

oh, tell me now, where was my fault

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oh, tell me now, where was my fault

by [sargeantwoof](#)

Summary

When Shane Hollander sits down across from her, Rose's first thought is *uh oh*.

Her next thought is, *I thought he'd be taller*.

The rest, she supposes, is history.

OR: A Rose can't bloom in a drought.

Notes

apologies in advance for the egregious use of italics!

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

When Shane Hollander sits down across from her, Rose's first thought is *uh oh*.

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The worst part of it all is that she likes Shane.

He's secretly funny, and immediately neurotic, and unbearably kind, and she just keeps telling herself: *get around this tight corner, and you're good, you'll crack it*.

Kissing him is fine. It's—she likes how it feels, a mouth on her, but she's not—she's not into it, she guesses. It sort of feels like she's kissing a friend. Or, maybe this is just how kissing is? She doesn't even know. It's the same as it always is, but it doesn't feel like how her friends have described, and it's certainly not the rush that Miles says it is. It's not like how they describe it in the media, and she knows—knows intimately, at this point—that it's mostly smoke and mirrors, but still, there's got to be some truth in it, right?

Maybe everyone's just lying to each other. She sure as hell wouldn't know. Every time she kisses a man, it's the same cardboard motions and the same damp feeling of *just get it over with*.

Sex, though—

The sex is bad.

The first time, she thinks it's on her. She's not just enough, not pliable enough, not perfect enough in the way she should be. She's damaged goods, she guesses, and that's just how she's built. And that's, well. It's not *good*, but she can try to fix it. She can! And Shane is so lovely about it, and he's embarrassed enough for the two of them, and she doesn't want to make him feel *worse* since he's already underperformed, so she swallows back her worries and just nods when he says *try again next time*?

The second time—

Yeah. Even she can tell he's not into it. And not, in a fixable way, because she's sort of used to fixing it for herself.

It's just.

She thinks she recognizes that face of his, that blurred, wrecked, bloated with fear expression that says *this is not enough*. The cruel lance of *what have I done wrong again*. She's seen it on herself, when she's shown another man the door, and lied through her teeth about how much fun she's had, and she just—

Shit.

It's the first time she lets herself think, and feel, and mean; *what if it's not just me, alone in this?*

What if I'm not the whole problem this time? What if someone else, someone I like and respect and want as a friend—what if they're in this room with me, too?

What does it mean, she wants to shriek, if we're both in agony because this isn't what we want?

In the *Before*—before the fame, the pressure, the notes from her agents—she had tried to voice it.

It had lingered, spilling across her with a filmy, shimmering glaze, a noxious gas of fear.

It's a crystal clear memory.

They're driving home. It's just her mom in the car with her, and it's winter; snow has fallen recently, the trees are a stunning, picturesque white. The roads are clean, clear of detritus, but every glint across the pavement makes her think they're going to hit black ice.

She thinks she's drowning a little bit.

Her stomach hurts. Her fingers are knotted together, her palms sweaty. The radio is on, quiet over the sound of the engine and the low rush of heat blowing from the vents.

Mom, she says, and even after all these years, she can remember how it felt. The way she swallows back bile and nerves, her throat prickling. She wants to touch her mom's hand, wants to cling and hope and say *listen to me* and believe that she'll hear her. *I think that—I think—*

Her words falter. Her mom hums, half-paying attention. Her stomach sinks faster, a whirlpool of dread opening up.

I think I might be a little different, she says, carefully. *I think that I might—*

The radio song changes, *Fix You* by Coldplay spinning on under the host's cheerful voice. She feels stupid, cold as she listens to the opening music, the opening lines.

when you get what you want, but not what you need, Chris Martin croons, and Rose is—there's vomit in her throat. She has to say something, or she's going to die, all of her blood buzzing in her veins too fast for her heart to contain.

Sometimes I think I like girls, she says, in one big gasp, her heart racing. She's never said it to anyone, but she's thought about it a lot. She's pretty sure she *only* likes girls, but that's—that's way too much for now. *Like I think I'd like to, I dunno, it wouldn't freak me out to marry one of my friends. I think I might, actually. Want that, maybe.*

This—this is the part she feels down to her bones, this is the ghost she will never be able to escape.

No, her mom says, and turns up the radio, just a hair.

She doesn't say it sharply, or cruelly, like she's a mistake or like she hates her. She just says it like it's a fact.

No, she says, a period at the end of the thought, a definitive answer, and Rose shrinks back inside, empty of bravery.

Oh, she murmurs, crushed to grit beneath her heels, and the conversation is over as the car's lights sweep across the snow, glittering and inescapable.

She keeps it together through the conversation with Shane. She lets herself smile at the driver when she scrambles into the car after, and she bites her lip to keep from crying, and she's good, and she's perfect, and she's not folding under this pressure, she's not thinking about the tears in his eyes, about the relief in his face. She's not thinking about how shallow his nod was, but how deeply, unyieldingly truthful and brave, and she's not crumbling to ash inside. She's not folding her nails in until they bite at the soft palm of her hands, and she's not crying, she's not, not when paparazzi are waiting to get her, when there's headlines in the wings, when her relationship with a man has just crumbled and she's back to being a singular entity and somehow all the worse for it in the eyes of the world.

She will not be hysterical about this. She will not. She cannot be reduced to this; not when there are knots in her soul she's yet to touch, let alone untangle.

She thinks about that *no* too much.

She needs to stop. She just, it's like what her mom always says, she just needs to find the right person. The right guy.

And then, it'll—it'll all be okay. She's trying, christ almighty. Harder than anything, just about.

It's all she has, now.

She says *tell them you're keeping my big lesbian secret* and almost throws up, staring at the thick blue smeared across her skin; a shapeshifter 'til the bitter fucking end.

Then she says, *oh, no, I wish*, and it's gone again, another false face to hide behind.

Shane visits.

He's unmistakably, unbelievably happy.

She can't believe she ever thought he was even *okay* before.

I have a boyfriend, he blurts out, the first night when they're three moscow mules deep, but really *six*, given how heavy her pours have been. *I love him*.

She thumps him in the arm, uncaring that it's the one holding her drink, too excited to notice that she's splattering liquid all over her cushions.

What?! she shrieks. Her heart folds in and then explodes. She doesn't think she's ever been so red-faced with sheer happiness. She's dizzy with unrelenting joy, thrilled at the taste of glee that's rolling around her mouth. *Tell me everything*.

And miracle of miracles, he does.

The long, sordid tale spills out of him; secrets whispered and kept, hearts unlocked with every unsteady step, and at the end of it, she's close to crying, and he's no better.

I love you, she says, catching his cheeks between her palms. *You're my best friend in the whole world*.

He beams at her, flushed and floppy, loose with alcohol and joy. *I love you too*, he says, like it's never been a question.

She, because she is normal and good at friendship, bursts into tears.

I want to be normal, she spits out, vicious and cutting, staring at her reflection.

She's sixteen. She's years away from her big break. She wants to be normal.

There's no such thing as normal, her mom says, her eyes already sliding away. *Or are you practicing your lines, honey?*

Practicing, Rose says, and doesn't even try to make up a lie about what it's for. Her mom's not going to ask anything else.

Whoa, Shane says, his hands fluttering over her. Even as she loses her dignity, she knows he's going to be bad at comforting her and has to swallow down a hysterical laugh. *Rose?*

I love you, she weeps. *But I think I've been lying to you*.

She's lonely, she thinks.

A burden of being a star, her agent chirps. *A stepping stone until you're settled*, her mom says. *Dude, you're famous now*, one of her brothers says, and then ignores her texts for three weeks.

She wonders, sometimes, if it's the loneliness that's carved her into this. If she's invited this ungainly need into her heart simply by being too open. If she's brought this on herself, since she's always greedy for more.

She sort of wants to apologize about it.

She also, in the deep, dark caverns of her heart, wants to let it dig its thorns into her until she's a bloody mess of nothing but heart and passion, unleashed and unwound; unable to be contained.

She doesn't, though.

She behaves.

I didn't mean to, she finally gets out, curled into Shane's arms. Distantly, she imagines headlines if people could see them now, and shudders, sinking into his grip when his hands sweep across her spine. She thinks this is the most intimate they've ever been, and isn't that a trip and a half? *I just—I tried, you know? I really thought I could do it. I thought you were—well, I—*

Take your time, Shane says, calm and gentle. *No rush*.

I have to say things weird, she says, like that makes any sense. But she's past making sense a little bit, past being palatable all the time. And Shane's safe. He's wonderful and easy and utterly taken and gay and completely, unmistakably safe. *But it's important, and I'm not making fun*.

Okay, Shane murmurs without pause. *I'm listening*.

At the restaurant, she says, not needing to specify anything further as Shane shifts against her. *You—I was—I think—it hurt me*.

Shane stills underneath her, even as his hands continue to drag across her back.

Not, like—not because of you, she says, worrying at the skin between her knuckles. *But because of you*.

I'm confused, Shane murmurs, but his hands don't stop.

She starts to cry again.

I got to watch you have this precious, fragile moment, she says, wiping her nose on her sleeve. *And it was so fucking important. For you. And, and I don't want to be weird, but for me, too*.

Because we broke up? Shane asks, and she fights the urge to giggle, wet and solemn and honest; there's no one else she wants to be here.

Because I wanted that honesty too, she says, and all of her tears stop. *I think I—I'm a lesbian. But I didn't even know. I didn't mean to lie.*

Wow, Shane says, after a beat. *Ilya really has nothing to worry about, huh?*

When Rose starts to laugh, it feels like sunshine in her soul.

By the time she gets to meet Ilya, for real, in person, months have passed.

“Ah,” he says, as she steps out of the car, his hands on his hips, a wide grin on his face. His face is familiar from their FaceTimes, cheerful and happy in a way she only ever sees around Shane. “Miss Rose Landry.”

She laughs, beaming back. “Hi,” she says, rolling her eyes when Shane bats her hands away from her luggage. “Is it weird if I hug you?”

“Only if you make it so,” Ilya says, and yanks her into a tight hug. “Welcome to our home,” he murmurs into her hair, and she sinks into his grip, her eyes damp. “I am glad to host, and double glad because you are not here to steal my Shane away.”

She laughs, bright and loud, over Shane's squawking disapproval. “He can't be stolen away,” she says, into his shoulder as his hug tightens. “He loves you too much.”

“It is still good to know,” Ilya says, unashamed as he pulls back. “I am glad he met you, Rose Landry.”

Rose's mouth trembles. “I am too,” she says, and settles her hand on his arm. She meets his eyes, sees the quicksilver startled look he levels at her, before it smooths out into something easy. The air tastes sweet as she inhales, thick with pollen and the taste of lake water and pond scum. She hopes it settles in her lungs, depresses the last of that acrid city air out of her. “But, even more than that, I'm glad that he met *you*, Ilya Rozanov.”

“Is no one glad they met me?” Shane mutters from the steps, sighing. She can hear the delight in his voice, though, and knows that Ilya can absolutely hear it too. He's such a shitty liar, and she's so fucking glad she knows him. So fucking glad she has him. “I feel like I should be the hot commodity.”

“He is so needy,” Ilya says, his eyes twinkling. “I think being a lesbian is the smartest choice you have made.” He gestures at Shane. “See what I have to deal with?”

“*Ilya*,” Shane hisses, glaring at him, even as a fond smile unstitches from the corner of his mouth. Rose thinks it's impossible to be frightened here, in the warm sunshine stretching down from the swollen egg-yolk sun, the future impossibly far and near, all at once. “You're the worst.”

“Ah,” Ilya says, grinning wildly, love clear. He hooks his arm with Rose's and begins to walk her up the steps, guiding her in. “But I am your worst, and that is all the difference.”

The days stretch as they do in the summer, long and sweet, flames flickering across their faces, nights gone in a flash.

She settles into a rhythm with them, does yoga with Shane some mornings, and heckles him with Ilya others. She meets Svetlana over FaceTime, this mysterious woman who steals her breath away, who Shane teases her about, but Ilya doesn't, somehow knowing that it's still too raw for him to prod at.

She drinks too much ginger ale, and laughs until her sides hurt, and she feels gloriously, stupendously normal.

She never even knew she could be.

When they part, she presses kisses against both of their mouths, quick, fleeting *thank you's* that sting when she draws away.

She can't tell them how much it means to have been seen. To have the sun. To be heard and listened to and known and loved.

How beautiful, to even have glimpsed this, she thinks, and cries the whole way back to LA.

Her first morning alone, she wakes up to a new group chat and an unknown number, sitting pretty at the top of her messages.

hi, the unknown number says, *this is svetlana. ilya said you may want a friend, or even more if you are not—if i have not overstepped, and i am often on the west coast. you are very interesting, rose landry. would you like to go to dinner? my treat.*

i gave your number to svetlana by way of this group chat, Ilya's text reads in their new group chat when she taps out of Svetlana's message. *in case you are confused.*

be nice, Shane has sent. *rose, no pressure, ilya thinks he's being helpful*

Svetlana's renamed the chat to: you are the worst ilya

Ilya's renamed the chat to: i am most helpful

Shane's renamed the chat to: stop fighting, all love

Rose stares at *stop fighting, all love*, ignoring the rest of the messages that devolve into petty bickering, and goes back to Svetlana's message.

hi, she types, hope springing up in her soul. She feels like she's stepped into the lake at Shane's cottage, thick, cool mud welling up between her toes, cool water lapping at her shins. She's staring at the horizon as the sun rises, and it feels like she can do anything.

She can do *anything*.

yes, she continues, her heart in her throat. *i would like that. if it's not too forward, it's a date?*

Svetlana responds immediately. *not too forward at all. it's a date, rose landry. i'm looking forward to it.*

me too, Rose sends, and means it.

End Notes

fun fact, & not to get too crazy on here, but that interaction with her mom is inspired by completely true events. family is hard. if your family tells you you're not valid, guess what, they're fucking wrong, and you can point them in my direction. i've got your back.

the deliberate use of italics in this was both for the love of the game [italics] and because i wanted it to feel like a ghost of a story a little bit. not quite centered on, even though i wrote a whole fic about it. this one was def a strange one, but rose is so fun to write. i have a way lighter roselana fic in my [30+, uh oh] drafts.

lmk what you think, and find me on [twit!](#)

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