

pushing it down & praying

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by [lavender \(punchinginadream\)](#)

Summary

“I get kind of—” Shane makes a little whining noise in the back of his throat, tips his head toward the ceiling for a moment before looking back at Ilya. “I hate those fucking press conferences. I hate them, Roz, and sometimes it just feels like too much and I can’t—” One hand goes up to run through his hair, already a little mussed, and Shane gives it a slight tug, making a frustrated noise that Ilya hasn’t heard before.

And Ilya decides that’s enough.

- or, a post-game press conference makes shane hit his breaking point. ilya goes after him.

Notes

i simply can't stop thinking about autistic shane hollander having to endure fucking overstimulating press conferences!!!!!! get my close personal friend shane hollander OUT of there!!!!

It's not obvious to anyone else, the way that Shane clams up.

It's a post-game press conference, which always wears Shane thin, frays his edges even more than hours of skating and sweating and slamming into the glass. The flashing lights, the jostling of the press and their bulky camera equipment, the eyes all trained on him... it's all too much sometimes. Makes his skin feel itchy and his eyes burn and his chest tight – he'd take getting slammed into the glass during a game over that any day.

If he could, he'd never attend another one of these bullshit pressers again. It's always the same, anyway – if they played well, they want to know what Shane thinks was done differently this time. If they lost, the journalists want to know what went wrong out there.

Of course, Shane has answers for all these questions. *Good* answers too, about the way the team meshes together, the way the first quarter of the game sets the tone, the dynamic of where they're playing and who they're up against.

But the thing is, the press doesn't want that. Not really. He learned this quickly: when he talks technical, they zone out. And the silence, the shuffling, the redirection to more questions about who's to blame or who's to praise is maybe even worse than the nausea Shane feels over trying to figure out exactly what he's supposed to say.

He knows now, having endured enough blank stares to understand that they want one thing. They want soundbites, little quips, and quick chirps about the other team or kissing his own ass about how well he played, how many goals he made, how well he led his team to victory.

Shane wants to talk about hockey – they want to talk about Shane.

These questions make him unravel, sometimes. Because the thing is, Shane kind of hates himself a lot of the time. Not in an intense way, not in any way that really *matters*. He can meet his own eyes in the mirror, can even stand to watch himself on TV (sometimes). He's *fine*.

But he knows he does things *differently* from other people, and he knows that this makes him off-putting to the public if he doesn't put on a good show, perform the role of *Captain*, read from the script he has stored away in the back of his brain for all of his social interactions.

When he doesn't stick to this formula, he gets weird. He says the wrong thing at the wrong time to the wrong person, shares too much or not enough, doesn't smile when he's supposed to, doesn't express himself the way everyone else seems to think he should. And then the next day he's there on his own TV screen or on his phone, his responses dissected and pulled apart like a dead frog in a high school science classroom, his oddities aired out on ESPN as they analyze every little fucking thing he said.

So to sit there and answer these questions, to try to think of what an *appropriate* answer would be, wears him out on the best of days. But sometimes, like today, he hits his threshold, and it's a wonder he can even get a sentence out at the end of it all.

It's not obvious to anyone else, but beside him at the press table, Ilya sees it: fingers curled tight around his arena-supplied bottle of water, thumbnail absently picking away at his cuticle, leg bouncing increasingly faster where it's pressed up against Ilya's own under the table. He doesn't have to see Shane's face to know his eyes are darting from point to point in the room, never fixating on one thing.

Ilya *knows* Shane, in a way he's never known anyone else. From the moment they met, Ilya found himself studying Shane, the way he moves and the way he thinks. He's fascinating to Ilya, probably in the same way hockey is fascinating to Shane.

If it were appropriate to dedicate his entire life to Shane Hollander like Shane had to hockey, Ilya would do it, he thought.

When Ilya first started noticing the way these conferences seemed to unravel Shane, it was after a particularly tough loss, where the Raiders had beaten out the Voyageurs 6-0.

Ilya assumed, naturally, that this was the reason Shane's answers were clipped, his words jumbled, his palms glistening with sweat. And in a twisted way, Ilya was kind of smug about this. Since the day he realized how easy it was to rile Hollander up, it was one of his favorite pastimes. So Ilya didn't blink twice at how flustered Shane got – he kind of reveled in it, actually. Got a little high on the way he could make Shane stutter – whether he was in front of the cameras, on the ice, or in dark hotel rooms.

But then it happened again, a few weeks later, when Shane had just led his team to a playoff victory. Ilya walked in, jaw tight, and took his seat next to Shane. Like always, it created a familiar *zing* of heat when their hands brushed as Ilya pulled out his chair, but Ilya did his level best to ignore it, kept his eyes straight ahead even as he felt Shane sneaking a glance his way.

Ilya was a sore loser, and everyone knew it. He expected to feel resentful at having to hear Shane talk about how he'd handed Rozanov's ass to him on the ice.

He knew Shane was proud of this victory. He had that stupid, happy little grin on his face after the final buzzer, his pretty, infuriating little baby face plastered all over the Jumbotron, so zoomed in you could see his freckles.

But despite their win, Shane's actions did not portray those of a captain who'd just brought his team to victory. Instead, Shane seemed high-strung, a bit feral, like a caged animal. He stumbled through answers that were clearly rehearsed beforehand, squinted into the bright lights, and flinched when the cameras shuttered.

Ilya wanted to feel angry, wanted that familiar flash of disappointment at the loss and his well-deserved sulking. But all he could feel was worry for Shane.

"You hold on so tight, Hollander," Ilya said one day. They were in Ilya's hotel room, after the press circus had their fill and they'd both celebrated – or commiserated – with their respective teammates.

His fingers ghosted over Shane's shoulders, up his neck, to cup his jaw. "You keep all your stress here." Long fingers tapped the side of Shane's temple. "Under your skin. In your bones." His thumb brushed across Shane's cheek and Shane felt himself leaning into it involuntarily. "You do not ever let go of it." A soft kiss was pressed onto Shane's bare shoulder.

Shane's face tightened. His eyes met Ilya's, then flitted away. He found it hard, sometimes, to look Ilya in the eyes. Especially when he was being so sincere. *Especially* when that sincerity was directed at him.

"I guess," Shane shrugged. He tried to turn his head, but Ilya's hand held him there, a warm, solid thing that offered a reassurance that a thousand English – or Russian – words never could.

"You can let go," Ilya's voice was quiet, strained. Like being this vulnerable was disconcerting for Ilya, too. "Here. With me. Is okay." His lips quirked up, but his eyes were still so painfully sincere that Shane kind of wanted to vomit.

Ilya tapped his own chest and winked. "I am big strong Russian hockey player. Can carry it." He leaned forward, kissed Shane's lips before whispering, "*Dlya tebya.*" *For you.*

Shane's eyes cut away. He knew Ilya was trying to lighten the mood, crack a smile from Shane, but he couldn't bear to pretend right now, no matter how hard he tried. *Uncomfortable* doesn't begin to describe how he felt in these moments, with the way Ilya seemed to see right through him in a way no one ever had. He didn't *want* Ilya to know how wound tight he was, how afraid he was that easing one inch of this tension he constantly held would cause his entire being to unravel.

But, like most things with Ilya, he didn't have a choice. Ilya didn't *give* him a choice – he simply saw him completely and told him exactly what he saw, holding up a mirror to all of Shane's idiosyncrasies without judgment or expectation.

He gave Shane no room to hide, nowhere to neatly file away his anxiety and his nerves. It made Shane feel *naked* – far more than when he was well and truly naked with Ilya when they were hooking up – and that made Shane feel a little bit like his guts were being spilled all over the hotel bedsheets, like the most locked-up parts of him were being lined up and arranged and assessed like they were up for auction. Like he might split right in two under the knowing gaze of Ilya Rozanov.

So he forced himself to play the part of *exasperated* at Ilya's words instead of falling into them, instead of letting himself melt into the rare, tender warmth that Ilya was showing him. Shane nodded, forced himself to roll his eyes and huff out a breath.

"Not that strong, Rozanov," he countered, placing one hand on Ilya's shoulder and pushing him back onto the mattress before swinging one leg over Ilya's hips, straddling him. "I'm still going to kick your ass next game. Four goals in the first half, at least. Easily."

Then Shane shoved his shaky palms into the mattress on either side of Ilya's head and kissed him silly, let the feeling of Ilya's warm skin and his soft lips consume him until the tight ball

of nerves unfurled in the pit of Shane's stomach and his brain fell finally, blissfully quiet.

Now, though, Shane is closer to the edge than Ilya had ever witnessed. His hands flex so tightly that the plastic water bottle crushes under his fingers. The feeling – or maybe the noise? – startles Shane so hard he flinches a little. Each jerky movement of Shane's head, each ragged breath was displayed under the harsh fluorescent lights. Ilya had the urge to pull Shane into him, shield him from the sounds and the voices and the expectations that are so clearly pulling him down into the depths of his own brain.

Ilya can tell, from a quick scan of the room, that some of the crowd is noticing the way Shane's answers are starting to falter. Furrowed brows, hesitant, half-raised hands as they try to pull their soundbites from a man so clearly on the edge of *something* Ilya can't quite name – a boiling point, a panic attack, a meltdown. The English words don't matter, really, Ilya thinks. Nothing matters except that Shane is still struggling, and the expectations are only piling higher the more flustered he gets.

Fucking vultures, Ilya thinks. He fights a scowl, forces his lips to remain pressed thin.

"Hollander," one journalist calls out. "You seem a little... on edge. Are you disappointed with the way you played tonight?"

Ilya bites the inside of his cheek to keep from opening his mouth.

"Uh—" Shane blinks, as if trying to get his bearings, and Ilya flashes back to that moment that seems like a lifetime ago, when *he* was overwhelmed trying to translate too many complex English words. With a small bump of his knee against Shane's, Ilya sits forward and clears his throat.

"Hollander is great player," Ilya says, his voice carrying no hint of the playfulness or cockiness he was known for with the press. "He has nothing to be disappointed about. Played great game. Raiders just happened to score more goals." Ilya shrugs, and Shane's gaze cuts over to his, his eyes wide with an expression that clearly says: *What the hell are you doing, Rozanov?*

There are a few murmurs in the crowd, some awkward coughs. Ilya knows what he did was out of character, that he is dangerously close to a line he simply could not cross without detonating his entire career, his entire *life*. But his rage is bubbling up, and Shane's eyes are a little bit calmer now that he's looking over at Ilya instead of the crowd, and all Ilya wants is to feel the soft tremors going through Shane's body finally let up.

Plus, he knows just how much he can get away with before he does something irreversible, and Ilya Rozanov is nothing if not a master of walking that thin, dangerous line without crossing it.

"Shane, do you feel that way?" another reporter pipes up. "Rozanov has high praise for you, but how do *you* feel about your own game?"

“I– Uh–” Shane tugs at the collar of his button-up and clears his throat. He looks down as if trying to gather his courage, then gives a little shake of his head. A white flag; a silent *no more* that Ilya hears loud and clear. “Sorry, I’m not feeling well– I can’t– Sorry.”

And then he’s out of his seat and beelining for the exit.

Shane doesn’t realize that Ilya’s followed him into the bathroom until the door is being shut behind him.

“Hollander.” Ilya’s voice is steady, deep. Even just his name in that pretty, honey-thick accent is enough to let the band of panic around Shane’s chest loosen infinitesimally. Shane doesn’t look up; his knuckles are stark white where they grip the edge of the porcelain sink. His shoulders are bunched up, muscles tense like his grip is the only thing tethering him to the ground.

Ilya stares. Wishes to be that tether for Shane so badly that it physically aches. He knows, of course, how tightly Shane is *always* wound, but seeing his facade crack in real-time makes Ilya’s bones ache more than any fight on the ice ever could.

“Shane,” Ilya tries again. His voice is softer.

“Why aren’t you out there?” Shane keeps his head down, eyes trained on the orange grime around the drain. Water drips slowly from the faucet. Strands of hair flop down in front of Shane’s eyes, and Ilya’s fingers flex involuntarily with the urge to push them away from his face. To cup his cheek, to stroke his jaw and count his freckles.

“They are not important,” Ilya says. He forces his mouth shut before the next words can come out: *You are*. Vaguely wishes he could wire his jaw shut so he could stop worrying about the most disgustingly enamored phrases falling out of his mouth every goddamn time he’s around Shane Hollander.

“It’s bad enough I bolted,” Shane mutters, glancing up to meet Ilya’s gaze through the reflection of the mirror. Still, even when Shane is mid-meltdown, he’s caught up about how his sudden exit is inconveniencing others, about what they’re thinking. “What did you say to them?”

Ilya shrugs, one corner of his mouth ticking up, his smile looking as forced as Shane’s felt a few minutes ago. “Told them to fuck off. That boring conference was over.”

“You did not.” Despite himself, Shane scoffs, shakes his head a little.

Ilya didn’t say *that*, exactly – the Raiders’ PR team might have his head – but it’s enough to break Shane out from his mental spiral. Ilya winks, raises an eyebrow. Dares him to question it.

This game – the unspoken *I dare you* that they were constantly throwing back-and-forth like a tennis match – is familiar enough that the confusion and the worry and the stress melt away for a second, and they stand there, eyes locked with small smiles.

But with the steady *drip-drip-drip* of the faucet and Shane's still too-ragged breaths and the murmur of voices outside, it's impossible to forget why they're here, why Shane's eyes look red-rimmed and his voice sounds tight and his knuckles are white.

When silence falls over them again, Shane's smile falters. He swallows thickly, his eyes falling back down to the sink as if the drain is the most interesting thing he's seen in months.

"They are not important," Ilya repeats, taking a step toward Shane. "You are worrying me, Hollander. Is very annoying."

Shane shakes his head. "I just needed—" He squeezes his eyes shut, takes a breath.

His hands finally detach themselves from the edge of the sink, his movements mechanical and jerky, like he has to put effort into every movement. He shakes them out a few times, trying to get control of his racing thoughts and his buzzing body.

Feeling now, without the steady grip of the sink, that he may sink into the floor or maybe float up into the rafters — end up anywhere but right here — Shane starts pacing back and forth in the cramped bathroom.

He takes another breath. Tries again. "I needed a minute. To breathe." He glances up at Ilya, confirms he's listening, that he isn't playing some kind of trick on Shane. Ilya is silent, solid, watching Shane carefully. Giving him the room he needs to get his jumbled thoughts together, form them into a sentence that makes any semblance of sense.

"I get kind of—" Shane makes a little whining noise in the back of his throat, tips his head toward the ceiling before looking back at Ilya. "I hate those fucking press conferences. I hate them, Roz, and sometimes it just feels like too much and I can't—" One hand goes up to run through his hair, already a little mussed, and Shane gives it a slight tug, making a frustrated noise that Ilya hasn't heard before.

And Ilya decides that's enough.

"Stop," Ilya says quietly. Shane doesn't even seem to hear him. Ilya reaches out and snags Shane's wrist, forces him to stop pacing. He gently pulls Shane's hand away from the death-grip he has on his hair.

Ilya forces more steel into his voice this time. "Stop." It's enough to tug Shane's brain out of its current spiral. His gaze jerks up, expression a little wild, frustrated tears brimming in his eyes.

"I think you are... panicking."

Shane laughs dryly in a "*no, duh*" way, and Ilya shakes his head, groaning a little in frustration as he tries to translate. "No, no, is not the right word..." he mutters, squeezing his eyes shut and willing the Russian words to rearrange themselves in a way that he can communicate to Shane.

Keeping one hand circled around Shane's wrist, Ilya presses the heel of his palm into his eye as he tries to think. "Um. I think you are feeling... like... like you want... to be in the air?"

This is when Ilya hates his brain the most, when he has so many fucking things to say, and the silence as he tries to do linguistic calculations is deafening, and he *still* can't get the Russian and English words to match up right. Makes him feel stupid, helpless.

Ilya pauses, centers himself, zeroes in on Shane's sharp pants, uses them to ground himself until the words are there in the back of his head and Ilya can grasp onto them.

"Like bird," he says, relieved at finally being able to find the words, even if they're still not quite right. He makes a stupid flapping motion with his arm that isn't holding onto Shane. "Like you want to fly out of here."

Understanding flickers in Shane's gaze, his panic momentarily forgotten as he tries to help Ilya figure out what he's trying to say. "Fight or flight," Shane murmurs, and Ilya lets out a *whoosh* of breath, nods.

"*Da*," he says on the exhale, feeling almost exhausted at trying to translate these feelings when all he wants to do is hold Shane in his arms and keep him tucked under his chin until Shane is pliant and gooey and soft all over like he is after he's been well-fucked.

"I- yeah," Shane swallows. He closes his eyes for a moment before looking back at Ilya. "It was too much, Roz. I can't- I felt like I couldn't breathe, and everyone was *staring* and-"

And then Shane's breath is hitching, and the soft little sob that climbs its way out of Shane's throat makes Ilya feel like his own chest is cracking open right there in the dingy, low-lit bathroom.

With a mental *fuck it*, Ilya is giving in to his instincts, pulling Shane forward. He catches the smaller man so off-guard that Shane's stumbling a little, kind of falling into Ilya.

Shane is so fluid, so smooth when he's skating that Ilya sometimes forgets how he can be when he's on solid ground - clumsy, fumbling, off-kilter, like he's still getting used to the world without his skates on. A lot like a baby bird, Ilya thinks. *Ptichka*. He feels a disgusting warmth blooming in his chest at the thought.

He tucks Shane in toward his chest, resting his chin on the top of Shane's head and valiantly resisting the urge to kiss the top of his skull. That feels too intimate, too familiar, but fuck if Ilya is thinking with his right mind right now. One arm snakes around Shane's middle, pulling him close, while the other holds Shane steady with a hand cradling the back of his head, absently stroking his silky hair.

"You are in fight or flight. Needed to get out of presser, yes?" Ilya says quietly, and Shane nods jerkily against his neck.

"What do you need, *ptichka*?" Ilya asks against the top of Shane's head, and fuck, he can't resist pressing a small kiss there too. Shane relaxes just a bit at the pressure of being held

tight, being grounded. He basks in the softness that Ilya provides, the tenderness that he keeps so locked up, that can't help but spill out around Shane.

"This," Shane answers, the wholly honest truth that he knows he probably shouldn't say. "You."

Ilya's arms tighten around Shane. "Then you'll have me," he says, and the simplicity of the answer, as if it's *that easy* makes Shane's heart clench. They stay like that, Ilya rocking them back and forth slightly, a calm reprise of Shane's violent rocking and pacing earlier. It grounds him.

Shane drags in a deep breath, tries to pull himself away, to get himself together. He needs to get back out there, say *sorry, sorry*, maybe joke about some bad shrimp on the plane ride. Laugh it off, perform for them, because that's what they expect. Push it all down and hope it doesn't bubble back up – at least not where anyone can see.

"No," Ilya says when he feels Shane try to squirm out of his grasp. His arms tighten, keeping Shane immobilized. The finality of the word, the simple, dominant act of taking the decision out of Shane's hands, bruises him like an elbow to the ribs, makes him ache deliciously, makes his limbs melt a little.

Shane can't bring himself to argue, to fully pull away from this safe place where he's landed after falling over the edge. Ilya shifts a little, kisses the top of his head again and hums a little song that Shane doesn't recognize. "Just feel it, Hollander. Breathe. Is okay. I am here, *ptichka*. Nobody expects anything of you right now except for you to just breathe, *da?*"

Shane doesn't know how long they stay there in that bathroom. Ilya's hand moves up and down soothingly against Shane's back, and he knows he has a million worries – why Ilya's comforting him in the light of the day, what they're going to say about him on tomorrow's sports gossip sites, what he's going to do the next time he panics like this – but he can't pull enough brain cells together to do anything except what Ilya says.

Ilya said to breathe, so he breathes.

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