

The Performer

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The Performer

by [toxotes](#)

Summary

Sometimes they're curled up on the bed together afterwards and Shane runs his hands up and down Ilya's body, rhythmic and smooth, touching just to touch. Ilya is stunning in the literal sense of the word: Shane is paralyzed by him, struck dumb. Desire may never be a problem here, but understanding is: Ilya feels distant and incomprehensible to Shane.

A cross-section of Shane Hollander's sex life.

Notes

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

1. Bridget

Shane loses his virginity at age sixteen to a girl named Bridget. Bridget is skinny, with very little muscle tone, and has long, wildly curly blonde hair. It isn't as soft as Shane was expecting when she puts her head in his lap at a party.

Shane doesn't want to be at the party, particularly, but he's never been to one before, and he knows that his team thinks that's odd. Odd enough that even his ability, the way everyone already knows he'll go high in the draft, isn't enough to fix things. He knows the rest of the team thinks *he's* odd, distant, unfriendly, and it's influencing locker room dynamics and that influences the way the coaches see him and that probably influences his ice time—

Before Bridget put her head in his lap, he had been sitting there on the sticky couch contemplating the consequences of being caught here, with all these underage kids and all this beer. He doesn't think it's enough to destroy his hockey career, but it might be enough to destroy the reputation he's worked so hard to build, and for what? So his juniors teammates would stop calling him boring?

Shane had been about to call his mom to come pick him up, but now Ryan and Marc are looking at him from across the room, eyes wide and eyebrows raised, and the look they're giving him clearly means something, and he knows what they expect but he doesn't think he can do it, and Bridget's looking up at him with big blue eyes, and Shane takes a deep breath and a sip of the untouched beer he's been holding so long it's gone flat. He wonders how to log it for his macros without letting his mom know he's been drinking, and he smiles down at Bridget.

Later, when she's sucking him off in Marc's bedroom with the brightly patterned comforter and the posters of hockey players on the walls, Shane holds on to his arousal with both hands. He can feel it slipping away, and he knows he needs to get into the same focused, driven state of mind that he does at practice. So he closes his fists around his thumbs, squinches his eyes tight shut, and thinks about hockey.

(He's at practice, and Coach Gagné is yelling at him to follow through on his slapshot. Shane sets himself up, ready to receive a pass. Gagné shouts at him— *Look at me!*— and Shane, obediently, does. Gagné is tall and slender through the waist, his broad, muscled shoulders betraying his strength. His dark skin glows under the harsh lighting of the rink as he mimes taking a slapshot. Shane watches his narrow hips turn sharply and his powerful arms—)

“Do you wanna?” Bridget asks, pulling off his penis. The cold air on his spit-wet length startles Shane into opening his eyes.

“Do I wanna what?” Shane asks. He wishes she would just finish sucking him. He was getting close, he thinks.

“You know.”

Shane doesn't. "Okay," he says, and regrets it when she squirms out of her clothes and lies back on the colorful comforter, contorted into a half-reclining pose he thinks is supposed to be sexy. Neither of them turned the overhead light on on their way into the room, and he can't see much of her in the dimness.

"Take your pants off," she laughs. "It's like you've never done this before."

Shane takes his pants off, mute, and stands there in his oversize T-shirt and nothing else. It hangs down low enough to mostly cover his penis, which he's grateful for.

"Do you have a condom?" he asks, and she nods at the nightstand. When he's torn the little packet open and rolled it on, which is both similar to and totally unlike the bananas they'd practiced on in health class, he looks back at her.

"Come here," Bridget tells him. With the hand she isn't using to hold herself up, she flips her thick hair over her shoulder. Her breasts stare Shane in the face.

Shane comes there. He leans over her, and she spreads her legs.

"So I just—" he asks, and gestures vaguely. "I mean, I know, I'm just checking so you're comfortable."

"Yeah," she tells him, so he grasps his penis in his right hand and pushes his hips forward. He can feel her vagina with the side of his index finger. It feels tight, and not as wet as he'd expected from the discussions he's overheard in the locker room and at school.

He guides himself in with only some effort. Inside, she's tight and hot and dry, and the friction hovers on the edge of pain.

"Do you like it?" he asks tentatively.

"Yeah." She reaches down to rub at her clitoris. Shane wonders if he should volunteer himself for the task, but the angle would be awkward on his wrist, so he discards the concept.

He thrusts, and slowly she grows wetter around him, easing the way. It still doesn't feel like he'd expected it would, though. He shuts his eyes, tries to get back to that focused place he'd been in before.

(Coach Gagné passes him the puck, and Shane shoots it.

"Good job," Coach Gagné tells him. His voice is deep and rich and accented: the kind of voice Shane can't help but listen to. "You're doing so well. I'm proud of you. Good boy. You're going to go first overall—")

Shane's hips stutter, and he comes into the condom.

"Did you come?" he asks stupidly. "I can, like, use my fingers? Or my mouth?"

"That's alright," she says. "Did you have a good time?" She looks around for her pants.

“Yep,” Shane says, popping the p.

When they walk out of the room together, Bridget leading Shane by the hand, Marc whoops loudly and points at them. They both redden, but Bridget doesn’t let go of Shane’s hand.

“I have to go home,” Shane tells her, and pulls his flip phone out of his pocket. “I have morning practice.”

“Everyone says you’re really good at hockey,” she tells him. “Like you’re going to play in the NHL one day.”

Shane extricates his hand from hers. “I have to call my mom,” he says, the hint of a whine creeping into his voice.

“Listen. Maybe we could do that again some time?”

Shane nods obediently, but when he sees her at school on Monday he avoids her eyes, ducks into the bathroom when he sees her coming. He doesn’t want to speak to her. He doesn’t want to do it again, and he doesn’t want to have to try to explain why.

The boys all offer him fist-bumps at morning practice, where Shane keeps his eyes on the floor and an awkward smile fixed firmly on his face.

“So you two really did it,” Marc says at the end of practice.

“Did what?” Shane asks, and then, immediately: “Oh. Yes. We had sex.”

“You were slow today,” Coach Gagné tells him while they’re taking off their sweaty pads, and Shane immediately decides he’s done partying—and done with girls— forever. This resolution lasts for two years, until his teammates on the Montréal Métros make it their mission to force him out into the bars.

If Shane’s honest with himself, he doesn’t resist as hard as he might. He likes these teammates better than his juniors ones, and if he’s going to drink he’d much rather do it in a clean, well-lit bar.

2. Jessica

He meets Jessica at a bar in Montréal in October of his rookie year. His fellow rookie, Hayden Pike, had dragged him out, and they’re sitting on barstools somewhere trendy in the downtown area. Shane has just taken a sip of his beer when Hayden elbows him hard and gestures across the bar.

“Look! In the silver dress!” he hisses. “She’s totally looking at you!”

The girl in the silver dress has long, straight dark hair and a conventionally attractive face. She looks like an athlete: maybe gymnastics, Shane muses. Something that requires muscular legs.

Hayden beckons her over before Shane can demur. The girl points at herself: *me?* and Hayden nods vigorously. *Yes, you.*

She picks her way through the mingling crowd, tugging the skirt of her tight dress back down her thighs as she comes. Shane watches her graceful movements and thinks about gymnastics. How do they score that, anyway? There has to be a standard of some kind, but what is it? Is it like figure skating? He's familiar with figure skating: he's trained with figure skaters before. He's never known a gymnast.

"I'm Jessica," she says when she reaches them.

"Hayden," Hayden says. "And this is Shane."

Shane sticks his hand out to shake.

"Oh, I know who you are," Jessica says, tucking her hair behind her ear. "I'm a Metros fan. I mean, how can you not be, living in Montréal?"

"How did you get into hockey?" Shane asks politely. Next to him, Hayden gets up, nods at the bathroom, and vanishes into the crowd. If he was going to the bathroom, it would just take a minute. Shane knows he won't see him for the rest of the night.

"I play a little," she tells him, and takes a seat on the barstool Hayden has just vacated. "Nothing like you, of course, just a local women's league, but we take it pretty seriously."

None of the WAGs Shane knows play hockey— have ever played hockey.

"That's really cool," he says, which is both the correct, normal thing to say and his honest opinion on it. That's nice. "What position?"

"Center. So we already have something in common!" She rests her chin on her hand as the bartender brings her something pink in a martini glass. There's a slice of lemon on the rim, and she picks it out and sets it on her napkin.

Shane grins. "I guess we do. So who did you come here with tonight?"

"Some teammates," she says, "it's my friend Katy's birthday. But they don't mind if I take off." Her pretty brown eyes meet Shane's as she takes a sip of her cocktail. Shane's gaze focuses on her pink fingernails, which almost exactly match the shade of her drink, which is only a shade or two lighter than her lips. He swallows, heavily, and drags his eyes back up to hers.

"Let me buy the next round," Shane proposes, "and then we'll see how we feel."

After one more cocktail— she insists he have what she's drinking— they're laughing, heads bent close together. Shane chews on his straw as she runs her fingers through her smooth, shiny hair and tells him how talented he is. Shane likes her a lot, or rather he wants to like her a lot: there's an emptiness, a numbness in his chest and belly that he carefully ignores. He can feel where the chemistry she feels ought to connect to him, and he knows how to make it

look like he feels it, but it's all a performance. This isn't a problem specific to women: he feels it, or rather feels the lack, with almost everyone.

Around midnight, a broad-shouldered blonde girl in a tight dress wobbles over on her high, high heels.

"We're going home," she stage whispers to Jessica. "Are you okay with him?"

"Yeah," Jessica tells her, "I'm good."

"Have fun!" the girl tells her, clapping her on the back.

They stay there until the bar closes, and she looks up at him through her long dark lashes, and he remembers Bridget looking up at him from her position in his lap. He hadn't known what to do, then. He hadn't known how to perform sexuality correctly. He does now.

Shane takes her hand and leads her out of the bar.

They go to her place, because Shane has never liked having strangers in his space. They always move something, or drink from the wrong mug, or use one of his extra toothbrushes. As she walks to the kitchen to get them water, he sits on the coarse gray fabric of her couch and puts the string of his hoodie between his teeth. He sucks meditatively and unconsciously on it as he looks around the room. There's a gear bag in the corner, and a pair of cheap hockey sticks propped up by the sham fireplace. He successfully resists the urge to get up and take them into his hands, but lets himself pick up the framed photo of a hockey team sitting on a side table.

"That's my club team." Jessica reemerges from the kitchen, carrying a pair of tall, slim water glasses. Shane spits the hoodie string out of his mouth hurriedly as she sets them on the coffee table and settles on the sofa next to him, so close that he can feel the heat of her skin.

"And you think this is your year, huh?" Shane sets the frame back on the side table and picks up his water glass, passing it back and forth between his hands. He tells himself the condensation from the cold water is the only reason his palms are wet.

"Well," she says, setting her glass down with a thunk, "it's certainly my night."

Shane's silent.

"Oh my god," she giggles, "that was terrible, wasn't it?"

Shane feels the corners of his mouth tic upward slightly. "Little bit."

"Sorry." She blushes. "I'm not great at that. Coming on to people. Can I just kiss you?"

Shane finds himself relieved. It's nice to meet someone willing to be direct with him when so much of flirting is obscure and incomprehensible to him, an activity he has to force himself to be interested in conducted in a language he doesn't speak. And while he isn't exactly aroused, it's been a while since he masturbated. He thinks he could probably stand to come, in the same way he could probably stand to get his hair cut right now.

“Yes,” he says, and she kisses him enthusiastically, rising up on her knees so he has to tip his head back to let their lips meet. He puts his hands on her hips, careful not to squeeze too hard but equally conscious that his grip doesn’t go slack, passive.

Jessica swings a leg over him, and then she’s in his lap, her hands on either side of his face, holding him firmly in place, and he moves his hands from her hips up to the defined muscles of her shoulders. She’s stronger than any girl he’s kissed before, obviously and unashamedly stronger, and an electrifying flash shoots through the bottom of his stomach. For one elusive second, he thinks, he feels what someone effortlessly normal would feel.

“Is this okay?” Jessica’s hand is resting on the button of his jeans.

Shane nods, and she pops it neatly, one-handed. The zipper comes down next, and Shane lifts his hips to wiggle his jeans down to his knees. He’s only half-hard, and painfully aware of that. He’s sure that if he can only get some time, it’ll be fine— his body will catch up with his brain, or his brain will catch up with the situation, or *something*.

“Let me?” he asks, putting his hand on her thigh, where the silver dress has ridden up enough to let him see the bottom of her pink panties. Jessica’s face lights up, and she stands up off his lap and extends a hand to him.

“Let’s go to the bedroom,” she says, and Shane kicks awkwardly out of his jeans and takes her hand.

She leads him back to a clean, organized bedroom with what seems to Shane to be too many cushions on the bed to be practical. As she reclines on the bed with its mountain of pillows, Shane pulls off his shirt.

“C’mere,” she says, her voice lower than it had been only a moment ago. Shane wonders distantly if it could be some side effect of arousal as he crawls up the bed to kneel between her legs. Her panties are off: she must have done it while he was taking his shirt off. She’s still wearing her black heels, Shane notes: he never would have worn shoes on *his* bed, but he supposes she’s entitled to her own rules.

Her pussy seems to look back at him expectantly as he lowers himself to his belly. It’s bare, though there are one or two hairs remaining near the back that she must have missed while shaving. Shane tentatively puts his fingers to the folds of her inner labia, and she smiles down at him.

“Go ahead,” she tells him, and uses two fingers to part her folds for him.

Shane swallows, but leans in and licks, cautiously, up the center of it. It tastes acidic, but not unpleasantly so, and smells the same. When he looks up to her for approval, she nods. Shane tries to stiffen his tongue as he licks again. Then when she doesn’t react audibly, he flattens it and tries again.

Jessica lets him go on like this for a few minutes before she slides her fingers through his hair and pulls him gently off.

“Here,” she says, and guides his fingers to a ridge of something that feels almost like cartilage. “Put your fingers here and move them side to side. Press harder than you think you need to.”

Shane does it, and is rewarded by seeing her thighs twitch inwards, as if she’s suppressing the urge to press them together. He does it again, faster, harder, and she gasps. She’s wet, he realizes, wet like Bridget hadn’t been, and he crawls up her body to kiss her, hard— not so much passion as relief that things are going according to plan this time, but it comes out to the same thing.

“You wanna?” Jessica pants after a while, looking down the line of her body at him. Shane realizes too late that he’s wearing a focused expression, his lower lip sucked into his mouth, and he rearranges his face into something he thinks is more appropriate for the situation— mouth a firm line, jaw set like the men in the porn he only occasionally looks at— as quickly as he can.

“Do I wanna what?”

“Fuck,” she says. “You wanna fuck?”

Shane nods dutifully. He’s all the way hard now, but it’s an undirected kind of arousal, none of the powerful, specific desire his friends talk about feeling when they look at hot girls. Maybe, he considers, they’re all lying to fit in, the way he does when those conversations come up. He’s never felt anything approaching that feeling, except last summer, under the eyes of— no. He cuts the thought off before it can finish. Still, he thinks he’s up to the task of fucking her.

“Yeah,” he says, and gets out of his boxers clumsily. “How do you wanna. Um. How do you wanna do it?”

Jessica stretches. The pointy heels of her shoes catch on the quilt that covers the bed, rucking it down the bed. “I was thinking I’d stay on my back,” she tells him.

Shane nods. That sounds reasonable. He crawls up the bed, winds up on his hands and knees over her. The position sort of makes his wrists ache, he notes. She spreads her legs and lifts her hips, and he lowers himself down over her.

He turns a whimper into a grunt as he slides into her. She’s hot and slick and tight, and even through the latex of the condom, he’s never felt anything like it before. His hips rock forward without his consent, and he groans.

Jessica hooks one leg over his shoulder in an impressive display of flexibility. The pointed heel of her shoe digs into Shane’s back, spurring him on like a recalcitrant horse. It’s a grounding sensation he desperately needs.

“C’mon,” Jessica says, kicking him gently, “fuck me.”

Shane does, thrusting his hips forward rhythmically. He’s an athlete, he tells himself, he has excellent body control, he can *do* this.

It's sort of a core workout, he notices first. And he was right, it does make his wrists ache. The core thing is good, probably a hidden benefit, but the wrists are a concern. He needs those for hockey.

After a couple minutes, he stops. "Sorry," he tells her, "it's just the wrists. Give me a second." He shifts his weight to one side, picks up one wrist, circles it, and then the other. They start to ache again almost as soon as he starts moving, but he forces himself to continue for what he thinks is a respectable amount of time before he stops to stretch them again.

After the third time he stops, she locks her legs around his waist and rolls them over. This time he doesn't contain the whimper, or the way his cock twitches inside her. She rolls her hips steadily, and he reaches up to hold onto the headboard, grasping the bars like he's been tied there. A flash of heat shoots through him, his hips buck up against her, and he comes with an embarrassing whining noise.

He knows enough to know she hasn't come. He puts two fingers on her clit, but she bats them away and replaces them with her own. They stay there, Shane underneath her, soft inside her, for either five minutes or a year. He thinks about hockey, about how Ilya Rozanov had stripped the puck from him so easily when the Raiders came to visit three weeks ago, about the way he'd fucked him after, rough and passionate. Then her pussy ripples around him, rhythmic clenching that lasts fifteen seconds at Shane's estimate, and she rises up on her knees, letting him slip out of her.

"That was good," Shane says awkwardly. "Wasn't it?"

"We should do it again," she says. "Let me give you my number."

Shane calls the next day, and within a few dates she's his girlfriend. They go on real dates. They watch hockey together. She goes out for drinks with the WAGs.

Shane waits patiently for that pointed, directed, specific desire that the boys all talk about with their girlfriends. The kind Hayden describes when he talks about Jackie. The kind he shamefully remembers feeling in a hotel gym as he waterfalled a drink from a bottle he wanted to put his mouth on. No matter how patiently he waits, it never comes. And one day, when she comes to him and explains that she can't cope with all the time he spends away, and it would probably be easiest to break up, he can't muster up any feeling of loss or grief. The relationship hasn't even lasted long enough that he has to choose whether to cheat or turn Ilya away: it fits neatly in the time between meetings of the Metros and Raiders. He still cries in his car afterwards, though, wracking sobs he doesn't understand, sobs that have him bracing his forehead against the steering wheel so hard it leaves a red mark when he finally sits up and feebly wipes his eyes.

3. Ilya

Desire is never a problem with Ilya. Shane's felt it in one form or another, pointed and directed and specific to Ilya, since the first time they met in that alley back in 2008.

It's been nearly three years since the first time they fucked in that hotel. Nothing has changed: not the furious desire with which they claw at each other, not the way Ilya nearly immobilizes him against the bed, one hand wrenched behind his back, face in a pillow and ass in the air. The powerful, muscular lines of Ilya's body, meanwhile, have only gotten stronger.

All of Ilya is strong. Striking. He stalks across hotel rooms, across the familiar wood planks of Shane's apartment and the cool, unfamiliar gray flooring of his house, like a great cat. He climbs, animal, over the backs of sofas and pounces like a predator, pinning Shane like prey.

Sometimes Shane sees him moving across the room, naked and golden-skinned, and he feels caught, trapped with his eyes raking up and down Ilya's body, his muscular shoulders and his perfectly round ass, his long, heavy cock swinging against his thigh as he moves. *I can't believe that fit inside me*, Shane always thinks first, and then: *I wonder when I can get him to do it again*.

Sometimes they're curled up on the bed together afterwards and Shane runs his hands up and down Ilya's body, rhythmic and smooth, touching just to touch. Ilya is stunning in the literal sense of the word: Shane is paralyzed by him, struck dumb. Desire may never be a problem, but understanding is: Ilya feels distant and incomprehensible to Shane.

"You want something, hm?" Ilya always asks, and Shane always leans in and kisses him, on his chest or his stomach or his bicep, and says nothing. He wants something, but he can't say it without sounding insane.

He looks at Ilya and wants to climb into his skin, wants to be so close there's no separation between the two of them, and that terrifies him, because he doesn't understand it. Because he knows he can never express it.

This is what he's contemplating when the knock comes on the door to his apartment. Shane, who's been sitting at the bottom of the stairs chewing on his fingernail and waiting, springs up. Then he forces himself to count to thirty, make it look like he was doing something, like he wasn't just waiting around for Ilya to show up.

Ilya's eyes rake up and down Shane's body when he opens the door. Shane stands a little taller and lets himself be inspected. He's wearing a pair of light-wash jeans and a white rib-knit tanktop through which his nipples are just visible, and the push-ups he did before settling at the bottom of the stairs to wait have made the muscles of his arms stand out a little more. He thinks he looks good. He hopes he looks good: this is his fourth pair of jeans since dinner two hours before.

Ilya says something incomprehensible in Russian, and Shane successfully resists the urge to ask what it means.

"Are you coming up?" he asks, brow furrowed and body tense. He doesn't like knowing that they're exposed like this, out on the street where anyone could see them. He knows it comes off as anger, but he can't help it.

Ilya laughs “Okay, okay,” he says, and pinches Shane’s cheek on the way past him. “So scary, like angry kitten.”

“Shut up.” Shane smacks at him with the back of his hand.

“After you.” Ilya makes a grand, sweeping gesture towards the stairs.

“You just want to watch my butt while I go up them,” Shane complains.

“Yes.” Ilya looks smug, playful: the corners of his eyes crinkle just a bit. Shane wants to kiss him, so he does, standing on the stair above Ilya and leaning down.

At the top of the stairs, Ilya slaps his ass and shoulders past him to get into the apartment first.

“Very clean,” he tells Shane. “This is all for me?”

“I have a cleaning service,” Shane explains, and doesn’t mention the frenetic dusting and vacuuming he had done in the time leading up to Ilya’s arrival. “They take care of all that.”

“Hm.” Ilya runs his finger along the smooth wooden edge of Shane’s dining room table, like he’s checking for dust. “Well, is impressive. But maybe I should have predicted this from the man who folds his clothes nicely before being fucked.”

Shane steps a little closer. His brain is practically humming, alive with need. Electric shocks ricochet back and forth in the cradle of his hips. In his stomach, arousal glows like the first hungry flames of a bonfire. (He looks at Ilya’s face, caught in profile as he prepares to grin, and something blossoms in his chest: he kills that where it grows.)

“Nice table,” Ilya continues, ignoring Shane’s obvious need. “What is this, oak? Walnut?” He’s suppressing a grin: no one thinks Ilya is funnier than Ilya does.

“I don’t know.” Shane steps closer still, reaches up and puts his hands on Ilya’s shoulders. “It doesn’t matter.” He wants to kiss him. Wants to fall to his knees and take him in his mouth. He hardly knows what he wants, except that it’s Ilya, inside and around and within him, closer than close. He’s fully hard in his jeans, doesn’t know when it happened, but the intensity of feeling almost hurts.

“And chairs!” Ilya glances down at the bulge in Shane’s pants, smirks, then turns away and puts his hands on the back of one of Shane’s dark wood dining chairs. “Where did you get?”

“I don’t *know!*” Shane squirms out of his tanktop and hangs it over the back of another chair. “It isn’t important, is it?” His voice is whining, pleading, and there’s a pull in his belly. It’s as if he’s a fish caught on a hook and Ilya the fisherman reeling him in.

“Is very important, Hollander,” Ilya answers, unsuccessfully keeping the laugh from his voice. “We should talk about this right now.” He pulls out a chair and sits. When he raises an eyebrow, Shane climbs into his lap and loops his arms around his neck.

“You’re such an asshole,” Shane mutters against his neck, his lips grazing the nearly-transparent blond hairs that grow there. “Honest to God.”

Ilya reaches up and winds his pale fingers in Shane’s dark hair, uses his grip to guide his face down to his. Shane kisses him like a man starving, like a man seeing his lover after a decade apart, like— it’s beyond words, he thinks, the way they kiss. He barely feels human at all in Ilya’s arms: he doesn’t have the brain space for that. He’s just a jumble of body parts, hungry lips and empty hole and straining cock, clutching arms and questing fingers and the electricity binding them all together.

“Go to bed,” Ilya rumbles, his voice low and accent thick the way it gets when he’s wrapped up in his own desire, and Shane half-steps half-falls off of his lap, stumbling toward the bedroom and getting out of his jeans and boxers on the way. He sets them in a neat pile on a side table and waits on the bed, legs spread and hand moving slowly up and down around his cock, a loose grip that doesn’t do much for him but tease.

“Is this alright?” Ilya crawls up the bed between his legs, pushing his knees to his shoulders as he goes. Shane holds on to the back of his knees, obediently keeping himself folded in half and exposed for Ilya.

Ilya reaches out and taps on the base of the plug Shane had slipped in earlier in the evening.

“For me?” he asks, falsely casual. But Shane can hear the hitch in his breath, can see the way his hips thrust minutely forward against nothing.

It’s too much, too intimate to say yes. Yes, Ilya, this is for you. Yes, Ilya, all of this— all of me— is for you. Shane turns his face into the pillow and bites down on the cotton pillowcase, dodging the question as Ilya pulls the plug free and sets it on the nightstand.

Ilya rolls a condom on while Shane reaches down and runs his index finger around his slick rim. He’s not sure it’s seductive, exactly, but it feels good, and Ilya always gets this hungry look on his face when Shane tenses and lets his head drop back in pleasure.

Shane clutches the backs of his knees as Ilya enters him, slow and slick and easy, and as Ilya bends down to kiss him, he hooks his legs over Ilya’s shoulders. When Ilya doesn’t move, he kicks at him gently, digging his heel into Ilya’s back like a recalcitrant horse.

“There is something you want, Hollander?” Ilya— already grounded, direct, fully in the moment— pulls back and grins crookedly down at Shane. “Ask nicely.”

“Fuck me,” Shane says, both ashamed of and aroused by the whine that has crept into his voice, and then when Ilya raises an eyebrow: “Please.”

Ilya slams into him with a force that makes the headboard of Shane’s sturdy wooden bedframe knock against the wall. Shane’s hands fly over his head to grasp at the pillow, the headboard, anything he can find as Ilya thrusts into him once again.

“You like it,” Ilya pants, not a question so much as a statement, but Shane answers anyway.

“Yeah.” Shane reaches down to rub at his cock, but Ilya knocks his hand away, taking over, volunteering himself for the task. Except that task is the wrong word— Ilya likes this. Loves it.

Ilya thrusts. Shane can feel how wet he is inside, can hear the vulgar squelch of too much lube easing the way. It’s a feeling he knows intimately after the last three years meeting up with Ilya, who seems to like everything in excess, from the significant— women, sex, cars— down to details like lubrication. Shane shuts his eyes and tries to focus.

Then he reopens them, fully present as Ilya leans down to kiss him. He loses himself in the kiss momentarily— nothing matters but the movement of Ilya’s lips against his, not even the steady thrust of his hips— until Ilya pulls out and slaps his hip.

“Roll over.”

So Shane does, gets on his hands and knees, and Ilya reenters him. Far from the powerful way his hips had slammed into Shane’s before, now he’s rocking into him, and his hands on Shane’s hips are petting him more than gripping him. It feels almost tender, and Shane doesn’t know what to do with that. It’s an uncomfortable feeling, and to escape it he turns his head to look over his shoulder at Ilya.

“I thought you were gonna fuck me?” he asks.

Ilya snorts. “Oh, he can chirp,” he says, laughing, and grabs Shane by the hair.

With his face shoved into the mattress and his body rocking with the force of Ilya’s thrusts, shuddering each time his cock drags across his prostate, Shane can tell he’s drooling onto the sheets. He’s as powerless to stop it as he is to stop Ilya’s hips, as he is to stop the tides.

“You like?” Ilya gasps above him, and Shane whimpers. What feels like his entire body is tense as rhythmic jolts of pleasure shock his body, concentrating in his untouched cock.

“Ilya,” he gasps: *Ilya, I’m close, Ilya, harder, Ilya, please, Ilya, I love it, I love—* and he comes all over the sheets. He can feel the muscles of his ass rippling around Ilya, rhythmic clenching that only lasts a few seconds but makes Ilya growl and his fingers dig into the meat of Shane’s ass.

Ilya grunts and shoves his hips forward one last time, keeping them flush with Shane’s ass as he comes. For a moment, Shane forgets about the condom, imagines cum spilling out of him as Ilya withdraws, and his spent cock twitches valiantly.

No, he tells himself firmly, the tone of the thought that which he would take with a disobedient dog. *No, that’s too much. No, you can’t have that.*

He waits for Ilya to pull back, to slip out of him, but he collapses forward, half on top of Shane, crushing him into the mattress with his body. Shane squirms, trying to throw him off— trying to try.

“You kill me,” Ilya tells Shane seriously. “I am dead now. Funeral is Monday.”

“Can you be dead next to me instead?” Shane asks, and is relieved when Ilya only grunts and starts to play with Shane’s hair. He clenches experimentally around Ilya’s soft cock, and is rewarded with a hiss and a smack to the back of his head.

“You do not know how to do nothing!” Ilya complains. “Always go, go, go with you.”

“Sorry.” Shane lets himself go silent for a moment. “What’re you thinking about?” he asks.

Ilya bites the shell of his ear. “Nothing.”

“Oh.” Shane can’t imagine thinking about nothing, letting his mind go empty and passive, everything out of his control. It sounds terrifying.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Nothing.” Shane is thinking about Ilya: what Ilya wants, what Ilya thinks of him. Whether Ilya ever closes his eyes and thinks of hockey, the way Shane does when he fucks anyone other than Ilya. Whether Ilya feels an obligation to perform the way Shane does, whenever he’s with anyone else. Why Ilya should be any different from the women that Shane has slept with. Shane’s mind hums, vibrates, threatens to shake itself apart. He feels the acute, familiar pressure to perform, meet everyone’s expectations, creep back in, and knows that what he’s doing with Ilya is far from what’s expected of him. He knows his breaths are coming faster, but is powerless to stop it.

Ilya shifts above him so their bodies line up perfectly. Suddenly, Shane’s entire body is enveloped in warm, comforting pressure, and everything seems to fall away. They stay there, Shane underneath Ilya, Ilya soft inside him, for either five minutes or a year. Shane thinks of nothing in particular: nothing but Ilya’s warmth above him and the way Ilya’s lips tickle the short hairs at the back of his neck when he kisses Shane there.

After a while, Shane’s slow, steady breaths are the only sound in the room, and Ilya rises up on his knees, slipping out of him.

“That was good,” Shane says sleepily. “We should do it again.”

Ilya throws the condom neatly into the trash can. “Next time, Hollander.”

“Next time.” Shane can feel his traitorous lips twitch upwards at the corners. There’s going to be a next time. Not that he had doubted it, of course, but it’s good to have it confirmed.

Shane props himself up against the pillows as Ilya dresses. He doesn’t want Ilya to leave so soon, he realizes, and isn’t sure what to do with the realization.

“Can you see my underwear?” he asks, and Ilya abandons the search for his socks to pass Shane his red boxers. Then it’s back to the hunt for his socks.

One, Shane realizes, is on the bed, blending in with the blue sheets. Quickly, before he can think it through, he grabs it and shoves it under the pillows.

“Have you seen my other sock?” Ilya asks, looking up from where he’d been peering under the bed.

“Nope.” Shane hops up. “I’m gonna get a snack. You want anything?”

As Shane weighs out nuts, Ilya comes up behind him and drapes himself over his shoulders. Shane slaps ineffectually at his hand as he takes an almond off the scale.

“You are always so careful,” Ilya tells him. It’s the kind of thing Shane would say with admiration, but Ilya says it like he’s rolling his eyes.

“That’s not a bad thing,” Shane says.

Ilya takes a handful of nuts from the bag and retreats to the sofa. Shane looks at him slouched there, picking through his unmeasured, unregulated handful for the almonds, and feels something warm and unfamiliar blossoming in his chest. He cuts it back like a weed.

For a moment, everything is quiet. Then Shane sighs and settles onto the couch next to Ilya.

“Funny how my sock is gone,” Ilya says. He’s clearly fighting a smile, and Shane wonders what it could mean.

“Maybe if you folded your clothes...” Shane smiles, close-mouthed, over at Ilya. Then he picks a walnut from his hand and bites it neatly in half. He can feel Ilya’s gaze on him like a brand, traveling up and down his body, leaving its indelible mark behind.

“Then we will both be boring,” Ilya tells him. “One boring person is enough in any...” He waves between them, searching for the word.

Relationship, something in the back of Shane’s mind whispers, and he quashes it hurriedly. “Situation?” he offers.

Ilya nods. “Situation. You need someone exciting to push you, little bit.” He yawns and stretches, casually slinging one arm over Shane’s shoulders.

Shane bristles, even as Ilya pulls him tight in against his side. “I’m plenty adventurous,” he protests.

“For example...” Ilya waves his fistful of nuts encouragingly. *Go on.*

“For *example!*” Shane leans over and whispers in Ilya’s ear.

Ilya’s eyebrows raise, and his half-smile fluoresces into a grin. “Shane!” he says, grabbing Shane by the shoulder and shaking him gently. “Very good!”

Shane blushes. “So we can do—?”

“Next time,” Ilya says firmly.

For a moment, they stare at each other, Ilya's muscular arm holding Shane in close. Ilya isn't much bigger than Shane, but sometimes it feels as though he is. This is one of those times. Shane imagines kissing him, imagines leaning up and up, placing his lips against Ilya's, devouring him and letting himself be consumed in turn, imagines joining himself to Ilya, the bond eternal and unbreakable—

“You play in San Jose next, yes?”

Shane snaps out of it. “How did you know that?”

“Is warm there,” Ilya says, which is not an answer to the question.

“Yeah.”

They stare at each other again. Ilya's eyes are bluer than Shane thinks should be possible, his hair more golden, his jawline sharper.

“Well,” Ilya says, tossing the rest of his mixed nuts into his mouth, “I have practice now. I can steal your socks?” He pulls his arm back from around Shane's shoulders and rises. The place where his arm had been feels cold in the warm air of Shane's apartment.

“Sure,” Shane says awkwardly. “Top drawer on the right, help yourself.”

Ilya vanishes into the bedroom, and Shane sits in silence for a moment before climbing to his feet and following him. When he enters the bedroom, Ilya already has a pair of Shane's socks on. Shane trails him out to the foyer, where he left his shoes, and then walks him down the stairs to the door leading out to the street.

Ilya puts on his jacket and turns to look at Shane, something indefinable and terrifying in his eyes. He looks like he has something to say. Shane sucks on his tongue and waits for him to say it, but Ilya only zips up his jacket and leans down for a kiss.

Shane hurriedly spits his hoodie string out of his mouth and leans up. He wraps his arms around Ilya's neck, and Ilya melts down against him, one hand on either side of Shane's ribcage. Shane feels secure, desired, as though the cup of his ribcage is overflowing with emotion. He doesn't know how anyone could ever express this depth of feeling, doesn't even know how to begin. But he wants, suddenly, to try.

“I'll see you,” he tells Ilya when they separate.

“Later.” Ilya turns, and just like that he's gone.

Shane races up the stairs. From the kitchen window, he has a view of the street below, and he just catches a glimpse of Ilya's brown leather jacket rounding the corner and vanishing into the Montréal crowds.

Shane turns and walks to the bedroom. Ilya's single sock lies discarded on the floor, a patch of light blue on Shane's hardwood. He picks it up, then retrieves its mate from under the pillow. For a few minutes, he sits on the edge of the bed and clutches them tightly in his

hands. He doesn't know exactly what to do now: he was acting purely on impulse when he hid one. Even now, he can't explain to himself why he did it.

Down on the street, a car backfires. Shane jolts, startled, and clutches the socks to his chest.

I shouldn't, he thinks. It's not normal.

But nobody has to know.

Slowly, he raises the socks to his face, shuts his eyes, and inhales. They smell like sweat, mostly— Ilya's sweat, he remembers, and something low in his belly contracts slightly, a kick of arousal taking him by surprise.

He rips them away from his face and shoves them back under the pillow. Then— carefully, intentionally— he forgets about them.

4. Rose

Shane is so, so grateful when he meets Rose. There's really no other word for it. Finally, he looks at a woman and feels something more intense than detached friendliness! Finally, he spends time with someone and doesn't feel like a performer— he feels like part of what's happening. Finally, he looks forward to the next time he sees her, finally he feels the way Hayden talks about his wife!

He wants to say he doesn't think about Ilya anymore, but that wouldn't be true. Ilya crops up in the most unexpected of moments: when Shane's showering, in the hazy not-quite-conscious moments before he drops off to sleep, filling the space between heartbeats as his feet pound away on the treadmill. Inhale-two, exhale-two, Ilya's lips white with tension, exhale-two again—

Rose's lips, smiling at him. Rose's voice, joking and laughing with him. Shane slows the treadmill to a walk and forces himself to breathe long and steady as he gets his mind back under control. He really shouldn't be thinking of anyone but himself and his teammates right now, he reminds himself. After all, technically speaking, he's at work. He has hours and hours later on to think about Rose, and he's going to, because he's a good boyfriend.

Later on, he dutifully thinks about Rose.

She's very beautiful, he knows. Her face, of course, but her body too. It's like a marble sculpture in a museum, he thinks: something to admire from a distance, something he knows he isn't allowed to touch. Doesn't even really want to touch.

Except, he reminds himself sternly, that he does want to touch her. Except that he feels that pointed, directed, specific desire that other men do. He does. And it is pointed at, directed toward, specific to her.

"Sometimes I look at her and I just feel like an animal, I want her so bad," Hayden had once said about his wife. Well, now Shane is going to be the animal, now his base, vulgar, carnal

desire (desire for Rose) will make him an animal. Now, he's going to want her. He slips his hand into his boxers and touches his cock, which lies small and soft against his thigh.

Shane refuses to allow himself to be defeated by this. He grasps it in his hand and moves his hand up and down. Thin skin drags over ridges of something harder underneath. The sensation is uncomfortable, just on the verge of pain.

He pictures her pale body, the curve of her hip, the creases underneath her small breasts. He imagines himself putting his hands on them, lifting them as if he were testing their weight. They have an interesting consistency: softer, when he squeezes them, than anything on his own body. He thinks he could play with them for a while: half an hour, maybe? Shane smiles. There it is again, that feeling that has to be desire, that proof that he isn't broken. Proof that he, too, can want women appropriately.

He's still soft, and the dry chafing of his hand is properly painful now, so he gives up and tucks himself back in his jeans. Or. Not gives up, because he isn't the kind of man who gives up on things, he tells himself. He just puts it off till later, because Rose will be coming over later, and he'll need to perform then.

It makes sense, he thinks, that the desire shouldn't come unless Rose was there in person. He's never had an overactive imagination, and anyway he hasn't had much sleep lately. He's not exactly in the right condition, the right frame of mind, to be masturbating. He puts on a hockey game— Boston at Montréal— and settles in to analyze the mistakes he made, the things he could do better.

It isn't long before Rose comes over: just after dinner. She kisses him as soon as she's through the door, and Shane kisses back, tasting the red wine she must have had with dinner. He sets his hands carefully on her slim waist, and the faint roughness of her sparkly dress grates against his palms. He's hyperaware of his environment, of the solid pressure of his feet against the floor and the scrape of his jeans against his inner thighs and her smooth, warm arms around his neck, pressing down on his shoulders. She must be up on her tiptoes to kiss him, must be leaning on him to keep herself steady. It's funny: she always goes on her tiptoes to kiss him, even though she doesn't need to. She's tall enough all by herself, especially in the strappy blue high heels he had noticed her wearing as she walked in. Maybe she does it to play a role, the slender delicate actress leaning up to kiss her big, muscular hockey player boyfriend.

Shane can meet her there, can match that. He catches her chin in his fingers, the way Ilya— no. He catches her chin in his fingers and tips it up to let their lips meet once again.

"You'll never guess what they made me do today," she says when they part.

"No?"

So she tells him, and Shane laughs like no one else has made him laugh in years.

"Really?" he asks, still giggling. "The paint dyed your skin?"

“Well, just in that one spot,” she says. “I can show you if you don’t believe me.” She moves to shrug out of one shoulder of her dress, but Shane holds up a hand.

“No, no, I believe you. It’s just... wow. You’d think they’d check what kind of paint they’re using!”

Rose leaves the thin strap of her dress hanging off her shoulder, one breast dangerously close to exposure. When she leans forward, Shane can see down her dress, right through the space between her small, high breasts. She isn’t wearing a bra. He wonders whether that’s uncomfortable, the way he’s always heard that a lack of support is for women.

“You would think,” she agrees.

Shane watches her hand make its way up his leg, then glances up at her through his lashes. She’s smiling sweetly at him, but there’s a glint of something hungry in her eyes.

“You wanna, babe?” she says, and it’s a question by the intonation of her voice, but it really doesn’t feel that way.

So Shane nods, and shifts in his seat as she rises gracefully to her feet. He can feel his cock—small, soft—lying against his thigh, and a uniform, granite nothingness sitting heavy in his stomach where arousal usually gathers. He gulps, and prays he’ll be able to perform.

“You’re so beautiful,” he says as he follows her into the bedroom, unbuttoning his shirt. “Like a star, or a sunset.”

She smiles at him from where she lies on the mattress, her gracefully-built thighs already parted. “Always so far away. Can’t I be beautiful like a woman you want to fuck?”

Shane—naked except for his light blue socks—turns to face her. “Well, you’re that too, of course.” His cock hangs limp—*as limp as your wrists*, he thinks viciously. *Get it together. You can do this.*

“Come here,” she says, and Shane crawls up the bed to hold himself above her on his hands and knees, his back arched like—

She reaches down to touch her clit, but Shane knocks her hand away, taking over, volunteering himself for the task the way he knows a man should. He can feel how wet she is, though not as wet as Ilya used to get him, too much lube leaking out of him just like wetness is dripping from her—

“You like it,” Rose pants, very much a question, and Shane resets himself, reminds himself of what he’s meant to be doing here, and answers.

“Uh-huh,” he tells her, lower lip caught between his teeth.

She bends one of her legs so that the thigh rises to make contact with his groin, like she wants him to hump her leg like a dog, like Ilya makes him—

Shane resets himself and moves his fingers a little faster.

“Are you hard?” she asks.

No. “Not yet,” he tells her.

“Can I blow you?”

It won't help. “Sure,” he tells her, and lies down obediently when she squirms out from underneath him and pats the pillow where her head had lain.

She moves gracefully, seductively down his body, and she lies on her belly between his legs. Her hand is a little cold when it grasps Shane's cock, and he shudders, full-bodied.

“Oh, you like that,” she purrs.

“I like *you*, so much,” Shane replies. Now is the point where his instinct is to close his eyes and think of hockey— of Ilya, now. With Bridget or Jessica, it hadn't felt like anything but the practical choice. But Rose is different. They're more serious, maybe, or he likes her more: either way, he's determined to succeed with her unassisted. Without cheating, as he thinks of it.

Rose spits into her palm and moves her hand up and down his length. Shane shuts his eyes— it's not cheating if he's thinking of her— and imagines.

“Hands on the headboard,” his imaginary Rose orders, and Shane complies. *“Good boy.”*

Shane's cock twitches, and he feels the soft ends of Rose's hair brushing his inner thigh. Next, he feels her lips there, kissing him softly in one of his most sensitive places. He wishes she would bite, like Ilya—

No! Shane opens his eyes: clearly, he can't be trusted with the freedom of his own fantasies.

“That's so good,” he says, forcing his voice low, as if he's wrapped up in his own desire. “Could you—”

“Could I?” She looks amused.

“Suck me?” Shane blushes furiously, and he gazes just past her at a lamp across the room. It's necessary, though, he thinks: there's no way he's going to get hard like this. But maybe with just a little more stimulation...

“It's so cute when you blush like that.” Her voice isn't condescending, but it's close enough that Shane's cock twitches again and begins to fill with blood.

When she leans down and takes him into her warm, red mouth, Shane allows himself to return to his fantasy.

“Ask nicely,” his imaginary Rose would have said when he asked her for this, and then when he said please: *“So polite. Such a good boy.”* Shane would keep his hands on the headboard, would let himself whimper instead of holding his noises in the way he does with his Rose, would keep his hips perfectly still to show her what a good boy he was capable of being. And

when he lost control and his hips jerked upwards, she would pull off him and smack his hip so hard it left a red handprint and make him beg her to suck him again. And when he came too soon she would make him lie over her lap, would bring her hand down on his ass over and over while he squirmed and whined and got hard all over again, would say in her Russian-accented voice—

“You know,” Rose says, sitting up, “it’s okay if you’re not feeling it.” His half-hard dick lands against his belly with a wet smack.

“I’m feeling it!” Shane protests. He is. He has to be: there have been too many times lately when he hasn’t been able to perform. Even on the nights he’s been able to fuck her, he hasn’t come more than half the time.

She raises a single, perfect eyebrow. Shane wilts as surely as his cock.

“Let me eat you out,” he proposes. “I want to.”

But she shakes her head. “I’m not really feeling it anymore. Let’s just cuddle.”

Shane opens his arms, and she lies down next to him, her head on his shoulder, her hand drawing lazy circles on his pec. For a while, they’re silent.

“What’re you thinking about?” she asks.

“Nothing.” Shane is thinking about Rose, how he’s failing to live up to what she deserves. He’s wondering whether Rose ever closes her eyes and fantasizes during sex, and if so what her fantasies are. Who it is that creeps into them. He’s wondering whether Rose feels an obligation to perform even when she’s off the set, the way Shane does. Shane’s mind is racing, humming, threatening to tear itself apart with the force of his anxiety. He is subsumed by the constant pressure to perform, to meet everyone’s expectations. He knows that even though what he’s doing with Rose is exactly what’s expected of him, he’s failing to do it adequately. His breaths are coming faster and faster, and he knows he’s powerless to stop it.

“Hey,” Rose says, taking his hands. “Hey, hey. It’s alright.”

Shane nods mutely, but his breaths keep coming as audible wheezes, his throat stays choked up.

“What can I do?” Rose rises up on her knees, still holding his hands.

“Can you lie on top of me?” Shane hates the vulnerability of asking, but if he can’t be vulnerable with his girlfriend, he tells himself, who can he be vulnerable with? And isn’t it worse to have a fucking panic attack in front of her than to ask for something like that?

She lowers herself down on top of him, and the warmth and pressure calm something inside Shane. He can feel himself relax, muscles he didn’t even know he had tense going lax and easy as he feels Rose breathe above him, her breasts and ribcage moving rhythmically against him. She hooks her feet around Shane’s ankles and burrows her forearms under the small of his back, locking the two of them together as best as she can.

They lie there in silence for a while, and then Shane clears his throat.

“Thanks,” he says. “I’m better now, I think.”

She turns her head to the side and kisses just above his right nipple. The skin there is smooth and bare, though on other men, more masculine, stereotypical men— on Ilya, a traitorous part of his mind whispers— there’s hair. Rose doesn’t seem to be thinking about that, though. She never compares Shane to other men, which he’s grateful for, because he’s intensely aware that there are a thousand ways in which he might be found different or lacking. Some differences are beyond his control and can safely be ignored, but most are his fault— his awkwardness, his lack of interest in women, the way he wants to submit. Rose doesn’t see most of these flaws, and that’s by design, but she forgives the ones she does, and Shane appreciates that.

She rolls off of him after a few minutes, and Shane sits up.

“Can I borrow some pajamas?” she asks, and he nods.

When they’re sharing a pair of plaid pajamas— her in the top half, him in the bottoms— he clambers back into bed.

“Nice socks,” she says. “You gonna sleep in those?”

“I was planning on it.” Shane looks down at the light blue socks he’s wearing. He’s washed them since acquiring them, but they still feel like a little piece of their owner.

The two of them fit together perfectly as they lie there, Shane curled around Rose, his arm over her waist and his hand resting on the sheet rather than holding her ribcage or breast, their feet tangled together. She breathes steadily and evenly as she sleeps, and Shane tries to match his breaths to hers. His mind is still racing, and he can’t seem to tame it.

I like her so much, he thinks. God, why can't I get it together? If I like her so much, why can't I show her the way she wants to be shown? The fact that his sexual performance has let him down yet again worries him. Shane is, he thinks, a performer, when you really get down to it: meeting fans, doing commercials, even playing hockey for the cameras is a performance. He doesn’t always love it, doesn’t always feel the enthusiasm people want him to, but he always gets it done. So, now that he actually does feel the affection, the enthusiasm for a woman that he should, why is he failing to do what is needed from him?

Probably he’s just not trying hard enough, he knows. Probably, it’s like an underdeveloped muscle: you have to learn *how* to engage the muscle before you can actually train it.

Or maybe it’s the way he’s expected to be in charge when he sleeps with women. Maybe he’s just not built to take charge, sexually. That wouldn’t be ideal— he knows, as a man, there are ways he’s expected to behave, things he’s expected to like— but it’s more manageable than the alternative.

Also better than the alternative: maybe he needs to be penetrated to perform sexually. That would be more problematic, but he could probably come up with something: wear his plug

while he fucks Rose, for instance. He doesn't *think* she would leave him over that.

And then there's the alternative, which Shane can only stand to think of in the dark, only with the reassurance of a beautiful, heterosexual woman in his arms. Maybe he's in the wrong game, so to speak. Maybe there's a reason everything was so different with Ilya.

But that's not it. That can't be it, not when he loves Rose. Because he does! Looking at her, he feels the same warmth in his chest that he does for his parents, or for Hayden. So he's going to figure this out, because he has to make this work. He has to.

("I just don't think that we can keep trying," Rose says, and Shane looks away, upward, anywhere but at her, so that she can't see the shine of tears in his eyes.)

5. Ilya

When Ilya opens the door to his apartment, Shane falls into his arms like they've been apart for a thousand years.

"I saw you one month ago," Ilya chastises him, but he scoops Shane off his feet anyway, bracing him against the door. With his thighs wrapped around Ilya's waist, Shane can feel his leather jacket through the thin fleece of his soft pajama pants.

"I'm excited to see my boyfriend," Shane says, "so sue me." He likes the way it tastes in his mouth: *my boyfriend*, electric and promising even after a month of turning the words over and over in his head.

"Your *boyfriend*," Ilya purrs, hitching Shane a little higher. "And did you miss your boyfriend?"

Shane nods into Ilya's neck. "Did you miss me too?"

Ilya bites the place where Shane's neck joins with his shoulder. "Yes, Shane. I missed you." His lips move up the side of Shane's neck to the corner of his jaw, which he kisses loudly. Shane squirms to get his legs back on the ground: he's heavy, he knows, and even braced against the door he doesn't want to make Ilya carry that weight.

Ilya pushes him harder against the door and kisses first Shane's cheek, then his lips. He murmurs something into Shane's throat, but it's indistinct enough that Shane can't even tell if it's in English or Russian.

He rocks his hips forward against Ilya's body. His cock is fully hard, now, has been since Ilya lifted him off his feet, and the contact makes him throw his head back against the door and whine. Ilya's hair tickling the underside of his jaw as he kisses his way down Shane's neck and across his collarbone makes him shudder, makes a wave of prickling warmth race across his skin.

"Are you going to fuck me?" Shane pants. He feels insane, desperate, hungry. He kicks his heel into Ilya's hamstring— not too hard, just enough to goad him.

“No,” Ilya says flatly, pulling back. “I come here, after a month apart, just to tease.” He sets Shane on the ground and starts straightening his mussed clothing as if he really is done with Shane.

“You’re such an asshole, Rozanov,” Shane says fondly, and leads Ilya to the bedroom by the hand. “Come and take what’s yours, already.” It’s a risky thing to say, something he never would have let pass his lips even two months ago, because he wouldn’t have known how Ilya would respond. That’s the thing about a performance: every step needs to be predictable and choreographed.

This isn’t a performance anymore. Ilya can respond how he likes: Shane knows he will weather it.

But just as he’d hoped, Ilya’s hand in his twitches convulsively, as sure a sign of his arousal as the bulge in his jeans and the tension in his jaw. He always gets like that, Shane thinks fondly: every muscle flexed, all sharp corners and hard lines as he tries to contain his arousal. The perfect complement to Shane, who always softens, letting his back arch and his limbs go liquid with arousal.

Shane can practically taste the musky, salty flavor of Ilya’s cock coating his tongue. He can feel himself dripping into his boxers, creating a rapidly-spreading wet spot that he knows Ilya will tease him for. He shuts his eyes and takes a quick breath, trying to reset himself, hold himself back a little.

He waits for Ilya to tell him to strip, but nothing comes. Ilya stands behind him, hands roaming up and down his chest, wandering under his loose T-shirt. One ventures into his pants, and Ilya makes a patronizing little noise in his ear.

“So wet,” he murmurs. “Like a girl, yes?”

Shane had known it was coming, knows it’s coming every time he starts leaking everywhere, soaking his underwear, but that doesn’t stop arousal from sweeping in like the tide, making his hips hitch into Ilya’s hand. He knows he’s blushing furiously, can feel the prickle of the flush across his cheeks.

“So pretty,” Ilya murmurs, and still makes no move to strip out of his clothing. Shane twists impatiently in his arms so that they’re facing one another.

“Clothes off,” he demands. “Now.”

“Bossy!” Ilya, apparently delighted, shrugs out of his jacket and pulls his shirt over his head. When his clothes are strewn across the hardwood floor of Shane’s bedroom, he goes to the bed and flops down on his back, reclining against Shane’s many pillows with his legs shamelessly parted.

Shane leaves his own clothes in a neat pile on the floor.

“You’re not going to fold them?” Ilya asks.

“Later.” Shane crawls up Ilya’s body and sits, looking down at him. He can feel Ilya’s half-hard cock nestled between his legs, and fails to resist the urge to settle down on it. It twitches against the sensitive space behind his cock, and he shivers happily, feeling something warm and unfamiliar blossoming in his chest. He lets it flourish.

“Hm.” Ilya reaches up to put a hand on his cheek, and Shane leans into it.

“What?”

“Like a cat in a sunbeam,” Ilya says, and then something in Russian, neither part of which makes any sense. Shane lets it go.

Ilya’s hands wander up and down Shane’s thighs, taking their time as they run counter to the sparse hair there, which tickles a little. Shane reaches down and palms Ilya’s pectoral muscle, the way Ilya always does to him.

“So easy,” Ilya murmurs, catching Shane’s hand and pressing a kiss to the base of his palm. “So sweet, so hungry, so... what is word? Submissive.” He pronounces the word deliberately, letting it fall from his mouth a syllable at a time.

His hands are steady as they return to Ilya’s chest, but Shane’s mind is running a mile a minute. He wonders, looking down at Ilya, whether he minds that Shane is always the one to submit. He wonders whether this flaw, this desire to follow rather than lead, bothers him: he’s never shown he can be in control with Ilya before, not more than brief moments of enthusiasm. And his previous attempts at taking charge in bed— all with women— were pale, vain imitations of the real thing, of what Ilya does to him. This inability to meet expectations had weighed heavily on him back when he was sleeping with women, but being with Ilya, knowing the right thing to do and say because Ilya shows him, has made it fall away. Except— what if Ilya secretly expects him to overcome that failing? His thoughts are racing, not panic but approaching it, when Ilya grasps him by the back of the neck and forces him to look down. Because he sees Shane spiraling, Shane thinks. Of course he does. He always does.

“Tell me what it is,” Ilya says, his thumb rubbing gentle circles into Shane’s neck. His eyes are so gentle. Shane takes a deep breath and forces himself to speak the truth, not to demur and say something more socially acceptable.

“Does it bother you that I’m so submissive?”

Ilya laughs disbelievingly. “Bother me? I think after all these years I know what I am signing up for, yes?” He pulls Shane down and presses their lips together, more tender than hungry. “I like it, very much. Now say you believe me.”

“You like that I’m submissive,” Shane says obediently. “I believe you.”

“Now tell me what you want.”

Shane takes a deep breath. “I want to suck you.” A moment. “Please.” It’s all so easy with Ilya.

“Good boy,” Ilya says. “Kneel.” His voice is low and deeply accented, and Shane feels warm all over. He slips off the bed and starts to sink to his knees on the floor, but Ilya catches him by the shoulder. He pulls one of the mountain of pillows off the bed and lays it at Shane’s feet. Shane looks at him and smiles, just a little. Then, feeling his chest like a kiln, he kneels.

Ilya puts his hand at the hinge of Shane’s jaw, guiding it open, and Shane lets his tongue stick out just enough to meet with his lower lip as he takes in the tip of Ilya’s cock. He tastes just like Shane remembers, and he swallows around the girth of him. He gags slightly as Ilya breaches his throat, and Ilya makes a move to pull back, but Shane grabs his hips and yanks them forward, forcing his length even deeper. His throat convulses around it, but he doesn’t choke: he’s had years to practice this by now, both with Ilya himself and— shamefully, in bed, under the cover of darkness, with his dildo. Ilya’s hands tighten in his hair, holding him down like he likes to be held: not so tightly he couldn’t break free if he had to, but powerfully enough that he feels confined.

Ilya curses in Russian, pushing his hips forward until Shane’s nose is buried in the coarse hair growing at the base of his cock. Shane can smell the salt-sweat scent of him as his cock pulses, blood-hot, in the back of his throat, and then all of a sudden he’s yanked off. He makes a quiet noise of protest, looking up at Ilya through his lashes in a way he knows Ilya likes.

“I was gonna—” Ilya explains. “I want to fuck you tonight.”

Shane leans forward and kisses the head of Ilya’s cock, just once.

“So fuck me,” Shane says, and Ilya gives him his hand and guides him to his feet. They stand there a moment, faces only a few inches apart, just looking at each other. Shane can see the faint laugh lines at the corner of Ilya’s eyes, and for a wild moment he wants to run his finger over their path.

Ilya pouts. “Kiss?”

Shane kisses him, wet and hungry. When he pulls back, a thin strand of spit still connects their lips; Ilya waves it away with the back of his hand.

“On the bed,” Ilya says, and Shane climbs up obediently. Almost as soon as he’s lying down, Ilya slips slick fingers between his thighs. Shane shudders.

“Cold,” he complains.

“Sorry.” Ilya doesn’t sound sorry. He’s rutting slowly against the back of Shane’s thigh as he slips two fingers easily inside him.

“Fuck,” Shane bites out, suppressing the whine that wants to break free from behind his teeth. But why does he bother? he wonders, as Ilya fucks him with what must, by the familiar burn and stretch, be three fingers. Why hide when Ilya already knows him so intimately? The next whine comes out through lax, spit-wet lips as Ilya slides into him, excess lube leaking out around his cock as he thrusts for the first time.

After a minute or so, Ilya pauses to roll Shane onto his side and hike his top leg up to his chest. The not-unpleasant stretch in his hamstring distracts him for a moment, and he grasps his knee, holding it close to his chest. Ilya's hips snap forward again, though, and Shane is pulled back to the present.

"I love you," Shane breathes, just barely audible even to himself, more reflex than conscious choice.

Ilya seems to hear it anyway. "What was that?"

"I love it," Shane says, because they say *I love you* in the quiet, tender moments when everything else has fallen away, and they say it when one of them is crying and needs to hear it, but they don't say it during sex. They don't say it just to say it, and it feels different, somehow, like he's cheapened it by saying it when it wasn't explicitly needed.

"Liar." Ilya thrusts harder, rucking Shane progressively up the bed, mussing the sheets worse than they already were.

"Am not!" Shane throws one arm over his face, lets the other hand sneak down to grasp at his cock, but Ilya bats it away.

"You can do it," Ilya tells him, voice strained with effort.

"I—" It's all too much for Shane, the relentless stimulation and the bursting, breaking feeling in his chest. "I love you! Fuck, fuck, Ilya—" He loves him, and it's easy, is the thing. It's so easy to feel what he feels, to want what he wants, it takes no effort at all, it's not a performance, it's as natural as breathing. And saying it carries just as much weight, as much importance, as it ever does.

Ilya grabs Shane's arm and drags it out to the side, pinning it there on the sheets. Shane looks up at him almost worshipfully as those flashes of electric arousal come faster and faster, brighter and brighter, and he knows as he strains upwards against Ilya's hand on his forearm that he's going to come.

Ilya kisses him through it when he does, devouring Shane's desperate noises and holding them behind his teeth. His hips never stop moving, and he comes deep inside Shane just as the aftershocks of his orgasm subside and everything starts to pivot from overwhelmingly good to too much.

Shane looks up at Ilya. He can see the two little moles on his throat clearly from here, and when he moves his free arm he can feel the slightly raised scar on his forearm, left there by a skate blade when he was young. He can still remember how Ilya had told him about it, rueful and amused as Shane catalogued every inch of his skin, demanding the stories behind every mark, every little scar. The knowledge feels more intimate even than actually having Ilya inside him. All kinds of people can say Ilya has fucked them. How many people can claim he laid with them afterwards, spoke in comfortable English, letting his grammar slide just a little? How many people can say he's kissed them not like he was hungry but like he had already been sated, the predator lazing around by the carcass?

Shane lies there like something Ilya has felled, Ilya's cock still inside him, and his mind begins to whirl. He makes a discontented little noise.

"You are thinking again," Ilya says reproachfully. "What are you thinking of?"

"Has anyone ever fucked you?"

Ilya makes a noise of affirmation against the back of Shane's neck. "It was alright," he says. "But is like you told Rose. You prefer to be a hole. I am happy with this."

"*The* hole," Shane says, mortified. "Because she'd said— a peg and a hole— it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter."

Ilya softly bites the back of Shane's neck and gently shakes his head, like a dog with a toy. "I love you," he says. "I love the sex we have. Stop thinking."

"I—" Shane says, but Ilya slips a couple fingers into his mouth for him to suckle, and he loses himself in that for a while.

"What're you thinking about now?" Ilya asks as Shane is letting his tongue work its way between the two fingers in his mouth.

"Nothing," Shane says, indistinct around Ilya's fingers. It's true: his mind is empty and passive, everything out of his control. With Ilya's warmth at his back, it's almost comforting.

"Are you sure?"

Shane plumbs the depths of his mind, and something floats to the surface. It's the kind of thought he's never known how to give voice to, the kind of thought whose phrasing is just socially unacceptable enough that he's resolved that it will never reach the ears of anyone else.

"Oh, there is something," Ilya says.

Shane spits the fingers from his mouth. "Sometimes," he says, "I want you so much— I miss you so much— I want to be so close to you that I want to crawl inside your skin. Or bring you inside mine. It's like being obsessed with you, I think."

Ilya nods. "Is very natural."

"Is it?"

"I'm very cool and interesting. Of course you're obsessed."

"Oh my god, you're such an egotist," Shane says, and then when Ilya looks confused: "You've got a big ego."

"Not all that's big." Ilya shifts his hips, and his cock moves inside Shane, who realizes with a start that it's hardening again.

“Are you going to fuck me again?” Shane asks.

“Depends. Are you good for it?”

“Yes,” Shane says, “but I’m not sure I can get hard again so fast.”

Ilya makes a move to pull out, and Shane throws a hand behind him to grab for Ilya’s ass.

“Wait! You should do it anyway.”

“You are sure?” Ilya pauses, and Shane can practically see the crinkle in his strong brow, trying to parse what Shane wants.

“I’m sure.” And Shane is. He’s failed to perform in sex before, and he knows this will be different. Less a failure, more... well. A feature. He thinks it’s going to be hot, Ilya fucking him, nothing expected from Shane— not even an orgasm— just taking what he’s given.

Ilya curses in Russian and rises to his knees. He slips free of Shane, cum and lube spilling out in his wake, but Shane hardly has time to mourn the loss before Ilya’s grabbing him by the hips, hauling him up onto his elbows and knees, and slipping home once again. Shane groans and lets his head fall down to his forearms.

He knows in the past he would have worried, on some level, about how he looked, whether his back was arched correctly, whether he moved where Ilya directed him gracefully enough. Now he just lets it happen, no element of performance or theater.

Ilya takes him as he is, fingers digging into the sparse fat on Shane’s hips as he fucks him hard and fast.

Shane’s soft cock hangs small and limp beneath him, swinging with the impact of Ilya’s hips against Shane’s. Without the distraction of arousal, he can feel everything: the friction of Ilya’s cock against his inner walls, the warmth of Ilya’s hips against his ass every time he thrusts forward, the way Ilya bends forward to bite Shane’s shoulder— almost hard enough to leave a mark— and the way he kisses the little hurt better immediately afterwards. Shane puts one arm behind his back, and Ilya takes the bait, grasping it by the wrist and pinning it against the small of his back.

“You like this?” Ilya gasps, his hips out of rhythm in a way that tells Shane he’s close. “You like when I hold you down?” It’s the kind of question Shane wouldn’t have answered with Jessica, or Rose, or even the Ilya of the past, for fear he had learned the wrong lines, that he would fail to project normalcy.

“Yeah,” Shane says. “Yeah, I like it.”

“Tell me what you want,” Ilya says, his grip on Shane’s wrist tightening. Shane twists his arm to grasp at Ilya’s wrist in turn.

“I want you to come in me again,” Shane tells him, his voice as broken and hungry as he feels.

So Ilya rocks forward once, twice, gentle compared to how he'd been fucking Shane, and he gives him what he wants.

"You feel more natural lately," Ilya tells him once they've showered and climbed back into bed. "Does this make sense? More comfortable than you used to."

Shane shuts his eyes. He knows what Ilya means, and he isn't sure how to explain it. Isn't sure he wants to explain it, make himself vulnerable like that. But if he can't show the soft parts of himself to Ilya— with his boyfriend— who can he open himself up to?

"Do you ever— do you ever feel so much pressure to do the right thing, to say the right thing, that your self starts to feel like a character you're playing? Like— like you're not interacting with people, not naturally, you're just pushing buttons to get the reactions you want?" He's not saying it right, he knows, not explaining it properly, and this is driven home when he feels Ilya shake his head against the back of Shane's neck.

"I guess I've felt detached from everyone, to some degree or another, my whole life," he says, and when he feels Ilya open his mouth: "Just let me explain. It's like everyone's interacting naturally, and you're an imposter, an alien trying to blend in. Like— like all these little social cues are another language you only sort of speak, and you're trying to keep up—"

"Yes," Ilya interrupts. "I know what this is like."

"And it was at its worst the first few times I had sex," Shane says. "I guess part of the problem was that they were women, but I didn't know that then. And it was better during sex with you, but it was still there, like I was just a little behind you all the time."

"You never said," Ilya says. Shane twists in his arms so that they're facing one another. Ilya's eyebrows are pinched up and together in the middle, and his lips are slightly slack. He hasn't teared up, but he looks like he might.

"I— it's been this way all my life, Ilya. I was ashamed of it. But it's been easier, with you, lately. I think that's what you mean by me seeming more comfortable."

For a moment it looks like Ilya is going to say something. Shane pauses to let him speak, but all Ilya does is kiss him.

"It still happens with you, sometimes," Shane says when they part. "You know— when you make a joke and I take it seriously, or I take something too literally? There's still something wrong with me."

Ilya opens his mouth.

"No," Shane says. He can feel himself tearing up, and he swallows, controlling it. He will *not* cry, he tells himself. "There is. But I'm not ashamed of it with you."

Ilya wraps him tightly in his arms and kisses him, slow and sweet. As he rolls to lie on top of Shane, the tears slide slowly down his cheeks.

End Notes

I sincerely believe this is representative of all the sex that show Shane Hollander has had.

ask me questions/send me ideas/make friends/generally find me on Tumblr at [toxotesjc](#), where I post about hockey but also Heated Rivalry, potentially including drabbles/ficlets! Seriously, please do talk to me.

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