

snapping at a butterfly

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snapping at a butterfly

by [marigoldens](#)

Summary

“I climb twenty flights to show you the solar eclipse, and it’s, *oh, bye, I must return to my boring book about—*“

“Eclipse? You said—“

“I said there is a reward at the top. What did you think I mean?”

Maybe Ilya’s hands and mouth on him? Maybe his dirty words printed at Shane’s navel and a smile before they took a risk? Shane blushes.

—

or: Shane is passionate. He just doesn’t know what about.

Notes

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

“*What moves you?*” Shane’s mom had asked him, when he was unable to get on the ice and unable to take his team to another victory, lifting the cup above their heads.

Shane didn’t understand. “What . . . *moves* me?”

“*Besides* hockey.”

Had there ever been something so ridiculous? “What’s besides hockey? You’re obsessed, too.”

“Yeah, well,” she shrugs. “You can always be obsessed with more than one thing.”

Shane knew that what they were discussing wasn’t Ilya. Or Ilya’s voice, or the way he carried himself, or the ease of how he took control so Shane didn’t have to, this wasn’t—this was pointless.

“I’m not.”

“Shane!” She laughs, then comes closer to him on the couch. “So stubborn. All I’m saying is that . . . if hockey isn’t your entire life—“

“Mom . . .”

“That’s not a bad thing. And certainly not a harmful thing.”

There wasn’t space for more, Shane thought. If he makes room, he clears out expertise, skill, for something new, and he doesn’t have the time for something new. Healing was about hockey. The summer was about healing, healing was about hockey. Everything leads back to it.

“You really want me to *not* focus on hockey. If this is about the chance of me getting hurt again—“

“It’s not. It’s about you.” She turns off the TV, one of the lamps, ridding the room of the extra light for Shane’s eyes. “I worry about you, you know. You should love everything that makes you curious. Does nothing make you . . .”

“Curious?” Again. It’s not about Ilya. “This conversation is,” Shane says.

“Sue me. I want my son to enjoy the world he jets around all year.”

“I do!”

Does he?

“What do you enjoy, then?”

—

Ilya’s steps seem like the loudest thing ever, suddenly, like, *so* fucking loud Shane’s nearly forgotten why they’re climbing twenty flights of stairs.

Ilya is barely out of breath, skipping steps in his tennis shoes, while Shane’s hesitancy keeps him back, eyeing the signs that say, *Floor 3, Floor 10, Floor 17* . .

“Will it kill you to speed up, Hollander? We will miss it at this rate.” He’s yelling, fucking *yelling* because he’s slamming his shoes against the stairs and it’s echoing down to the bottom floor.

“Shut up. I’m going back to my room.”

“Uh, you are going nowhere,” Ilya says, looking to Shane over his shoulder. “I climb twenty flights to show you the solar eclipse, and it’s, *oh, bye, I must return to my boring book about* —“

“*Eclipse?* You said—“

“I said there is a reward at the top. What did you think I mean?”

Maybe Ilya’s hands and mouth on him? Maybe his dirty words printed at Shane’s navel and a smile before they took a risk? Shane blushes. “You’re a dick. We could’ve just gone outside. Like, down the elevator?”

Ilya chuckles. They reach *Floor 19*. “Where is the fun in that? I could not have raced you that way.”

“Wait, what—“

Ilya *sprints*. Shane chases after him, and forgets about how his laughter is dancing, reaching from the top of the world to the core of it.

—

“I enjoy a lot of things, Mom,” Shane defends himself, his shoulders raising up.

“Like?”

“You already know,” he says quieter, realizing that this shouldn’t be getting to him as much as it is.

“Yoga is good. Reading is good. But there is *so much*, Shane. Paintings, and sculptures, and architecture, knitting, music, surfing—“

“I—okay. I get it. I’m boring.”

Her eyes go wide, and she grabs Shane’s hands. He looks down to them, her painted blue nails for the Metros, and then her wedding ring, too, and the ring her best friend gifted to her as a college graduation present in rose gold.

“I don’t think you’re boring. You’re my son, there’s no way.”

Shane laughs, resting his head back on the couch.

“I’m so proud of you, Shane. But I would be, even if you did something else. Even if you wanted to talk about pantones, or cars, instead of hockey.”

—

“It’s freezing up here!”

Ilya doesn’t shiver. He slings an arm around Shane’s shoulders. “I will keep you warm. Wear these, you will go blind if you don’t, the Internet says.”

He hands Shane a pair of glasses, the lens shaded. Shane puts them on. “People could see us from up here.”

Ilya smiles, almost sadly, bringing Shane a bit closer to the edge of the building. “No one is looking at you,” Ilya says. “I know this is shocking for you.”

“Shut up.”

“You shut up,” Ilya quips back, very cleverly. “Look at the moon.”

“But I-I don’t. I’m okay with what I like.”

Which is partially true. Shane’s had it pointed out since childhood that his interests are *boring*, that he could stand to look a little longer at the paintings in a museum. And he does, he *looks*, he just doesn’t know what keeps him looking.

Is it obligation? All the people around, so if he doesn’t, someone will go online saying Shane doesn’t appreciate the artist?

He remembers this one painting, in Pittsburgh. He’d wandered off from Hayden and J.J., wanting a closer look at it. His eyes hadn’t moved from it the whole walk, and once he was in front of it, he backed away, just to see it completely.

It was tucked into a corner, and Shane can’t remember the art beside it now, but he remembers—he remembers looking at this lion, lying on the ground in the darkness, and it *should’ve* been the focus. Shane doesn’t know about what categorizes a painting as a masterpiece, but he thought the lion was astonishing, and imagined the artist who had outlined him and took a paintbrush to the color of his fur and made it real.

To spend *hours* at a zoo, just studying this certain animal with a pencil and sketchpad and nothing else but their curiosity and their passion keeping them repeating the process, over and over, drawing the lion’s legs posed in different ways, its jaw opened and talons out against the rocks, and every unique thing about it made permanent on paper.

And it wasn’t the most interesting part. Not to Shane. Every time, when he would look back to it, he’d find himself looking instead to what the lion had his attention set onto.

In the air fluttered a bright, blue butterfly. A small thing compared to the rest of the painting, and not the focus—but it was. Because the lion was looking at it, because despite the lion’s mane being so detailed Shane could almost feel the rough hair at his fingertips, there was this *blue* that was nowhere else in the painting.

Something so little, and Shane couldn’t take his eyes off it. And why, *why* did such a small thing make Shane so curious, so shocked that he wanted to call over Hayden and J.J. to look at this butterfly that wasn’t even an inch long across the canvas? For such a terrifying and formidable beast to be distracted by a harmless thing, one of its teeth bigger than the insect—suddenly, Shane was frustrated by it, that he couldn’t look away, that if someone tried to move him he’d say, *no, not yet*, he’d stand there all day wondering about that fucking butterfly.

“Are you?”

The eclipse is . . . Shane has seen it before. His mom had dragged him out of bed to look at it. But the chances of Shane ever seeing it again, of him ever seeing it again with *Ilya*, is what keeps his eyes on it.

“Neat,” Ilya says, in his precise accent, a question to the word like he doesn’t quite understand if the eclipse is meant to alter his life or just his night.

“Yeah, it’s—beautiful.”

“Mm. Yes.”

Does this make people passionate? Obviously, it does—astronomers, scientists, astronauts all dedicate some chunk of their life to it. Kids can fear it following them on the drive home, like Shane’s dad had told him, a childhood story.

It keeps Shane up at night, how damn bright it can get. He’ll close his curtains, wonder how it can shine as much as the sun does. And Shane hears more about the moon than he does the sun. The craters, the *man in the moon* thing, the missions to step onto it, a place few have gone.

And what is the sun to that? The sun is unapproachable, it blinds, it can turn someone sick. It’s not something people want to look at. They don’t want to walk on it. It gives and it gives, but despite how much, it will never be enough because people think it is only useful for one, singular purpose. *Icarus flew too close to the sun*, a *Greek mythological figure*, unphased by how it could hurt him, and he had fallen away.

How lonely, Shane thinks. He’d rather be the moon instead.

“*Are you?*” Shane’s mom asks.

Is he? Is he okay with being passionless? Is he okay with knowing he isn’t one of the millions, *billions* of people out there that love a band, or a book so desperately they think of it everyday, have memorabilia for it, that it changed their lives so much it had saved them from pain?

Is he okay with not loving as much as everyone else does?

Ilya doesn't race Shane down the stairs. He walks slow, exhaustion catching up to him after their game, the run up, the hours they've already spent together in Ilya's room, and Shane . . .

Shane can understand *why*. Why people want to see the eclipse. To know the unknowable, to see a rarity the people after won't, to be shone upon by pure beauty—this would make anyone feel special.

What he doesn't understand is that Ilya had dragged him up to the roof, from bed. He'd made Shane get dressed quick and even had the damn glasses all ready in his jacket.

"So you like that kind of stuff?"

Ilya hums. "What stuff?"

Shane shrugs. "The moon, the stars. Space stuff."

"I . . . don't hate it. You do?"

"*No*, no. But, I mean—"

"Hollander," he interrupts, stopping Shane on the stairs. "Don't overthink it. Okay?"

So there's something to overthink, Shane thinks.

"What do you love about hockey?" His mom asks, and, *finally*, something Shane doesn't have to scour his mind for.

"I'm good at it."

"I know. What do you like about it?"

The ice comes into Shane's mind, the freedom, the Metros logo to the middle, scratches from blades across it, how satisfying it is to skate across it freshly buffed, unblemished, reading new stories from old skates, near to flying.

And there's Hayden catching up to him, the sound of his blades approaching, his stick tapping, signaling for Shane to pass the puck. And they're alone, it's silent, it's cold but the air is fresh against Shane's sweaty skin. It all narrows down to a goal, that's what it is, that's the purpose, the fulfillment after all Shane's hard work, to show it paid off, to show that with hockey, *in hockey*, he didn't blend into the background, and it didn't *matter* if he was something else off the ice. All anyone cared about was if Shane could skate, if Shane could score, if Shane could go another year securing the cup.

Shane was perfect when a game came around. It was what was expected. That's what he is to the fans, what he is to his coach. Shane *is* hockey. A methodical, choreographed silent dance, racing towards something that made sense because it made other people happy.

Shane wouldn't step out of line. Shane wouldn't throw a punch. Shane wouldn't lose the puck to the opposite team. Shane wouldn't say anything unpracticed in an interview. *Shane wouldn't kiss a guy.*

Shane would play hockey. That's all.

And Shane *likes* this. To be in control, to know what is going to happen, to see the end before it comes, to see every solution, to have no more questions because hockey had stopped asking them long ago, the answer was Shane, the answer was to never stop going, never, never, never.

Unless he was—Unless—

—

“So you hate the fucking moon, okay.”

The door beeps as it automatically locks, and Shane scoffs. “I don't hate the moon. Did you think I like the moon?”

“These questions,” Ilya mutters, pulling his shirt off.

“You made us get out of bed to go see it, so—“

“It is the fucking eclipse. The next time you see it you will be grey and old and half blind.”

Shane undoes the tie on his sweatpants. “So you didn't want me to miss it.”

“I didn't want you to overthink,” Ilya says. He unbuttons his jeans. “Now, here you are, overthinking instead of kissing me.”

He has passion. Ilya wanted for Shane to feel it. To share wonder with him. To share beauty and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Shane was worth that, to him.

“Don’t see you doing anything about it.”

Ilya shakes his head, and they tumble into bed again.

—

Is there passion enough in Shane, is there fearlessness enough in Ilya, is there kindness enough in a person’s admiration to accept that the sun and the moon are a perfect fit?

Shane’s mother wipes the tears from his eyes. *Shane*, she whispers. She’s sorry. And maybe it was about passion, but maybe passion was about the sun, maybe the sun was about Ilya and if no one else wanted to look too long, Shane would keep reminding him his focus has never quite wavered, and that he has never stopped being grateful for how he shines a light on Shane’s dark, even when he thought keeping it all hidden away was what he needed to do in order to maintain the perfection he showcased on the ice.

—

Ilya kisses him once, twice, and then he’s asleep, and Shane is wired, now, stuck on the concept of the whole world looking at a miracle while Ilya couldn’t look away from Shane, and this is not what Shane is meant to do, this is not how he’s meant to act when he’s only wanted for one purpose.

Hockey completed him. But there was no hockey if there was no Ilya.

—

Finally, Shane settles on an answer. Why does he like hockey? Because it brought him the only person to ever want Shane beyond it.

—

End Notes

not to say shane doesn't love hockey. of course he loves hockey. but he should get to love other things too.

probably there wasn't actually an eclipse at whatev time this is set but 🙄

the painting referenced is at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, and you can look at it [here](#)

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