a weak backhand

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by you-cant-spell-subtext-without (ayreisha)

Summary

Ilya: Okay, Sam. I need you to help with something. I want to do commercial shoot.

Sam: Um - okay, I don't think that I am -

Ilya: You are Samantha Pearson, yes? Head assistant to what is his name, Mr. Marketing?

Sam: Chief of Marketing Operations. Yes, that's me, but -

Ilya: Great. So here is what I want you to tell Mr. Chief. Should be commercial with me and Shane Hollander. People love talking about us. It will make CCM a lot of money.

Sam: So a commercial with both of your teams?

Ilya: Ne sovsem. No. Just me and Hollander, I think. We can make rivalry - what is word, only thing there?

Sam: Um, the focus?

Ilya: Da, focus! And part of focus would be our faces. So lots of close up of our faces.

Sam: Like during a face off play?

Ilya: Da! Exactly. During face off. Because hockey! Molodets!

Sam: Okay, um. I guess I should be writing this down?

Ilya decides to take matters in his own hands when he realizes he won't see Shane until October, and orchestrates a little commercial shoot with their new sponsor.

Notes

once again huge shout out to @DoctorProfessorSong for the beta and feedback (and a little bit of the inspiration for an OC i'm quite fond of)

big thanks to @/talula19281926 for the thread that inspired this idea

ps Ilya's confusion about mortgages brought to you by me directly googling CCM and having a mortgage servicer come up first. art parallels life (Ilya and I are both idiots at Google, probably)

See the end of the work for more notes

“Hi, I need a pass for Sam?”

“You mean Samantha Pearson?” An annoyed looking man in a blue baseball cap frowns at the clipboard in his hands.

“Um, sure. Yes.” Sam replies, tugging the suddenly too-tight collar of her button down nervously.

“Cool. You can sit over there.” The man hands her a plastic square with one of those frustrating metal clips that never quite goes on the way you want it to. Sam sighs, pinning it to one of her pockets at an awkward thirty-five-degree angle. The tag bears her full, legal name, which - makes all logical sense. There’s no reason for Sam to insist on the shortened version that feels more like ‘her’ instead of the elongated, girlie ‘Samantha’ currently gracing awkward badge dangling from the left side of her body.

Still, it would be nice of her boss to remember her preferred moniker when putting her name on the list for this shoot, especially since Sam is specifically going out of her comfort zone to supervise this for him.

It’s not like she’s voting, or getting on a plane or something. What does her *legal* name matter? Maybe she should just start calling her boss something arbitrary and mildly offensive. Like Mildred, a name Sam has always considered solely reserved for a fictional, sickly Victorian child.

She wrinkles her nose, ruing the day she picked up the phone to accept the call that precipitated this very burdensome break in her typically mundane work routine, a reroute that’s causing her usual steady buzz of generalized anxiety to ratchet up to ‘angry beehive.’

Caller: Yes, is this headquarters for the company CCM?

Sam: Um. Headquarters? This is our home office, yes.

Caller: *Slava bogu.* When I first type in the Google for CCM, they send me to buy a house or something. Mortgage office. Real estate. You really should think about rebrand.

Sam: Rebrand? I - I’m sorry sir, you are?

Caller: Ilya Rozanov. You are one of my sponsors.

Sam: Oh, yes - that’s right. We just recently signed you. Did you have a question about your contract, Mr. Rozanov? Let me connect you to -

Ilya: No, no. Just moment, please. I do not need to be connected. And please call me Ilya.

Sam: Okay. Um, how can I be of assistance?

I**lya:** What should I call you?

Sam: Samantha. Um, Sam - actually.

Ilya: Okay, Sam. I need you to help with something. I want to do commercial shoot.

Sam: Um - okay, I don't think that I am -

Ilya: You are Samantha Pearson, yes? Head assistant to what is his name, Mr. Marketing?

Sam: Chief of Marketing Operations. Yes, that's me, but -

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Sam: Like during a face off play?

Ilya: *Da*! Exactly. During face off. Because hockey! *Molodets!*

Sam: Okay, um. I guess I should be writing this down?

Ilya: You are very good at this job. I knew you were the right person to call. Also, Sam? One more thing?

Sam: Yes, I'm listening. Though I'm still not sure I'm the one who can make this happen.

Ilya: Shh, shh. You can. Ok - so Sam, please make sure that there are locker rooms.

Sam: Locker rooms?

Ilya: Yes, for realism. With showers. Okay, I will wait for your call later.

Sam: But hold on, Ilya - I -

Ilya: And no rush, but just - before October. Ok Sam?

Sam: Ilya!

Ilya: Ok. *Poka, poka.*

phone disconnects

Sam's not sure what got into her after that call, but for the first time in her three year career (if anyone could call it that) as assistant to Thomas Minyard, Chief of Marketing for CCM Hockey Equipment, she actually used her marketing degree for a pitch as opposed to helping him choose the best seasonal Starbucks to order that day.

What's even more miraculous than that uncharacteristic bold move? Thomas greenlit the idea - with one caveat.

"If you really believe in this, Samantha, you have to own it. So we're sending you!"

So that's why Sam is presently sitting on a highly uncomfortable chair in a dimly lit room in Toronto, staring at an empty hockey rink - because she's the one representing CCM at this shoot. She rolls her shoulders under the weight of her hair, which is making her neck ache again, only adding to her discomfort. For the umpteenth time, Sam considers chopping the long auburn locks off entirely, no matter how despondent or reproachful her mother would be over that choice.

A choice Sam could hardly explain, because her mother has never understood why even when Sam was little, she felt more comfortable in a pair of pants than a skirt, just like she liked the more neutral version of her name and shied away from makeup and the color pink for as long as she could possibly remember. Sometimes Sam just wants to say fuck it, and make those choices anyway - go with the things that make her feel more at ease in the confines of her own skin instead of prioritizing the comfort of everyone else around her at her sole expense.

But sometimes has yet to come around, so here she sits, with 'Samantha' on her name tag and her hair hanging down her waist, as heavy on her shoulders as the responsibilities of a day she certainly never contemplated happening, much less signed up to lead.

Sam shoves her thoughts away and tugs the end of her long braid anxiously, trying her best to feel qualified to serve as the voice of 'final approval' for this, Ilya Rozanov's hair-brained idea of a marketing campaign put together using three Canadian dollars and a dream.

"Okay, wonderful. Wonderful. We need some background music for ambience, though!" A quickly moving form darts through the dim light, pausing in front of Sam's chair.

"Ms. Pearson?" The energy around the man feels like an electric force. He adjusts the glasses perched on top of his nose before offering Sam his hand for a shake. "I'm Glen Pastoré."

The director.

"Um, just Sam," Sam responds, placing her palm into his and hoping fervently he won't notice how clammy it is. She's been an admirer of the man for years, ever since she had her secret tumblr account that she started as a child expressly for (*embarrassing! Hopefully never to be unearthed from the bowels of the internet!*) dissecting all of his work - before her parents convinced her that a marketing degree was a much safer bet than taking a chance on film school.

Well. Convinced is an understatement. *More like coerced.* Nothing motivates a career path pivot like a good, old-fashioned Pearson family guilt trip.

Anyway, the fact that Ilya Rozanov somehow managed to snag such a high profile director for a sports gear commercial starring two teenagers relatively unknown to the cinematic world is - nothing short of positively shocking.

“I’m a big hockey fan,” Glen offers, as if he’s reading Sam’s actual thoughts - or perhaps, per the usual, the expression on her face is once again too unguarded to keep anything rolling around her mind private. “And let me tell you - these two? They’re gonna be huge. Huge!”

Sam nods politely. People tend to assume that by virtue of her employment she’s a big hockey fan but truth be told, anything Sam *has* picked up about the sport comes from the m/m hockey romances she reads voraciously on the weekends.

And somehow, she doesn’t think the way those books tend to use ‘hat trick’ translates to the mechanics of the actual game.

“I will be huge, yes. With Hollander we will have to wait and see.” The familiar accented voice slides into their conversation smoother than a stick of lightly melting butter.

“Rozanov!” Glen claps his hands together excitedly.

“Please. Ilya.” The hockey player smiles, offering a giant palm to Glen in greeting.

Sam may not be into hockey, but looking at Ilya in the flesh - well, she feels just a little bit starstruck. With his swath of freely curling hair, perfect physique, and soulful greyish-blue eyes - he could be starring in a television adaption of one of Sam’s romance novels instead of a silly, small hockey commercial. Her eyes drift to the mole perfectly placed on the left side of Ilya’s face, right at the center, like the artist who created this impeccably sculptured human couldn’t help but sign off on her magnum opus of a work.

“This is Samantha Pearson,” Glen says, clear amusement underscoring the tone of his voice as Sam realizes she’s practically - *oh god* - yeah, she’s very close to drooling over Ilya Rozanov right in front of the athlete’s own salad.

“Sam, actually,” Ilya says, winking at her. “It is nice to meet you in person.” He rolls the ‘r’ in the last word like a purring cat, and *Sam is not going to pass out*.

“Very nice!” She chirps, holding out a slightly trembling hand. Ilya’s palm practically engulfs it and he gives her a warm smile.

“Thank you for making this happen.” Sam nods, and thankfully before her mouth can come up with what would likely be highly embarrassing words, Ilya turns to Glen.

“Has Hollander arrived?”

There’s a tight urgency to his tone that wasn’t present before, almost as if he’s expecting the answer to be ‘he isn’t coming.’

Glen raises a finger, pulling out a ringing phone and steps away to answer it before responding to the question. Ilya follows him with his gaze, a small pulse of tension beating rapidly in his cheek.

Sam suddenly feels the need to reassure him somehow.

“Um, we have Mr. Hollander’s contract. He executed it in full two days ago so, uh -”

Ilya turns to her quizzically, and Sam immediately feels slightly idiotic.

“...what I mean, is that um - he is contractually obligated to come.”

Something - *naughty?* - twitches the corner of Ilya’s mouth at the last word, and Sam quickly squeaks in clarification just in case Ilya’s mistranslated her intent:

“Be here! I mean he is contractually obligated to *be here*.”

Ilya nods, slowly. “Ok. Good.” The stiffness of his posture loosens lightly, but his eyes are still roaming around the room, like they’re involuntarily seeking a physical confirmation of Sam’s words *vis-a-vis* Shane Hollander’s physical presence.

Why is he so on edge?

“We got word that Hollander’s car just pulled in, so he should be changing shortly.” Glen announces, rematerializing, and Sam watches the slope of Ilya’s (*very broad! Inhumanly so!*) shoulders relax as he adjusts his posture to one of almost aggressive nonchalance.

“Too bad. I was hoping to do a few solo shots.”

Glen lights up. “Do you want to? I’m sure we have some time, and -”

“No, no.” Ilya waves him off, glancing at Sam. “I am sure that uh, the money is - um -” His expression seems to be asking for Sam to assist.

“The budget,” she says, surmising that for whatever reason, Ilya Rozanov doesn’t seem to want to waste camera time if Shane Hollander isn’t present on the ice. “The, um, budget won’t allow for that. Two of them or nothing. Do not separate!”

Jesus fucking Christ, Sam needs to learn how to stop when she’s ahead. And probably be less chronically online because why is she using threads lingo with irls right now?!

She fights the urge to clap her hand over her own mouth, but Ilya smiles, seemingly satisfied with her explanation.

“You can go set up,” he says to Glen. “I will wait on that slow hockey player with my friend Sam.”

Okay, well. Sam did not have Ilya Rozanov calling her ‘friend’ on her bingo card today. Is that even permissible? Oh god, is Sam being - inappropriate?

She gives Ilya a shaky smile.

Glen shrugs, bolting off towards the camera setup white furiously scrolling through what appears to be a playlist of songs on his phone. “Let us know if you need anything. You too, Samantha,” he calls out over his shoulder as an afterthought - because of course, per the usual, that’s all that Sam appears to be.

Her shoulders droop.

Then, a point of an elbow gently juts into her arm.

“*Do* you need anything, Sam?” Ilya’s eyes look thoughtful.

“Oh, um. No, no thank you. I’m okay!” Sam says as her stomach chooses that particular moment to let out a very decided rumble belying her words.

Ilya’s lips twist wryly. “I see.” His gaze goes to the crafty table of snacks within their direct eyeline.

“I’m really okay,” Sam squeaks out, because the thought of leaving this chair and traversing the open space of the filming area, leaving herself open to questions she is likely unable to answer sounds - well pretty much like Sam’s own worst nightmare. The very idea of it is practically paralyzing.

“Well. I am hungry.” Ilya announces. “I will be right back.”

Sam nods, watching him stroll easily over to the table, hovering over the options. She realizes she's jealous of Ilya's unique stride - he walks like he skates, with a sinuous, even cadence. It doesn’t really fit into a box.

What Sam envies even more though? His smooth, sultry confidence.

Well, Samantha, that’s why you’d never make it in film. You can barely talk to people as is. Direct? Darling, that’s some imagination you’ve got, certainly. Yes, I know imagination is important for that industry, but you’ve got to have the voice to convey it. And that, my dear, is not something that can be taught. Not to mention, all those beautiful actresses on set? You’d never snag a husband in that line of work! Marketing, now that is a lot more practicable.

Her mother’s voice spirals through Sam’s brain unbidden and she frowns at the intrusion.

Well, mom. At the very least I’ve made it on a set, whether you like it or not.

That single defiant notion makes Sam feel just a little bit better. Perhaps she - can fake answers to the questions. Or at the very least confidently avoid them.

Ilya’s still hovering over the table, scratching the back of his neck. He swivels his head to look over at Sam with a clearly confused expression on his face.

Maybe he needs someone to translate a label.

Sam takes a breath. *Okay. This is dumb. You can do this. This is your client and helping him is, technically, a part of your job.*

Trying not to think about it too much, she gets up from her chair and scurries over to the crafty table, keeping the slope of Ilya Rozanov's shoulders in her eyeline like they're the horizon at the edge of an endless sea.

"Hello," Ilya says with a small smile as Sam arrives by his side, doing her best not to breathe heavily. "Can you explain to me - what is slim jim?"

He's assembled a bevy of treasures on a small paper plate - peanut butter crackers, two bags of m&ms, a package of Red Vines, and three bags of pretzels living together in harmony as Ilya's fingers drum lightly on top of the table next to them.

"It's a beef stick," Sam answers readily, pulling a couple from the large plastic jar in the center of the table to offer him.

Ilya's smile grows wolfish. "Hm. I do enjoy a beef stick." He gestures to the plate. "I took too much, if you want? Cannot put it back now."

Sam nods, and they walk back to the set of chairs in tandem, Sam's steps feeling just a little bit braver. A harried PA does approach with a question clearly written on his face, but Ilya manages to brush him off with one simple look, to Sam's utter relief.

Okay, well. Baby steps.

Ilya opens a bag of pretzels once they get settled back in on the tall, still-uncomfortable chairs. He hands it to Sam before opening one for himself, and they munch on the snack smorgasbord companionably for a brief moment.

Finally, Ilya breaks the silence with:

"I am - um, not scared - that is wrong word, but -" he pauses, with that querying look that Sam's begun to recognize as Ilya's need for someone to supplement his present grasp on the English lexicon.

She notices the incessant, barely visible jitter of Ilya's left knee, and goes with the feeling that's been permeating her own body since her arrival. "Nervous?" She pauses trying to figure out how to explain it. "Like - ants in the pants. Ew, that's gross - I'm sorry, um -"

Ilya laughs. "That is it, I think. Nervous." His face grows serious. "I - do not like it." He ducks his head, looking uncharacteristically shy at the admission.

"It's not fun," Sam agrees. She pauses, crinkling her nose. "Have you never been nervous before?"

A shrug. "I do not think so, no. Not like this."

Sam flicks the salt off of one of her pretzels. "But you play hockey in front of hundreds of people…"

The leg jiggle intensifies lightly. “Yes.” Ilya’s eyes drift to the far side of the building, in the direction of the locker room area. “But this is different.”

“The cameras?” Sam says, feeling highly unhelpful. “You can just pretend they aren’t there,” she suggests.

“Mmm,” Ilya says, gaze still distant. “It is hard sometimes. To pretend.”

Sam feels like they’re not talking about cameras anymore, but in an attempt to be - supportive? *Is this even within the parameters of her job description?* - she goes with:

“Well, at least Shane - um, Mr. Hollander - will be there, too. You know, you won’t be alone.”

Ilya turns to her and Sam notices one corner of his mouth lifting in a small smile. “Not alone. *Da*, you have a point.” He pauses, then pats Sam almost fondly on the shoulder. “And you are here, too. So yes. Not alone.”

Sam deflates slightly at that. “Well. I’m not much help, I’m afraid. I’m sorry they didn’t send someone more official.”

Ilya’s forehead wrinkles in bepuzzlement. “You are very big help.”

“Oh…” Sam’s voice trails off and she crumples the empty pretzel package into a ball in her palm. “I don’t even know why I’m here, to be honest. Crap!” She jolts up, eyes wide. “Please don’t tell my boss I said that.”

“Ok.” Ilya says easily. He puts one finger on his lips. “Shh. It’s secret.”

Something about the gesture makes Sam smile, the constriction in her chest growing lightly. “Thanks. Half the time he forgets I exist anyway, so it probably wouldn’t even matter - oh *God* okay, please don’t tell him that either.”

“Ok.” Ilya says again. He pauses. “I told you on the phone, Sam. You do a very good job.”

Sam smiles wryly. “Thanks but - it’s not even a job I like. I dunno…I used to, oh never mind.” She notices her braid is unraveling mid-sentence, and frustratedly bats the hair away from her neck. “God. I want to cut this entire mess off.”

“Why don’t you?” The question is so simple that Sam isn’t sure how to answer it.

Thankfully, Ilya doesn’t seem to expect a response because he adds, “Your hair is very pretty.”

Right. Of course he thinks that, just like Sam’s mother always says. Men love long hair, Samantha. It’s one of your best features for attracting one.

“But you should do what you want. It is your hair.” Ilya shrugs. “I think you make good decisions, Sam. That’s why I called you for this shoot.”

The sound of skates interrupts them, and Ilya's gaze jerks to the ice, where a fully geared-up Shane Hollander appears to be warming up, finally. He takes a deep breath, and Sam notices his leg start to jiggle again.

Huh. Maybe it's not the cameras bothering Ilya after all.

Ilya's eyes follow Shane's circling form, that tense muscle in his jaw pulsating slightly.

Something about his expression makes Sam feel a little bit sad. She puts her hand on his. "Um, Ilya?"

Ilya jerks out of his trance, looking at her, and clears his throat. "Um, sorry. He is so slow I cannot imagine how we are going to do this."

Methinks the lady protests too much is what pops into Sam's head, but she has a feeling a Shakespearean joke would fall flat for the loss of translation. Instead she goes with:

"I think the two of you will look good together."

Ilya's entire body stiffens. "What?"

"On the screen," Sam clarifies, fighting her smile. "Trust me. I know, right?" She puffs out her chest, fully grinning. "After all, I set up this shoot."

A dimple appears on Ilya's left cheek, the one with the mole. "Ah, yes. You are right. I should go." He bites his lip for a moment before adding, "Thank you, Sam."

"Just doing my job," Sam replies. "Go do yours. I'll um -" she gestures around the room, feeling suddenly shy. "I'll be right here. So you're not alone. You got this." She does a fist pump in the air, feeling yet again, absolutely ridiculous.

Ilya glances over at Shane again before looking back at Sam. He takes another small breath, then mimics her fist pump gesture. "I got this." He winks and heads towards the rink.

Sam spends the better part of an hour watching the two men repeat their face-off position. At first the pair seems tense. When they pause for a break, Ilya doesn't skate away from Shane. Instead, he leans against the boards, posture once more his usual brand of loose and confident. Sam can't make out what they're saying, but she catches Shane's lips perk up in a smile. When the shoot picks back up, the atmosphere feels lighter between both men.

At one point they're both bursting in peals of raucous laughter.

Yeah. They look good together, Sam thinks with a warm glow beginning to flicker in her chest, the one that tends to accompany the good part of her favorite books.

"Samantha? Did that last take work for CCM? I think that's all we're getting out of them at this point." Glen's voice sounds a little bit frazzled.

"Looks great," Sam calls out - because she's fairly certain at this point the takes aren't what will matter to Ilya. "Great job boys, hit the showers," she murmurs in the direction of the duo

on the ice before turning back to Glen.

“And Glen - it’s *Sam*, actually.”

She swears she can see Ilya smile in approval as he skates off to the locker rooms behind Shane.

Then she opens her phone to google salons.

While making the appointment, she also decides she’ll fill out that film school application tomorrow.

End Notes

Did any Jacob Tierney fans catch my little nod to Letterkenny in the fic? If not, look again ;)
Thank you for reading, Ilya loves you and so do I.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!