

Three

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Three

by [ompalompap](#)

Summary

Shane swallowed hard, tears still slipping down his face, but he managed another breath. Then another. Each one shaky. Each one fragile. But they were coming. Ilya kept his hand steady against his back, the other still lightly holding his forearm.

“You’re okay,” he repeated quietly. “I’m right here.”

Shane’s voice came out broken and small. “I’m sorry. I couldn’t- I tried- I needed-”

His words dissolved into another shaky inhale, frustration and shame mixing with the remnants of panic. Ilya didn’t press him to explain. He knew Shane’s mind was still tangled in whatever storm had triggered this.

Right now, breathing mattered more than understanding. “You don’t have to say anything,” he said softly. “Just breathe.”

The pressure gets to Shane and he has an anxiety attack mid-game.

Notes

I watched 'Inside out 2' yesterday and thought of my very close friend Shane Hollander. This is inspired by Ryley's anxiety attack. Yup, that's all this is, and it's a long one!

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

It was Shane's first season with the Ottawa Centaurs. That alone would have been enough to put him under a microscope, a high-profile transfer, a star player leaving the team that had defined his career, stepping into a new system where expectations were enormous and patience was limited. Every shift he played was analyzed. Every statistic compared. Every small fluctuation turned into discussion.

But that wasn't the only reason all eyes were on him. Now, his life off the ice was public too.

Everyone knew about him and Ilya, not as rumors, not as speculation, but as fact. Interviews mentioned it. Commentators referenced it casually. Fans talked about it online constantly. Their names were linked together everywhere now, inseparable in a way that felt both beautiful and terrifying.

To most people, it was a story. To Shane, it was pressure. Because it meant every game he played carried an extra, unspoken question beneath it: *Is he still the same player?* Is he still driven? Still focused? Still ruthless enough to dominate at this level? Or had something softened him? Changed him?

He had been playing okay so far this season. Not bad. Not failing. But not undeniable either. Not the kind of performance that silenced doubts.

And "okay" wasn't enough. Not for the Ottawa Centaurs' new star player. Not for someone who had built his entire identity on being exceptional. Not for someone who could feel the weight of expectation pressing in from every direction.

So he told himself what he had always told himself when the pressure grew too loud; *Work harder. Prove it. Show them. Show everyone. Show yourself.* That he was still the same Shane Hollander.

Shane didn't remember when exactly the number had appeared in his head. It wasn't something anyone had told him. No coach had said it. No analyst had written it. No teammate

had even hinted at it.

But sometime during the days leading up to the first game of the season, somewhere between the extra workouts, the late-night film sessions, the scrolling through comments he told himself he shouldn't read, the thought had lodged itself deep in his mind and refused to leave.

Three. It came with a tight, sharp feeling in his chest every time he thought about it. *You need three goals.*

Not one. Not two. Three. Because one could be luck. Two could be coincidence. But three, three would prove something. Three would silence the whispers. Three would make the headlines shift back.

Three would tell everyone, the fans, the media, the critics, the doubters, the quiet voice in his own head, that he was still the same Shane Hollander. Still fast. Still dominant. Still unstoppable. Still worth everything.

By the time he stepped into the locker room before the game against New York, that number felt less like a thought and more like a command. It sat behind his eyes, heavy and insistent. Three. He tied his skates with hands that weren't steady.

Across from him, Ilya watched.

He had noticed the change building for weeks now, the way Shane stayed later and later after practice, the way his appetite had dropped slightly, the way he woke up sometimes in the middle of the night, breathing too fast, staring at the ceiling like he couldn't slow his mind down.

But today was worse. Today he looked wired. Tight. Like a string pulled so hard it might snap.

Ilya finished taping his stick, then stood and walked over, leaning his shoulder casually against the locker beside Shane.

“You look like you're about to fight someone,” he said quietly.

Shane didn't look up. “Maybe I am.”

Ilya huffed a quiet breath, not amused. “Shane.”

There was something in the way he said his name that made Shane glance up despite himself. Concern. Plain and unmistakable.

“I'm fine,” Shane said quickly, almost automatically. “Just focused.”

Ilya studied him for a moment longer. “You don't have to-”

“I know,” Shane cut in, more sharply than he meant to. He exhaled immediately, running a hand over the back of his neck. “Sorry. I just... want to play well tonight.”

Ilya's gaze softened, but the worry didn't leave. “You always play well.”

Shane didn't answer. Because that wasn't what he was afraid of. It wasn't about playing well. It was about proving something. To the fans. To the analysts. To everyone who thought his priorities had changed. To everyone who whispered that maybe love had softened him.

And, most of all, to himself.

From the moment the game started, Shane played like he was chasing something only he could see. He skated faster than anyone else on the ice, cutting sharp turns, accelerating hard, pushing his body beyond its normal rhythm.

But it wasn't the smooth, instinctive speed he was known for. It was frantic. Forceful. Driven by urgency instead of flow. Every time he got the puck, his first instinct wasn't to look for a pass. It was to drive forward. To shoot. To make something happen immediately.

Midway through the first period, he got his first chance. A clean lane opened in front of him, the puck settling perfectly on his stick. He didn't even think. He fired. The puck slammed into the back of the net. The crowd roared.

His teammates cheered. Someone slapped his helmet as he skated past. But the relief that flooded him wasn't simple satisfaction. It was something sharper. Like easing pressure in a sealed container.

One. His brain latched onto the number immediately. *Two more.*

He barely registered Ilya skating up beside him during the celebration. "Nice shot," Ilya said, smiling, but his eyes were searching Shane's face carefully. "You okay?"

Shane nodded quickly. "Yeah. Great."

But his gaze had already moved past him, scanning the ice again. Already calculating. Already chasing the next opportunity. Ilya watched him skate away, unease settling heavy in his chest. Because that hadn't looked like joy. That had looked like relief.

As the game continued, it became obvious to everyone on the ice that Shane wasn't playing normally. He was fast. Dangerously fast.

But he wasn't really playing with the team. He cut off passing opportunities to take shots himself. He ignored open teammates in better positions. He chased the puck relentlessly,

often skating deep into defensive pressure alone.

At one point, Troy skated alongside him, clearly open. “Hollander! Pass!” Troy shouted.

Shane didn’t even turn his head. He took the shot himself. Missed. And slammed his stick once against the ice in frustration.

From across the rink, Ilya saw it all. His stomach twisted. During a line change, he caught Shane at the bench, grabbing his arm lightly.

“Shane,” he said quietly. “Breathe.”

Shane pulled his arm free almost immediately. “I am breathing.”

“No, you’re not,” Ilya said softly. “What’s going on?”

“I’m fine,” Shane snapped. “I just need to score again.”

Ilya furrowed his brows. “You already scored.”

“Not enough.”

“Enough for what?”

Shane didn’t answer. Because he couldn’t say it out loud. Couldn’t admit how irrational it sounded. How his brain had decided that anything less than three meant failure.

"I just need one more," he muttered finally, looking away.

Ilya's expression shifted, worry deepening into something closer to alarm. "Shane..."

But the coach called for the next line, and Shane was already jumping back onto the ice.

Late in the second period, he got his second goal. It came from sheer persistence. He fought through two defenders, skating hard along the boards, muscles burning, breath ragged. He drove straight toward the net despite the pressure, refusing to pass even when a teammate called for the puck.

He shot from a difficult angle. The puck slipped past the goalie. The crowd exploded again.

Two.

Relief surged through him, but it didn't last. Because immediately, his brain whispered again. *Not enough. One more.*

His chest tightened. His breathing sped up. During the celebration, Ilya skated up to him again, grabbing his shoulder gently.

"Hey," he said softly. "That's good. You're good. You can ease up now."

Shane shook his head almost immediately. "No."

Ilya blinked. "Why?"

Shane's throat tightened. "I just do."

Ilya's voice softened, careful. "What's happening? What is this?"

But Shane was already pulling away again, eyes darting back toward the ice. Because now, the number felt like a ticking clock inside his head.

Three. Three. Three.

By the third period, his anxiety had spiraled into something sharp and suffocating. His heart wouldn't slow down. His hands trembled slightly on his stick. Every missed opportunity felt catastrophic. He imagined the headlines already forming.

Shane Hollander struggles despite early goals.

Star player fading under pressure.

Distraction off the ice affecting performance.

Shane Hollander can't keep up with the scoring race.

The thoughts came faster and louder, piling on top of each other until it felt like he couldn't think clearly anymore. He just needed one more. Just one. And everything would stop.

When the loose puck slid along the boards late in the period, Shane reacted instantly. He skated after it at full speed, cutting across the ice with reckless urgency. He reached it first. Pulled it forward. Turned toward the net, and suddenly a New York rookie slammed in from the side, trying to strip the puck away.

It should have been routine. A normal challenge. But Shane's mind wasn't calm enough for routine. All he felt was the pressure. The panic. The desperate, overwhelming need to finish what his brain had started.

And something inside him snapped. He drove his shoulder forward with full force. The impact was brutal. The rookie hit the boards hard, body slamming with a loud crack that

echoed through the arena.

Everything froze for a split second. Then the whistle shrieked. Shane stood there, chest heaving, adrenaline roaring in his ears. He didn't even fully register what he'd done until he saw the stunned expressions around him.

He wasn't usually this aggressive. Not like this. Not out of control.

"Hollander!" someone shouted. The referee skated toward him, pointing sharply toward the penalty box. Timeout.

As he skated off, the crowd noise swelled into a chaotic roar. His vision felt narrow. His breathing too fast. His hands shaking badly now. He passed Ilya near center ice. Ilya had stopped skating entirely, watching him with wide, worried eyes. Not angry. Not disappointed. Just deeply, painfully concerned.

"Shane," he called softly.

Shane couldn't meet his gaze. His throat tightened. He looked away almost immediately, skating past him, the penalty box door slamming shut behind him. And as he sank onto the bench inside, hands trembling in his lap, one thought kept repeating in his head, over and over like a broken loop: *You only got two. That's not enough. You're not good enough.*

Shane sank onto the bench inside the penalty box, the door closing behind him with a hollow, final click that felt louder than any horn or cheer in the arena.

For a moment, he just sat there, legs spread, hands gripping the boards in front of him. His heart was still hammering in his chest, loud enough that it seemed like everyone could hear it. The noise of the game outside, the shouting, the skates scraping ice, the puck hitting the boards, filtered in dimly, almost distant, and yet somehow overwhelming all at once.

He tried to calm himself. He told himself to breathe. He forced the thought down deep, telling it to be reasonable, telling it he was fine, he was okay, it was just a penalty, he'd been here before. But his brain had other ideas.

Suddenly, it started, the flashes, the rapid-fire images, the comments he'd read online, the whispers he'd imagined in locker rooms, in crowded arenas, at home.

"Hollander's washed up."

"Traitor to the fans who made him."

"Weak. Not the same. Not good enough."

Each phrase hit him like a slap, echoing in his skull. His chest tightened, and the air felt impossibly thick. He tried to inhale. Tried to exhale. But it wasn't enough. His lungs wouldn't cooperate. He gasped, clawing at the boards in front of him, as if holding onto something solid could anchor him in the middle of the chaos in his own head. A tear slipped down his cheek, followed by another. And then another.

Shane lurched forward, pressing his forehead to his arms on the boards, trying to hide himself, trying to curl into something small enough that he could survive the pressure, trying to just breathe. But even breathing was a battle. His hands shook, fingers trembling around the edges of the boards. Every muscle in his body coiled tight, as though ready to bolt, but he couldn't move.

Across the ice, Ilya noticed.

He had been skating in the neutral zone, waiting for the next shift, trying to follow the flow of the game. But then he caught sight of Shane. The way he curled over, shoulders trembling. The way his hands gripped the boards so hard the knuckles were white. The tilt of his head hiding his face. The unmistakable way his body was wracked with panic.

Ilya's chest tightened in panic. He wanted to skate over, grab him, say something, anything to calm him, but the game was still in play. The puck was moving. Teammates were counting on him. And here he was, helpless to just... be there for Shane.

The whistle blew, and there was a short stoppage. Ilya skated closer to the glass, crouching slightly so he could be seen by Shane.

“Shane,” he called, his voice low and urgent, carrying over the boards.

Shane didn’t respond. Not even a twitch. Ilya’s chest tightened. He saw the tears streaking Shane’s face. He saw the shaking. He saw the way Shane had lapsed into himself, trying to hide, trying to fight something invisible that was consuming him. He saw the way Shane’s hand reached up to fist his shirt, just over his heart.

Ilya’s mind raced. He knew he couldn’t reach him like this. Not fully. Not in the middle of a game. And yet he couldn’t just watch. He couldn’t just skate away and pretend he hadn’t seen.

“Shane,” Ilya called again, louder this time, banging gently on the glass, eyes locked onto him. “I’m right here. Look at me. I’ve got you. Hey. Look at me.”

Shane’s body didn’t move. He stayed hunched, breathing uneven and rapid, shaking so violently his helmet rattled against the boards.

Ilya’s stomach twisted. He wanted to break the glass. He wanted to climb over, to grab Shane, to stop the panic from consuming him. But he couldn’t. It wasn’t just a rule violation, it was the middle of a game, and the officials would never allow it. Not without consequences.

Still, he couldn’t walk away. He studied Shane’s face. Saw the tears, saw the wide, panicked eyes, saw the way his chest heaved. His own hands curled into fists at his sides. Desperation twisted tight in his chest.

Then, decision. A bold, reckless, absolutely insane decision. If he couldn’t reach Shane here, he would create a way to reach him, no matter the cost.

The whistle blew again, and the game resumed. Ilya moved quickly, skating with determination, eyes still locked on Shane. He deliberately positioned himself in such a way that a minor infraction could be manufactured, a high stick, a hook, something small and deliberate that would get him sent off.

The thought of doing it made his stomach churn. But he didn't hesitate. Shane needed him. Shane was drowning in panic, alone in that glass box. And nothing else mattered.

Ilya's mind was made up. He would be there with him. He would not let Shane fight this alone. He skated hard, deliberately drawing attention, and waited for the moment, the contact, the call that would send him to the penalty box. His heart hammered in anticipation, just as Shane's was still hammering with fear, panic, and a suffocating sense of pressure.

Across the ice, Shane had barely registered the game anymore. The fans' voices, the opposing players, the puck, none of it existed beyond the overwhelming, spiraling storm in his mind. Every flash of doubt, every imagined comment, every whisper of accusation and criticism pressed him down further.

And Ilya, moving deliberately into the infraction, was the only thing he didn't know yet, the only lifeline that might finally reach him. The moment of collision, of call, of consequence, was coming. But Shane, shaking and crying inside the glass, couldn't see it. He only knew the panic, the weight, the suffocating pressure of needing to prove himself, of being enough, of being the same Shane Hollander the world expected.

The penalty box door hadn't even fully slid shut behind Ilya before he was moving.

There was no hesitation, no embarrassment, no awareness of the crowd watching through the glass. The game noise, the roar of thousands of voices, the scrape of skates, the whistle blasts, faded instantly into the background.

All he could see was Shane. Curled forward on the narrow bench. Shoulders shaking violently. Gloves pressed against his face like he was trying to disappear inside them.

Ilya's chest clenched so hard it almost hurt to breathe. He had seen Shane upset before. He had seen him exhausted, frustrated, even broken after injuries or brutal losses. This was different. This was panic. Raw, overwhelming panic that had completely overtaken him.

"Shane," Ilya said softly, immediately crouching in front of him.

No response. Only a ragged, choking inhale that sounded like it barely made it into his lungs. Shane's hands were trembling so badly his stick clattered softly against the boards beside him. His whole body shook in uneven waves, like he couldn't get control of a single muscle.

Ilya reached out carefully, not grabbing, not forcing, just resting one hand lightly against Shane's forearm.

"I'm here," he said quietly. "Hey, it's me. I'm here."

Shane flinched at the touch at first, not pulling away, but jerking slightly like his body was too overloaded to process it properly. His breathing was wrong. Too fast. Too shallow. Each inhale catching in his throat like it couldn't get past the tightness in his chest.

His head stayed bowed, but Ilya could see tears dripping steadily from beneath his gloves, dark spots staining the fabric. And that broke something in Ilya's heart. Because Shane almost never cried. Not like this. Not uncontrollably. Not where anyone could see.

"Shane, listen to me," Ilya said, his voice low, steady, forcing calm into every word even though his own chest felt tight with fear. "You're okay. You're safe. Just breathe with me, okay?"

Shane tried. Ilya could see him try. His shoulders jerked as he sucked in a breath, but it came out in a broken gasp, almost a sob, his body curling tighter like he was trying to protect himself from something invisible.

"I- I can't-" he choked, the words barely audible, torn apart by uneven breathing.

Ilya's hand tightened slightly on his arm, grounding but gentle. "Yes, you can," he said softly. "You can. Just slow. Just one breath at a time."

Shane shook his head weakly, tears falling faster now. His mind was still trapped somewhere else, still replaying voices that weren't in the penalty box at all. The comments. The headlines. The imagined disappointment.

Traitor.

Liar.

Different.

Weak.

Dependent.

Distracted.

Not enough. Not enough. Not enough.

They crashed through him relentlessly, overlapping, suffocating, louder than the arena itself. And worst of all, his own voice joined them. *You only got two. You're not good enough. Not for the league, not for Ottawa, not for his fans, not for Ilya.*

His chest hitched violently, another sob breaking free before he could stop it. "I- I ruined it," he gasped. "I ruined everything-"

"No," Ilya said immediately, firm but gentle. "You didn't ruin anything."

Shane shook his head again, harder this time. "I did. I- I need to be better. I need to- fuck."

Ilya shifted closer without hesitation, kneeling fully in front of him now despite the cramped space. "Sweetheart. Look at me," he said softly.

Shane couldn't. His face stayed buried in his gloves. So Ilya changed approach. He moved one hand to Shane's back, pressing lightly between his shoulder blades, a steady, rhythmic touch.

"Okay," he murmured. "You don't have to look. Just listen. Follow me."

He exaggerated his own breathing deliberately. Slow inhale. Long, steady exhale. Again. "In," he whispered. "And out. Slow."

At first, Shane couldn't match it. His breaths still came in short, sharp gasps, his chest heaving unevenly. But Ilya kept the rhythm. Didn't rush him. Didn't panic. Just stayed steady.

"I've got you," he murmured quietly. "You're okay. You're not alone. Just breathe with me."

Shane's hands loosened slightly against his face. Just a little. Enough that Ilya could see his eyes now, red, glassy, overwhelmed. Shane looked utterly lost. And that look made Ilya's throat tighten painfully. He had never wanted to protect someone more than in that moment.

Slowly, haltingly, Shane's breathing began to shift. Still uneven. Still shaky. But no longer completely out of control. He dragged in a breath that was slightly deeper this time, his shoulders jerking with the effort.

Ilya nodded softly, encouraging. "That's it. Good. Keep going."

Shane swallowed hard, tears still slipping down his face, but he managed another breath. Then another. Each one shaky. Each one fragile. But they were coming. Ilya kept his hand steady against his back, the other still lightly holding his forearm.

"You're okay," he repeated quietly. "I'm right here."

Shane's voice came out broken and small. "I'm sorry. I couldn't- I tried- I needed-"

His words dissolved into another shaky inhale, frustration and shame mixing with the remnants of panic. Ilya didn't press him to explain. He knew Shane's mind was still tangled in whatever storm had triggered this.

Right now, breathing mattered more than understanding. "You don't have to say anything," he said softly. "Just breathe."

Shane's shoulders sagged slightly, exhaustion starting to replace the sharp edge of panic. His hands finally dropped from his face, resting weakly in his lap. His eyes were red and wet, his expression still strained, but the wild, panicked look was fading slowly.

He leaned forward unconsciously, closer to Ilya, like gravity itself was pulling him toward the only safe point in the world. Ilya didn't hesitate. He shifted forward just enough to close the small distance, resting his forehead lightly against Shane's temple. A quiet, grounding touch. Ilya knew the game was still on, the world was still watching. Yet, he couldn't bring himself to care about anything other than the man in front of him.

Shane let out a shaky exhale that almost sounded like relief. "I'm sorry," he whispered hoarsely.

The words hit Ilya like a punch. "No," he said immediately, his voice soft but firm. "No apologizing."

Shane's hands trembled again slightly. "I messed up," he said weakly. "I- I lost control."

Ilya pulled back just enough to look at him, his gaze steady and unwavering. "You had an anxiety attack," he said gently. "It's not something you can control."

Shane's eyes filled again, fresh tears gathering. His voice dropped to almost nothing. "I just wanted to be good enough."

Ilya's chest ached so sharply it almost stole his own breath. "Oh, sweetheart," he said quietly. "You are. I promise, you are more than good enough."

Shane shook his head faintly, not fully believing it, not yet. But he didn't argue. He didn't pull away either. He just stayed there, breathing unevenly, leaning slightly toward Ilya's warmth, letting himself exist in that fragile space between panic and recovery.

The buzzer was so loud it felt like it split the air open.

It wasn't just a sound, it was a shockwave, a violent, metallic scream that rattled through the arena and into Shane's bones, and for a second he didn't even understand what it meant, didn't register the cheers or the scrape of skates or the sudden surge of bodies in front of him, because his ears were still full of the echo of his own breathing a few moments earlier, the memory of how tight his chest had felt, how the world had narrowed to that tiny, suffocating box of glass and noise.

Game over.

Someone on the bench slammed a stick against the boards in celebration. Another player whooped. The crowd roared, a huge rolling sound like thunder. Shane just sat there for a moment, shoulders heavy, chest rising and falling too fast.

Ilya was still at his side.

"You okay?" Ilya asked quietly, voice low under the chaos.

Shane nodded automatically, even though the motion felt slow, delayed, like his body was catching up to him seconds late.

“Yeah,” he said, but it came out hoarse.

Ilya watched him for another second, eyes searching his face, clearly not convinced. “We talk at home,” he said.

It wasn’t a question. Shane nodded again. “Yeah,” he whispered. “At home.”

The locker room afterward was loud in a different way, the clatter of equipment hitting the floor, the rush of the showers, the overlapping voices of teammates replaying moments from the game, but to Shane it all sounded distant, muffled, like he was underwater.

He moved on autopilot. Helmet off. Gloves off. Pads unstrapped. Tape peeled away. His hands were still slightly shaky when he untied his skates.

No one said anything about the penalty box. Not directly. A couple of teammates glanced at him, quick looks, concerned but careful, like they didn’t want to embarrass him. He was grateful for that.

Ilya stayed close without hovering, sitting a locker over, moving at the same pace, occasionally glancing at him to make sure he was still grounded. When Shane stood up after showering, towel slung around his neck, hair damp and curling slightly at the edges, he looked pale and exhausted.

Ilya noticed immediately. “You dizzy?” he murmured.

Shane hesitated. “...a little.”

Ilya's jaw tightened. He didn't say anything else, just stayed near as they finished changing. He already knew the worst part was coming.

The hallway outside the locker room was bright, crowded, full of cameras and microphones and people talking too loudly. The second Shane and Ilya stepped into it, the noise sharpened into focus.

"Shane! Shane, over here!"

"Can you tell us what happened in the penalty box?"

"Viewers noticed you were very emotional-"

"Were you crying?"

"Was it the pressure getting to you?"

The words hit Shane all at once, overlapping, too fast, too loud. He froze. For a split second he looked genuinely confused, like he didn't understand how they knew, how anyone could have seen that moment, that private collapse he'd thought had been hidden behind glass and noise and chaos.

"I-" he started, but his voice caught. Cameras clicked. Microphones pushed closer.

"Was it related to your performance tonight?"

"Fans are wondering if off-ice distractions are affecting your play-"

"Is this about your relationship with your teammate?"

"Were you having a conflict with Rozanov?"

The last question landed like a slap. Shane's eyes widened. He hadn't even realized that was where they were going. His breathing stuttered. For a second it looked like he might panic

again, his shoulders drawing in, his gaze flickering, trapped by the crowd and the lights and the relentless attention.

Then Ilya stepped forward. He moved just enough to place himself slightly in front of Shane, not blocking him completely, but clearly inserting himself between Shane and the press. His expression was cold. Controlled. Dangerous.

“Wow,” Ilya said flatly. “You people really have no shame, huh?”

The reporters paused, surprised. “Rozanov, can you comment-”

“You see a player struggling,” Ilya continued, voice sharp with sarcasm, “and your first instinct isn’t ‘is he okay,’ it’s ‘how fast can we shove a microphone in his face and turn it into a headline.’ That’s impressive. Truly.”

A few reporters bristled. “We’re just doing our jobs-”

“Yeah?” Ilya cut in, eyebrows lifting. “Your job is to speculate about someone’s mental health on live television?”

No one answered that. Shane stood behind him, stunned, still trying to steady his breathing.

One reporter tried again, more aggressive now. “Are you implying this indeed has something to do with Shane’s private life? Are the two of you not aligned-”

Ilya let out a short, humorless laugh. “I’m implying that his private life is none of your business,” he said, voice icy.

Another reporter pressed forward. “Fans deserve transparency. The public has a right to understand what’s affecting a star player-”

“The public,” Ilya cut in sharply, “has the right to hockey. And Shane scored two goals this game, did he not? So maybe ask about that instead of our relationship.”

There was a ripple of tension through the group. Another voice pushed. “Your relationship has been very public- you can’t expect people not to ask-”

Ilya let out a short, disbelieving laugh. “Public, yes,” he repeated. “But that doesn’t mean you’re entitled to know every detail.”

He reached back without looking and found Shane’s wrist, gripping it gently but firmly. “Interview’s over.”

He didn’t wait for permission. He just turned and walked away, pulling Shane with him through the stunned silence.

The car ride home was quiet. Not tense. Not angry. Just heavy. Shane leaned his head back against the seat almost immediately, eyes half-lidded.

Ilya glanced at him every few seconds while driving. “You still with me?” he asked softly after a few minutes.

“Mm,” Shane murmured. But his voice was fading. His body looked like it was finally crashing after running on pure adrenaline for hours.

They stopped at a red light. Ilya looked over again. Shane’s eyes were closed now. His breathing was slow and deep. At first Ilya thought he was just resting. Then he said quietly, “Shane?”

No response. A small spike of panic hit his chest.

“Hey,” he said, reaching over and touching his arm. “Shane.”

Nothing. Not unconscious in a frightening way, his breathing was steady, his face relaxed, but completely, utterly out. Passed out from sheer exhaustion. Ilya swallowed hard, a knot forming in his throat.

“...okay,” he murmured to himself, forcing his voice steady. “Okay. You’re just tired. That’s all.”

But his grip tightened on the steering wheel. And he kept glancing over at Shane the entire drive home, worry sitting heavy and unmoving in his chest.

By the time they pulled into the driveway, the sky was fully dark. Ilya turned off the engine and sat there for a moment, listening to the quiet hum of the cooling car. Then he reached over carefully.

“Shane,” he said softly. No response. He touched his shoulder, gentle but firm. “Sweetheart. We’re home.”

Shane stirred slowly, brow knitting as he dragged himself back to consciousness. It took a few seconds for recognition to settle into his eyes, confusion first, then memory. Then embarrassment.

“Oh,” he murmured hoarsely, straightening slightly. “I... I didn’t mean to-”

“No, is okay,” Ilya said immediately. His voice was gentle, but there was a sharp edge of concern under it. “You didn’t ‘mean’ anything. You were exhausted.”

Shane swallowed, looking down at his hands. They were still trembling faintly.

“I’m sorry,” he said quietly.

The apology landed wrong. Ilya exhaled slowly. “Stop apologizing,” he said, softer now. But Shane just nodded without looking at him, like he didn’t quite believe that.

Inside, the house felt almost too quiet. No arena noise. No reporters. No bright lights. Just the familiar creak of the floorboards, the faint hum of the refrigerator, the safe, enclosed stillness of a place that belonged only to them.

Ilya didn’t turn on the main lights, just the softer lamp in the living room. Shane sank onto the couch like his legs couldn’t hold him up anymore, elbows resting on his knees, hands clasped together so tightly his knuckles went white.

For a while, neither of them spoke. Ilya gave him space, gave him time. He sat down beside him, close enough that their shoulders almost touched, but not forcing anything. Waiting. It took a long time before Shane finally broke the silence.

“I thought...” His voice was rough, quieter than usual. “I thought if I just worked harder, it would go away.”

Ilya turned his head slightly. “Go away?”

Shane let out a shaky breath. “The noise,” he said. His hands tightened together. “The pressure. The... the feeling that I had to prove something every second I was on the ice.”

His voice faltered. “I kept thinking, if I just scored enough goals, if I played fast enough, if I pushed hard enough, then people would stop looking at me like I’d changed.”

Ilya's chest ached. "Shane..."

But Shane kept going, words spilling out now that they'd started. "Ever since they found out, they've seen me as different," he said, voice trembling. "They say I'm softer, more distracted, more reckless. That I cared more about... about us than hockey."

His throat tightened. "And I- I do. You know I'd choose you, everyday. But it just- I hate that they think me loving you makes me worse. Because I still love hockey, and I still want to- be good enough."

Ilya's heart twisted painfully. "Loving me doesn't make you worse," he said immediately.

"I know that. I've spent my entire fucking career loving you," Shane whispered. "But my brain just won't accept it."

He pressed his hands against his face for a moment. "Every time I miss a shot, it's like there was this voice in my head going, *see? This is why. This is what everyone keeps saying. You're not enough anymore.*"

His shoulders started to shake slightly. "And tonight it just... got too loud."

The words came out in a broken rush. "I kept thinking I needed three goals. Not one. Not two. Three. To prove I was still me. To prove I deserved to be here. To prove I didn't ruin everything."

Ilya felt something in his chest crack. "Shane," he said quietly.

"And I couldn't reach it," Shane continued, voice unsteady. "No matter how hard I skated, it felt like I was chasing something I could never catch. And when I got sent to the box..."

His breath hitched again. "It was like everything hit at once. All the comments, all the headlines, all the... the horrible things people said about us. The assumptions, the accusations."

He swallowed hard. "And I'm sorry. I didn't want you to see me like that."

That part came out barely audible. And that was what finally broke Ilya's restraint. He turned fully toward him, reaching out and taking his hands firmly.

"You think I would ever judge you for struggling?" he said softly, almost incredulous.

Shane's eyes were wet when he looked up. "No, I just- I didn't want you to worry," he whispered.

Ilya's expression softened completely. "Of course I worry," he said quietly. "You're my husband. That's part of the job."

He squeezed Shane's hands. "I wish you'd told me," he added gently. "I hate knowing you've been carrying all this by yourself."

Shane's lip trembled slightly. "I didn't want to burden you. You already have so much to deal with. I didn't want to add to the stress."

"Shane," Ilya said firmly, looking him straight in the eye. "You're not a burden. Not now, not ever. Just because I struggle, doesn't mean you can't as well. That's not how this works."

He leaned closer, their foreheads almost touching. Shane let out a shaky breath.

"You're allowed to hurt," Ilya admitted quietly. "You're allowed to break, but you have to tell me. I can't help picking up the pieces if you hide from me."

That landed. Shane's shoulders shook again, but this time he didn't try to hide it. "I was scared," he admitted. "If I said it out loud, it would mean it was real."

Ilya exhaled slowly, then pulled him into a tight embrace. Shane collapsed into it immediately, arms wrapping around him like he'd been holding himself together all night and finally didn't have to anymore.

"You don't have to prove anything," Ilya murmured against his hair. "Not to the fans. Not to the media. Not to anyone."

He held him closer. "You are still you. Nothing about that has changed."

Shane pressed his face into his shoulder, breathing uneven but slowly steadying. "I just... I don't want to lose everything. I've worked so fucking hard for this Ilya," he whispered.

"You won't. People will forget, people will find something else to obsess over," Ilya said softly. "You won't lose this."

He rubbed slow, grounding circles against Shane's back. "We will get through this, together. But Shane?"

Shane hummed quietly. "Yeah?"

"Next time, you will have to tell me before it gets this bad. You scared me today, I hate seeing you like that. When you hurt, I hurt," Ilya sighed, pressing his lips to the top of Shane's head.

A small, shaky nod against his shoulder. "Okay," Shane whispered. "I promise."

And for the first time since the game, his body finally began to relax.

End Notes

Why do I make Shane hurt in every fic?

I'm not really sure if this was classified as an anxiety attack or a panic attack. Please feel free to educate me!

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