

poster boy

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by [Joana789](#)

Summary

"Shane Hollander, Montreal's perfect captain," Ilya mutters. His breath tickles Shane's ear.

Shane turns his head, tips his chin up and lets Ilya kiss him right against the front door until his lips are buzzing with it.

He is what Ilya says he is — he's boring and proper, polite. He sticks to his meal plan and eats brown rice and vegetables and steamed fish, and no processed sugar. He tries not to make his parents worry. He gives perfectly fine, safe interviews and ignores it when the press tries to get him to say anything that would be out of line, and he is professional and good at it.

No one needs to know that he lights up under Ilya's touch like the New Year's Eve sky, how easily he goes down to his knees for him, how his heartbeat kicks into overdrive the second Ilya leans into his space. It is only for Shane to know, and for Ilya, maybe, if he would like to.

Or: Shane Hollander and the pressure of being in the spotlight.

Notes

heated rivalry hit me like a ton of bricks man

i know nothing about hockey. i also love shane hollander dearly in all his autistic, neurotic glory, and just needed to get it out of my system - it's interesting to think about his efforts of maintaining a certain public image through the lense of who he is and his changing relationship with ilya, hence this.

i did read the books and this is set during book/season 1, but you can genuinely imagine whatever timeline you'd like as this is very non-specific and just thrown together. i wrote it for fun instead of writing my conference abstract! whatever inconsistencies you find, pls excuse them as my creative choices

For the most part, Shane just tries to do his job.

It's his third brand deal of the year.

It's nice, Shane thinks, that he is actually on the ice for this one. That doesn't usually happen. He's only done a handful of commercials — his mom's bidding, since she's taken control of his media presence with a sense of purpose he can only describe as scarily impressive, and has been elbow deep in emails and phone calls ever since, for which he is very grateful — but he knows how this goes by now, roughly. He squints against the harsh set lighting and lets the makeup people do their magic, stands in the right spot and tries not to look like an idiot.

This one's for hockey gear, at least.

"Just do what feels best," the director tells him from behind the camera. The rink looks a bit strange with all the shooting equipment strewn around, but Shane will manage. If there are instructions he should stick to, for later, he hasn't heard them yet — maybe they will want a close-up of his face, a shot of him firing the puck at the goal, him skating down the ice as fast as he can, maybe something else that looks good on TV.

"What feels best?" he repeats, hoping for pointers.

"Yeah, just pretend we're not here," the director says. "It's your stage, Shane."

Shane guesses, from the man's small smile, that it's supposed to be encouraging. He hopes he reads that correctly. That's nice, except if the filming crew wasn't here, then it would mean that Shane would be at practice, or in the middle of a game, maybe, playing Florida, or Detroit, or— or Boston. He would be racing Ilya Rozanov down the rink or chirping back at him during a face-off. It would be fun. He would not be thinking about camera angles, and he wouldn't be wearing a foundation too light for his skin because the makeup artist couldn't find one that would better match his complexion, though she seemed apologetic about it.

"Right," he nods. "Sure."

He does some warm-up drills that he hopes will translate well enough on camera and only allows himself to miss Ilya Rozanov for a very, very brief moment, as he skates down the rink by himself.

When his deal with Reebok goes through, his mom hugs him tight. She smells like the same perfume she's always used, the default Christmas present she's been getting from dad for years now.

Shane remembers it back from when he was still a child, scrawny, wobbly in his skates, missing a few teeth. He would wait around for his mom to pick him up from practice, reading comic books or sports magazines, squirming in the uncomfortable plastic chairs of the stands, usually alone because even then it was hard to make friends, and because his mom always got off work late, so he was just the last one there, really. He didn't mind much. It was peaceful, and mom would wave at him from the entrance when she'd arrive, and he'd go jumping down the steps because by then he was usually starving. Her car always smelled like the perfume, too. Shane lets Yuna Hollander fold him into her embrace like back when he was ten, only he tucks his nose into her hair now, and not her shoulder, because he's not shorter than her anymore, and thinks of dosing off in her car on the way back home from practice, his comic books put away carefully in his hockey bag so they wouldn't get crumpled. Back then, hockey was just fun, and he was good at it because he just was, and not because he was expected to be. All games were just this — games. Less intense, with less at stake.

"I'm so proud of you," mom tells him, and Shane makes a noise into her hair that is equal parts acknowledging and grateful. She rubs his back like she used to when he was smaller and couldn't sleep because the sound of his alarm clock ticking was suddenly too repetitive and much, or the cars outside, or the fridge, when everything got intense to the point of exhaustion. This feels, in a way, similar. "This is such a huge step. You're the first Asian-Canadian ambassador they signed." She lets him go, but only an arm's length, to look into his face. "Think about what ten-year-old Shane would say."

Ten-year-old Shane would be terrified. He would also be ecstatic. Not many people in hockey look like Shane does — when he was a kid, no one did at all. He learned very quickly, in his years and years of watching hockey games — and rewatching, and rewinding and analyzing, and watching again — not to look for similarities of this kind very hard. The only things that matter on the ice are skill and grit, and being tough enough for it. Shane is tough enough for it.

Ultimately, it doesn't really matter that he's always stood out in pictures, or that his second name, the one his grandma picked, curls strangely on his tongue every time he pronounces it, that the comfort food he remembers from childhood was made up of dishes his classmates never heard of, that his mom would celebrate holidays and festivals and traditions none of the other kids knew, that he's never been *just* Canadian. Does it?

"He would go crazy," Shane says, and it makes his mom laugh.

He books a sponsorship with Nokia. He gets Rolex. His mom works her magic, and the brand deals keep filing into his inbox. Shane plays, season after season, and keeps proving himself on the ice and winning, and he keeps thinking about his ten-year-old self, every other kid out there who is like him, who will see him on TV and come into this sport, spot Shane Hollander among the players and feel a little less out of place.

"Rozanov has been talking shit about you again, you know," Hayden tells him, fumbling with his jersey. "There was an interview."

Shane puts his left skate on, then his right, as usual. "Oh, yeah?"

He is already buzzing with adrenaline. He hasn't seen the interview. He will, now that he knows about it, but later — after he's gone out into the arena and let his playing do the talking for him; after he's looked the very real, very striking Ilya Rozanov in the face and stolen the puck right from under his stick.

He slides his shoulder pads on, just as Hayden says, "He called you predictable and a menace."

"He usually does," Shane tells him. Everywhere but in Ilya Rozanov's book, these two things should not mix. He hides his smile in the dip of his head.

"Sounds like he learned a new word and just wanted to show it off," J.J. calls from across the room. "We'll fuck Boston up for you, Hollzy."

"You fucking better," Shane says. It earns him a few fired-up whoops of *Aye, Captain!* cutting through the locker room pre-game buzz, already sounding as eager to go out and play as he feels. They can win it tonight. They will win it. He puts on his elbow pads and his jersey, then grabs his phone out of his locker and types up quickly, *Don't have too much fun out there.*

It only takes a moment for a reply to come.

Lily: *That's for after the game* 🤔

Shane grins like an idiot.

"Let's show these assholes who's the better team here, yeah?" he calls out, puts his phone away and grabs his helmet to the accompanying roar of his team cheering, the sound of it loud like the rush of blood in his head.

It's his third brand deal of the year.

"That was great, Shane," the photographer says. "Let's take a five and maybe try one more time."

Shane nods and loosens his death grip on the energy drink can. The metal is sweating in his palm. One of the fluttery-handed assistants runs up to him to fix his hair, shields his eyes away from the sudden spritz of additional hairspray with a muttered, "Oh, be careful," and then skitters away again. He shoots her a weak smile, blinking against the glare of the ring lights.

Shane's done so many of these photoshoots since he started out in the NHL that he should be better at them at this point, probably, and yet — the photographer's increasingly more disgruntled comments have been as hard to miss as the bright red X mark taped up on the floor where Shane's standing. He can't quite get it right. His smile comes out too plasticky, artificial on his face; his shoulders are too stiff; he's tense like he's bracing himself for a punch, only it doesn't come. It feels like he's firing shots at a goal and keeps missing.

He keeps thinking about his own face, staring back at him from bus stops and ads in airports and the back pages of Sunday newspapers. There was a campaign for NorthFace he did a couple of years ago where they couldn't get a single decent shot out of him for hours, where the shoot ran so late he started to straight up apologize to people, where he had to step outside and breathe and his mom found him crouching at the back of the building with his head between his legs on the verge of hyperventilating. They did get some usable pictures of him after, but every time he saw one later, on billboards or in department stores, he kept going back to that moment.

This feels similar.

"Just relax, honey," is what his mom told him on the phone earlier, when she called to ask how it's going, and he let it slip, frustrated, that it could be better. That he could do better. "You've done this before. You're a natural."

"I'm not, mom," Shane said, pressing the phone to his ear, pressing the heel of his other palm to his eye for a second before he remembered he was wearing makeup and flinched away to not mess it up. He wanted to say that he was a natural on the ice, not in front of a camera. That anywhere that wasn't a skating rink, all the attention made his throat close up a little. That the fabric of the shirt they put him in kept itching at his skin, and that they styled his hair in a way that was supposed to look effortless and dishevelled but only kept getting it into his eyes, and that he was starting to get a headache from so many people swarming around him.

But he wasn't sure how to phrase it all in a way that wouldn't make him sound ungrateful, or fussy, or difficult to work with. So he said nothing.

"You'll be great," mom told him, not noticing the hesitation, and then Shane heard something muffled following on her end. She sighed. "I need to go. Just hang in there! Don't stress too much. I love you."

Just hang in there, he tells himself now. *Don't stress.*

He steps away from the red X marked-up spot and beelines for his chair on the side, straightens out his jacket where it's sitting askew, thrown over the back of it, takes a swing of his water. The bottle is dented just a little. Shane tries to undo it, but it won't, quite, which bothers him. He presses his fingers into the plastic and only makes the dent move places, then again. One of the stylists, a tall guy who picked the itchy shirt for him, shoots him a quick glance.

Shane rolls his shoulders, like it could help at all. He drinks some more water, screws the cap on tight, puts it back on the floor carefully, the dent facing away where he can't see it.

There's a message on his phone when he fishes it out of his pocket — probably from his mom, checking in. She does it during all his shoots she's not present in person for, and especially if they're not going very well, which — check, and check. Shane clicks on the message and watches it load, already forming a reply in his head. Something along the lines of, *it's okay, I'm not stressing, I just need—*

Lily: *Let's make a bet.*

Oh God. Seriously?

Shane: ?

Shane: *What do you want?*

Lily: *So rude, Hollander. No one ever believes me when I say you are rude person.*

Lily: *You should be nicer to me.*

Shane has to keep himself from rolling his eyes. Of all the things Ilya Rozanov could say to him, that is in the top 20 of the more ridiculous ones. Or maybe not, knowing him.

Shane: *I'm always nice to you, asshole.*

Shane: *I'm busy. What do you want?*

Lily: *You say always nice and call me asshole in one sentence, it does not make sense :(*

Lily: *Busy with what, planning how to get kicked out of playoffs? Don't worry, I can help you with that.*

Shane clicks out of the message, closes his eyes, counts to ten. This jerk. If he has to bite his lip just so he doesn't smile, no one has to know. The photographer still hasn't come back from his announced five-minute breather. Shane clicks back into the inbox.

Shane: *Fuck you.*

Lily: *Can help with that also.*

He tilts his phone away from the nearest person, like they could see anything on his narrow screen from where they're standing.

Shane: *I don't have time for this, I'm serious. Bye.*

Lily: *No*

Lily: *No wait*

Lily: *Is going to be worth your time, promise.*

Lily: *Let's bet who scores highest number of goals the next game.*

Shane huffs.

Shane: *Congratulations, you just described the key rule of hockey.*

Lily: *No, Hollander, is not what I mean.*

Lily: *Not team.*

Lily: *I mean bet who scores more goals between you and me.*

Shane: *What for?*

Lily: *For fun. May be a new concept for you, I know, but is okay.*

Lily: *Whoever scores less next game has to do what the other says.*

Shane considers this. He imagines Rozanov stretched out on his couch or hunched in a bar stool in some loud club, tapping at his phone, wearing this smile of his that Shane always wants to wipe off his face on the ice, or kiss it away when they're off of it. He is probably bored, hence this whole thing. Isn't this how they work anyway, a part of him thinks — they piss each other off during the game, and most of the time it feels like foreplay, as unprofessional as that sounds. Shane would rather die than admit it out loud. But whether Montreal or Boston wins, each time they face each other, matters more than just a place in the rankings when he knows how heated and desperate Ilya can get after he loses, how content and self-satisfied and cocky he is when he wins.

Shane really does not have time for this at all, but when he looks over to the center of the room, no one seems to pay him any mind, still, so. That's the only reason he gives in.

Shane: *Fine.*

The response is immediate.

Lily: *If I win, I get to fuck you against this fancy new mirror I bought. Make you watch.*

He fumbles with his phone; the room gets suddenly hotter by a few degrees. Last time they saw each other, Rozanov pushed him into his bed and kissed so hungrily it left Shane

gasping, then pressed him into the mattress and pushed his legs open and fucked him like they were running out of time, more so than they usually were. He told Shane, "You should see yourself, fuck," and "I wish I could take a picture," and Shane had to close his eyes against it, like the words would have less of an effect on him this way. Maybe that's what this is about.

His throat is dry. He shouldn't be thinking about this here — shouldn't be thinking about it *at all*, period. He wills himself to type a response, slowly.

Shane: *If I win, you stop smoking during the playoffs. And I told you not to sext me when I'm working.*

Lily: *Oh my God, I should have known yours would just be boring.*

Lily: *But fine. You will lose anyway, so no harm.*

Lily: *And you said to not sext before game. No game today* 🐈

Shane: *I wish there was a game. I'm at a photoshoot.*

He sends it before he can think. Rozanov will probably just make fun of him again. People still do that sometimes, though less often than they used to. Shane watches him type a response, the bubble appearing and disappearing and appearing again, and tries not to think about how the press sometimes calls him a wannabe-model, how the guys laugh at him in the locker room every now and again, saying, *considering a career change, Hollander?*, how uncomfortable it makes him feel. His phone pings with an answer.

Lily: *Good. I will have new pretty Hollander material to look at.*

Shane stares at it.

The frustration of this whole godforsaken shoot crests in him again, then, surprisingly, flatlines. The Ilya Rozanov in his head is always a little different than the Ilya Rozanov out there. It's nice to be reminded, time and time again, that he can be annoying, but is not cruel, never to Shane. Shane unclenches his jaw, takes a breath and realizes, belatedly, that his face feels hot. That he's blushing. He wants to press a hand to his cheek like a teenage girl just to hide it but doesn't.

Shane: *Not if it continues to be as successful as it has been so far. We don't have a single good picture.*

Lily: *Every picture with you in it is good.*

Shane swallows.

Shane: *I think the photographer would disagree with you.*

Lily: *Shitty photographer then.*

Lily: *Doesn't know beautiful face when he sees one? You just need to be in the frame and there, commercial is success.*

Lily: *I would know. I've seen your face many times.*

The smile that makes its way onto Shane's face is entirely out of his control. *I've seen yours, too*, he types, which is just plain stupid and Rozanov would one hundred percent make it into an innuendo, so Shane deletes it quickly. *It doesn't work like that*, is next, which he deletes too. In the end, he only goes with, *Oh, really?* and tells himself that this is not flirting. Shane does not flirt. He's at work.

Lily: *Really.*

Lily: *You might not know this, but I have a poster of you in my bedroom, I kiss it before every game we play with Montreal, just to say "sorry, Hollander, sorry you will be loser again".*

The laugh that escapes him earns him glances from the tall stylist and a few nearby assistants.

"Sorry, sorry," he mutters and waves a hand in what he hopes comes off as an apologetic gesture, bites his lip just to keep his smile under control. *That's a lie*, he types, and waits for a response again, ten, twenty, thirty long seconds, until the typing bubble appears.

Lily: *Yes, is lie. I prefer to kiss the real Shane Hollander, in person.*

Which is— fine.

Shane does not bite down on his lip harder, and does not exit the inbox again, and certainly does not consider responding with, *I prefer you in person, too*, or *I can't wait to see you*, or something equally ridiculous.

He has the schedule of his games memorised three times over; he knows exactly when the next time they'll play Boston is. It doesn't help at all with the fact that he suddenly cannot wait. And God, fuck it.

Shane: *I can help with that.*

"Shane?" he hears then and almost drops his phone. The fluttery-handed assistant, now holding a notepad, smiles at him politely. "Are you okay to continue? I think we're about to start up again."

"Yes, sure," he says, hoping intensely that his ridiculous blush doesn't show. Over the assistant's shoulder, he can see that the photographer is back, tinkering with the camera. "I, uh, I'll be right there."

"Whenever you're ready," the assistant says and leaves him to it. Shane only glances down at his phone when she's a safe distance away.

Lily: *Please do.*

He takes a very long breath in.

Three weeks. He just needs to get through this photoshoot, and then the next three weeks, and then he will win the game and the stupid bet and get to kiss Ilya Rozanov again.

Shane: I need to go. The photographer is back.

Lily: Cannot appreciate a pretty face and has bad timing. Almost as bad as Hayden Pike.

Shane: Bye, Rozanov.

Lily: Bye, cover boy.

Lily: See you soon.

"See you soon," Shane mutters to himself, and then pockets his phone, grabs the godforsaken energy drink can, makes sure the logo is showing in his grip and goes.

So, yeah. For the most part, Shane just tries to do his job.

He knows, realistically, that he can't do it all perfectly all the time. But he can try, and if he is anything, then it is a player, so he will play the game. As most things in life, it gets easier with practice — he always has his talking points memorised, knows how to skirt around a controversial question, and the interviews never really stray away from a certain pattern anyway. He learns his best angles for the camera, where to look, how to seem more at ease even when he never feels so. The brands keep wanting to work with him. He must be doing something right.

He counts his macros, rewatches past games, meets his parents for dinner every once in a while, goes to practice, plays and plays and plays. Sometimes, he goes out with his team; more often, he doesn't, because the bars are always too loud and there are too many people. He hangs out with Hayden, watches his kids chase each other around in the backyard, reads to them when they swarm him on the couch, holds little Arthur to his chest until he falls asleep because, for some reason, he seems to like him.

His teammates tell each other about their girlfriends and wives in the locker room after practice, talk about vacation plans and moving in together, *I think we will buy an apartment, we're having another kid*, and Shane knows that even if he does everything perfectly, wins every award and does every brand deal, he will never get to have this, not like they do.

Ilya's t-shirt is on the floor in the hallway, right where Shane dropped it as soon as he ripped it off of him, seconds after Ilya'd made it past the threshold. The back of Shane's neck feels hot when he makes his way after Ilya as he walks through Shane's apartment and pieces his outfit back together. His underwear by the bed, his pants on top of the stairs, his t-shirt here; it's like a very embarrassing version of a treasure hunt. Ilya crouches down to reach it and winks at Shane over his shoulder before his head disappears under the fabric, then emerges back out again as he pulls the t-shirt on. His hair gets messy from it, even more than it already is. Shane clasps his hands behind his back to fight the ridiculous urge to step closer and fix it for him.

"Be careful on your way out," he says instead, because he is well-mannered, even in the face of temptations like brushing his infamous rival-slash-whatever-they-are's curls out of his eyes. "And have a safe flight tomorrow."

"Ah, yes," Ilya tells him instead of a thank you, standing up. He stretches; his t-shirt rides up. Shane lets himself look at the sliver of skin above the waistband until it disappears under the fabric again. "The flight from Montreal is always so long, is so annoying."

Shane huffs out a breath. "It's not even two hours."

"I still have to pack," Ilya tells him, like it's Shane's fault. He guesses it is, maybe, since Ilya is here and busy with him instead of in his hotel room, busy with folding his clothes and stuffing them into a suitcase. It makes him giddy; he tries to smother the feeling and hopes it doesn't show on his face. "And then wake up early tomorrow, go to airport, stand in long queue for luggage check and sit around by the gate like it will disappear if I don't have it in eyesight for two minutes."

"Line of sight," Shane corrects; Ilya waves a dismissive hand. "Yeah, thanks, I'm aware of how airports work."

"And that's only if flight is not cancelled." Ilya jams his feet into his shoes, the right one first, then the left. He lifts an eyebrow at Shane. "You Canadians are so scared of snow, I don't understand." Which is so not fucking true. "One snowflake in the sky and suddenly no one goes anywhere, is absurd."

He pronounces it as *ab-surd*, stressing the first syllable, not the second. Shane loves it. It loops in his head like a ringtone.

"It's not gonna snow tomorrow," he says. "I checked the forecast."

"Of course you did." Ilya picks up his jacket from where he threw it onto the dresser by the door earlier. "That eager to have me out of the city?"

"The opposite, actually," Shane says before he can think. *Absurd*, it echoes in his head.

For a moment, they just look at each other.

Most of the time, all this is is a convenient arrangement. If they're in the same city, they fuck. Ilya Rozanov is incredibly hot and Shane can admit, by this point, that it turns him on like

nothing else; whatever Shane has going on seems to be doing something for Ilya, too. Shane is very fucking good at hockey, and, by now, at sex, and can separate one from the other like the professional he is. He just needs someone to get him out of his head sometimes. He needs Ilya's hands on him, and his clever mouth, needs to know there is a very specific, very carefully carved-out time and place where he doesn't have to be anyone. He can just focus on the sensation of another body next to his, on making another person feel good, on feeling good in return. Simple enough.

Except it isn't, really, and hasn't been in a while, with how Ilya says his name and sometimes touches him with something akin to reverence and looks at him like he's waiting for an answer to a question he hasn't yet asked.

He's smiling now, a little, though he's turned his head to the side like he wants to hide it. Shane feels like he just scored a hat trick.

"Oh, and what's that?"

He is pulled out of the moment by Ilya's head jerking up with sudden interest, him stepping closer to the dresser. Shane follows his line of sight.

"Ah, this," he says and comes nearer as if strung by an invisible thread Ilya is pulling, until he's almost by the front door. "It's nothing."

There was an interview a couple of weeks ago his coach made him do for a sports magazine that came to them with the idea of writing a piece about the team. Something to give to the fans, they said, and to keep the interest high. The Metros have had a glorious streak of wins, their lineup was tight, they were doing better than ever. It was only fair to allow some spotlight, even with the season still very much ongoing. And who better to represent the team than Shane Hollander?

His picture on the cover is a snapshot of him mid-swing, attention zeroed in on the puck. He'd felt guilty about being the one chosen as the face of it all — this was a piece about the *team*, not just about him — until he said as much to Hayden, only to get good-naturedly laughed at.

"Hell, man, we're all grateful you did this, and not, like, fucking Comeau or someone," Hayden told him, shaking his head. "Can you imagine? All this press stuff is just stressful. You took one for the team."

"They sent it to me a couple days ago when it came out," Shane dutifully informs Ilya, though he hasn't asked. "There is an online version, too."

Ilya flips through the pages.

"*The Metros' winning streak: Shane Hollander and his crew*," Ilya reads out loud, then sends Shane a slanted look. Shane leans against the front door, trying to feign nonchalance.

"Winning streak, yeah, right, will not last long."

"We beat you tonight, in case you forgot."

"Only because Marlow fumbled the assist."

"No, because we're the better team." Shane juts his chin out. "Says so right there."

Ilya flips to another page, smirking. "Sure it does," he says, then is quiet for a moment as he reads. "You are such proper, polite boy, Hollander, this interview has no edge. *We are focused on perfecting our teamwork and building our trust in each other. It can get tough out there, but we've shown what we're capable of before and I'm confident we will not let anyone down with our performance this season.* God. You are giving them nothing."

"Fuck you."

"We don't have time for another round, sadly."

Shane's affronted laugh gets surprised out of him, echoes in the hallway. "Oh my God, shut up," he says, trying not to smile around the words and failing. "Give me that."

"No, I am taking this with me, souvenir from Montreal," Ilya tells him, grinning, dancing out of reach when Shane swipes at him. He hides the magazine behind his back. "I will read this on the plane tomorrow. Will help me sleep through flight."

"You're unbelievable."

Ilya hums. His smile turns into something sharper. "Hm," he says, "you are, too."

Maybe if Shane stays where he is, pressed against the front door of his apartment, between Ilya Rozanov and the rest of the world, Ilya won't have to leave. Maybe it could be that easy, for once. He watches Ilya step closer again, lean into his space, lick his bottom lip like he's nervous, or hungry, or both. Ilya stops an arm's length away — it is up to Shane, then, to reach out and hook his fingers in the belt loops of Ilya's jeans and pull him closer, until they're chest to chest and there's nowhere else to go. His breath catches in his throat.

"Shane Hollander, Montreal's perfect captain," Ilya mutters. His breath tickles Shane's ear.

Shane turns his head, tips his chin up and lets Ilya kiss him right against the front door until his lips are buzzing with it.

He is what Ilya says he is — he's boring and proper, polite. He sticks to his meal plan and eats brown rice and vegetables and steamed fish, and no processed sugar. He tries not to make his parents worry. He gives perfectly fine, safe interviews and ignores it when the press tries to get him to say anything that would be out of line, and he is professional and good at it.

How much of it is done out of his own volition and how much out of obligation is inconsequential. If his deranged macrobiotic diet will help him play better, so be it. If he has to keep smiling for the press and give out interviews for magazines and make sure the team's reputation stays intact because he's the captain, then he will. It's trouble enough that he stands out simply because of his ethnicity, that every once in a while some asshole will chirp at him a shit line about skin color and playing where he's not welcome, that the anxiety keeps

buzzing under his skin during every photoshoot, that he cannot keep track of all the unspoken social rules everyone else seems to just know how to stick to, that he only really feels like himself when he's either on the ice or under Ilya Rozanov's hands. That he's gay — that he's been lying to everyone for years and still can't help it, even though he's tried and tried and tried. It's difficult enough.

No one needs to know that he lights up under Ilya's touch like the New Year's Eve sky, how easily he goes down to his knees for him, how his heartbeat kicks into overdrive the second Ilya leans into his space. It is only for Shane to know, and for Ilya, maybe, if he would like to.

"I need to go now," Ilya tells him when they part, though he doesn't move away. When Shane nods, their noses brush. He presses one last lingering kiss to Ilya's lips, cradles his jaw, smooths down his hair like he thought about earlier, and lets go.

"Enjoy the reading," he tells him.

Ilya shrugs on his jacket, grabs the stupid magazine and waves it at Shane, smiling like a five-year-old on Christmas day.

"Oh, I will," he says. He tucks the magazine under his arm as he leaves.

—

"Shane?"

He looks up from his plate. His mom blinks at him from across the table; his dad smiles patiently. Shane realizes that he must have been asked a question and is now expected to answer, except he's been too focused on the texture of his food not being right and missed whatever was said to him.

"Everything okay?" mom asks.

"Uh, yes, sure," Shane says and puts down his fork. "Sorry, I'm just. Just tired." Mom frowns a little. Dad makes the face he usually makes when he's worried but doesn't want Shane to know, where he presses his lips together and blinks too quickly. Shane's familiar with it.

"What did you say?"

"I asked about the Armani commercial," mom says. Her frown is still there. She scans his face like she used to when he would come home from the ice rink back in school, and she'd ask him if anything hurt, and he would try to hide his bruised shins or an aching shoulder so she wouldn't forbid him to go to the next practice. "Remember? Next month?"

"Right." Right, there was something. Shane can't remember what exactly, but that's— it's fine. He's just a little tired. "Yeah, next month."

His parents exchange a look that is probably supposed to be subtle; Shane can't tell what it means. Then his mom reaches across the table and takes his hand. Her palm is soft and dry.

"Honey," she says, "if it's too much—you'd tell us if it was too much, right?" He blinks at her. "I can make some phone calls and reschedule a few things. It's not a problem, really. With the brand deals."

It's not too much. It's okay. Shane just needs a good night's sleep, and a different lunch to eat because this one is all the wrong texture and feels gross, and he needs to rewatch a few of their old games, maybe, just to catch up to speed, and maybe also needs to stop lying to everyone in his life about who he is or is not in love with, or sleeps with, or sneaks around with.

"I'm okay, mom," he says and hopes it is convincing. He looks from his mom to his dad, and back to his mom. "I don't mind the brand deals, really. I can handle it." He squeezes her hand, and she looks at him for a second, but then nods and lets go. "Armani. Was it the one they wanted to shoot by the waterfall?"

—

Rose calls him first thing in the morning, which means it's around midday for her.

"I'm on lunch break, technically," she says, "only they don't let me eat anything good anyway, not until we're done with all the skin-tight costumes scenes, so what's the point?"

Shane looks down at his own protein smoothie that he's just made and doesn't comment.

She's in London, shooting a movie about a young ballet dancer who falls in love with her stagemate. The stagemate is also a woman, apparently. Shane did not know this. Rose laughs at him over the phone when he says, "Oh, interesting," and his voice does something funny. She's on speaker; her laugh makes the kitchen seem brighter when it echoes against the tiles.

"No need to clutch your pearls," she says, "it's not very scandalous. Just, eh, you know, they could have done a better job with the script. But at least no one is painting me blue from head to toe this time, and I'm happy to be a part of it, obviously. And I have a great dialect coach, which is amazing because sometimes after a few hours of speaking with a British accent, my mouth just feels funny. Do I sound funny?"

Shane can tell she's excited. He smiles down at his phone and pours his smoothie out of the blender and into a glass. "Don't worry, you sound normal to me," he says. The blender goes in the sink. "Do you think it'll be, uh. Well received?"

She hums. "I hope so, yeah. At the end of the day, it is a love story."

Shane leans against the countertop and looks at the swirling pattern of the marble there. "And does it have a happy ending?"

"I definitely should not be telling you, because one, it is a spoiler, and two, there for sure is a clause in my contract that forbids me from doing it," Rose informs him, and Shane knows exactly the face she's making right now, "but yes. I trust you not to leak this to the press, Shane Hollander."

"I will remember to act surprised when I eventually watch this movie on the plane somewhere, promise."

"Wow, okay, thank you, now I'll just force you to watch it the second it comes out." Shane would, anyway, and she knows as much. His smile widens. "But yeah, I hope people like it. I really think we could use more queer stories in mainstream cinema. Everywhere, actually."

The patterns of the marble look like a spiderweb, white splitting out into gray, into gold. Shane traces the lines with his finger. The surface is smooth like ice. He takes a deep breath in, says, "Will never happen in hockey."

His voice is a piece of wood that's been in the fire too long, splintering right down the middle under the heat; over the phone, the crack doesn't carry. Rose just huffs. "Yeah, well, the arts are a little more forgiving, I guess," and then backtracks when it stings. "Wait, no, not forgiving, that sounds wrong. Just—"

"I get it. Open."

"Yeah," she says. "Open."

For a moment, they're quiet. Shane's always liked that he can be quiet with Rose; he imagines the silence stretching over the phone signal and power lines, from Canada all the way to England, only it is comfortable and not awkward, like it sometimes is when he misses a hint or a social cue or a reference. He wants to ask her if it really rains so much in London, and what the latest drama on set has been, and if she thinks happy endings in queer relationships can only happen in fiction, or in real life, too.

She would tell him not to be stupid. He wishes she was here in person so he could hug her.

"My break is over," Rose says, like she is apologizing, and then switches to annoyance.

"Ugh, back to memorising lines. Who was it that said to never make your passion your actual job? I would like to send them an apology fruit basket for not listening."

Shane laughs. Tension lifts away from him like morning fog lifting from the surface of a lake. "Have fun, ballet dancer."

"Thank you, hockey player," Rose says, her smile audible in her voice. "Though I have to say, it seems like you've been having much more fun than me, recently." He is momentarily mortified by that statement, imagining some paparazzi catching him in front of Ilya's building or a grainy photo of the two of them in front of Shane's place that some fan has uploaded on Twitter until she adds, "This new cologne ad that you did, with the beach? So jealous."

Oh.

"You saw that?"

"Of course," Rose says, like it should be obvious she keeps up with what Shane Hollander, her gay ex-boyfriend, is up to media-wise. "You look *so* hot in it."

"We just shot it in a studio, I'm sorry to tell you," he says in lieu of a better reply. "Not much to be jealous of. It wasn't even a real beach."

"Is it ever," Rose sighs dramatically. "But it does make me feel better about being stuck in cold, gray London now."

"Happy to help."

She laughs again. "Gotta go. Love you."

"Love you," Shane tells her and waits until she hangs up first.

—

Boston wins 3-2, with Ilya scoring the last goal right at the very end of the third period.

He opens the door already grinning, smug fucking asshole, and has Shane on his knees barely two minutes later. His fingers twist tight in Shane's hair when he holds his head as Shane takes him in his mouth, tighter when he stops him before he comes, his breath a staccato rhythm of need. They stumble to the bedroom, tugging at each other's clothes, and then fuck like it's another type of game, to see who breaks first.

Shane wins this one.

He lets himself relax into Ilya's arms only until his head stops spinning, then ignores his whining and how he tries to cage him in and shuffles to the bathroom to shower. The water clears away the tremor in his hands but doesn't thin out the residual heat still curling in his stomach. They still have some time before he needs to go. Maybe an hour. Shane feels loose around his joints and well-fucked, satisfied in a way he only feels after this. He tips his head under the spray of water, lets it drum against his skull.

Ilya's eyes are on him the second he comes out. His gaze is so heavy it is almost a physical thing. "What?" Shane asks, adjusting the towel around his waist and comes back to the edge of the bed, sits at the edge of the mattress. Water drips from his hair, down his neck and spine. He should have dried off better but didn't because he was in a hurry to get back to—this. Ilya would laugh at him if he knew.

"Nothing," Ilya says. He reaches out and smooths his palm up Shane's arm, wrist to shoulder. "Come back here."

Shane does. He settles with their arms touching, careful, stupidly coy like he still sometimes gets and has to actively fight against. Ilya leans into his side as if to counter Shane's reserve, runs his fingers up and down his chest, slowly, splays his hand on Shane's stomach like he's testing what Shane will do, or like he's considering what his next move should be, or like he just wants to touch.

"Useless shower," he says. "We're not done yet."

Shane swallows his smile down. "You could use a shower, too, you know."

"What for?" Ilya shakes his head. His hand twitches against Shane's stomach; he moves his middle finger to the side and back, just barely. "I cleaned up here in bed. No need to get up."

"Did you now," Shane mutters.

"Yes." Ilya's hand inches lower until it's brushing against the hem of the towel. "Used your shirt. See, so no shower needed—"

Shane cuts him off with an affronted gasp, and then Ilya cuts himself off with his laughter. "Fuck off, oh my God, you asshole," Shane says, pushing at Ilya's shaking shoulders and his insufferable laughing face, looking wildly around the room for his poor shirt until he remembers, in a flash, Ilya tugging it off of him somewhere between the couch and the bedroom. "That's not fucking funny!"

"Montreal's merch would finally be useful for something!"

Shane punches his shoulder, hard. "I'm leaving."

He twists his wrist out of Ilya's hold when he clutches at him.

"No, don't," Ilya says, the laughter lighting up his voice. Shane pushes at him again, feels the hard muscle work under his palm when Ilya resists.

"Seriously."

"Wait, wait." He huffs out the last scraps of his amusement. "Don't go."

Shane will not go. It's a testament to how far past any point of return he is that he knows it right away. It must show in his expression, because Ilya tips his chin up and looks.

Something changes in his face. He gives Shane the kind of measured look he knows from the ice, a player used to assessing his opponent's strength. Shane looks back at him and feels, suddenly, heat rising up in his face that has very little to do with getting angry, and then only has enough time to register a glint in Ilya's eyes before he, in three efficient movements, tugs Shane down the bed and pins him halfway under his own body, catching one of his wrists. Shane's heart slams against his ribs so hard it's almost painful.

"Mm, better," Ilya mutters. "You can't go anywhere now."

Shane's first exhale is shaky; the next one is better. He could break out of his hold easily. Instead, he pretends to kick at Ilya to throw him off, but ends up just looping his leg around Ilya's waist. They press together. Shane's towel falls away, useless; he notices it acutely, feeling hot all over.

"You're lucky that you won today," he says as a distraction for himself.

"I *am* lucky," Ilya says. He presses his thumb against Shane's pulse point right in the center of his wrist, pushes it harder into the mattress. "But not about game. I won because I am better than you."

"You wish."

"Don't have to. You saw my last goal, yes?" Shane did. It replays in his head again, in all its glory, how Ilya grinned at him across the rink right after, triumphant and deserving of victory. His expression is similar now, like he's won something and is still reeling from it. He grips Shane's thigh, digs his fingers into the muscle. "Was beautiful."

"Right."

"Is what the press said, too," Ilya tells him. "They asked, *Captain Rozanov, how did it feel to score such amazing goal right in front of Shane Hollander's face?* And I said, *great as usual, we have been playing for so many years and it never gets old.*"

"Sure, *Captain Rozanov*," Shane says. He blinks up at Ilya's smug face, looks at where his eyes crinkle at the corners. "If the press said so."

"*Captain Rozanov, they said, you are the star. Your team is so good.* And I said, *yes.*"

"Wow."

"*What is your advice for the Montreal Metros after today?* I told them, *to play better.*"

Shane huffs out a breath. "This is a horrible interview," he says.

Ilya arches an eyebrow at him. "Like you give better ones?"

"I do," Shane says. Ilya smooths his palm up from his thigh to his knee, then back.

He says, considering, "Okay."

He lets go of Shane's wrist and stretches halfway off the bed in one fluid movement that Shane registers with a delay. "What—" he starts, cuts himself off when they brush against each other, half-hard. The long, smooth line of Ilya's body stretches until he snags something off the bedside table and then curls back above Shane, bracketing him in. It's his phone — he must have dug it out of his jeans when Shane was in the shower.

"What are you doing?" Shane says, and then Ilya sticks the phone right in front of his face.

"Captain Shane Hollander," he says. "Golden boy of hockey. How do you feel about Boston beating you tonight?"

Shane blinks at him. "Are you kidding?"

"No," Ilya says seriously, though his mouth turns up at the corner. "I am interviewing you."

"And this is supposed to be the microphone?"

"Yes," Ilya's smile twitches, like he's fighting it. "I am professional."

"You are a court fucking jester." Shane wants to kick at him again, or maybe just wrap his arms around him and never let him go. He doesn't do either, only rolls his eyes and fights his own smile when Ilya says, after a few seconds, "Well?"

Shane sighs, hoping it comes out long-suffering and not at all indulgent. "It was a good game," he answers, feeling stupidly fond and somehow younger than he usually feels, "and we did our best, but Boston had a stronger offense today. They can enjoy the win until we beat them next time."

Ilya hums. Shane can't tell if it's pleased or sceptical. He skims his fingers up Ilya's spine, up to his neck, weaves his fingers through his hair. He feels him shiver, just a little.

"Then what do you have to say about the beautiful goal scored in the last two minutes of game?"

Shane's lips twitch. "I've seen better."

Ilya grins at him, sharp, rolls his shoulders and then hips, like he's making himself more comfortable between Shane's legs.

"And how do you feel," he asks next and holds up the phone closer to Shane's face, "having Ilya Rozanov, best player, so handsome and funny and nice, here with you?"

"No journalist would ever describe you as nice," Shane says. "And not the best player."

"Was not the question," Ilya says. He stretches further into Shane's space, like a cat in the sun, so they end up as close as it gets. Shane wonders if Ilya can feel his heart beating. If he can feel the heat of Shane's blush from where he's tracing his thumb along his cheekbone, propped up on his forearm. "So?"

"I feel mildly annoyed," Shane tells him, just to see his smile widen. Then, quieter, "Mostly very lucky."

Ilya's crooked grin relaxes into something soft-edged, then, something less for show and more just for Shane. He leans down and presses the curve of his lips to Shane's forehead, to his cheek, once, twice, then, finally, to his mouth. The kiss feels funny at first, when Ilya's still smiling into it, but then Shane breathes in, and Ilya licks into his mouth, and the smile turns into a sigh, into a groan. Ilya's hand guides the tilt of Shane's head into it; he bites down on Shane's bottom lip, a sharp sting soothed with another kiss.

Desire ripples through Shane's body like a fever, leaves him hot and shivering, makes him arch his hips up and lock his thighs around Ilya's ribcage and twist a hand in his hair and tug. His head swims. They rock against each other, a push and pull — Shane can feel Ilya already hard against him again, twists just a little so they fit better together, gets a stifled moan in reward for his efforts. His breath stutters; he smooths a hand back down Ilya's spine and rocks into him again when he feels his hips twitch.

He only remembers the phone when it digs into his ribs. Right. Right, they should put it away. He fishes it out from where Ilya's dropped it onto the bedsheets and reaches blindly to put it back on the nightstand. It lands with a clatter.

"Interview is over?" Ilya asks when they part, tipping Shane's chin up; his lips brush Shane's when he speaks. His eyes are dark. His mouth is red. Shane did this; it feels like the very end of a game, like he cannot tear his gaze away from the scoreboard. It feels like winning. "I still had questions I wanted to ask."

He only needs a second too long to stitch a sentence together. "Did you," Shane says. Ilya hums in response, then dips his head to nose along Shane's jawline. "Such as?"

"Such as," Ilya repeats. His breath is hot in the hollow of Shane's throat; his mouth is hotter. He leaves a wet, searing kiss on his Adam's apple, lower, then drags his lips over to where Shane's pulse is thrumming away and bites down. "Do you like this?"

With the way his hips stutter, the answer is not difficult to guess. But still. "What do you think?"

Ilya hums again. He fits his mouth to Shane's pulse point and sucks; his fingers let go of Shane's jaw and press against his bottom lip, blindly, where Ilya's mouth has just been. "And this?"

"Those are very—" Shane tries and is only momentarily thrown off when Ilya nips at his throat again. He hopes it leaves a mark. "Very inappropriate questions, for an interview."

"Is exclusive interview, Hollander," Ilya tells him like it's supposed to be obvious. His fingers press against Shane's lips again, and then against Shane's tongue, and Shane gives into it, draws the two offered fingers all the way into his mouth. "You are so good at all the media stuff, I thought you would know." Shane runs his tongue over and between them, sucks like he would if it was Ilya's cock, imagines that it is. He only realizes he must have closed his eyes when he feels Ilya's lips leave his neck, when he blinks up and Ilya's watching him again. He looks hungry. He tells Shane, "Is only for me."

Shane makes a sound he barely recognizes from himself.

And then Ilya's swearing under his breath, something low and Russian, and pulling his hand away, trailing spit, and then they're kissing again, open-mouthed, hot. Shane is so hard. They're straining against each other. When Ilya finally wraps his hand around them both, Shane gasps too loudly; then, the quickening flick of Ilya's wrist forces a string of, "Yeah, yes, yes," out of him, right against Ilya's mouth and his answering rough refrain of "So good,

so good, Shane.” It has Shane bucking his hips up, chasing for more friction, his fingers curling in Ilya’s hair, clawing at his back.

”For you,” he says nonsensically, his body one big rhythm of need. ”Only for you.”

”And last question,” the journalist asks him, ”from all of us who are looking at what you’ve accomplished so far and can’t wait to see what you’ll show us next — how do you handle the pressure?”

”Oh,” Shane says, does not squirm in his seat, ”I just try to do my job.”

His mom forwards him an email about another prospective brand deal precisely at 7:00 AM. It means she will call him later and walk him through an outline of a half-formed plan already. Shane reads through the message, blinking blearily at his too-bright screen and the solid block of tiny letters, phone angled weirdly because the cable of his charger is barely long enough to reach the bed. He closes it without replying. A touch away, Ilya nuzzles his face into the pillow, expression relaxed in a way it rarely is when he’s awake.

Throughout the day, the email keeps knocking around in the back of Shane’s head like a fly trapped in a room, alive and persistent and annoying. He doesn’t want to read it. He doesn’t want to think about work. He wants to sit at the breakfast table with Ilya and watch the sunlight bring out the golden streaks in his hair, laugh at him splashing around in the lake, kiss him out on the dock and then some more once they’re back inside the house. Make him dinner. Not plan out the next photoshoot schedule, the anxiety of the camera and the studio and the too-tense angles of his body already nibbling at his gut.

He is, for the most part, successful. It becomes very apparent very fast that Ilya’s plans look very similar to Shane’s, and everything that is not Ilya’s smile or Ilya’s hands or the way he rolls his r’s fades into the background easily. He presses Shane against the kitchen island and kisses him slowly as the coffee machine works, pushes him into the water when they go out on the dock, doesn’t apologize even once, only laughs at Shane’s annoyance instead, then chooses to kiss it better. His mouth and his touch are hot enough to very quickly have Shane shivering against him for reasons entirely different from only cold lake water. Once Shane drags him back inside, Ilya blows him in the shower, looking stupidly pleased at the sounds they make together that echo against the tiles. He steals one of Shane’s hoodies and skips downstairs barefoot, throws himself onto the couch, reaches out in an imperial gesture and says, ”Come here.”

Shane's phone sits on the coffee table, dim and quiet. He pretends it's not there. Ilya snatches the remote and surfs through channels until he stumbles onto what looks like a documentary about Canadian wildlife and, to Shane's amusement, doesn't skip further, muttering something about birds under his breath. Shane grabs a book off the table and settles against Ilya's chest to read, hesitant at first, then more confident when Ilya stretches an arm around his shoulders and presses him closer. He takes one look at the cover of Shane's book, sees it is inevitably about hockey and snickers, "Obsessed."

"Yes," Shane tells him, feeling bold enough to press a quick kiss to Ilya's temple, quietly delighted at his answering smile.

They sit together, quiet. Shane feels warm, and safe, and comfortable. Ilya keeps tracing his fingers over the collar of Shane's t-shirt, just barely, like he doesn't even realize he's doing it, and keeps turning, every few minutes, to kiss the top of Shane's head like he can't help himself. Shane's eyes stumble over words every time it happens. He has to reread paragraphs. He would be happy to never finish this book if that's the prize to pay. The volume of the TV is low enough not to bother him, the light of the screen only barely brighter than the dying sunset outside.

Ilya says, "Your mom is calling you."

She is. He knew she would; he thinks back to the email and suddenly feels more tired than he should be. Shane's phone is on silent, but the screen's lit up with her contact photo. He looks at it until the call ends, but doesn't move to pick up.

"I will call back later," he says. He looks away from his phone and up to the TV. They're showing a bear trudging through a meadow; maybe that's why Ilya still hasn't changed the channel.

Ilya makes a quiet sound. His fingers trace up and down the seam of Shane's t-shirt, skimming the skin of his neck, making him suppress a shiver. "You sure? Maybe it's important."

There are very few things that could be more important to Shane than curling up on the couch with Ilya Rozanov. He doesn't say it out loud. The email from this morning comes back into full focus. He blinks, hard, like that could dispel it. "I know why she's calling, it's fine. It's just work."

"Work?"

"Another brand deal," Shane says. He feels the familiar strain of stress stab at his temples. It's too dark to read now that the sun has set fully, so he closes his book and then, briefly, his eyes. "She sent me an email about it this morning. It can wait."

"Brand deal," Ilya repeats, sounding curious. "What, another cologne?" When Shane doesn't answer, he says, with a little jolt to Shane's shoulder, "Tell me more, come on. This show is so boring."

"You picked this channel."

"I need better entertainment." Shane blinks his eyes open. The documentary is still playing, but on mute. He nuzzles a little into Ilya's hold, wonders if any of his stress is showing on his face, or in his voice.

"I don't know, it's more sportswear, I guess," he gives in. "Fucking—base layers, athletic wear, something like that."

"I like your base layers," Ilya hums. Shane swats at his chest, but weakly; Ilya grabs his hand and tangles their fingers together. "You don't want to do it?"

"No, I mean— yes, I just." He fumbles, cuts himself off before the sentence can go anywhere. He doesn't know how to explain to Ilya that sometimes he gets so anxious at photoshoots that he feels sick. More often than not, when he looks into the camera, he just thinks about his ten-year-old self; how he never learned Japanese fully because, at ten, hockey was more fun, and at eleven, his coach started saying that his future in it looks very promising, so when he was twelve, his parents had to choose one or the other. He carries it with him regardless, right there in every picture. There are the league's expectations, and the industry's, and his team's, his parents', his own. It feels heavy sometimes. He is a symbol of something bigger than himself, more often than not. "It just stresses me out."

Ilya is quiet for a second before he says, "You work too much."

"I don't mind it, usually," Shane says in lieu of an answer, shifting on the couch so he can rest his cheek against Ilya's chest. Ilya's fingers comb through his hair immediately, cradle his head. "I'm fine with it. I just get nervous." Out of the corner of his eye, he catches the sunlight glinting off the chain around Ilya's neck, where it's peeking out from beneath the loose collar of Shane's hoodie that he's wearing. He admits, quieter, because it occurs to him that Ilya doesn't know it and Shane would like him to, "The most fun I've ever had on a shoot was the commercial we did together."

Ilya takes a strange breath in. Shane doesn't know what it means.

"That is because I am always joy to be around," he says, aiming for his usual flirtation and missing a little, judging by how he just sounds strangely choked up. He traces the line of Shane's eyebrow with his thumb. At length, he adds, "I had fun, too."

"Maybe we could do another one together," Shane says, feeling shy. "One day."

"Maybe," Ilya says in response. "But I think you are better than me at all the commercial stuff. *Just* commercial, remember."

Shane huffs out a laugh despite himself. "You don't wanna do more of it?"

Ilya makes a quiet sound. "No, is too much trouble," he says. Shane knew that, because Shane knows him. "The one we did together, it was different." His voice is a low rumble right against Shane's ear, more feeling than sound. "I only did it to get you to look at me."

It is his third brand deal of the year.

"A little more to your right, Shane," the photographer says, "yes, that's great. Maybe let's try a softer look now, that would really sell it."

"A softer look?" Shane says, shifting his weight, feeling weird in his flowy pants and half-unbuttoned shirt. At least the fabric is nice this time. It feels cool and smooth against his palms where the sleeves end, like he is dipping his hands in water.

"Dreamy," the photographer supplies. "Try to think of a nice memory, try to relax, you are on a beach in Hawaii, far away."

Shane's never been to Hawaii, so that's a pretty useless tip.

It is an ad for another cologne. Ilya laughed when Shane told him about it, throwing his fist up like he won some sort of bet. "See, I knew it," he said, his smile wide like it got when he'd manage to check Shane into the boards, or like when he'd score a goal on him; like when he was having fun. "You are so easy to figure out, Hollander."

He had Shane backed up against his kitchen table. The edge of it was digging into Shane's spine. He wanted to stay there forever. "My mom chose it, not me."

"And thank God for that," Ilya said. "You would just pick something ridiculous. Like dish soap, or screwdriver, or lightbulbs."

Shane tried to bite his smile down, with poor success.

"Someone needs to advertise this stuff, too," he said, which just made Ilya raise an eyebrow at him. "And you would watch anyway."

"I would," Ilya told him then, unashamed, chuckling. "On repeat."

"That's it, perfect, hold it just like that," the photographer calls. Shane almost jolts, blinking. He holds still as instructed and wonders what he looks like, what his face is doing, if his eyes look like Ilya's do when Shane looks at him across the room and finds him already looking back. He hopes so. "That's the money shot right there."

Who would have thought?

End Notes

it kills me that shane is the hot girl of hockey but doesn't see it!! i need ilya to tell him he's beautiful five billion times

is "stagemate" a legit word in the english language? google said so

special thanks to the youtube channel of the hockey rink in cockburn (yes, really), australia, where i learned what the proper order of putting hockey gear on is

i have a [tumblr](#)

and a [twitter](#)

though am rarely on there because life is overwhelming, but i'll answer if you message me!

if you leave kudos/bookmark/comment, i am kissing you on the forehead

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