

the other f word

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by [daseydaisy](#)

Summary

TW: Disordered Eating, Discussions of Triggers/Thought-Processes

Shane returns home to find that his husband, father, and closest friends have prepared an intervention for him in regards to his eating disor- habits.

Notes

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

Shane opens the door to the sound of Anya's paws scampering across the hardwood as she bolts toward him. He used to wince, concerned about the state of the floors, but he loves Anya, loves Ilya, too much to care. They can be cleaned, repaired, replaced. A floor doesn't compare to the love of his husband's life.

He pets Anya, letting her wriggle around on the floor as she tries to get him to pet every inch of her at the same time. She's a menace. He lets her lick his face once, twice, and then he pulls back. Her tongue is so wet, like she's holding half her water bowl in her mouth.

"Hello?" He calls out into the quiet house.

It's unusual for Ilya not to appear the second Shane shuts the door behind him. They've got the timing down to a science. If either comes home, the other is waiting impatiently while attempting to look like they've been keeping themselves properly distracted.

"In here," Ilya yells from the living room.

Also odd. The hair on the back of Shane's neck stands on end as his nervous system kicks into overdrive. He toes off his shoes, gives Anya one last fortifying pat, and then makes his way toward his husband.

Only, Ilya's not alone.

"Hello," Rose says. She sits on the couch between Hayden and Ilya, spinning a ring on her finger around and around. Her attempt at a smile is weak and off-putting.

"Take a seat," Shane's dad says, motioning toward the seat across from him. He sets his magazine down on the coffee table and removes his glasses. "We've got something we want to discuss with you."

Shane knows what this is. He's seen them on TV, had a few for a player here and there who needed to acknowledge that their drinking or other habits have gone too far, but he never thought he'd come home to find one staged for him. Not in his own living room. So, he stands near the doorway, unwilling to commit.

Ilya shifts on the couch, uncomfortable. Shane wants to say it's because he's next to Rose Landry, as it appears as though he might never fully let that go (and Shane doesn't want him to), but he knows his husband better than that. Ilya *agreed* to this. He must, on some level, believe in whatever it is that's got everyone else up in arms. Shane wracks his brain for anything they've talked about recently, any arguments that weren't really arguments but rather Ilya attempting a difficult conversation, and comes up empty.

"We're here to help," his dad continues.

And Shane knows precisely what this is about. His blood pressure does something weird and the room gets fuzzy for a moment as he clutches at the doorframe to keep himself on his feet. He pulls in a shaky breath and tries to play it off, act like he doesn't know what they mean. His heart beats in his throat but he keeps his expression as empty as he can manage.

“Shane, we’re concerned,” Hayden says.

A smile twists up at the corners of Shane’s mouth and he hates it. *Hates it*. It’s unconscious and uncalled for, but it’s the only honest reaction he can have at the moment.

Whatever he’s been doing, all that time spent triple checking ingredients, mulling over menus to find the perfect thing, avoiding dessert like it might kill him for even considering it, has paid off. People noticed. People saw the changes, the effort, noted the ways that his body changed with each new restriction he implemented.

His nutritionist works with many other high level athletes. The entire regime is proven and trusted. It’s not like he’s the only one following the plan. He wants to scream it over and over until they all throw their hands up in surrender and let it drop.

The smile turns sour, though he doubts it ever reached his eyes. He takes a step back, further from the room, and wraps his arms around his chest like a shield. All of his reasonings have been played through. If they didn’t listen before, then there’s nothing left to do but wait until they air out their grievances. He can do this.

“First, we want to say that we’re doing this because we want what’s best for you,” Rose tries. It sounds like she’s reading another kidnapping script. “It’s become rather obvious over the past couple years that something’s wrong.”

“What do you mean?” Shane tries, playing stupid.

Ilya tilts his head and purses his lips, unamused. *Disappointed*. Shane’s heart dips at the thought and he vows to remain silent for the rest of this.

“If I invite you out to eat, it’s more involved than inviting most of my coworkers. And they’re in movies, constantly on screen. We have to worry about costumes, cameras, posing, people picking apart our appearance.” Rose shakes her head hard, as if aware this is the wrong way to steer the conversation. “Yet, they’ll still get pizza with me if I ask. Hell, I eat fries. Twice a week I get a burger because burgers are the best and I love them. When was the last time you ate something because you enjoyed it?”

He doesn’t have an answer, so he stays silent.

“What have you eaten today?” His dad asks. “Does it align with the list you gave your mom? We ran that by another nutritionist, claimed it was a diet given to me, and he said it was enough calories for weight loss. And I’m not trying to maintain muscle. Or stay active every day for hours on end.”

“Strangely,” Hayden adds, “it also seemed to be less than the list you gave me when I first asked. You know, the one you printed out and gave me to show Jackie for when you come over for dinner.”

There’s a knot in Shane’s throat now. He stares at the couch, unwilling to meet anyone’s gaze.

“Shane,” his dad says, leaning forward in the chair. “There’s a reason why your mom isn’t here.”

“She’d be on my side,” Shane states immediately. He’s done this enough. His mother always comes to his defense whenever Ilya starts to pick on him for his various eating habits. She’s protective of her baby. It doesn’t matter that he can see the glances, the concern in her eyes as she attempts to double his serving of almonds. She believes in Shane.

At least, that’s what he tries to tell himself. There’s something else to it. That desire to accept his flaws at every turn because it’s working and, goddammit, Yuna Hollander is not going to break something that works. She put up with the season where he refused to wash his socks, listened to the tantrums when something small in the game day routine changed, and made him the same meals on end for years until he began to expand his palette. She’d only mentioned her displeasure once or twice when he began to restrict, to contain the variables as best he could.

“Yes and no,” his dad says. He’s gentle, like when Shane broke his wrist and had to sit out until it healed back in fourth grade. “She wants to defend you, to agree with you, because you’re her son and she believes that *you* believe you’re doing what’s best for yourself. But that doesn’t seem to be the case.”

“You used to beat me every time we went running together,” Hayden says. “You made it look easy.”

This is when Ilya’s supposed to butt in, say something to tear Hayden down and discount the entire conversation, but Ilya stays silent. Shane has to hold his breath to stop himself from doing something he’ll regret.

“When we invited you over for dinner last week,” his dad continues, “you didn’t eat everything on the plate. It almost looked like you were counting the grains of rice. Your mom went and triple checked to make sure she got everything right. She’s still trying to figure out what she did wrong because she trusts you. She trusts that you aren’t doing something to mess up your life.”

Guilt wracks through Shane’s body.

“We know you want to live forever,” Rose quips, trying to cut through the tension, “but that typically involves food. Your body needs fuel.”

“And if you have a child,” Hayden says, out of nowhere, “they will watch and learn every single aspect of your eating disorder until it becomes a part of them too. Do you want to do that to a kid? Tell them that what they want is unhealthy for them at every turn until they’re scared to eat anything that isn’t bird food? What would you do if Jade or Ruby refused to eat dinner because they want to be just like their Uncle Shane?”

“I wouldn’t — ” Shane interjects.

“Jade said that yesterday.” Hayden clenches his fist, cheeks red with fury, as he glares at the floor. “She turned down a piece of cake on her brother’s birthday because Uncle Shane

wouldn't take one and Uncle Shane just broke a record."

Shane's stomach drops and his palms go clammy. "I — "

"Good thing Uncle Ilya never turns down cake and is just as good," Hayden says. He leans back on the couch, arms crossed against his chest, and fights back a snarl. "Got her to eat at least a few bites."

Shane knows this is serious when Ilya doesn't fight the allegation that he's only 'just as good' as Shane.

"People notice, Shane," Rose says. She reaches out as if she can force the correct answers into his head. "We want to make sure you live a long life and that you continue to kick ass on the ice. If that also means that I can get a piece of pizza with my best friend instead of eating rabbit food like I have to with everyone else, that would be great too."

Everything is too much. The overhead lights, the sweat he hasn't had the chance to wash off, the dog saliva on his chin, the way his face feels too hot compared to the rest of his body, the eyes of everyone trained to him as they judge each and every one of his moves. His skin itches. He wants to throw himself into the shower and scrub beneath the scalding water until all that remains are his organs.

"Ilya," Shane says. It's a plea. He pulls in a shaky breath and watches his husband's eyes, hoping that they're on the same page.

"Give us moment," Ilya says. He's soft, barely controlled, but everyone listens to the command.

The room empties. Each person walks past Shane as they go. His dad meets his eyes, gives one gentle nod, and pats his shoulder. Hayden stares at the floor, as though he's used up his bravery for the day. Rose offers a timid smile, aware this isn't their most awkward conversation.

Once alone, Ilya holds out his arms. "Come here."

And Shane throws himself across the room and into Ilya's lap. He nestles beneath Ilya's chin. It takes a minute to calm his breathing, each shuddering attempt threatening to reveal the tears he's fighting hard to contain. Ilya's fingers run through his hair.

"You will need to have this boring conversation," Ilya whispers into the top of Shane's head.

"Asshole," Shane mutters without any heat.

"Come. Tell me," Ilya insists, giving Shane a little shake. "Is not so bad once you start talking. Dam breaks. Gets easier."

"I don't even know where to start."

Shane feels so small. Not in the good way, not how he's been attempting and hoping to achieve, but like he's let everyone down. He's created a situation where his friends and

family felt the need to get together to tell him to knock it off. What kind of person does that to those he cares about? He's made them all sit here and beg him to do something that should be easy.

"What are you thinking?" Ilya asks.

"That I'm sorry."

"Don't care."

"Sorry?" He turns to glare at his husband incredulously.

"You feel bad. Fine. If it helps you get better, good. I want to know why."

"Why I'm sorry?"

"No. Why?"

That's the very question Shane doesn't want to answer. He tucks his chin into his own chest and stares down at the coffee table as though his dad's copy of *The New Yorker* will tell him the right answer.

"Come on," Ilya says. His tone is light, but Shane can see right through it. "Is me."

And it is him. If Shane can't tell Ilya, then who can he tell? There's no one else who would understand on the same level. No one else that he wants to know more. He's tried before, when they were curled up in bed in the dark and everything felt so heavy but distant that he didn't fear the fallout for half a second, when Ilya discussed one of his breakthroughs with his therapist, when he broke down after eating a Snickers bar and couldn't believe he reacted in such a way. But he'd never followed through.

At the end of the day, even with the person who he knew loved him most in the world, it all sounded so fucking stupid.

"Shane," Ilya whispers.

"It's something that can be controlled," Shane starts in a small voice. "You can weigh out lettuce, list the ingredients in a candy bar that a nutritionist says are bad, count calories. By all accounts, there's a right way to do it. All these people have done the research and created what should be the best diet. All these other athletes follow the rules without a single complaint, without ever fucking it up, and they're at the top of their game."

"As are you."

"No, I'm not. I could be better. I could always be better. Faster, stronger, more controlled, balanced. I've been at this for twelve years. There's new rookies every year, and every year they come in looking for their place. At some point, one of them has to take mine. I can't stop myself from aging. The planet moves around the sun and I gain another year whether I want it or not. But I can control what goes into my body, what I use to fuel myself and hold myself together and be at the top of my game long enough that I get to decide when I'm done.

“And it’s all my choice.” He’s fired up now. “No one else can make me eat a burrito if I want salmon and broccoli. No one can say that I’m required to eat ice cream just because everyone else is. No one can force me out of my favorite restaurants because they don’t want me there anymore.”

Tears burn at the back of his eyes but he won’t cry. He *can’t* cry. It’s ridiculous, to still be holding on to everything when he’s happy now. He’s got Ilya, they’re married, they play on the same team for every game, and... it doesn’t fix that hole.

“It doesn’t matter why,” he decides, furiously wiping away the stray tears. “It’s just another stupid quirk about me that’s detrimental to my health. I figure you’d be use to that by now.”

Ilya’s quiet for a moment, then he places a kiss on the top of Shane’s head. “You are unhappy.”

Shane jerks back from his grasp and stares at him in disbelief. “Never.”

“You would prefer to be with Montreal. With Hayden,” Ilya says, lips curled in disgust. “Is fair. You did not choose to leave.”

“Yes, I did.” Shane grapples for Ilya’s hands. “I chose you.”

“But, had they not been terrible people, you would have stayed. Made career of it.” Ilya stares at him, not disappointed, just searching. “You prefer Montreal. Is okay. I understand. They are assholes. Did not deserve you. And yet, here we are. Starving yourself will not make them want you.”

That’s when the dam breaks, and Shane’s certain it’s not the one Ilya meant before. The sob rips through his chest and he doubles over, forehead against Ilya’s thigh as his lungs constrict as though all the air has been ripped from the room. The words echo through his head and he can’t come up with a single way to dispute them. He doesn’t even know why he’s crying.

It’s like everything he does is never enough. He can ration and plan like he’s in the middle of a war, but he’ll age out of this sport like everyone else. Someday, none of the teams will want him. He’ll be washed up, useless, left to waste away in his home with no other skills to speak of. He’s not a woodworker, he can barely do a puzzle without overthinking the entire thing and irritating his dad until he’s kicked off the project, he can’t even meditate properly.

“The whole thing sucks,” he says, because there’s no other way to say it. He’s made a mess of Ilya’s sweatpants and he can’t bring himself to lift his head, to meet Ilya’s eyes. “Either I’m thinking about food, eating food, or panicking about food. It’s always there. Like I can’t escape it. If I’m hungry, then I’m doing something right and I feel good about myself. But then I have to eat so I can be a useful part of the team, but there’s so many ways to eat something that will make it all worse and I’ll spend half the game beating myself up for making the wrong choice. I can portion everything out, make sure it’s precisely what the nutritionist says I need to eat, and my whole body tells me that it’s too much. What if it’s only supposed to be one bite? Enough to make my stomach stop growling and for the food noise to temporarily disappear long enough for me to escape the kitchen? Do I need to gorge

myself until I can barely move to make everyone shut the fuck up about the fact that I'm eating like a bird? What am I supposed to do? How do I make it stop?

"I want to think about something else. I want to go about my day worried about hockey and Anya and you, but I can't get my brain to shut up long enough to be fully present. Even when I'm happy, when we win a game and we're all celebrating together or we come back home and have our own celebration, half the time I'm thinking about whether or not someone's going to spring food on me. Do I weigh more this time when you go to pick me up? Did I lose weight and now we're going to have an uncomfortable conversation? Does someone else want to go out and drink? It never stops. I feel like I'm losing my mind."

Ilya rubs his back in small circles and sits in silence, processing this deluge.

Shane bites back the guilt, reminding himself again and again that he isn't the one who started this conversation. Yet... he could have tried to say it in Russian. It would have forced him to think it through, to slow down and help Ilya understand everything he wanted to say. He should have taken a step back. He should have put his thoughts together and then dumped them all on Ilya at a time when he at least knew what he was trying to say. He wants to take it back, to try again.

He wants a Snickers.

"Carbohydrates are necessary for energy," Ilya says out of nowhere.

"Yes, I know." Shane rolls his eyes and goes to pull away, but Ilya drags him back.

"No, no. I did research. You will listen." Ilya holds Shane against his chest, locking him in place with a tight hug. "Carbs are good for the body. Keep brain active. Help think of other things. Be involved. Need protein for muscle growth. Make you big and strong. Scare off rookies. Become new Ryan Price."

"I'm not tall enough," Shane sniffs.

"Can be worked with. If you eat food, that is."

"Eating more food will make me taller?"

Ilya pinches Shane's side. "You know what I mean. Don't be dumbass."

Shane wipes his nose on Ilya's shirt, not at all sorry. "But that's easier said than done. I can't just force myself to eat something. You'd be so sick of me. You must already be sick of me."

"Shut up."

"No, really. I'm sorry." Shane sits up, but Ilya pulls him tight against his chest once more.

"This isn't very boring of me."

"Is very boring. Can't eat food. What dull problem."

“And yet I don’t know how to fix it,” Shane mutters, cheeks burning. “What do I do? Start binge eating in hopes that it eventually evens out?”

“Fire nutritionist. We will find another. Better. Believes in carbs.”

Shane chokes out a laugh.

“But, first, we find you therapist. Like mine. But not Russian. Too tough for polite Canadian boys.”

“Asshole,” Shane mumbles into his chest.

“And you go back to regular boring. That is order.”

“Only if you send everyone home,” Shane negotiates. “Because I don’t really want to talk to them right now.”

“Deal.”

“Thank you,” Shane whispers, “for everything.”

End Notes

Was trying to eat a brownie and realized that maybe I needed to write something for Shane.

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