

high strung.

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by [steelatoms](#)

Summary

What kind of role model can't handle a little bit of pressure?

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Shane has a bad day, leading to a meltdown. Ilya helps pick up the pieces.

Notes

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

Shane wasn't exactly sure what brought it on.

It was supposed to be a good day; after weeks of only being able to communicate by FaceTime or text, Ilya was going to be visiting. They'd have the whole weekend together in his apartment without the stress of interruptions from the outside world.

All he had to do was survive the game against the Admirals, then Ilya would pick him up and they'd go home to lose themselves in each other. They'd fuck, Ilya would leave him a puddle of mush as always, and it'd be alright.

Despite the promise of such bliss, he awoke with the most awful sense of dread in his chest – it was something he always felt ever since fighting with Scott Hunter all those years ago, in spite of the older man's offer of letting bygones be bygones.

It had gotten more difficult since Hunter had come out so publicly.

It wasn't fair to put it on him, he was living his life open and happy and his openness and happiness had pushed Shane and Ilya together and yet, he still couldn't help but envy the man. He wasn't in love with a rival, he had a partner who wouldn't make everyone else feel like he'd lost his mind. Who wouldn't call into question his professional ability.

Shane sometimes still thought of his parents' reactions – though they'd since embraced Ilya and looked at him like a second son, he couldn't get past his dad asking if they were no nice men in Montreal, his mother's prying questions about him deliberately throwing a game.

It had been months since then and he still awoke in the middle of the night with the alternate events playing in his mind – his parents looking upon him with disgust, rejecting him. He hadn't told his team, hadn't told Hayden. Rose knew he was gay, but to tell her he was dating Ilya Rozanov would be a true litmus test.

Lily: See you later;)

He reread the message for the fiftieth time that morning as he nursed (or barely ate) the plate of carefully selected macros before him.

Shane had always been... *highly strung*.

In school, he was studious, quiet and hardly popular. His entire life had been consumed by hockey, it was all he could really remember liking growing up and it meant that he didn't really relate to people, he never really got close to them.

Until Ilya, that was.

God, he loved Ilya.

Loved him more than it made sense to, more than he'd loved anything in his whole life. So why did it hurt so much when they were finally together?

His leg bounced against the ground anxiously – the sun seemed entirely too bright from where it peeked in from the crack of his blinds. He wondered briefly if he should clean up again, though knew there wasn't much time before he had to leave, and to the naked eye, the apartment was pretty much spotless anyway. Outside, he heard distant cars and the loud whir of construction equipment.

He'd be fine.

He'd play the game, do his best – *no, better than your best* – and later on, Ilya would come by and give him many, many orgasms. He'd fuck all the stress and worry from him and be there after.

Ilya's presence was always calming to him these days in spite of the near insanity he drove him to in his early days. He still thought of Vegas, the cold emptiness of rejection he'd felt for days after being nailed into a bed then left high and dry.

We didn't even kiss.

To be fair to Ilya, he'd apologised profusely for his cruel behaviour that night once Shane had brought it up at the cottage. Shane *hated* how vulnerable he'd been, admitting how he'd gone back to his hotel room and cried himself to sleep afterward, his body tired and soul unsatisfied. He had been thankful to any damn God that existed that Hayden was a heavy sleeper as explaining that to him might have killed him from shame.

"I'll never leave you unkissed." Ilya had promised, then to reiterate it, kissed every inch of his face.

He wished he was here already, wished he could've woken up in his arms before the game – Hayden was right, he always played better after having sex. Right now, he was overstimulated and sexually frustrated and on the edge of melting down.

"Have you talked to anyone about it?" Ilya had asked one night after bringing him down from a panic attack caused by a near-miss of being caught.

Shane had shut it down immediately, he couldn't afford to break. He was a role model to so many kids, just as his mother had said.

What kind of role model can't handle a little bit of pressure?

His knee bounced faster – the food before him remained, he'd only taken a few bites before feeling a wave of nausea build between him.

Shane had been struggling with panic attacks for years and there was a time his mom had suggested he'd speak to someone. He'd pretended that he was fine, that he didn't need anyone.

He didn't tell her he'd passed out from a stress-induced headache later that night.

God, the light was so damn *bright*.

After so many years playing with the Metros, Shane had gotten rather good at masking in front of them, being sociable enough to engage in some locker room banter.

Tonight, it was as if his tongue was too heavy for his mouth and he could only make small, non-committal huffs in reply.

“*You okay?*” Hayden asked.

Hmm.

His friend was clearly concerned, reaching out to touch him on the arm before trying to lighten the mood, “Guess you’ll be feeling better when Boston Lily texts, huh, bro?”

Shane’s eyes darted up, a little panicked – he didn’t meet Hayden’s gaze, “*Sorry?*”

His brain felt like it was stuffed with cotton but his heart still skipped a beat. Did Hayden know?

God, he wanted to discuss Ilya with him, but the logistics of it seemed too much. Telling Hayden meant telling Jackie which meant telling–

“-- can *not* afford to lose to that homo tonight!”

Shane’s head snapped up.

He wasn't sure who said it exactly, but the comment, logically targeted to Hunter, hit him like a bullet to the chest.

"Come on, dude, not cool—" Hayden criticised, though his voice sounded underwater.

Shane's head was pounding, everything felt so loud and bright – he could hear one of the guys slowly getting on their gear, the rustle of fabric sending shivers up his spine.

Homo, homo, homo.

His thoughts raced in his chest, a dryness in his throat. He felt like he was going to pass out or throw up or break down crying. *Too much, too much, too much.*

The game was nothing short of disastrous – he briefly overheard Hunter asking if he was alright when they went head-to-head, but the rest was a blur. He played like he was on autopilot and by the end, the team had been absolutely destroyed.

"*What the fuck, man?*" he heard J.J. call out as they returned to the locker room, but once again it was distant.

God, his heart was racing.

Hayden went for a softer, if still clearly pissed approach, "You good, buddy?" he reached out to touch his back but Shane jumped, forcing him to hold his hand back, "What was that out there?"

"I—" Shane struggled to form words, his eyes stinging, "I don't know, I'm just—" his breath trembled, "Off day, I guess."

J.J. scoffed, “*That’s* an understatement.”

They’re all mad at you.

Hayden held up a hand to quell the other man, “Not helpful.” He gave Shane a careful once over, “You don’t look so hot, bro.”

“I’m not—” Shane bit his lower lip to physically stop himself from crying there and then, “I think I’m sick. I need—” he hiccupped a breath, “I need to go home.”

One of the other guys called out, “What about the post-match interview?”

“It’s okay, I’ll handle it.” Hayden offered, aching to give his friend a little comfort, “You should go home.”

Shane shook his head frantically, “I– I shouldn’t—”

“No, seriously, dude.” Hayden gently rubbed his shoulder, making sure it was okay first. At Shane’s continued hesitance, he then suggested, “Look, if you *are* sick, last thing you need to do is spread it to the rest of the guys, right?”

Shane finally looked up at him then nodded, mumbling, “*I’m sorry.*” before getting ready to leave.

Shane could barely focus the entire journey back home, but ignored the constant barrage of calls and messages blowing up his phone.

Mom probably saw me, he realised, she’s probably disappointed.

When he got home, it was still light out and the sound of the streets were still achingly loud – he left the Uber then ran inside as quick as he could. His legs felt like jelly, like he was about to collapse at any second.

He kept replaying the team's looks of disappointment, the sound of boos in the stadium, the casual slur his supposed teammate had dropped just before.

They don't know, he thought logically, *but if they did, they'd hate me.*

He wondered if Ilya had seen the game, how disappointed he'd be in him to see him playing so terribly. Maybe he'd even break up with him.

Without hockey, all he had was boring.

Boring, boring, homo.

As soon as he got inside, it was like his strings had been cut – he didn't even make it to the sofa, just collapsed on the floor like a miserable heap. He wanted to scream, wanted to cry but couldn't make a sound. He gripped his hair, hot tears burning down his cheeks, body shaking hard.

On the floor, his phone continued to buzz.

Lily: please pick up.

Lily: are you okay?

Shane couldn't answer, could only tug at his hair and rock back and forth, whimpering. Everything was so unbearably loud, it was *painful*. Outside, he could hear cars, despite his apartment being relatively hidden away. He wondered how many people driving and walking past knew about how terrible he'd been.

Failure, failure, failure.

He hit his head back against the wall with a whine, pain spreading over the area. It hurt, but the brief bloom of pain cut through the panic somewhat so he repeated and repeated and repeated.

Lily: i'm five minutes away

Shane didn't even notice the most recent text as he rocked faster, whimpering and tugging at his hair. He didn't even lock his door. *Anyone* could wander in, find him in such a pathetic state.

Maybe it was what he deserved, to be the face of a scandalous headline the next day.

Metros' Shane Hollander is a Complete and Utter Headcase.

Shane didn't even notice the sound of Ilya's car pulling up outside, too in his own head. He also didn't hear the sound of footsteps, nor his boyfriend's horrified inhale of breath as he came upon the sight before him.

"Holy shit, Hollander." Ilya's gaze sharpened and he knelt beside him, catching his head before he bashed it again, thankful there didn't seem to be any blood, "Shane, can you hear me?"

Shane only whimpered, not quite a response.

"Fuck, okay." Ilya had dealt with his panic attacks before, but never a complete meltdown on this level. Shane kept tugging at his hair and Ilya was worried he was going to hurt himself, "Baby, stop. Can you stop that for me?"

Shane didn't hear him, rocking faster.

"Sweetheart..." Ilya's voice was soft, "Please, please hear me." he gently took his hands, intending to pull them away from his face.

Shane stiffened like a frightened animal, finally letting out a whimpering cry – it was nigh on hysteria and honestly quite terrifying. Ilya briefly considered calling an ambulance, getting someone professional to help but knew it'd only distress him further.

Instead, he brought his hands to his lips, stroking the back of his head with his other hand, "It's me, solnyshko." he spoke carefully, "I'm not going to hurt you, I promised you I would never do that, yes?"

Shane took a second before a glimmer of recognition came to his eyes – *Ilya*, he wanted to say, but the words caught in his throat. Instead, his face crumpled and he broke down sobbing.

Ilya's heart ached, but crying was at least a step up from the alarming unresponsiveness of a few moments prior. He lifted Shane into his lap, feeling him sag and grip onto him like a lifeline. They were around the same size, but Shane felt so damn small when he was in his arms.

"It's okay, you're okay." Ilya whispered, rubbing his back.

His own eyes stung from seeing the man he loved in such a state of upset – Shane had seen him through some pretty dark times and had been a rock for him, so the least he could do was provide him that same safety.

When his tears had calmed to a manageable amount from the wrenching, painful sobs they had been, he kissed his shoulder, not pulling back as he suggested, "How about we get off floor, hmm?"

Shane sniffled and nodded against him so Ilya slid his arms under his thighs, carrying him carefully to his bed. He set him down carefully, breaking away only to shut the door and close the curtains, making sure all the outdoor influences were closed off.

“That’s better, hmm?” he said before taking off his shoes and clambering into the bed, offering his arms to his still-crying boyfriend.

Shane practically threw himself against the hard, warm surface of his chest and Ilya instantly wrapped himself around him, kissing his forehead as more tears soaked his face.

“You don’t have to talk if you don’t want to.” Ilya murmured against his hairline, “We can just lie here.”

Shane swallowed thickly, wiping his eyes as he croaked out, “*S– sorry.*”

“Why sorry, Hollander?” Ilya sounded flabbergasted, “We are boyfriends, yes?”

The other man nodded weakly.

“So that means we stay with each other despite all the bad, yes?”

Shane sniffled, “But you should be with someone who has his shit together.”

“And you think I have mine?” Ilya let out a small, soft laugh, thumbing away a tear, “Oh, you silly, boring, beautiful Canadian boy.” he pecked his lips, his voice softening on the word ‘boring’ as if it was the fondest word in the English language, “I love you, you know what that means, yes?”

Shane replied, “It doesn’t mean you should have to deal with this.”

“Maybe I want to.” Ilya countered, “Maybe I want to see you like this.”

Shane huffed a pained laugh, “*Pathetic?*”

“Vulnerable.” Ilya corrected, “You’ve seen me vulnerable and I’m supposed to be the one who doesn’t act like that.”

Shane shook his head, “It’s different. *You’ve* been through shit—”

“And is it competition?” Ilya asked, “Which one of us has been through the most awful trauma, who gets prize for being the most sad?” he sighed, “Sweetheart, I think you really need to let me in. I know you’re used to, what is the word— masking, yes? Pretending—”

“I’m not—”

“No, let me finish.” Ilya cut him off, “I know you’re used to pretending you’re okay, that you have to be the best and everything. But you don’t have to be that with me. I love *you*. I love you in all your boring, panicking ways. I love you when you’re happy, when you’re anxious, when you’re sad.” he gave a dangerous, yet still sweet smirk, “I love you when you’re *begging* for more like little slut or when you just want to lay down and watch terrible television shows and eat your disgusting food. I don’t love some other version of you where you die on the inside pretending everything is okay. I love *you*, okay?”

Shane was *floored*, and to his own annoyance, crying once again, though this time, it wasn’t out of his brain being too loud to bear or one of his teammates being a casually homophobic asshole.

“*Fuck*.” His voice cracked, “Your English has really gotten good.”

Ilya grinned at that, “Well, yes. Practice for my lovely boring boyfriend who I want to spend forever with.” he pressed more kisses across the skin he could easily reach, then his mouth, “Now, enough. You want to tell me what is wrong?”

“I don’t know.” Shane’s breath shook on a long exhale, “I mean, it’s a bunch of things, I guess. But it was kicked off by one of the guys...” he sighed shakily, “They called Hunter a homo.” he leaned into Ilya’s comforting touch, “I should be used to it by now, it’s guy talk, locker room talk.” he wiped his eyes again, “But I was already feeling so overstimulated and then that and I fucked up the game. I just— I feel like I’ve ruined everything.”

Ilya pulled him closer, “You worry too much, solnyshko. It was just a game.”

“Not to me.” Shane countered.

Ilya nodded, “Yes, but that’s because hockey is everything to you and I get that.” he stroked his hair, “But is okay sometimes to have off day. You are allowed that. Plus, if I ever get my hands on that teammate—”

“*Don’t.*” Shane warned, but there was a crack of a smile, “Fuck, I can’t believe how stupid I look, crying like that.” he took a second then admitted, “I’ve not had a meltdown like that since I was a kid.” at Ilya’s curious look, he explained, “I lost some tournament and I just— I completely lost it. I was inconsolable— not calming down for hours.” he snuggled closer, “I remember my parents discussing the possibility of me being autistic a few nights later, one of the other parents had suggested it.” He chewed his lower lip, “But I didn’t want to be the autistic kid on top of the Asian one and you know, the gay one later on.” he sighed, “I just wanted to be normal, so I got good at masking. At least, I thought I did. Not so much anymore. I just don’t want people to think something’s wrong with me.”

Ilya cupped his face, “Hey, look. There is *nothing* wrong with you.” he then added with a cheeky grin, “Well, not *nothing*. You are very boring—”

“Fuck you, asshole.” Shane bit back, but couldn’t help smiling.

Ilya laughed, rolling atop him, “Mm, maybe later.” he kissed his cheek and neck, feeling Shane arch backward to give him more access, “Right now, I just want to be with you, be comforting boyfriend.” he took his earlobe between his teeth, hearing Shane whine, “Then later, when you are feeling better, after we’ve texted back the many, many, people who are worrying about you...” his hand ran under his shirt, “Then, I will ruin you, Hollander.” There was a feral growl to his voice that sent shivers down Shane’s spine, right down to his crotch.

Fuck, he loved it when Ilya got so possessive.

“You’re really good at this, you know.” Shane melted under his touch.

Ilya's thumb then coaxed his mouth open for a deep kiss, "I try, you know?" he pressed their foreheads together, "I love you, you know that."

"Ya tebya lyublyu." Shane countered, then softened into another kiss, the worries of the day not quite forgotten but much more relaxed.

He let Ilya pull him close again, whispering under his breath in a mix of Russian and English and for the first time in ages, he was able to settle in his own skin.

End Notes

hi so like everyone in the world i'm big in the heated rivalry fandom rn and i wanted to write something for my autistic princess shane hollander (him getting hugs and love). follow me on twitter @sapphicgiallo

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