

Circuit Breaker

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Circuit Breaker

by [Shanebug \(Wildandflourecent\)](#)

Summary

Shane sighed, but nodded. “I’m just so tired of this. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life dealing with it.”

Shane thought he was angry, but the sentiment just came out sounding sad. Ilya took a deep breath, running his wedding band along Shane’s cheek.

“I know, Sweetheart. But you also have me for the rest of your life. Dealing with it with you.

Tears pricked the corner of Shane’s eyes. Ilya pressed a kiss over his heart, where his head still lay.

Or, glimpses of Shane navigating sensory overload throughout his life, and the ways those around him impact it.

Notes

The self injury is not graphic and is meltdown-induced, but I still felt I should tag it, more details at the end. Let me know if there is a better way to catalog it.

I have a few fics I am working on right now that I hit a roadblock with, and as it usually goes, I threw myself into writing something in 48 hours. This is a weird piece to me, but I think it’s necessary groundwork for where I want this Est. 2021 series to go. It also is necessary to me on a personal level. It would be blatantly untrue to say any thread of this is not directly taken from my own experiences with family (good and bad), in locker rooms, with well-meaning but clueless friends, and with a partner that truly gets it.

► More notes on autism, sensory overload, and Shane.

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

It was Christmas and Shane was sitting in the corner. All around him, cousins swirled and screamed. Music blared. Drunk uncles roared with laughter. Aunts shouted over the TV playing Christmas movies. The flashing of the gaudy display in the yard across the street made the living room pulse with light that only Shane seemed to be able to see.

Throughout the night, Shane had wormed his way further and further back into the room, and now found himself almost under the tree. His aunt's small white cat curled in his lap, he hummed to himself to try and block out the noise, but it still wasn't enough. Shane couldn't breathe.

"Hey honey, let's go eat," Mom said, crouching down at his eye level. Shane shook his head, hands buried in the cat on his lap.

"The kitty will still be here when you are done eating, Shane. I know you are hungry."

Shane shook his head again. He was hungry, but if he left this corner, he'd have to go in the kitchen, and in the kitchen were all of the adults who ruffled his hair and asked questions he didn't know how to answer.

Unfortunately, it was too late, and his protest drew attention.

"Hey kiddo, why hide down there? It's Christmas!" One of his uncles boomed, dropping to his knees next to Mom and shoving his face into Shane's space. The cat darted away with the sudden movement, and Shane could feel his lip quivering.

"Aww c'mon, bud. You won't be so cranky once you eat." His uncle reached to pick him up, the sudden movement throwing bright light into Shane's face.

"NOOOOO." Shane wailed, and started flailing.

"Woah woah woah!" His uncle fumbled with him, immediately setting him back down. "I've never heard him make a noise that loud," he quipped at Mom. Mom didn't respond.

The panic in Shane rose. All he could do is cry and plead and try to shake himself out of the mounting fear in him. He didn't know what was happening, he just knew everything was dangerous.

"Shane, baby." He was vaguely aware Mom was talking but it was too much, he stuck his thumb in his mouth and tried to focus everything into one point of attention. He was four, he was a big boy now, and Mom kept telling him this to try to get him to stop the habit, but he needed it right now.

"Shaney, please listen to me."

Mom sounded scared. Shane tried to find her eyes, but his gaze took in his uncle still hovering, and the crowd forming behind mom's shoulder staring at him. It hurt. Shane felt bad for making Mom scared, but the nervous energy radiating off of her made everything even worse. Shane bit the hand in his mouth.

"Honey," Mom reached towards Shane, and he sobbed louder when she made contact. "I'm sorry I'm sorry I know," she pleaded, as she took both of Shane's little fists in hers and pulled bigger wails up from him. "We need to be safe with our body."

Shane could feel the crowd of onlooking family members pressing closer, and shame was mounting with everything else.

"Alright everyone, go eat. Give them some space." Shane heard Dad call from over his own panicked breathing.

He was aware of Mom's arms wrapping around him. He squirmed at first, but she was soon holding him too close to move. She then squeezed him tight, rocking him back and forth in her lap.

The motion and pressure was just enough for Shane to have something to focus on besides his need to feel grounding pain, and he redirected all his energy into crying harder.

Mom didn't say anything, just squeezing and rocking him until Shane had cried for so long that his body went limp in her arms.

At this point, he was exhausted, a new kind of haze setting in.

"You're okay baby, I'm right here" Mom whispered quietly. Shane went limp in her arms, burying his face in her sweater. "Do you want food?"

Shane shook his head violently.

"Okay, okay. What do you need?"

"I don't knowwww," Shane wailed again.

Mom hummed, pulling her fingers through his hair

"Do you want some time to calm down and join everyone or do you want to go home?"

"I- I want-" it took him a couple tries between hiccups. "I want to go home."

"Okay, honey, okay. I'll tell Dad." She went to stand up but Shane panicked again.

"No please don't leave me," he pleaded.

"Hey, hey," Mom cupped his face in her hands. "You'll be okay baby I promise. I'm just going to tell Dad to warm the car up and then I'll be right back."

Shane didn't even know why that thought scared him, but in his confusion it did. His mom's touch, which hurt so bad just a few minutes ago, now felt like all he had to tether him to reality.

"Look," Mom said. "The cat is under the tree."

Mom pointed to a little white face poking out of the branches at Shane.

"She likes you, Shaney. I bet if you sit here real still while I get Dad she'll come back to you."

Shane nodded, sniffing but becoming still as a statue, making it his mission for the kitty to come sit with him again.

Mom got up gently, and Shane used all the willpower in him to try to keep his breath steady so his hand extended towards the cat wouldn't shake.

Eventually, she slinked out and, and nuzzled her face into Shane's hand. By the time mom came back, she was next to Shane, rumbling a steady pur.

2003

Shane was in the very back of the bus. His team was on the return home from a long tournament and he was exhausted. His body was beaten and bruised, and they didn't have the wins to show for it. That didn't seem to deter the other boys on his team though, who screamed equally as rowdy as a return home when they won. The conversations swirled, mixing with ever bump and jostle of the bus. The hum of the group, the musk of sweat and potent bad body spray that was distinctly teenager mixed in the air, reminding Shane that he was the youngest on his U14 team. It made him feel small. He didn't fit in with the boisterous, rapidly growing guys. He wasn't used to fitting in with most of his teams though, so instead he tried to focus on his book as he curled into a seat. Today, they seemed committed to including him for once.

"What about you Hollander, hmm?" One of the largest guys threw a sock at him to get his attention. "Kiss any girls yet or are you still a baby?"

"Piss off" Shane snapped, throwing the sock back. Somehow, the guys thought it was hilarious, and Shane cringed as their laughter raised the collective volume even higher.

"Bro, maybe if you got your nose out of your books you could catch some pussy," one taunted.

Shane reddened, but he wasn't sure why. He tried to calm his breathing like his mom taught him, but it wasn't working. He let his nails rake up and down his arm.

The guys kept poking and prodding him with questions, but Shane couldn't hear them. He didn't want it to seem like he was too young to be here. He thought if he played hard enough, was diligent enough, he'd fit, but it wasn't enough. He was mad at his teammates, but even

madder at himself. He could feel the tears welling up, but even in his haze, he knew that was the fastest way to make things even worse for himself.

“Hollander what the fuck, you’re bleeding,” finally cued him back to the conversation. Shane looked at his arm and realized he drew blood. He quickly pulled his hoodie sleeve back down, and the questioning of ‘What the hell?’ intensified. His heart pounded in his ears and his teammates words spun faster and faster around him.

“FUCKING SHUT THE FUCK UP” Shane was yelling before he even realized the words were leaving his mouth. The guys looked at him, stunned that their usually-docile teammate had snapped.

“Bro chill out, we were just joking,” one of them said. “You don’t have to get all scary.”

Shane wasn’t sure if they said much else, as his vision tunneled down to the page he had been reading, never to be flipped for the rest of the bus ride home.

2011

Shane could feel the world shrinking in around him in that familiar way as he lost the battle with exhaustion. His first All Stars Weekend had bled straight into a road trip. The initial rush of being with Ilya had faded into duller emotional fatigue, and while most of the team was refreshed after a few days off, Shane was running on fumes.

He fought hard as he sat at a dinner with his teammates. It felt like it took every ounce of energy he had to not let his eyes get painfully pulled into the four different TVs flashing in the restaurant. Hayden tried to say a few things to him, but every time Shane reached into his brain for words, he couldn’t more than a grunt out of his mouth. Usually when this happened, he panicked, but tonight he was too tired to care. He was so desperate to get to their room and bury himself under the covers. As Shane caught the occasional word out of the thrum of five conversations at once, he realized everyone was making plans to go out. He chewed on his bottom lip, cycling through the relief of the stimulation and reminding himself not to draw blood. He should think of an excuse, he should make up a reason, but his brain was bluescreening behind his eyes and he resolved himself to being a ghost for the night, drug along the streets and clubs with his drunk teammates, a million miles away from his consciousness.

When they returned back to the hotel room to change though, Hayden didn’t reach for the light. He quickly pulled on a different shirt, and then went to leave without waiting for Shane to follow.

“Wha-?” Shane searched for words.

“What, did you want to come?” Hayden paused in the doorway. “You just had that scary android eye glaze thing happening so I figured you wanted the night in.”

Shane’s already-empty brain lagged. Hayden sensed the confusion.

“I know how you get man, I just thought I’d change and then I’ll be out of your way for a while. I know you need to reboot or whatever.”

Shane was taken aback by someone else having an awareness that something was wrong. He was so used to pushing it down and trying to be normal. It seemed that he wasn’t doing as good a job as he thought.

It was a relief to know he had the room to himself, and Hayden was trying to be understanding, but still. Something stung in Shane. Hayden treated him with white gloves. He was talking about him like he was a faulty robot that had broken down, and not a real person. He had completely written off Shane for the night. Not that Shane even wanted to go, but the dismissal that he was an assumed wet blanket for the foreseeable future without expressing it still hurt.

Shane took a deep breath. He was spiraling. He needed to lay down in the dark for as long as possible, and he needed to just be grateful Hayden was letting him do it.

”Um, thanks” Shane whispered.

“Yeah man, I’ll try to be quiet when I come back.”

As Shane lay there alone in the dark, he supposed he did feel like an alien. How could his body, one that gave him a career in being a well-oiled machine, still fail him when it came to the most basic human functions?

2018

Shane felt it early, the dull pain behind his eyes, the thrumming in his chest. He was getting better at the whole thing. He changed his hoodie from the branded one that was slightly scratchy to one of his own. He took off his watch. He took out his hair that was pulled back tightly. He put his headphones on. He tried to just block it all out, but the chaos of the bus still pushed through. It was supposed to be a short shuttle ride from the airport to the hotel, but a car crash had them trapped as a cranky team mounted in their frustrations.

Shane tried to do what he knew he needed to. He pulled on a sunglasses to block the lights of oncoming traffic, but they hurt his head. He tried to move to a back corner of the bus, but the idling engine still rattled under him, the slow stop and start of the bus creeping through the rubbernecking making him nauseous. He rhythmically snapped the hair tie across his wrist instead of chewing on the inside of his cheek, but it wasn’t a strong enough sensation. He tried to keep himself present on his own, but he felt himself slipping away. He remembered that Ilya had already made it back to Boston from his own road trip that night, so he pulled out his phone.

Jane

R u awake

Ilya liked to tease Shane for how formally he usually texted, but right now Shane could only force out the minimum motor skills.

Lily

Yes, are you ok?

Jane

2 mch happening

Lily

What is?

Jane

Stuck in traffic

I'm so tired

i want my bed

I dont want to melt down

Lily

It's ok if you do

Jane

No it's not it's embarrassing

Lily

I know

Jane

Everyone else handles change fine

Its not fair

Lily

No, it's not

What do you wish you had?

Jane

Any bed

you

Lily

incoming call

Jane

call declined

Can't talk

Lily

Don't have to, just connect your headphones

incoming call

Shane triple checked his Bluetooth was connected, and then answered Ilya's call.

"Hi" Shane croaked out, it took everything in him.

"No talking," Ilya said so softly. "I'm going to talk to you so you have me with you, text me if you need something. If you want me to stop talking, just hang up on me, I promise I do not mind. Okay?"

Jane



Shane closed his eyes and leaned his head back against the seat. Ilya started up quiet murmurings in his deep, throaty voice. He told Shane about his day, about the dogs he saw in the park on his morning run, about a new recipe he was trying. He told Shane about his Christmas present ideas for David and Yuna, about the relationship drama of every one of his teammates. He told Shane about all the ways he missed him, about all the ways he loved him, about how badly he wanted to be there in person with Shane.

In the safty of Ilya's voice wrapping around him, Shane let himself go. He rolled his hoodie strings between his teeth and every time panick welled in him, he tried harder to listen to Ilya's voice. Shane wasn't sure how long he sat there folding into himself. As their shuttle finally pulled up to the hotel, he realized Ilya had switched to Russian at some point. Shane was getting better, but his brain simply refused to translate in this state as the familiar lilt flowed through him. He kept the tones wrapped around him like a blanket for as long as he could, until they were in the hotel lobby.

Jane

Made it, getting our room, need to go

“Okay sweetheart, keep your headphones on if you can.”

Jane

Ik, ty

“Always Shane. Thank you for telling me. I love you.”

Jane

love you too

“Go get some sleep, I'm going to hang up now.”

Jane



Shane trailed behind Hayden as he let him collect their keycards and guid him to the room. He ignored the knowing eyes Hayden threw at him as he collapsed face first into the bed, not even bothering to change. He was exhausted, but further in him, the warmth of Ilya's voice was still coursing through his veins.

2022

Shane and Ilya were on day 6 of a 7 day Italian vacation with David and Yuna. Today they were going to the Roman history museum David was planning as the highlight of his trip. Shane was exhausted. He knew that besides Ilya, his parents were the least embarrassing people to ask for a break from. However, they had been his and Ilya's cornerstone through their outing and first year of marriage, and this trip was Shane's thank you present to them. He wasn't going to ruin it by needing to slow down.

So Shane kept his sunglasses on throughout the whole day. He slipped ear plugs in when the children in the museum screamed. He wore the dorky tourist neck fan. He set a timer on his phone to spend 5 minutes in the cool tiled bathroom for every 30 that passed.

Shane flinched when a soft hand clasped his arm.

"Sorry honey," Yuna said, quickly pulling back. "Doing okay? I know that look."

Shane nodded "I'll lie down when we go back."

She nodded, seemingly satisfied by that.

Just a few more hours he told himself, as the heat in the basement gallery rose and tourists crowded around them. *We could have gone anywhere in the world*, Shane thought, but his parents wanted Italy in July. Shane would give them the world if he could, but it was currently killing him.

David was monologuing about something, and Shane was trying to do his best to nod along and keep things moving. His stomach dropped as he suddenly realized a shutdown was quickly becoming unavoidable. He did the math in his head. If he was going to shut down, maybe he could time it for the train ride home so he didn't have to be as bothered by the crowds. That would probably be risking a meltdown, but at least they'd be in for the night.

His thoughts were interrupted by Ilya wrapping himself around Shane and squeezing tightly.

"We are going back now, parents can meet us later," he said in a low voice.

Shane was shaking his head, but Ilya was already turning to David.

"I think you will want to stay far longer than Shane, and he needs a break. We are going to go home."

David seemed to pull his eyes from the art for the first time and frowned when he noticed Shane.

“Bud, why didn’t you say anything?” Shane tried to form an apology, but Ilya was already pulling him out of the gallery.

When they got back, Ilya closed the bedroom shades shut, turned on brown noise from his phone, and flipped on the window unit that he had insisted they have despite Shane’s complaints that it was narrowing their options for an “authentic” Italian villa. He then wordlessly stripped Shane down to his boxers and then did the same to himself as Shane collapsed into bed.

“Want me to stay?” Ilya whispered quietly. Shane nodded, and reached a hand out towards him, pulling Ilya down on top of himself. Ilya brought his entire weight down into Shane’s torso, bracketing Shane’s arms and legs with his.

Shane instantly felt his brain go still, the air cooling around him, the human weighted blanket and the comfort of it being Ilya skin-to-skin grounding him. They lay there for a long time, and Shane slipped further into his mind. It was quiet though, a reset he was letting himself have rather than a system failure he fought his nervous system on. It didn’t matter, with nowhere to be and no one around.

Oh, except they had dinner plans. Fuck. They weren’t even supposed to go back to the villa and Shane had completely forgotten the reservation he had made at the fancy place his mom had been looking forward to. He was fucking it all up.

“Hey. Hey.” Ilya picked his head up from Shane’s chest, where a pressed ear had definitely heard his heart rate pick up.

“You are ok, I have you,” Ilya murmured. “Breathe with me.” Ilya took long animated breaths, his expanding rib cage pressing into Shane. Shane focused on matching the pace. Slowly, Ilya’s breathing grew even deeper, and Shane matched it. The silliness of their sternums battling for space eventually making Shane let out a small laugh.

“Ilya, the reservation,” Shane started.

“I know, I pushed it back to 8,” Ilya said matter-of-factly. “We have plenty of time.”

Shane hummed, trying to void himself of the adrenaline spike his brain had already released.

“I thought I got better at managing this. It’s been so long,” Shane said. “I didn’t realize it was happening until it was too late.”

“You did manage it. You did everything you should, including leave, and now we are here. Managing it.” Ilya said, matter of factly. “It’s been so long because you know what to do in your normal routine. It is okay that an 7 day trip is not part of your regular routine.”

“I’m ruining it for Mom and Dad,” Shane whined, not caring that he sounded like a child.

“Shane, no you are not.” Ilya said firmly, propping himself up on one elbow to take in Shane’s face. “Ruining it would be hurting yourself to be with them, they would not like that.”

Shane huffed as Ilya cupped a hand around his face.

“Look, you can speak, yes?”

”Yeah.” Shane buried his now-free hand in Ilya’s hair.

“Would you be able to right now if we stayed until David reads every single boring plaque in a museum spanning 2,000 years?”

“Probably not,” Shane mutters.

“Good, so you rest now, so you can be good to talk for dinner. And if you are not, that is okay, and we can let him tell us about every plaque we missed.”

Shane sighed, but nodded.

“I’m just so tired of this. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life dealing with it.” Shane thought he was angry, but the sentiment just came out sounding sad.

Ilya took a deep breath, running his wedding band along Shane’s cheek. “I know, Sweetheart. But you also have me for the rest of your life. Dealing with it with you.”

Tears pricked the corner of Shane’s eyes. Ilya pressed a kiss over his heart, where his head still lay.

“Okay?” Ilya whispered.

“Yeah,” Shane whispered back. Ilya craned his neck up to press a kiss to the underside of Shane’s jaw, before returning his head back to Shane’s chest.

A soft knock rapt on their bedroom door a little while later. “Boys?” Mom called quietly.

“Come in” Ilya called back, bracketing his hands around Shane’s ears as he spoke. Shane playfully batted them away.

“I just wanted to ask, oh-“ Yuna seemed to melt. “You two look so sweet, can I take a picture?”

Frankly, the idea was absurd, documenting Shane just barely back from the edge of a shut down, both of them in their underwear. Something about the comforting way his hands ran through Ilya’s curls while Ilya’s weight still held him down felt cozy though, so Shane complied.

His sense about it was right though, as Yuna sent the photo in their group chat a few days later, along with one of Ilya wrapping him up in the museum. The dusk light, softened by the

curtains, made the whole room glow. Their bodies fit together perfectly, and Shane couldn't help but notice how relaxed his face was.

Mom

two images attached

Seeing you two love each other in the open and in private was the best part of the trip. ❤️

End Notes

► Self Injury

This can be considered a prequel to [Did I hold you facing away from me?](#)>If these little moments feel open-ended, it's because this is how this phenomenon feels to me. It is not something that can be cured, and it has presented differently throughout my life at different ages, levels of emotional regulation, and understanding of myself. It's not something that will get closure, only better integration into the rest of my life.

The final scene was greatly inspired by [this beautiful piece by @drawballa](#)

[I know A03 comments have been weird lately, but your thoughts fuel me so I made a twitter if you want to come yap <3.](#)

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!