something different bloomed

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by only_the_golden

Summary

Shane was diagnosed with autism as a kid, and kept it a secret once he decided he wanted to play hockey as a career. He decides it's finally time to tell Ilya.

Set in Chapter 17 of Heated Rivalry.

Title from 'You're on Your Own, Kid' by Taylor Swift

Notes

idk what to say about this one. kinda just had my own stuff i needed to get out so i'm projecting onto shane. long live finals season.
also i need episode 5 ASAP i'm not okay

See the end of the work for more notes

Shane had been seven. He hadn't understood what the word meant. Just knew that the weight of it hung heavy in every room he entered ever since the doctor muttered it to his parents, voice hushed and if saying it too loud would cause all hell to break loose.

Autistic.

He tried to ask his parents what it meant. Their eyes would soften, less with love and more with pity. "Don't worry," his mom would say, her voice trying too hard to sound light. "It just means you're a little different. That's all."

Shane didn't want to be different. Other people didn't like different. It was hard enough being one of only two Asian kids on his novice hockey team, the stares and the sneers under the breath of parents with bleach blonde highlights and orange fake tans. That was different enough. He didn't want any more reason for the other kids to see him as different. To shoot him weird looks when he would flap his hands, the excitement of scoring a goal never getting old, or when he would complain about the incessant buzz of the overhead lights being too loud for him to focus during skating drills.

Different wasn't good. Shane knew that.

But he couldn't escape it. After his diagnosis, too many things changed. A new classroom, new teacher, new classmates, new classes. Shane hated it. He hated the changes. He hated the acknowledgement of his differences. He hated the way his old friends now ignored him on the playground, hurling words at him that burned like fire in his veins. He hated when his new teacher would explain his differences to him, as if he couldn't see them for himself. *Of course* he knew that the other children didn't cry and scream and hit just because they could feel the tag on the back of their shirt. He learned that one pretty quickly when he mentioned it to someone he once called a friend, and got a look of horror in response. So yeah, *now* he knew that, thank you very much.

Too much changed all at once, and Shane didn't know what to do. It was all too much. Too much to think about, too much to deal with and understand. Just too much.

The only thing that didn't change was hockey.

On the ice, nothing changed. Shane was still Shane when he had a stick in hand. That became his escape. When the world got too much and he wanted to crawl out of his own skin, he would ask his parents to take him to the rink. The racing thoughts in his head would unravel as he skated laps around the ice, sinking pucks deep into the back of the net. On the ice, he wasn't different. He was *good*. He was *the best*.

When Shane was 9, he began taking hockey more seriously, looking at it as a future career rather than a hobby. He understood his autism by then, understood that it made him different and how. Understood how he could hide it better. His parents noticed the shift, the way he made an effort to mirror the other kids around him, taking on their mannerisms, speech patterns, behaviours. They didn't comment. They loved their baby more than anything, they wanted him to be happy. "If I want to go pro I can't stand out, not like that," Shane had said

the one and only time his parents brought up the shift, forks lightly scraping against plates at the dinner table. “The only thing that should set me apart should be my talent. Nothing else.”

His parents had shared a heavy look, but said nothing. Shane knew his dream, and they would be damned if they stood in his way. They watched as his goal celebration became too casual, the only remnants of the boy who used to be in the wiggle of his fingers at his sides. They watched him try to be subtle as he pulled on the collar of his shirts, now refusing to cut the tags out. It broke their hearts, but it was what their baby wanted. To be the best. To not be *different*.

— — —

As he got older, it became more difficult for Shane to block out his differences. His race, his sexuality, everything seems to make him different. Make him stand out more than he would like. And while it’s not public that he’s… *gay*… he can only imagine how people would react. How much more different they would treat him. It’s hard enough hearing slurs thrown around the locker room. Just like in elementary school, they may be different words with different meanings, but they sting just the same.

Since reaching the NHL, all the pressure Shane has been under his whole life has multiplied by one hundred. Suddenly, every little mistake or mishap feels like the end of the world. Like the ground is crumbling beneath him, threatening to give out and swallow him whole. This is his *dream*. He should be happy. He *is* happy. But that doesn’t make it easy. The world is so much louder, everything is too much too fast all at once.

Only when he’s with Ilya does the world start to calm down.

— — —

It’s after the All-Star game. After Shane told Ilya that he’s gay. After he finally said the words out loud, shedding a weight he hadn’t realized he had been carrying for so long. It felt like a relief, like liberation. Shane felt unstoppable.

They’re in bed, Ilya’s hand tangled gently in Shane’s hair, the weight a welcome comfort. Ilya is a constant pressure against his side, calming his nerves. He doesn’t know how long they’ve been sat like that, just enjoying each other's presence, the scent of skin and sweat and sex thick around them, but not overpowering. Just letting them exist and bask in the light of… whatever they are.

The words tumble out of his mouth before Shane has the chance to think them. “I’m autistic.”

The hand in his hair stills as the room falls even quieter than it was before. Panic furls in his chest and Shane wishes more than anything that he could reach into the air and snatch those words back. He doesn’t know why he said that, why the words seemed to fall out of his mouth like they’ve been sitting on his tongue for years, waiting to burst free. Maybe they have, and this was the first time he’d finally got the nerve to set them free.

Suddenly, Ilya shifts. He buries his head in Shane’ hair, placing a soft kiss to the crown of his head. “Okay.”

“That’s it?” Shane asks, unsure what he was expecting. It’s not as if he was planning on dropping that bomb tonight. *Hell*, he and Rozanov aren’t even dating. What kind of response did he even want?

“What is this? Is important? I should know what it is?”

Right. Language barrier.

“Autism Spectrum Disorder,” Shane supplies. He catches the edge of the sheet, worrying it slightly between his thumb and index finger. “It’s a disability. It affects my social abilities and shit. Like social clues? Never pick up on them. Sensory issues, so if, like, the lights are too bright or a place is too loud, that kind of stuff. I’m also really bad with change so I try to do everything the same pretty much everyday.” He’s rambling now, panicking. How is he ever supposed to explain this? His tongue feels thick and useless in his mouth and he knows he’s fumbling this big time.

“Basically my brain works differently.” Shane cringes. He hates that word. “And it can make it really difficult for me to do things that most people wouldn’t ever think twice about.

“Thank you for telling me,” Ilya cuts him off, sensing Shane getting overwhelmed by his own words. Ilya’s voice is soft, not with pity but with understanding. With something that starts with the letter ‘L’ that Shane definitely isn’t ready to face yet. He’s already come out as gay and announced that he’s autistic all in the same night, and to his biggest rival of all people. That’s enough revelations for today. “I’m glad you can trust to tell me this.”

Another kiss to his hair, this one lingering close and sweet.

“I don’t think anyone really knows. Not unless they knew me when I was little. I learned to hide it, to pretend to be *normal* because I didn’t want it to ruin my chances of going pro. Just never realized how difficult it might make things when I got older.” Shane chuckled halfheartedly.

“Is difficult for you?”

“I mean, yeah. I have a whole team, a whole *city*, relying on me to always be perfect and it’s a lot of pressure. But I don’t feel the amount of pressure maybe you or other captains do, it’s like this crushing, overwhelming pressure that if I think too much about it I can't breathe. We’re forced into all these stupid sponsor events that are always so loud, there's a million people all bumping up against me and every touch feels like I’m being stabbed. Everyone wants to talk to me all the time and I’m never prepared for it so I don’t know what to say or how to act, then I get too in my own head worrying about if I’m making the right face or making enough eye contact to even pay attention to the conversation.

“I constantly feel like everyone has all these things they expect of me but no one will tell me. They just get mad when I mess it up because they think I should just *know* what they want but I *don’t*, and I don’t get how everyone else seems to know without being told. Then I get so overwhelmed by all these little things building up that I feel like I’ll explode. Over the stupidest things too. Like I’ll have this string of rough days where it builds and builds and suddenly I can’t find my skates before practice and I just lose it.

“I’ll be out with the guys and they’ll be talking and I have to remind myself to laugh because I never catch the jokes they make. I say stupid stuff and give stupid answers to questions because I take everything too literally. I can’t ‘read between the lines’ or whatever people say. If people aren’t straight up with me I’ll never understand and it sucks. People look at me like I’m an idiot just because I don’t get their stupid jokes, as if it’s my fault that no one can say what they fucking mean.”

Shane snaps back into his body as Ilya rests a hand on his chest. “Sorry, I-”

“Is no need to apologize. I’m happy you can tell me these things. I don’t mind. Ilya gives him a soft smile. “I’m sorry you have to deal with that.”

“Don’t be sorry, it's not your fault,” Shane answers, curling himself to tuck right into the Russian’s side, head pillowed on his chest.

“No, is not. But I can see is hard on you. You are very strong, Shane Hollander.”

“It’s not a bad thing, being autistic. I used to think it was. Hated how it was just another reason for the other kids to think I was different. Now I guess I realize it’s just another part of me. Even though it makes things way more difficult. It’s not as if it’s making my life easier, but it’s not something I can change so I might as well stop trying to hide it.”

“How can I help?” Ilya asks, pressing another kiss to the top of Shane’s head. “Help you stop trying to hide.”

“This is a good start. I don’t feel like I have to hide as much around you.”

“Good. Don’t hide. I want to see you. All of you. Real you.”

“I’ll try.”

End Notes

think i did a terrible job of writing about the autistic experience which is wild considering i'm writing about my own experience, but i also hate writing about myself at all so really it's on brand

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