

Twelve Years, Still Ours

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Twelve Years, Still Ours

by [leialoo7](#)

Summary

Twelve years after filming their first CCM ad together, Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov are asked to return for a follow-up campaign. The offer sparks reflection and conversation about privacy, visibility, and what it means to exist openly as a married couple in the NHL.

“Okay,” Farah said, brightly. “So. CCM reached out.”

Shane straightened instinctively. He and Ilya were both sponsored by CCM, they had been for years. Would CCM pull their sponsorships now that they were publicly out? Would they only want to keep working with one of them now that they were married and would be playing on the Centaurs together this season?

“They want you two for a new ad campaign,” she continued, eyes sparkling. “A twelve-year retrospective referencing the one you shot together the summer before your rookie year.”

Chapter 1: The Call

Summer 2022—Ottawa

Shane adjusted the collar of his blue shirt in the mirror, smoothing it once, then again. Then he immediately started messing with his hair for the third time that afternoon, because apparently nothing wanted to cooperate today.

Behind him, the closet door rattled.

He turned to find Ilya on his hands and knees, rummaging through the closet like a Russian raccoon.

“What are you even looking for?” Shane asked.

“My black T-shirt,” Ilya said without looking up. “The one that makes me look hot.”

Shane blinked. “Ilya... they all make you look hot.”

Ilya paused, glanced over his shoulder, and smirked. “Yes. But this one makes me look *extra* hot.”

Shane rolled his eyes but felt his cheeks heat. “Okay, fine, but I don’t want to be late. It’s my first social event with the team and I want everyone to like me.”

“They will love you,” Ilya said, walking over to give Shane a kiss, with what was presumably the hot black T-shirt, clutched in his hand. “Everyone is very happy to not have to play *against* you this season.”

Shane smiled at him. “All right, how much time do we have?” He reached for his phone on the table behind him to check, and noticed two new messages from their agent Farah.

Farah: Are you and Ilya together right now?

Farah: Can you FaceTime for 5 minutes?

Shane inhaled sharply.

“Ilya,” he said slowly, “Farah wants to talk.”

Ilya froze mid-motion, with his shirt halfway on and still covering his face. He came to and finished pulling the shirt all the way on. Oh. That *was* the hot one. “She did not say why?”

Shane shook his head and tried to stop his mind from racing. “Should we just call her right now? I don’t know if I’ll be able to relax tonight if we don’t find out what she wants.”

Ilya sat down on the edge of their bed and patted the space next to him.

Shane settled in beside him and took his hand, exchanging a resigned glance before pressing the call button.

Farah's face filled the screen. "Hi guys! Great, you're together."

Ilya nodded.

Shane swallowed.

"Okay," Farah said, brightly. "So. CCM reached out."

Shane straightened instinctively. He and Ilya were both sponsored by CCM, they had been for years. Would CCM pull their sponsorships now that they were publicly out? Would they only want to keep working with one of them now that they were married and would be playing on the Centaurs together this season?

"They want you two for a new ad campaign," she continued, eyes sparkling. "A twelve-year retrospective referencing the one you shot together the summer before your rookie year."

Shane's breath caught.

Twelve years.

He glanced over at his bedside table where a still from that day sat framed. It showed Ilya and Shane staring into each other's eyes in a simulated face-off position, but instead of the intensity the director had wanted, they were laughing. Ilya had somehow tracked down the photographer and gifted it to him last Christmas. It was Shane's favorite photo.

They were so young. That version of Shane still had so much to learn about himself.

That shoot had been... intense. Confusing. Electrically charged in a way he hadn't had words for at the time. And afterward... Shane remembered how he wasn't able to look away from Ilya in the showers. He had never felt such a magnetic pull toward someone before. It was the first day they'd kissed. The first time they'd hooked up.

"Wow. I cannot believe it has been twelve years," Ilya said wistfully, as though his mind had gone to the same place Shane's had.

Shane squeezed Ilya's hand. "So... what exactly did they have in mind?"

"They want to do a modern follow up showcasing you both now with callbacks to where you started. It would highlight your historic and record-breaking careers, of course. They also want to build a narrative around what you mean to the league and its fans now. Not just as veteran players but also as a married couple, and as—" she paused and smiled softly. "—Icons."

Shane flushed.

"You think it is a good idea for us to do this?" Ilya asked Farah.

“I do.” She responded. “The league is changing. They want to be a part of that change. It would be good for their brand and I think it would be good for you two as well. You wouldn’t have to do or reveal anything that you don’t want to. A lot of people are interested in your lives outside of hockey and this would give you an opportunity to control the narrative a bit.”

Ilya set his hand on Shane’s thigh and leaned forward to look into his eyes. “What do you think?”

Shane held his gaze, not yet sure how to put his thoughts into words.

“Take your time. You don’t have to decide right now,” Farah said gently. “Just think about it. I truly think it would be a positive thing for you both but you are absolutely under no obligation to say yes to this.”

“Okay.” Shane nodded, throat tight. “Thanks, we’ll let you know.”

Farah ended the call and Shane slowly lowered his phone.

Ilya slid to his knees in front of Shane and reached up to caress the side of his face with one hand. “Sweetheart. We do not have to do this.”

“Ilya, they’re going to ask us about our rivalry, about that first shoot. What if, when people find out how long we’ve been together, they look at all of our accomplishments differently. Like we didn’t actually earn them. After the way Montreal reacted to you knocking us out of the playoffs—”

“Screw Montreal. You are here now, and no one in Ottawa was dumb enough to think that you did not put everything you had into that game,” Ilya interjected. “And we don’t have to tell them anything we are not comfortable sharing. Farah said that. We will have some control.”

“It’s not that I don’t want to be open about us,” Shane clarified quickly. “We *are* open. The league knows, the fans know, everyone knows... Thanks to Brad.”

“Yes. Happy Birthday to Brad.” Ilya smiled softly, patiently waiting for Shane to continue.

“I’m so happy we don’t have to hide what we are to each other anymore. I love you so much and I love that the world finally knows it.” Shane paused. “But doing a CCM commercial about the details of our story? About everything we kept secret for years?” He felt his throat get tight. “We had to keep our relationship separate from hockey for so long, it just seems weird to put it all out there for public scrutiny in an advertisement for hockey gear now. I don’t know... It’s like we would be putting a spotlight on something that’s always been just ours.”

Ilya nodded, looking away thoughtfully. “We hid for a long time. Then everything was public. Very public. It is a lot. Let’s not make a decision right now.” He gathered Shane’s hands into his own and leaned down to kiss his fingers. “We will figure it out together, moy krasnyy velosiped.”

Shane's eyes flicked upward as he racked his brain for the words. "Red bicycle?"

Ilya smiled brightly. "Yes. Good job. Now come on, we should head to Bood's house for the BBQ. Harris said he is bringing the cider that his sisters make. It is amazing. Everyone is excited to see you."

Chapter 2: Around the Fire

“Hollander, my man!” Bood barreled out the front door to his house, pushing past Ilya to envelop Shane in a giant bear hug. “So glad you could make it.”

“Oh!” Shane yelped, stumbling back from the force of Bood’s enthusiastic body crashing into him. “Yeah, me too. Thanks for having us over. Your house is beautiful.”

“I am also here,” Ilya said, a huge smile splitting across his face at both the sight of their teammate welcoming Shane so warmly, as well as Shane’s obvious effort to not look completely flustered by the show of affection.

“Yeah, finally!” Bood replied, releasing Shane. “Although now I understand why you blew off most of my invites over the last few years.”

“Yes,” Ilya said, grinning fondly at Shane. “We were busy. Sorry.”

Shane blushed.

“No worries at all, I’m happy you’re here now,” Bood said, clapping Ilya loudly on the back. “Come on in you guys, everyone is out back. I made way too much food so you gotta help us make a dent in it.”

Ilya followed them through the house, the familiar chaos of a Centaur’s gathering already audible-overlapping conversations, bursts of laughter, and some terrible country song that indicated that Dykstra had somehow wrestled control of the speakers. The back doors were wide open, and the smell of grilled chicken and something sweet and smoky hit him immediately.

The second they stepped outside they were greeted with cheers of, “Hey, Captain,” “Roz, our fearless leader,” and “Is that Shane Hollander, Ottawa’s hometown hero?”

“Grab plates,” Bood called from the grill once the noise had died down a bit. “We’ve got jerk chicken, ribs, potato salad, plantains, and there’s pelau over on the table. If you don’t know what it is, just trust me.”

Ilya and Shane took turns adding various foods to each other’s plates then migrated over to a table where Harris, Troy, and Wyatt, were already sitting.

“Hollander,” Wyatt said, leaning back in his chair. “I just want to say, I am so glad you and Roz are together. Truly. You’re adorable, you seem happy, all that good stuff.” He pointed his fork at Shane. “But more importantly? The fact that this got you on our team is the best thing that’s happened to me professionally. Everyone is happy to have you here but no one is more excited than me. You have *no idea* how annoying it is to defend a goal against you, man.”

“I can imagine actually,” Shane said, flashing their goalie a cocky little smirk.

Ilya smiled. The little shit knew exactly how talented he was. Montreal was going to be a joke this year without him.

“Harris, Troy, how is our Chiron doing?” Ilya asked.

“He’s great,” said Harris. “We dropped him off at the farm on our way over here so he could play with the other dogs. My parents just took in another one and he and Chiron are best friends, it’s the cutest thing.”

“We actually closed on a house this weekend,” added Troy. “It’s got a massive fenced-in yard for Chiron. We’ll be able to take him over there soon to show him.”

“That is amazing,” replied Ilya sincerely, “Congratulations.”

“Yeah, thank you. You guys have to come over once we’re moved in. And bring Anya so they can play.”

“That sounds good, she would love that,” said Shane. “I can’t wait to finally meet Chiron. Though I feel like I already have? Ilya is obsessed with him.”

“Because he is the best.” Ilya stated simply. “You will see.”

Ilya watched Shane take a forkful of pelau, his expression lighting up in surprise at the taste. Something warm and satisfied settled in Ilya’s chest.

As the sun dipped toward the horizon, Ilya found himself around the firepit with an intimate group of players and their partners.

Shane turned toward him and spoke in a low voice, “I am having such a good time.”

“I told you,” Ilya said, bumping his knee gently against Shane’s. “This team is the best. It is only good people.”

“You were totally right.” Shane admitted, his eyes twinkling in the firelight. “Have you been thinking about the ad campaign at all?”

Ilya had been.

He was sick of hiding. He had already decided that he didn’t give a shit what anyone thought about their relationship or how it started. But he also understood, deeply, Shane’s instinct to protect what was theirs. The idea of people packaging their love and history into something that could be sold still felt strange to him. But his thoughts kept drifting back, not just to this possible campaign, but to that first one, twelve years ago. To two young men who didn’t yet have the language, or the courage, or the safety to name what was already happening between them. If there had been another couple back then, two men who played at the highest level

and spoke openly about loving each other, maybe they wouldn't have spent so long believing that hockey and honesty could not coexist.

Whether CCM was doing this to help their brand, or because they actually cared about Ilya and Shane's story, he realized that didn't matter to him.

He wanted to do this. But only when Shane was ready.

He had just opened his mouth to begin expressing that when Harris plopped down heavily next to Shane. "What are we talking about?"

Troy perched onto the chair next to him.

Across the fire, the conversation between Bood, Wyatt, and Dykstra halted.

Ilya subtly raised his eyebrows at Shane, leaving the decision to include them entirely up to him. He'd been on a team with most of these players for years; Shane hadn't. And even with time, Shane was only ever truly at ease around certain people.

"Okay, maybe you guys can help us figure something out," Shane turned to look at the group. "Our agent called us today and let us know that CCM is interested in shooting a new ad campaign with us. We did one with them years ago, before our rookie season, where they built this whole narrative around our rivalry as two up-and-coming players. They want to kind of... pick that story back up and follow it through to us now as a married couple in the league."

Dykstra whistled low, "That could be huge."

"Yeah that could have a big impact on the league and its fans," added Harris thoughtfully. "We get messages all the time on the Centaur's socials asking about you guys. How it went from rivals to husbands. How you make it work in the league. I'm not shocked CCM wants to capitalize on it."

Wyatt leaned forward, elbows on his knees. "So what's the hesitation?"

Shane exhaled slowly. "It just feels weird to me," he said. "Like turning what we are into a marketing angle. We went from hiding everything to being exposed overnight. Most of the reception has been largely positive but you know, it hasn't all been good."

He hesitated. "People burned jerseys. We still get hate messages. And that was just from them finding out we're together. I'm scared that if we start sharing more—if we put the whole rivals-to-husbands story out there—people will start looking back and rewriting things. Like our careers somehow mean less. Or worse," he added quietly, "like it was all planned."

"Oof, that's fair." Troy conceded. "For what it's worth, I cannot speak highly enough about putting your whole, authentic self, out there. The good, and the bad. But my situation was completely different and I got to choose exactly how and when I came out. You guys got outed by some faceless assholes online. It makes sense that you would want to preserve what's left of your privacy."

“I bet it would be fun to relive that shoot though,” Dykstra chimed in. “You know, taking a little walk down memory lane, but this time all in love with each other instead of fueled by hatred.”

Ilya and Shane glanced at each other, identical, knowing smiles spreading between them.

“Umm, what was that look?” Wyatt asked, pointing his finger back and forth between them.

“Yeah you gotta explain that one,” said Bood.

Ilya was unable to hold back his laughter. “Would not be so different this time from last.”

Harris gasped dramatically. “Wait, shut up. I need the full story. Were you guys dating during your rookie year?”

Shane giggled. “No, not really. We were... something though.”

“No way! When did it start?” Harris asked, bouncing up and down in his seat animatedly.

“That kind of depends on how you define it but...” Shane continued, “we hooked up for the first time the day of that CCM campaign.” He mumbled the last part, burying his adorably red face in his hands.

Harris let out a delighted little scream. “I love this. I have a thousand questions.”

Troy looked like his brain was buffering. “So when you guys were fighting on the ice—”

“Oh no,” Ilya cut in. “That was real. Shane is very annoying.”

Shane scoffed. “Please. You were just finding excuses to slam me into the boards.”

“You loved it.” Ilya said, smiling crookedly.

Shane leaned over then, cupped Ilya’s cheek, and kissed him, right there in front of everyone. Easy. Unselfconscious.

“I did,” Shane said softly, eyes still locked on his.

There was a brief beat of silence.

Wyatt exhaled slowly, shaking his head. “You know... people think they know you guys now. But they don’t know a damn thing.”

“So the whole time you guys were out there beefing publicly, you were secretly also...” Bood gestured vaguely between Shane and Ilya.

“Confused,” Shane supplied helpfully.

“Idiots,” Ilya added.

Troy cleared his throat. “You don’t owe anyone your whole story. But if you ever decide to tell it? I think it would matter to people. In a good way.”

Chapter 3: After the Fire

After saying goodbye to everyone, Ilya and Shane walked down Bood's driveway to their car.

"I told you they would love yo—" Ilya's words were cut off when Shane surged forward, mouth crashing into his, body pressing him back against the car door.

The kiss was urgent and breathless. Ilya's hands immediately found Shane's waist and pulled him closer. He slid one hand up, tangling his fingers in Shane's silky hair. He grabbed a fistful of it and pulled his head back, breaking the kiss, so he could look at his face.

Shane's pupils were blown wide and the skin under his freckles was flushed pink. He was beautiful.

"Wow, Shane. You are very horny," Ilya teased, grinning crookedly. "Was it my sexy shirt?"

Shane blinked disorientedly, and looked down at Ilya's chest and arms. "Actually, yes, maybe that also. Your body looks insane. But that's not—" he shook his head, breathless. "I didn't realize how good it would feel to be, like, a real couple in front of people. In front of hockey people. Calling you my husband. Touching you. Talking about us like it's normal." He swallowed. "That was so fucking hot."

Ilya's heart fluttered.

"I think I get turned on from being open and honest about our relationship," Shane added, brow furrowing adorably. "Is that a kink?"

Ilya burst out laughing, loud and unrestrained. "Yes, Shane. You are a freak." He leaned in to kiss him again. "But I have same kink."

"Get us home fast?"

Ilya winked. "Get in."

The front door to their house had barely clicked shut behind them before Shane was on him again.

Ilya laughed into the kiss as his back hit the wall, the sound swallowed by Shane's mouth. Shane's hands were everywhere, tugging on his shirt, gripping his shoulders.

"I loved seeing you like that," Ilya murmured against his lips. "There was a time I thought I might never get to tell anyone on the team about you. About us. But to have you there. To

have you here with me... It is a dream. I am very happy you felt comfortable enough to open up to everyone like that.”

“Me too,” Shane said. “I want to tell everyone everything. Well, not, you know, not everything obviously, there are things people don’t need to know, but I don’t want to hide things anymore.”

“Maybe this is just the cider talking,” he continued, breathless, forehead pressed to Ilya’s, “But I kind of want to be obnoxiously public about it. Like, holding hands while we walk, maybe some tasteful PDA—”

“Sex in the showers in the team locker room.” Ilya supplied, undoing the buttons on Shane’s shirt with deft fingers and walking them backward down the hall to their bedroom.

“What,” Shane sputtered. “No, definitely not that.” He paused. “Definitely, probably not, doing that.”

“Wow, Shane,” Ilya smirked. “I can’t believe you want to do that. That is very irresponsible.”

“I said definitely not! Or probably not. Shut up!”

“Such a freak,” Ilya hummed, pushing the collar of Shane’s shirt off one shoulder and kissing the side of his neck.

Shane moaned at the contact. “It’s your fault. I can’t think straight when you’re wearing that shirt.”

Ilya stretched one arm over his head and pulled his shirt off, throwing it into the corner of the room. “And now? You can think clearly again?”

Shane immediately leaned forward and licked across Ilya’s chest. “Nope,” he said, looking up through his lashes. “Didn’t think that through.”

He unfastened Ilya’s pants and pulled them down along with his briefs.

Ilya stepped out of them one foot at a time and gently guided Shane down into the center of the bed. He popped open the button on Shane’s jeans, then slowly tugged his jeans and briefs down his legs, licking and kissing the exposed skin until they were all the way off.

Ilya knelt before him, then maneuvered Shane’s muscular thighs over his own, sliding his knees to the outside of Shane’s hips. He placed one hand on the pillow, leaning his face towards Shane’s. He held Shane’s gaze as he spit in his other hand and grasped the base of Shane’s leaking cock, pulling it toward his own so he could hold them both together.

“Fuck, Ilya,” Shane groaned, bucking his hips involuntarily at the contact.

Ilya hissed at the friction. “Yes, do that,” he ordered.

Shane continued thrusting up as Ilya began stroking his fist up and down.

Their rhythm turned immediately frantic as they chased their pleasure. Shane placed one hand on top of Ilya's to help steady them. Both men groaned as they worked their hands together. Shane was still thrusting upward into their hold, causing a delicious slide of their cocks against each other.

Ilya could tell Shane was getting close, his thighs were tightly hugging Ilya's hips and his cock was dribbling. Ilya leaned down to kiss him roughly, swallowing his moans as he came all over their fists and stomachs.

He gave him one last parting kiss before releasing Shane's cock and raising up high on his knees.

Shane looked up at him, flushed and panting. "You gonna come for me, baby?"

"Fuck," Ilya groaned, tilting his head back. Shane had never called him a pet name before and the word somehow sounded simultaneously adorable and filthy coming out of his pink lips. Just like him.

Ilya used Shane's come to get himself off quickly, painting Shane's body with his release.

He braced his elbows beside Shane's face before collapsing over him. Shane leaned up to kiss him languidly, weaving his fingers through Ilya's curls.

"You called me baby," Ilya said, once he had caught his breath.

"I did," said Shane. "Is that okay?"

"Is perfect," replied Ilya, smiling brightly at him. "I'll be right back. Don't move."

Ilya went to the bathroom and cleaned himself up. He took a moment to look at himself in the mirror, taking note of his mess of curls and the goofy smile that would not go away. He took a deep, steadying breath. Tonight felt like the start of something. Like maybe this is how their lives could be from now on. Living in Shane's hometown, playing for the same team, spending time with friends who not only knew about their relationship, but loved them both.

Ilya walked back to the bed where Shane was still lying, covered in come. "You took a while," Shane said, raising an eyebrow. "Gonna leave me like this?"

Ilya stopped in front of him. "I could. You look hot covered in my come."

"I am sticky and disgusting," said Shane laughing.

"Sticky and hot," Ilya argued, gently cleaning Shane up with a cloth.

"So, what you said about wanting to tell people things," Ilya began, "Does that mean you want to do the campaign? Or was that just a side effect of your new kink?"

"No, I think I really do. I mean, as long as you want to."

"I do."

“That’s great. We can let Farah know tomorrow,” Shane said. “But I think it’s more than that... Being around the team tonight, I felt really optimistic about the future. I felt... safe? I don’t think I realized how much I was missing that in Montreal. Even around some of my closest friends, I still sometimes felt like I had to act a certain way or hold things back. It was exhausting. I didn’t have to do that tonight. I could just be.”

Shane turned his head to look over at the photo of them from twelve years ago. “The day we shot that, I remember thinking that every time I looked at you, it was like I was standing too close to the sun. I was so terrified of what I felt for you. And then I spent so much time being terrified of people finding out about that. I’m done being scared of those things. Once everything is out there, people will react the way they’re going to react. There isn’t anything we can do to control that.”

Ilya reached for Shane’s hand and brought it to his lips, kissing the ring on his finger.

Shane turned to look back to Ilya. “If there had been other players like us then... I think I might have been less scared.” He paused to consider. “I don’t know, I actually probably would have still struggled. I put way too much pressure on myself back then.”

“Back then?” Asked Ilya, grinning.

Shane laughed, “Okay, fair.”

“But what you said earlier,” Ilya ventured, “about putting a spotlight on something that has always just been ours... you are not worried about that?”

Shane shook his head and smiled. “It’ll always just be ours, Ilya.”

Ilya felt tears prick his eyes as he leaned in to kiss Shane. His husband, his only love, his heart.

“I’m really glad you knocked twelve years ago,” Shane whispered.

“I’m glad you opened.”

Chapter 4: The Shoot

Chapter Notes

After a couple comments from people asking about how the ad would look and wanting to see everyone's reactions to it, I have been convinced to add two additional chapters! I didn't want the story to feel unfinished to anyone and I also just personally wanted to see how it might play out soooo happy reading, I hope you like it!

Summer 2022–Toronto

The rink smelled the same.

Shane knew that logically, that made no sense. They had done a massive renovation of this arena three years ago so even though it was the same location, it was a completely different building than the one they filmed in in 2010. But it did. He was hit with a sudden, intense, feeling of nostalgia.

He leaned over to Ilya. “It smells the same.”

Ilya smiled up at him from where he was lacing his skates. “Do you think they kept the original showers?”

Shane laughed. That dingy locker room had to have been the first thing to go in the renovations. The thought made him a little sad, but a lot had changed in the past twelve years. Buildings, the league, him. Plus, that locker room was legitimately gross.

The CCM crew had closed the rink for the day. Lights blazed overhead, bouncing off freshly resurfaced ice that gleamed like glass. Cameras and equipment lined the boards where fans would usually press up during warmups.

Shane rolled his shoulders, suddenly hyperaware of his body. Of how he stood. Of how he might look.

Farah appeared at his side, eyes scanning his face carefully. “Hey,” she said gently. “You hanging in there?”

“Yeah,” Shane lied automatically, then sighed. “I think so. Just... weird.”

“That’s allowed,” she said. “Remember, this isn’t a documentary. It’s an ad. You set the boundaries. You walk away if anything feels off.”

Shane nodded, grateful, and watched as Ilya skated out onto the ice for a lighting test, effortlessly confident as ever. His heart filled with pride as the sounds of scattered laughter

bounced across the ice at something Ilya had said.

He finished getting dressed in silence. The familiar ritual steadied him, tightening his skates, pulling on his gloves. Muscle memory did most of the work and he was able to quiet his thoughts for a few minutes.

“Shane,” the photographer shouted, calling him over to where she was still standing with Ilya at center ice.

“We’re not recreating anything shot for shot,” she said, gesturing between them. “Think of this as... echoes. Same space. Same gear. Different lives.”

Shane exhaled slowly, trying to level out his heart rate.

The first setup was simple. Opposite ends of the rink, skating toward each other. Shane pushed off, eyes lifting automatically to find Ilya.

For a moment, the years converged. There was nineteen-year-old Ilya who was obnoxious and arrogant and so stupidly talented that it drove Shane crazy. The one he’d unhealthily obsessed over.

And then there was this Ilya. His husband. Steady and open, skating toward him with the faintest curve of a smile on his face. The one he was frankly, still pretty obsessed with.

Their skates cut into the ice as they stopped just short of each other, breath fogging between them.

“Perfect,” someone murmured.

Shane didn’t hear it.

All he could see was Ilya’s eyes—soft, attentive, asking without words: *Are you okay?*

Shane nodded briefly.

The next shots were closer. Side by side at the boards. Sitting on the bench together, gear piled at their feet. One frame had them both leaning forward, elbows on knees, sticks resting next to them.

At one point, the photographer adjusted the angle and said, almost absentmindedly, “You can get closer if you want.”

Shane hesitated. He looked over at Ilya who wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Shane smiled and scooped over, resting his head on Ilya’s shoulder and looking up at him, finally feeling at peace.

“Oh,” the photographer breathed. “There it is.”

During a break, Shane sat on the bench, helmet resting beside him, watching the crew fuss with equipment. His pulse had slowed. The full panic he'd anticipated all day never came.

Instead, there was a strange calm. Like he could finally stop bracing for impact.

Ilya dropped down next to him, bumping his shoulder gently. "You are doing very well."

Shane huffed out a quiet laugh. "That's the same voice you use to calm Anya down at the vet."

"Yes and if you keep being a good boy I will give you a treat when we get home."

Shane blushed and shoved Ilya playfully.

A woman with a headset—the creative director, if Shane had heard correctly—approached them with a tablet tucked under her arm.

"Hey guys," she said warmly. "When you're ready we'd love to grab some voice-over takes while they set up for the final visuals of the day."

Shane's shoulders tensed.

"Nothing on camera," she added quickly, noticing the shift. "Just audio. You'll each be in a booth separately. We'll ask a few questions, you answer however feels right. We can cut anything you're not comfortable with."

Farah appeared at their side. "And remember," she said calmly, "you can pass on any prompt. No explanation needed."

The director nodded. "Exactly. We're not looking for soundbites. We're looking for... truth. However you define that."

Ilya glanced at Shane and squeezed his thigh comfortingly. "Good?"

Shane took a breath and placed his hand over Ilya's. "Yes. Yeah, okay, let's do it."

The booth was small and the walls were lined with dark foam. Shane sat on a stool, hands clasped loosely in his lap, staring at a small red light that indicated he was being recorded.

A soothing voice came through his headphones. "Hey Shane. My name is Sky. I'm going to ask you a couple questions and you respond however you want. We're looking for a casual conversation, so no need for polished responses, and if you hate where things are going just tell me and we'll move on, okay?"

"Okay," Shane responded, trying and failing to get comfortable on the stool.

"We'll start easy. What's one moment in your career that still makes you smile?"

Shane thought for a moment, then felt a faint smile appear. "Probably my first goal in the NHL. Just that feeling—like all the work and waiting finally... clicked. Everything else faded

away for a second.”

“Your career is often described as historic,” Sky said. “How does that sit with you?”

Shane chuckled softly. “It feels strange to hear that. On the ice, I don’t think about history. I think about the next play, the next decision, trusting the guys around me. That’s what matters in the moment.”

“Can you tell me about that first CCM shoot from twelve years ago? Do you remember how you felt?”

Shane tried to focus on the actual shoot and not on what happened after it. “Um. I was mostly excited. I hadn’t even played a single game in the NHL yet when we filmed it so it was a big deal to me. I was eager to prove myself as a rookie.”

“Speaking of your rookie year...”

Shane took a deep breath.

“People talk a lot about your rivalry with Ilya back then,” Sky continued. “What do you think that rivalry meant to your career?”

Shane leaned back slightly, eyes closing. “It pushed me. It sharpened parts of me I might’ve ignored, made me a better player, and a better teammate. If my career is historic, it’s thanks, at least in part, to our rivalry.”

“Do you think about that rivalry differently now?”

“Yes,” Shane said softly. “I think it was always more complicated than we let ourselves admit.”

“And what does being married to Ilya mean for you as a player now?”

Shane closed his eyes again and pictured stepping onto the ice with Ilya for the first game of the upcoming season. In matching Centaurs jerseys. “It means I carry the rest of my life with me differently. On the ice, I know my game. But now, off it, I feel steadier. More... grounded. I can focus on what I’m best at, without the rest pulling me under.”

Shane was happy this was just a voice recording because he knew there was a giant dorky grin on his face. “It also just means I’m going to be having a lot more fun. I am so ready for this season.”

When Shane stepped out of the booth a few minutes later, Ilya was leaning against the wall nearby, arms crossed loosely. He looked up immediately.

“How was it?” Ilya asked.

“I think good? I didn’t cry.”

Ilya smiled and kissed him. “Proud of you,” he whispered in his ear.

A few minutes later, they switched.

Shane waited outside the booth this time, listening to the faint murmur of voices through the wall.

When Ilya emerged, his expression was thoughtful, his eyes bright.

“What did they ask you?” Shane asked.

Ilya shrugged. “About winning. About records. About leadership.” He paused. “And about loving you.”

Shane’s heart stuttered. “And?”

Ilya smiled gently. “I told them it is the easiest thing I have ever done.”

They were called back onto the ice after that for the final shots.

The final setup mirrored the old shoot most closely. A face-off position at center ice.

Shane lifted his gaze to meet Ilya’s.

Ilya had a taunting smile on his face, and Shane knew he was remembering how they couldn’t stop cracking up in this position the first time.

Shane pursed his lips, trying to fight back a laugh but it was no use. As soon as he started giggling, Ilya joined in, his hazel eyes crinkling at the edges.

“Sorry,” Shane said, trying to regain his composure. “Totally my fault, I can do this.”

He made an effort to rearrange his features into something more appropriately serious but whatever he was doing just made Ilya laugh harder which set Shane off again.

“No worries at all, this is actually perfect,” said the photographer. “We definitely got the shot.”

Chapter 5: What Remains

Fall 2022—Ottawa

Ilya plucked Shane's phone out of his hand on the way to the couch and placed it face down on the coffee table.

"No peeking," he said firmly.

"I'm not peeking," Shane replied, already reaching for it again. "It hasn't even aired yet. There's nothing to peek at."

Ilya slapped his hand away. "You will peek. You are physically incapable of not peeking."

Shane huffed and flopped back into the cushions, pouting exaggeratedly with his arms crossed over his chest. "Fine. Ten minutes. We agreed."

"Yes. Ten minutes *after* it airs," Ilya said, taking out his own phone and placing it screen side-down beside Shane's. "Like responsible adults. Who do not let the internet ruin their evening."

Shane snorted. "Bold assumption."

The living room lights were dimmed, the only glow coming from the TV and the faint yellow lamp in the corner.

Some of the major photos from the campaign had already been posted but the commercial was airing today. Farah had shared some rough cuts with them a couple weeks ago but they still hadn't seen the final product. They were going to experience it for the first time live. The same time that the rest of the world would be seeing it.

The CCM logo flickered onto the screen.

Shane's leg immediately started bouncing.

Ilya slid his hand over Shane's knee, grounding him. "Hey. Breathe. We survived twelve years of worse things than a commercial."

Shane laughed weakly. "That's not reassuring."

The screen went black.

Then—the sound of skates carving into ice.

The first frame faded in slowly. An empty rink, lights low, ice freshly resurfaced. The camera glided just above the surface, tracking the red line at center ice. There was no music yet, just the rhythmic scrape of blades and the hollow echo of the arena.

Shane's voice cut in. *"Everyone talks about talent. But talent isn't what keeps you here."*

The image jumped—grainier now. Old footage. The original shoot.

Two nineteen-year-olds circled each other on the ice.

Ilya smiled at the image. God, they had been babies.

His own voice followed. *"It's the people. The push from the guy across from you... and the ones beside you."*

The next shot showed their younger selves showing off and cutting aggressively across the ice.

Music crept in low. A steady, pulsing beat.

"People talk about rivalry like it is anger. But for me," his voice continued, *"it was always respect."*

The image shifted to them lined up across from each other at a face-off. Fierce stares inches apart. The tension vibrating between them so obvious now that it was almost embarrassing they hadn't understood it then.

The footage rolled on, past what had made it into the original ad. On the screen, Ilya's lip twitched before he doubled over laughing, the moment so sudden it dragged a laugh out of Shane too, his young face lighting up with glee. The same smile Ilya saw every day now, but one that had felt impossibly rare back then.

The screen snapped back to the present.

The same rink.

Renovated. Brighter. Sharper.

Now, two men skated where the boys had been before. The camera circled them slowly, tracking the blades on their skates, the tape on their sticks, the rings on their left hands.

Shane sucked in a quiet breath beside him.

"Over time," Shane's voice said, *"the game teaches you what actually matters."*

Ilya turned his head just enough to catch Shane's face in profile. His eyes were bright, fixed on the screen.

A quick cut on the TV showed them side by side on the bench, Ilya looking down at Shane with gentle reverence as Shane rested his head on his shoulder.

"It teaches you who makes you better," Shane's voice continued.

The music swelled now, fuller, uplifting.

“What we didn’t know...” Ilya’s voice began.

Cut to them lacing skates in the locker room. Laughing. Ilya bumping Shane’s shoulder with his own.

“...is that sometimes the thing pushing you forward...” Shane picked up.

The camera jumped again, this time to them skating toward each other, meeting at center ice.

Their voices joined for the final line: *“...is the same thing that brings you home.”*

The final shot mirrored the original almost exactly.

Face-off position.

Only this time, neither of them was trying very hard not to laugh.

Shane broke first, smiling openly. Ilya followed, his laughter silent but unmistakable.

The screen faded to black.

White text appeared:

RIVALRY EVOLVES.

Then:

RESPECT REMAINS.

Then:

WHO MAKES YOU BETTER?

Then the CCM logo.

The room stayed quiet.

Shane didn’t move.

Ilya didn’t either.

After a beat, Shane let out a shaky laugh. “Oh my god.”

Ilya swallowed past the lump in his throat. “They got us.”

Shane turned, eyes glassy. “They really, really got us. I thought it might be cheesy but it was like—” He paused, searching. “We did all that posing, but they only included the real moments?”

That was exactly it.

The quiet stuff. The heart eyes. The way their bodies drifted closer when they forgot they were being watched. For so long, Ilya had thought of those moments as liabilities—things to be erased or hidden. Seeing their relationship on display—not the rivalry for appearances, or the half truth of their friendship—but their real relationship, it felt like they could finally just be.

He leaned in and brushed his thumb across the freckles on Shane's cheek. "It's our story," he said simply. "And it's honest."

Shane's smile softened, steadied. "Yeah. It is."

Ilya glanced at his watch, noting the time. *Whose stupid idea was it to wait ten minutes, anyway?* His fingers twitched involuntarily in the direction of his phone.

Shane noticed. He smiled smugly.

"Fuck it," Ilya exhaled, reaching for Shane's phone first and handing it to him before grabbing his own.

"Oh no," Shane said immediately after unlocking his phone. "Oh *no*."

The internet had, predictably, lost its entire mind.

@hockeyguy87: ok cool so I'm crying in my car over a GEAR AD????

@bipanicatthedisco: whoever approved this knew EXACTLY what they were doing

@puckbunny4lyffee: pov: you thought it was about skates but it was actually about LOVE 😭😭😭

@rozanovaddict: hey so looking at that original footage they were definitely already together, right? Am I crazy???? I need the timeline NOW!!

@nhlmemesdaily: rivals to husbands is not a trope it's a LIFESTYLE

@roselandryluvr: the HEAT has definitely always been there 🔥🔥🔥 this is what happens when the slow burn lasts TWELVE YEARS 🥰

@iceicebb24: I remember that original ad but I don't remember the giggling?? That was so cute!!

@loontruthers: CCM really said 'what if we changed hockey culture forever on a Tuesday'

@icedlattesandhockey: ummmm cutting from them eyeing each other as rookies to the matching RINGS???? ON THEIR LEFT HANDS????? I am so normal about this!!!!!!

@lifeinthecrease: me in 2010: I hate both of these guys 😡 me in 2022: I would die for both of these guys 😊

@ottawacentaursfanpage: Ilya Rozanov smiling at Shane Hollander like that should come with a warning

@hazys_saveys: didn't think hockey would ever show something like this

@curlygurlly19: this matters more than they know 100 100 💖

@letsgovoyageurss: not even gay but my wife and I just watched this twice??

@wlw4wlw: this is what they mean when they say representation matters

@luca_haas_step_on_me_please: me explaining to my dad why this ad made me emotional and him just nodding 👍👉

@zamboni.daddy: not to be dramatic but this healed something in me

@shanehollandersfreckles: why did the music swell like that I felt ATTACKED 😭

@sticktapz: rivals to lovers but make it capitalism 😂

@babygirlcoded: ok but seriously does anyone know when their relationship started because I need DETAILS

@bostonbaby81: me, a grown adult, explaining to my roommate why a CCM ad changed my life

@therealchuck: my kid just asked why I'm crying at lunch

Shane was laughing now, curled into Ilya's side, both of them scrolling furiously.

"Oh my god," he wheezed. "Someone already edited it to a Taylor Swift song. How are they so fast?"

Ilya leaned over to look. "Which song?"

"Um," Shane squinted at his screen, "You Are In Love?"

Ilya hummed, pleased. "Correct."

Another notification popped up.

The team group chat.

Bood: HOLY SHIT

Wyatt: I am suing for emotional damages

Harris: I SCREAMED. ACTUAL SCREAM. STILL SCREAMING.

Troy: He seriously is though.

Troy: From a storytelling perspective, that was beautifully restrained.

Harris: can we repost on team socials because I am LOSING MY MIND

Dykstra: why was it kind of hot though

Bood: DYKSTRA

Wyatt: no no let him cook

Bood: proud of you guys ❤️

Shane stared at the screen for a long moment.

Then he set the phone down and leaned into Ilya, pressing his forehead to Ilya's shoulder.

"I feel like we did something there," he said quietly. "Maybe something big?"

Ilya kissed the top of his head. "I think so too."

The next day, the Centaurs posted their own still from the campaign. A simple caption.

Proud to have them both. Always.

Shane saw it while sitting in the locker room, lacing up for an optional skate he hadn't been sure he'd attend. The room felt different today. Lighter.

As he stood, Wyatt clapped him on the shoulder. "Hey."

"Hey."

Wyatt hesitated, then said, "My little brother texted me. He plays juniors. Said he'd never seen anything like that before."

Shane swallowed. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," Wyatt said. "So... thanks."

Across the room, Ilya caught Shane's eye and smiled.

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