under Ilya's arm.

Ilya made a soft sound but didn't wake.

Shane stood in the dark hotel room breathing hard.

This is stupid.

He knew it was stupid. That made it worse.

Because he still wanted to do it.

Just prove it.

That was all.

Prove you could've beaten him.

Then you'll sleep.

Shane shoved on workout clothes.

No shirt.

Just shorts and sneakers.

The hallway outside the room was silent.

The elevator ride down felt surreal.

He almost turned around twice.

But the agitation inside him kept buzzing louder.

The hotel gym was nearly empty.

One older man on a stationary bike.

A woman stretching near the mirrors.

Nobody looked at Shane twice.

All just trying to shake the restlessness from their bodies.

He climbed onto a treadmill.

His hands shook slightly as he set the speed.

Just enough to beat Young's mileage.

Then done.

Simple.

The treadmill started moving.

Shane ran.

At first it felt relieving.

Like scratching an itch.

See? You're fine.

But relief turned ugly fast.

Because once he passed the original twenty-five minutes, the old thoughts came flooding back with terrifying familiarity.

You can go farther.

You should go farther.

You used to go farther.

His breathing sharpened.

Sweat rolled down his spine.

The treadmill display ticked upward.

He did not stop at the number he had originally planned.

He kept going past it.

When he finally stepped off, sweat cooled quickly on his skin. The gym felt colder than before.

He stood there for a moment, hands on his hips, breathing steadying.

Finally he had proved himself. He can still do it. He doesn't need a new fucking meal plan. He is at his fucking peak.

You need to tell him.

Back in the room, Ilya was still asleep.

Shane stood for a moment in the dark again, then sat carefully on the edge of the bed.

Ilya stirred immediately.

One eye opened.

Then the other.

“What time?” Ilya muttered.

“Late..” Shane said.

Ilya pushed himself up slightly, immediately alert in the way he always was when Shane’s tone did not match normal sleep patterns.

“What is it?” Ilya said.

Shane looked down at his hands.

“I went to the gym.” he said.

Ilya did not move.

Shane continued. “I could not sleep. I ran.”

A beat.

Then Ilya, sharper now. “You went alone.”

“Yes.”

Silence again.

Shane swallowed once. “I should not have.”

Ilya’s expression changed slightly. Not anger yet. Something closer to concern trying not to become panic.

“Why.” Ilya said.

Shane hesitated.

Because I needed to know something, he thought.

Because I needed to feel in control of something that felt like it slipped earlier.

Because I could not stop thinking about it.

He did not say any of that.

Instead he said, "I just wanted to clear my head."

Ilya stared at him for a long moment.

Then he said, very quietly, "Shane."

That tone mattered more than the name alone.

Shane exhaled.

"I am ready to call Leena in the morning," he said, but it came out weaker than intended.

Ilya swung his legs out of bed and sat fully upright now.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"No."

"Did you push past what you were supposed to do?"

Shane paused.

That was the question he was waiting for.

He nodded once.

Ilya closed his eyes briefly, then opened them again.

"Okay.." Ilya said. "Okay."

But it did not sound okay.

Shane's throat tightened slightly.

"I just needed to know I could still do it," he said.

Ilya looked at him for a long moment.

Then, softer, "You do not get to prove that at the cost of your health."

Shane did not respond immediately.

He looked away.

“I know.” he said finally.

But he did not sound convinced.

The next morning, the hotel breakfast area was already filled with noise.

Coffee machines. Plates clattering. Early conversation that slowly built into full volume.

Shane and Ilya sat together.

Shane had a much easier time eating because of his extra cardio the day before to balance it out.

And, he had given Leena an hour long call earlier to talk about healthy coping behaviors.

Apparently, what he had done was progress.

Then Harris looked like someone had died and dramatically dropped his waffle.

That was Shane’s first clue something was wrong.

The second clue was Troy saying, “Uh oh,” under his breath while looking into his boyfriend’s phone.

Shane slowed.

“What?”

Harris held up his phone.

“Please tell me you knew someone was filming you last night.”

Ice flooded Shane’s stomach.

“What?”

Harris turned the screen around.

A video played automatically.

Shane on the treadmill.

Shirtless.

Sweating.

Running.

The angle was from across the gym. Probably the woman stretching near the mirrors.

The caption read:

SHANE HOLLANDER DOING EXTRA CONDITIONING AT 2AM DURING PLAYOFFS. CAPTAIN SHIT. I KNOW THATS RIGHT.

The video already had hundreds of thousands of views.

Shane went cold.

“Oh my God.”

Troy grimaced. “Yeah.”

Harris looked furious in a very controlled way.

“The comments are deplorable honestly--”

Shane grabbed the phone before anyone could stop him.

He scrolled.

UlalaMama: What discipline.

Rllyricardo: No wonder he’s elite.

KennedyJoyce: Body goals honestly.

HockeyHenry: That’s a real athlete.

Shanela: I’d let him ruin my life.

Then worse.

BullyMia392: Thinspo king.

MattWell: ED twitter is gonna love this.

King477: Need his routine immediately.

talk4not: So I should just stop eating. Okay.

Shane stopped breathing for a second.

His hands started shaking.

Ilya took the phone away instantly.

“Enough.”

But Shane had already seen enough.

A familiar sickness crawled into his chest.

Not because the comments were cruel.

Because they weren't.

People admired it.

Admired him.

Admired the exact behavior that had nearly killed him once.

Harris rubbed both hands over his face. "We're trying to get the original video removed."

Shane stared blankly at the table.

"It's spreading faster than we can report it."

"Don't read anything else." Ilya said sharply.

Too late.

Shane could still see the comments scrolling in his head.

Thinspo.

Body goals.

Discipline.

His stomach twisted violently.

He hated being like this. How could people want to mimic this part of him. His least favorite part of himself.

He did not want to be thin. He was basically pure muscle.

He wanted to *be* pure muscle. He was on a specific diet to gain healthy muscle and reduce body fat until he fucked it all up. He was not anorexic. He was-He *is* orthorexic.

"Fuck.." He leaned down to rest his forehead on the table to collect his thoughts.

He was probably making everyone worry.

Including Ilya.

Shit.

Shane grabbed the protein shake beside him instead and forced himself to drink half of it.

Harris sat down beside him.

“We can handle the PR side.”

“I don’t care about PR.”

“I know.”

Harris lowered his voice.

“But you need to stay off social media today.”

Shane laughed once without humor.

“Little late.”

“You know what I mean.”

Yeah.

He did.

The dangerous part wasn’t hate.

Shane could handle hate.

The dangerous part was praise.

Praise always dug hooks into him before he realized it.

Ilya touched his knee under the table.

Shane looked down at his hands.

“I didn’t even think anyone would care.”

Harris snorted softly. “You’re one of the most famous players in the league.”

“Unfortunately,” Troy added.

Normally Shane would’ve laughed.

Today he just looked tired.

“You never had to prove anything.” Ilya said low enough for only him.

Shane looked at him.

Ilya’s expression was steady but upset in that deep quiet way Shane knew too well now.

“You know that, right?”

Shane’s throat tightened immediately.

Because logically he did know.

Chapter 9

The hotel room was still dark when Shane woke up.

For one disorienting second, he didn't know where he was. Then the familiar ache in his shoulders settled into place, the distant hum of traffic filtered through thick glass, and he remembered.

Boston.

Game day.

Finals.

He stared at the ceiling and listened to the sound of Ilya breathing beside him. Shane envied him a little.

Not the sleeping. Ilya could sleep through a natural disaster.

The ease.

The ability to exist in his body without fighting it every second.

Shane closed his eyes again and tried not to think about breakfast.

That was always the dangerous part. Not the food itself. The anticipation. The inventory his brain wanted to take before his feet even hit the floor.

What did he eat yesterday?

How hard was practice?

Was he bloated?

Did he really need—

No.

He pressed his tongue against the roof of his mouth and inhaled slowly through his nose.

Not doing this today.

His therapist had spent two entire hours the last week helping him identify the spiral before it swallowed him whole. Sometimes he still got caught anyway, but he was better at recognizing the edges now.

Especially during playoffs.

Playoffs were brutal on him. Stress made everything louder. Every old rule and ritual tried to crawl back out of the grave whenever he felt out of control.

And right now nothing in his life was under control.

The series was tied 3-3.

Tonight decided everything.

Shane rolled carefully onto his side. Ilya was sprawled across half the bed, one arm flung over his head, hair sticking up in impossible directions. His mouth was slightly open.

Shane smiled despite himself.

As if sensing it, Ilya cracked one eye open.

“You staring because I am beautiful Hollander?” he mumbled.

“You drool in your sleep.”

“Lies.”

“You’re literally doing it right now.”

Ilya wiped at his chin immediately, then narrowed his eyes when Shane laughed.

“Very funny,” he said. “You awake long?”

“Not really.”

“Hmm.”

Ilya studied him for a moment in the low light. Shane knew that look. They’d been together too long for him to miss much anymore.

“You okay?”

“Yeah.”

A beat.

“Real yeah?”

Shane exhaled.

“Just game-day nerves.”

That, at least, was true.

Ilya reached across the sheets and tugged him closer until Shane’s forehead bumped against his shoulder.

“We eat breakfast,” he murmured. “We win hockey game. Then everyone in Canada worships me forever.”

Shane snorted softly.

“You specifically?”

“Yes. Obviously.”

“You’re unbelievable.”

“I know.” Ilya kissed the top of his head and settled back against the pillows. “Five more minutes.”

“You said that yesterday.”

“And it worked yesterday.”

They stayed like that until Shane’s alarm finally went off.

By the time they got downstairs to breakfast, the hotel restaurant was crowded with teammates, coaches, and media people pretending not to stare.

Shane hated that part too.

The buffet stretched across half the room.

His brain lit up immediately.

Too much. Don't. You can't. Too heavy before a game.

You can skip the toast.

You don't need the peanut butter.

Just do protein and fruit.

“Sweetheart.”

Shane blinked.

Ilya stood beside him holding two plates.

“You disappeared.”

“Sorry.”

“You want me to make plate?”

Normally Shane would have refused automatically. Too much pride. Too much shame.

“Yeah,” he admitted quietly.

Ilya nodded like it was nothing.

Because to him, it was nothing.

He loaded up scrambled eggs, oatmeal with berries and almonds, toast with peanut butter, and a banana on the side. Balanced. Familiar. Safe enough.

When he handed the plate over, he didn’t comment on any of it.

Didn’t say you need this.

Didn’t say good job.

Didn’t watch Shane take bites.

Just sat beside him and demolished three servings of hash browns like a bear preparing for hibernation.

It helped more than Shane could explain.

“You nervous?” Shane asked eventually.

“Terrified.”

“You do not look terrified.”

“I am very internal Hollander, you know this.”

“Sure.”

Ilya pointed his fork at him. “Do not invalidate my complexities.”

Shane laughed again, softer this time. "Big word."

He finished everything on his plate.

Because his body needed it.

Because starving himself had never actually made him better at hockey.

Because he’d promised himself and Ilya and his therapist that he would keep choosing recovery even when it was difficult.

Especially when it was difficult.

By noon, the entire team was restless.

Guys drifted in and out of hotel rooms, pacing hallways, playing cards, watching sports highlights they clearly weren’t absorbing. The energy before elimination games always felt

strange. Too sharp. Too electric.

Shane lay on the bed scrolling aimlessly through his phone while Ilya sat on the floor on his ridiculous tablet.

“You think media will explode if we win?” Ilya asked.

“Yes.”

“Good.”

“You enjoy being an asshole.”

“It is my true passion.”

Shane smiled faintly, then his stomach tightened.

Snack time.

You already had breakfast.

You're not hungry enough.

You're sitting in a hotel room all day.

“Shane.”

Shane rubbed a hand over his face.

“My brain's being fucking weird.”

Ilya set the stick aside immediately and climbed onto the bed beside him.

“What is brain saying?”

“That I don't need the snack.”

Ilya nodded once.

“Okay,” he said. “And what does smart Shanya say?”

“That it's important to stay on schedule.”

“Mm-hmm.”

“And that skipping stuff makes things worse later.”

“Yes.”

“And that my nutritionist would probably kill me.”

“She definitely would.”

That got another tiny smile out of him.

Ilya nudged their shoulders together.

“You know what I think?”

“What?”

“I think your brain is asshole.”

Shane laughed under his breath.

“There he is.” Ilya said quietly.

He sat cross-legged on the bed and ate while Ilya rambled about how Boston fans smelled bad.

“You cannot say that in interviews,” Shane said.

“I can say whatever I want. I am star.”

That warmth hit Shane all over again, sudden and familiar.

The voice in his head didn’t disappear, but it quieted enough for him to breathe around it.

Progress, Leena would say. Not perfection.

The game was chaos.

Fast and brutal and exhausting.

By the third period Shane’s lungs burned every time he hopped over the boards. The arena shook with noise. Every hit rattled through his bones.

And somehow, impossibly, they won.

The final buzzer sounded and suddenly everyone was screaming.

Gloves flew into the air.

The bench erupted.

Shane barely had time to process before Ilya crashed into him at full speed, grabbing his helmet with both hands.

“We did it!” he shouted.

“You’re yelling directly into my face.”

“We won Stanley Cup!”

Shane laughed breathlessly as Ilya kissed him hard enough to nearly knock him backward.

"We have outdone that dinosaur." Ilya said into his neck.

Shane felt strangely disconnected for a moment, like his body couldn’t keep up with the adrenaline flooding through him.

Too loud.

Too bright.

Too much.

But then Ilya pressed their foreheads together and everything narrowed back into focus.

“You okay?” Ilya asked quietly despite the chaos.

Shane nodded. “Yeah.”

And he was.

Mostly.

The locker room celebration blurred into interviews, champagne, hugs from coaches, texts from family, more interviews, and eventually the late team dinner reservation the organization had booked at an upscale steakhouse downtown.

By then Shane was running almost entirely on adrenaline.

That was dangerous too.

Because adrenaline made it easy to ignore what his body needed until suddenly everything crashed all at once.

The restaurant buzzed with energy.

Shane sat between Ilya and Bood, trying to stay present while menus circulated around the table.

“You picking or staring?” Ilya asked beside him.

“Thinking.”

“Of course.” Shane elbowed him lightly.

Eventually he ordered steak, mashed potatoes, vegetables, and bread for the table.

Normal.

The first few minutes went fine.

He even managed half a roll while listening to LaPointe tell an increasingly incoherent story about rookie-year parties.

Then someone across the table popped another champagne bottle.

The room exploded into cheers.

A server dropped a tray somewhere nearby.

Multiple conversations crashed together all at once.

And suddenly Shane couldn't breathe properly.

His skin felt tight, his hands had started shaking under the table.

Ilya noticed immediately.

"Hey."

Shane swallowed hard.

"I just need a minute."

Ilya's expression softened instantly. No judgment. No panic.

"Bathroom?"

Shane nodded.

"Okay."

That was it.

Shane stood carefully and threaded through the crowded restaurant toward the bathrooms in the back hallway.

The second the door shut behind him, the noise dulled enough for him to think.

He braced both hands against the sink.

Breathed in.

Out.

Again.

His reflection looked pale and exhausted.

He ran cold water over his wrists.

You are overwhelmed.

Not failing.

You are anxious.

Not weak.

Food is not the problem.

The feeling will pass.

He closed his eyes.

In for four.

Out for six.

Again.

Again.

Eventually the shaking eased.

Not completely.

Enough.

When he stepped back into the hallway, he found Ilya leaning against the wall outside the bathroom door.

“Hi,” Ilya said softly.

Shane blinked. “You followed me?”

“Yes.”

“You didn’t have to.”

“I know.”

Shane stared at him for a second.

“You okay?” Ilya asked.

“Yeah.”

A pause.

“Real yeah?”

Shane exhaled slowly.

“I got overwhelmed.”

“I figured.”

“The noise kind of hit me all at once.”

Ilya nodded.

“You want leave?”

And there it was.

No pressure either direction.

Just a choice.

Shane thought about it carefully.

Part of him desperately wanted to go back to the hotel, curl into bed, and disappear from the world for twelve hours.

Another part knew exactly what leaving now would feel like later.

Like retreat.

Like letting the fear win.

“I think...” Shane rubbed at the back of his neck. “I think I want to go back.”

Ilya’s face softened into something unbearably fond.

“Okay.”

“But maybe you distract me.”

“I am extremely good at distracting people.”

“That’s unfortunately true.”

Ilya slipped their fingers together briefly before letting go again.

“Ready?”

Shane nodded.

When they returned to the table, nobody made a big deal out of it.

Thank God.

Bood was passionately arguing that he deserved playoff MVP solely for emotional support reasons.

“Absolutely not.” Shane said as he sat down.

“Fuck off.”

The food had arrived while they were gone.

For a second Shane’s brain tried to recoil again at the sight of the full plate in front of him.

Then he felt Ilya bump his knee lightly under the table.

Shane picked up his fork.

One bite.

Then another.

Conversation swelled around him again, but this time he focused on specifics instead of the overwhelming whole.

Ilya stole mashed potatoes directly off Shane’s plate despite having his own.

“Get your own food.”

“It tastes better from your plate.”

“That’s not even true.”

“You are not even true.”

“That sentence doesn’t even mean anything.”

Still, Shane kept eating.

He finished the steak.

Most of the potatoes.

The vegetables.

Another piece of bread when dessert menus appeared.

And somewhere in the middle of it, he realized something important.

He wasn’t trapped anymore.

People talked about it like a finish line sometimes. Like eventually you became cured and fearless and untouched by old habits forever.

That wasn't what this was.

This was choosing differently over and over until the choice became easier to live with.

He just hoped the effort would pay off.

Chapter 10

The morning of his final weigh-in arrived far too quickly.

Shane woke before his alarm, courtesy of his nerves. For a few moments he couldn't remember why his stomach felt tight.

Then he remembered.

The weigh-in.

Beside him, Ilya was sprawled diagonally across the bed, one arm thrown over Shane's waist. His husband was deeply asleep, breathing steadily, completely unconcerned by the fact that Shane's entire future seemed to hinge on a number.

Not his future, Shane corrected immediately.

That was ridiculous.

It was just a weigh-in.

A routine medical check.

A routine medical check that had become anything but routine.

Shane carefully reached for his phone.

6:07 a.m.

Too early.

His appointment wasn't until ten.

Three hours and fifty-three minutes.

Plenty of time to panic. Wonderful.

He set the phone down.

Immediately picked it back up.

Opened the notes app where he'd been tracking everything for weeks.

Calories.

Meals.

Protein shakes.

Weight trends.

Recommendations from Terry.

Comments from the nutritionist.

The last thing he wanted was for anyone to think he was slipping backward.

Even when Terry repeatedly assured him that wasn't what anyone thought.

"Stop looking at spreadsheets." Ilya's voice was rough with sleep.

Shane jumped.

His husband opened one eye. "You are doing wet kitten face."

"I don't have a kitten face."

"You do." Shane rolled his eyes.

Ilya propped himself onto one elbow.

"Come here."

"I'm already here."

"Closer."

"You are literally touching me."

"Closer Hollander or I will die." Ilya groaned.

Despite himself, Shane laughed.

Ilya smiled immediately.

The man was annoyingly good at that.

"You nervous?" Ilya asked.

"A little."

"A little." Ilya mocked

"Okay, a lot."

"That is better."

Shane dropped his head onto Ilya.

For a while neither of them spoke.

Eventually Ilya kissed his hair. "You did everything Terry asked."

"I know."

"You ate."

"I know."

"You drank one thousand disgusting protein shakes."

The smile faded slightly from Shane's face.

"What if it wasn't enough? I fucked up so many times Ilya, we both know I did. The scale..the..treadmill."

Ilya didn't answer immediately.

Instead he rubbed circles against Shane's back.

"What if it was? You have never given up after set backs." he asked quietly.

Shane sighed.

That was always the problem.

The logical answer was obvious.

The emotional answer was much louder in his head.

Ilya pushed a plate toward him.

"Eat."

"You sound like Terry."

"Thank you."

"That wasn't a compliment."

"It was."

The food actually tasted good.

That helped.

The last several weeks had involved an exhausting cycle of monitoring, adjustments, and conversations.

Terry.

The nutritionist.

Team staff.

Even Shane's therapist.

Everyone approached the issue carefully.

Nobody accused him of relapsing.

Still, Shane felt a bit embarrassed. Ashamed, sometimes.

As though he should have caught the weight loss sooner.

As though he should have somehow prevented it.

As though he shouldn't struggle with the adjustment as much as he did.

Objectively, he knew that wasn't fair.

Playoff hockey was brutal.

His appetite often disappeared under stress.

The season had been emotionally exhausting.

The Centaurs' playoff run had demanded everything from him.

And despite all of that, he'd listened.

He'd accepted help.

He'd followed recommendations.

That should have mattered.

Yet anxiety rarely listened to reason.

At nine forty-five they arrived at the practice facility.

Shane's stomach immediately dropped.

The building looked exactly the same as it always did. But it just felt like too much.

"Good morning."

Terry appeared from around a corner carrying a tablet.

"Ready?"

"Yup."

"Excellent."

The medical office felt familiar.

Shane sat while Terry reviewed notes.

Nothing dramatic.

Questions about sleep.

Hydration.

Appetite.

Energy levels.

The same topics they'd covered repeatedly.

Eventually Terry looked up.

"How are you feeling?"

"Nervous."

"About the weigh-in?"

"Maybe."

Terry smiled knowingly.

"Understandable."

The kindness nearly made Shane feel worse. Because kind people were harder to disappoint.

"You know this isn't a pass-fail exam, right?"

"I know."

"Do you?"

Shane hesitated.

Terry laughed softly. "Okay. Fair enough."

He set the tablet aside.

"Here's what I want you to remember."

Shane nodded.

"We've been monitoring trends. Not judging you."

The words sounded familiar.

Because Terry had said versions of them many times.

Still, hearing them again helped.

"You had a difficult playoff stretch."

"Yeah."

Then Terry stood.

"Ready?"

The scale sat in the corner.

Terry adjusted a few settings.

"Whenever you're ready."

Shane stepped forward backward. No looking for him

The room felt strangely silent.

He knew intellectually that this moment wasn't life-altering.

Yet his pulse hammered.

Terry looked at the display.

"Oh, good." The tension inside Shane cracked instantly.

Terry checked the numbers again. "That's excellent."

Shane swallowed. "Yeah?"

"Yeah." Terry nodded.

"We got exactly the response we wanted."

Relief surged so quickly it almost hurt.

Weeks.

Weeks of worrying.

Weeks of second-guessing every meal.

Weeks of wondering whether he was secretly failing.

And suddenly—

It was okay.

Actually okay.

By the end, Terry finished with a satisfied nod.

"I'm happy."

The words nearly made Shane laugh.

"You are?"

"Very."

"Really?"

"Shane."

"Sorry."

Terry smiled. "You did good."

Three simple words.

They landed harder than expected.

Shane looked away.

For one embarrassing second he thought he might cry.

Not because he was upset.

Because he was exhausted.

Because carrying fear for weeks took energy.

Because letting go of it felt overwhelming.

Terry seemed to recognize that.

His voice softened.

"I know this wasn't easy."

Shane nodded.

"No."

"But you handled it."

Another nod.

"You should be proud of yourself."

Shane laughed weakly.

"I'll work on that."

"Good."

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