

lay me down

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by [kjo33398](#)

Summary

When Shane's day goes to shit and he can't hold it together in his usual way, he shuts down completely, and Ilya is out of his depth but desperate to help

Notes

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

He was all for a good cause, but if it was going to be like this, Shane Hollander was ready to quit hockey. And even though that thought was deeply unsettling to him, it didn't hold a candle to the visceral discomfort he was in.

The pink jersey he had on had to have been imported straight from hell. The sizing was off, and the way it pushed his pads into his skin, the way it hit just the wrong place on his neck, the tag in the back rubbing - it was making his skin feel like it was on fire. It clung to his arms and his wrists in all the wrong ways - so uncomfortable that he even tried to pull the cuffs over his gloves, which were mercifully his standard issue ones. No use - he was stuck with that cursed fabric chafing against his skin, not worn in and much rougher than all his usual uniforms.

And to top it all off, he was reserved for the entire photoshoot - the star center had to be in as many shots as possible, of course. Which was how he ended up in front of three different cameras pre game, his entire body sweating under the lights.

He hadn't made it five minutes before he was flinching at each bulb flash, nauseated as he looked around.

"Shane? Hollander! Hey!"

The photographer's voice was harsh, and it pulled him back into focus.

"Big smiles, yeah? This is a breast cancer awareness campaign, not a funeral," the man muttered, shaking his head.

Shane put on his best smile, letting his eyes glaze over just enough to keep him sane, to let him escape his body for a few moments of relief. He was able to sink into the background of the team shots soon after, which was a blessing. But even still, any time he was forced back into his own body, he felt like his skin was crawling, pins and needles across every nerve ending that touched that retched jersey. Hayden seemed to notice when he couldn't control a particularly harsh shudder, and raised his eyebrows.

Shane locked every muscle down in refusal to acknowledge it and gave him a reassuring thumbs up, though he couldn't quite manage to look him directly in the eye. He tried to breathe through it, to will himself numb, but every bit of air he pulled into his lungs made his jersey tighten on his chest, made it rub against his undershirt.

Was this what torture was like? It had to be close. He couldn't remember the last time clothes had made him so uncomfortable. When he was little he refused to wear anything but gym shorts and cotton t-shirts. And rain boots, for two months straight in winter, if Yuna's stories and the pictures from his baby album were to be believed. But he'd learned to cope with it over the years, at least he'd thought.

The shoot went over it's allotted time, and Shane bit at the inside of his cheek until the skin tore off. He'd have to adjust his pre-game ritual, skip at least two, if not three steps to be on time. He shuffled through as they finally, *finally*, called cut on the shoot. He pushed past his

teammates, already stripping the jersey off, already dreading when he'd have to put it back on before the game.

But at least he had an hour.

"Hollander!" His coach called, voice so loud it hurt Shane's ears. "They want you for press, put your shit back on."

Fuck.

"I... I, uh, I need, uh, I just-" Shane's words jumbled in his mouth, catching on his tongue. His coach put a hand out, ushering him as if that would make the words come faster. It only made him fall completely silent. He hadn't even known the press was going to be there, and he had no time to process.

"Don't need an excuse, just go get it done," Theriault said, waving him off. Shane pulled the jersey back on with a shudder and moved towards the media room.

Today sucked. Royally.

Press was awful. Everyone spoke at once, vying for his attention. He could hear his own voice in his head, flat and monotone no matter how much inflection he tried to add to it. He knew what the headlines would say. Antisocial. Short. Cold. Uninterested. He'd seen it all before, but it didn't make it hurt any less. No one understood how hard he tried to sound warm and kind, and it was eternally frustrating. He pulled the jersey back off as soon as he cleared the room.

He made it back to the locker room soon after, immediately reaching for his headphones to drown out the drone of everyone's chatter. With his entire routine thrown off, he was at least grateful that he'd remembered to pack a pre-game snack, and had time to enjoy it. He pulled the baggie of blueberries out of the top compartment of his bag, popping the first handful in. They were tangy, and crunchy - so much so he could hear the skin break when he bit down under the noise cancellation of his Beats. He grabbed a few more, and then he gagged. One of the bunch had been too far ripe, mushy and sour. He darted for the trash, spitting them out and immediately returning to his water bottle to wash the taste out. It lingered still, and his nausea returned.

Today *sucked*.

He could feel himself teetering on the edge, a delicate balancing act required to keep himself in check. He knew the fall wasn't pretty, so he texted Ilya, because that was the only thing he knew would never backfire.

Miss you, can't wait to see you tomorrow. Today is shit.

The dots popped up immediately, and he smiled.

You okay?

Yes. Just a bad day. I'll tell you about it later.

Well, I was going to surprise you, but you sound sad. The Admirals flight got grounded for weather, so game got cancelled. I am packing up to come to you early ❤️

Shane let out his first real breath in hours and hearted the message. Ilya would be there *tonight*. Maybe when he got home, if he was lucky. He just had to get through this game, in his stupid fucking jersey that he would never have to wear again, and then everything would be okay. He just had to keep it together

He waited until the very last minute to put it back on and join his team on the ice.

Ilya hit traffic outside of Montreal that had him chewing his lip and drumming against his steering wheel.

There was a feeling in his gut he couldn't shake. Shane hadn't texted him after his game - and he knew the game had been over, because he watched the highlight reel while he sat in the standstill. Not that there had been many to show.

Montreal had gotten slaughtered. He couldn't remember a time that Shane had played so badly. In every shot they showed of him up close, there was just something... *off*. Ilya almost wondered if he was hurt - it looked like he was in pain. He checked his location again. Home, in his apartment. He'd been there for over an hour and still, no text. No call. It had him on edge as he inched along the highway, the red and blue lights in sight.

Fifteen minutes later he finally cleared the accident, and he hoped all the cops in Montreal had been there, or he was going to end up with a speeding ticket he was sure. And he wished he could drive directly up to Shane's door as he waited in the elevator after his arrival, nerves growing as each floor ticked by agonizingly slow.

He put his key in the lock as quickly as he could, and froze when he opened the door.

Every light in the house was off, apart from a soft glow from the bedroom.

"Shane?"

No answer.

Bile rose in Ilya's throat, and he threw his keys on the counter, immediately moving towards the light. His mind spiraled, desperate to know he was safe, he was okay.

"Shane!?"

He rounded the corner, finding the bed empty. There was a quiet sound of water falling, and he rushed through the room to the bathroom, breath catching at the sight he found.

Shane was in the shower. There was a moment of relief, but it was short lived.

Because Shane was in the shower, sitting on the floor. Naked, knees curled up to his chest as he sat on the tile, the shower head on full blast and spraying water over his head. It was hard to see him - the lights were on their dimmest setting, almost off. His hands were over his ears tightly, and he was rocking just barely back and forth. Over the water, Ilya swore he could hear him humming.

“Shane?” He tried one more time, to no avail. So he took off his coat, tossing it on the floor and approached the shower door. He opened it slowly, reaching out for Shane’s shoulder and immediately recoiling.

The water was *freezing*. Ilya checked the knob - it was turned to hot. He must have been in there since the moment he got home.

“Shane, you’ve got to come out, it’s too cold,” Ilya pleaded, reaching over to cut the stream. That was enough to get Shane’s attention, and when he looked up, Ilya was pretty sure his knees gave out. Either way, he ended up kneeling in front of him, the water soaking through his jeans.

Shane had been crying, that much was clear. His eyes were bloodshot, puffy and full of exhaustion. When Ilya looked him over closer, he noticed that he had red streaks along his skin, as if he’d been clawed.

He was still dripping wet, but Ilya didn’t hesitate. He pulled him in, holding him tightly to his chest. His skin was so cold it was like hugging ice, but Shane didn’t even shiver.

“Sweetheart. What happened? Talk to me.”

He felt Shane shake his head against his shoulder, and even that was enough to make him breathe just a bit easier. At least he was *in there*.

“Okay. Okay, well then let’s get you warm.”

Ilya grabbed a towel from the hook, immediately wrapping Shane up in it after he helped him to his feet. He felt Shane’s hands slide down to his hips as if to hold him there, and he leaned in to kiss his forehead quickly before he started to dry him off, trying to be gentle but efficient.

Shane’s lips had a bit of bluish tint to them, and Ilya felt like he could vomit. When he was dry, he led him to the bed, sitting him on the edge. Shane stared down at his feet, still humming, so softly Ilya could barely hear it.

“I’m going to get you clothes. Okay?”

Shane said nothing, and Ilya backed up, keeping himself facing him until the last second. He grabbed the first soft things his hands touched in the closet and came back immediately, setting the pile on the bed. Shane looked over at it, taking the briefs only and sliding them on.

Ilya watched, chewing his lip. He'd known Shane was having a bad day - he'd told him as much. But this? This was something different entirely. It wasn't a panic attack - Ilya was actually pretty well versed in helping with those at this point, and they'd been less frequent lately. He'd seen Shane zone out plenty of times, go quiet. But never *silent*. He missed his voice, and he wished more than anything he could read his mind. Instead, he knelt down in front of him so Shane could see his face, even if he wasn't really looking at it.

"What can I do?" He said softly, waiting.

Shane moved. Slowly, but he was moving. He walked to his side of the bed, pulling the covers back and sitting the extra pillows down one by one on the floor, in their usual spots. Then, he laid down flat on the bed and finally, *finally*, looked at Ilya in the dim light.

"Come here," he said, a bit strained. He patted his chest, and Ilya had to keep himself from leaping onto the mattress. He wished he'd put on the hoodie he'd brought out, or the flannel pants, but he supposed that body heat would do. So he stripped his wet clothes off and climbed into bed. He curled up against his cold body, letting his head rest on his chest.

And then Shane was pulling on him, coaxing him closer. Ilya scooted, confused but willing until he was hovering over him. Shane tugged again, and it felt as though he was trying to pull Ilya into him. Ilya let himself sink down further, chest pressing to Shane's, bodies meeting everywhere they could as he kept himself propped up on his forearms.

If Shane wanted sex from him, he'd give it. Hell, he'd escaped his own mind through Shane's body many times, soothed his aching soul even. But this felt different.

Shane gazed past him at the ceiling when he spoke again, hands pressing at his back where they had wrapped around him.

"Lay down."

Ilya looked at him, worried.

"I will squish you like bug." Shane could hold his own, but Ilya had 30 pounds on him, at least.

"No. It will help. Please."

There was a pleading in Shane's voice that Ilya couldn't have denied if he wanted to. And so he let himself relax fully, let his full weight down on top of Shane. He felt his boyfriend let out a sigh, almost in relief. Ilya rested his cheek against Shane's chest, listening to his heart in the silence.

His breathing settled out. The beats slowed. His skin warmed, though now Ilya was cold, all of his heat having been leeched from him.

Ilya lasted five minutes of silence before he had to ask.

"Is helping?"

“Yes.”

“Good. How?”

“Pressure. Proprioceptive input.”

Ilya would have to google that, but he didn't dare move. Not until Shane did, which was three minutes later. He felt his breath first when he turned his head, nuzzling into his hair. Then, his fingers were there, twisting at a loose curl like he did some nights before he fell asleep.

“Your shampoo ran out. In the shower.”

“Is okay. I brought some in my bag,” Ilya reassured him, unsure of why it mattered. “Do you need?”

“No. I tried to use some earlier, to help. To smell you.”

Nothing he was saying made sense, so Ilya risked the chance of sitting up enough to look at him. His eyes had settled - Ilya could actually see *Shane* in them, that familiar glint returning just enough to calm his weariness.

“I am confused. And you scared me a little,” he admitted. “I did not like finding you in the shower like that.” He couldn't even manage an innuendo to lighten the mood, everything still felt too raw.

“I'm sorry. It hasn't happened in a while.”

“What is ‘it’? What do you mean?”

Shane was quiet again, and Ilya swallowed his panic. He hadn't meant to push, not when he'd just gotten him back. So he kept his lips pressed tightly until Shane spoke again.

“Did you ever know anyone who was autistic? Like when you were younger?”

Ilya thought about it for a moment.

“Back home no. Autism is not talked about in Russia much. But in Boston, yes. Our equipment manager, Luke. He told us about it a little. Why?”

Silence again for a bit. Ilya could see where Shane was chewing the inside of his cheek.

“I never really got a diagnosis. Well. They did a screening on me, when I was three. And I didn't pass some parts of it, but I passed others. My mom never wanted me to do the official testing, because she didn't want anyone to try to keep me out of stuff. And I did good in school, and in hockey, so no one ever looked closer. But it makes sense I guess, with all my... stuff.”

Ilya paused. He thought about Luke. Luke, who was so particular about the equipment that you never had to worry if it was right. Luke, who had his catchphrases that everyone loved,

little quotes he repeated constantly. Luke, who ate the exact same breakfast as long as Ilya had known him, and could tell you every fact about the owners of every NHL team.

And then he thought about Shane. Shane, who -

“I know you’ve noticed things I do that are different, you don’t have to pretend you don’t.” Shane interrupted his thought, and the immediate defensiveness made Ilya pause before he spoke.

“What things do you think I noticed? That you have to fold your clothes a certain way? That no matter how good the dinner I made is, if it’s too many spices you won’t eat it? That you hate the microwave fan and turn it off even when the stove is steamy? Socks in hotel rooms, no big lights-”

“Yeah, okay, enough,” Shane huffed, closing his eyes. Ilya waited a moment, and then he ran a finger along Shane’s freckles, waiting until he looked at him.

“They are not bad. Those are all things that make you Shane. And I love Shane, if you didn’t know.”

“I do know,” Shane sighed, tears brewing again.

“And you are more than those things too, for the record. You are kind, and strong, and brave. And warm. And my favorite,” Ilya hummed, pressing a kiss to his shoulder. “All the things about you are my favorite, the autism parts too.”

“Autistic,” Shane corrected gently, a tear falling as he tilted his head. “I love you. So much. C’mere.”

Ilya let out a breathy laugh, looking down at the two of them that were pressed together everywhere they could be.

“Uh - I am here.”

“Closer,” Shane grinned.

“What, crawl into your skin?”

“Sure.”

“Sounds slimy,” Ilya crinkled his nose, and Shane laughed, leaning down to kiss the tip of it. Ilya shifted closer to him, and Shane wiggled, moving his legs and pressing his feet up against Ilya’s calf. Ilya jolted as if someone had dumped ice water on him.

“Jesus fuck you’re cold! Can I get you socks?”

Shane shook his head.

“This is the one time you will not wear socks? When you have ice cubes on my skin? Really, Hollander?”

“Less clothes helps after a shutdown for me,” Shane explained, moving his feet. Ilya chased them with his leg, still desperate to warm them despite his complaining.

“A what?”

“A shutdown. That’s what *that*—” he gestured towards the bathroom - “was. I’m sorry you had to see that, I know it isn’t pretty.”

“Explain more.”

“I have trouble... processing things I guess. Sensory things, like smells, sounds, lights. When things change really fast, or my routine gets thrown off, that’s always hard. That’s why I like to keep things the same, when I can. Or when my emotions are really big, that can cause it too. And it usually goes one of two ways. Either I meltdown, where I yell and I get really upset, or I shutdown, and I kinda go quiet. To be fair, I don’t really meltdown much anymore. Mom says I did when I was younger, but now it’s usually a shutdown. But it has to get really bad before that happens.”

Ilya couldn’t get that image of him out of his head. So small, so vulnerable on the tiles.

“What does it feel like?”

“Awful,” Shane answered immediately. “It’s fucking awful. You feel trapped, and everything is too much and there’s no way to stop it. It feels unsafe. Scary. When it gets really bad, like today, I can’t even get words out. I think them, but I can’t get them out of my mouth. I can’t get my brain to shut up actually. And my *skin*, it feels like it’s on fire most the time. I usually dissociate, just to escape.”

“What is ‘dissociate’?” Ilya was running his fingers along Shane’s arm as he spoke.

“It’s where you kind of, like, check out. Try to leave your body a little bit, or your brain. Cause it’s too much.”

That, Ilya knew about.

“So when you shut down... I am supposed to lay on top of you?”

Shane smiled.

“You’re adorable you know.”

“I am serious,” Ilya frowned. “I don’t like feeling helpless.”

“I know, but that’s also hard to answer. Most the time, just making things less. Less lights, less noises, less people, less talking. Taking me away from whatever is causing it, if you can. Pressure helps, like weighted stuff. I have a weighted blanket in the back of my closet I use. Well, actually, I haven’t used it once when you’ve been here, your arm is usually heavy enough.”

“Glad to be of service,” Ilya smiled, kissing his skin. “Do I count as people? I can give you space, if you need.”

Actually, Ilya would rather die than get up, but he would do it if Shane asked.

“No, you don’t. I wasn’t actually sure how that would go - you being here. But it helped. It’s helping.”

“Good. Does the humming help too?”

“The what?”

“When I found you, you were humming. But you said less noise is better.”

“It’s weird. Some sensory things help. The sound the shower makes when it hits my head and my ears are covered sounds like rain, and that helps some. Humming too, but I think it’s the vibration. And water. Familiar smells, sometimes.”

“Like my shampoo?”

Shane blushed, and Ilya was grateful to see the warmth in his cheeks.

“I thought maybe... smelling you would help. Make it easier to calm down. I feel safe when you’re around, and that was as close as I could get.”

Ilya was pretty sure his heart was going to burst out of his chest, and he couldn’t stand it anymore. He moved up his body, kissing Shane gently.

“I will leave my bottle here then,” he whispered.

“Well, I have the real thing now.”

For next time, Ilya thought, and it broke his heart. God, it was so unfair that they couldn’t just spend every night together, that he couldn’t make a promise to be there next time and know he wouldn’t break it.

“What happened today, that made it so bad?”

And Ilya just *listened*. He listened to Shane talk about the pink jersey, and the photoshoot. The press, the blueberries, how he missed his stretches. How he couldn’t feel where his body was on the ice all game because his body was only focused on the fabric. He could picture it when he spoke about scratching at his skin when he got home, desperate to stop the burning. Ilya had kissed the red marks that were fading during that part.

“So I just got in the shower. And I don’t remember much after that, until you got here.”

“Did you feel how cold the water was?”

“No, I didn’t really notice until you said something. I’m warm now though.”

“Good. You always say I am like space heater, it was useful today.”

“Yes,” Shane teased, pressing his nose against the bottom of Ilya’s jaw. Ilya wrapped his arms around him and rolled, pulling him onto his chest so he could hold him.

“I am sorry you had such a hard day. It sounds exhausting.”

“It was. But it’s over, and you’re here.” He said it like that was all that could ever be needed.

“I’m here,” Ilya said back, tilting his head up and kissing him slow. They stayed that way for a while, lips melding gently, without a single ounce of urgency. That was until Shane yawned.

Ilya wanted to quip about boring him, but he just couldn’t quite find the heart to. Not when he was so relieved that he was okay, that he had relaxed, that he was *safe*. And that Ilya himself was part of the reason he felt that way.

“Sleep, sweetheart,” was what he chose instead.

“Okay,” Shane mumbled, scooting down just enough to rest on Ilya’s chest.

And Ilya began to hum. A soft tune, one he knew from Russia, something he’d experienced in those rare, soft moments of his childhood that were so scarce.

Shane slept soundly until the morning.

End Notes

my sweet autistic baby I will protect u with my life and thank god Ilya is heavy

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