Ilya's Guide to Menacingly Soft Launching Your Relationship (and One Extremely Effective Hard Launch)

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by Lil_lightning15

Summary

“I think we tell world now,” Ilya declared grandly, pacing across Shane’s living room in Montreal. “Big announcement. Maybe fireworks. Maybe airplane banner over city—”

Shane, sitting curled on the couch in sweatpants, nearly choked on his tea.

“No,” he said immediately. “Absolutely not. No fireworks. No banners. No announcements. I’m not letting you hard launch us into oblivion.”

Five times they soft launch and one time they hard launch, or Ilya is given free rein to soft launch their relationship.

Notes

This is just me fantasizing about a world in which they weren't outed and Shane had enough therapy to at least pretend to be chill with Ilya doing this

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1: Ilya Rozanov Has A Plan

Ilya Rozanov loved many things.

Hockey. Winning. Expensive cars. And Shane Hollander.

Especially Shane Hollander.

He loved him so much, in fact, that he was exceedingly proud of the ring now sitting on his own finger. A ring that, even weeks later, he touched every thirty minutes, expecting it to disappear.

But now that he had a ring, it was basically impossible for Ilya to contain his excitement.

“I think we tell world now,” Ilya declared grandly, pacing across Shane’s living room in Montreal. “Big announcement. Maybe fireworks. Maybe airplane banner over city—”

Shane, sitting curled on the couch in sweatpants, nearly choked on his tea.

“No,” he said immediately. “Absolutely not. No fireworks. No banners. No announcements. I’m not letting you hard launch us into oblivion.”

Ilya crossed his arms. “Why not? We are engaged. World should know I beat every other man on Earth.”

“Not helping,” Shane muttered, cheeks pink.

Ilya sat beside him, knee bumping Shane’s gently. “Sweetheart,” he said, softer, “you are scared.”

“I’m not scared,” Shane insisted. Then, after a second, “Okay…I’m a little scared.”

Ilya kissed his cheek. “So we soft launch. Easy. Gentle. Sneaky.”

Shane blinked. “Define soft launch? I feel like we might have different versions.”

Ilya grinned like a wolf. “First step: subtle public appearances. Two very close ‘friends’ doing things ‘friends’ do.” He used his fingers to exemplify his sarcasm.

Shane narrowed his eyes. “I feel like you’re already abusing quotation marks.”

But when Ilya leaned in and murmured, “Do you trust me?” the answer came without hesitation.

“Yes.”

That was why, later that evening, Ilya uploaded a short Instagram video:

Silent footage of him and Shane passing a puck back and forth on Shane's backyard rink.

No faces. Just gloves, skates, soft winter light, and the curve of Shane's smile barely visible at the edge of the frame.

Caption:
"good practice today ❄️"

@hockeyblues890:
IS THAT HOL–?? WAIT.

@friends-not-rivals:
They said they were friends but I didn't believe it

@iloverozanov77:
This is either the softest post ever OR a PR nightmare I can't tell

@hollanov_truthclub:
THE FORM. THE ENERGY. THE WAY THEY PASS TO EACH OTHER??? THEY ARE MARRIED

→@straight_up_hockey:
Idk looks normal to me. Just bros hanging out

@hollander4ever:
Why is Rozanov in Montreal???

Shane threw himself onto the couch face-first as Ilya read some of the comments out loud.

"Oh my god," Shane groaned into a pillow, "people still think we're fake friends. This will not go well."

Ilya beamed, phone in hand.

"This is why this is important! They don't even believe we are friends. But we are engaged! This is important information for the world to have."

"I don't know about the world, Ilya…" Shane muttered without lifting his face.

Ilya kissed the back of his head.

"Stop worrying. This is soft launch, sweetheart. Phase one."

Shane peeked up at him, eyes warm despite the embarrassment.

"You're enjoying this."

“Mmm,” Ilya hummed cheerfully. “Very much.”

And he was. Because every step they took into the light, every inch Shane allowed himself to be seen with him, it was another stitch holding them safely together.

Chapter 2: Subtlety? Ilya doesn’t know what that is

Chapter Summary

Ilya's team finds out

Ilya had hosted gatherings in his Ottawa home, birthday parties, playoff wins, accidental post-game ragers that started as “just one drink,” but never one like this.

This one involved strategy. Soft launch strategy. Phase Two.

He and Shane were already settled in the living room when the doorbell chimed with the first arrival. The fire crackled warmly, the lights were low, and, most importantly, Shane was pressed against Ilya’s side on the couch like they had been born that way.

Shane looked unfairly beautiful in a soft grey sweater that clung to him in all the ways that made Ilya wish the house would empty fast.

“Stop staring at me like that,” Shane muttered, nudging him.

“I am admiring my fiancé,” Ilya said innocently. “Is my right.”

Shane rolled his eyes but smiled, small and secret, just for him.

When Ilya opened the door, Bood stepped in first, stomping snow from his boots.

“Roz! You finally invited people over on a non-playoff night—holy—HOLLANDER?”

Shane lifted a hand in a tiny, awkward wave. “Hi.”

Bood blinked several times.

“Okay, but… you two are… hanging out? Like actually hanging out? Thought that was a PR lie!”

Ilya scoffed. “Why does no one believe we are friends?”

Wyatt walked in behind Bood, sipping from a travel mug. He lifted an unimpressed eyebrow.

“I mean… historically, you haven’t been.”

“We are now,” Shane said, shrugging casually even though his cheeks warmed.

Wyatt nodded. “Yeah. Makes sense.”

Bood whipped around. “How does that make sense?”

Wyatt sipped his drink again. “Goalie intuition.”

Luca burst in next, red-cheeked from the cold. “Did I hear someone say Shane Hollander was here? OH MY GOD IT’S TRUE.”

Harris and Chouinard entered next. Troy followed last, eyes flicking between Ilya and Shane once, twice, then giving a barely-there knowing nod. Of all the players on this team, Troy Barrett was the least surprised by anything. Ilya was going to enjoy this night.

“So, uh…Hollander,” Bood said slowly, looking between the two of them. “Are you just here to visit your parents and decided to grace Roz with your presence?”

Ilya blinked once.

Then deadpanned perfectly:

“He came to see me. He will stay here. Obviously.” He turned to Shane. “I am a good host, no?”

Shane just smiled up at him.

Bood, on the other hand, choked on his beer, making Ilya laugh.

Wyatt did not react at all.

Troy hid a smirk behind his drink.

“RIGHT,” Bood said loudly, still coughing. “Cool. Cool cool cool.”

Shane leaned closer to Ilya and hissed, “You didn’t have to say it like that.”

“I tell truth,” Ilya murmured back. “Cannot help voice sounding sexy.”

“You’re impossible.”

“You like that.”

Shane elbowed him gently, more affection than irritation.

The longer the evening went on, the more subtlety died a slow, dramatic death.

Shane stayed at Ilya’s side the entire time, shoulder pressed against his, knee brushing, their hands resting closer and closer on the couch cushions until their fingers nearly touched.

Every time Shane laughed, Ilya looked at him instead of the person who told the joke. Every time Ilya moved to stand, Shane automatically steadied him with a hand at his back. It was not subtle.

At one point, as Ilya returned from the kitchen with drinks, he set one down in front of Shane and murmured:

“Zaychik, drink. You get headache if you forget.”

The room froze at that.

Luca mouthed silently: What did he call him?

Shane’s face lit up pink, looking at Ilya. “I don’t know that one? Rabbit?”

“I call you what you are,” Ilya said breezily. “Little hare.”

Shane covered his face with one hand.

The team stared.

Chouinard blinked rapidly. “Okay. What is going on?”

Ilya looked at Shane, a hand on his knee, a gentle touch asking if it was still okay to tell them. Shane nodded once, small but sure.

Ilya turned to the stunned Ottawa Senators, held up his hand with his ring, and announced:

“We are engaged.”

For a moment, there was only stunned silence. Then the room erupted.

“WHAT THE HELL”
"YOU'RE GAY??"
“HOLD ON… ENGAGED? When did they date?”
“SINCE WHEN?”
“How did we not notice that ring the WHOLE NIGHT?”
“OH MY GOD OH MY GOD—”
“Was their ever a rivalry?”
“WAIT DO YOU LIVE TOGETHER??”
“When did you even have time to figure this out?”
“WAIT WHEN DID THIS START?”
“WHY DID NO ONE TELL ME???”

Troy took a sip of his drink. “Called it.”

Wyatt shrugged. “Yeah. Obvious.”

Bood turned on him. “TO WHOM???”

“All goalies know gay vibes,” Wyatt said calmly.

Harris had already pulled out his phone. “Can I post—?”

“NO,” Shane and Ilya said in unison.

After that, everyone calmed down. A bit.

“Okay wait… so when this did this start?” Bood questioned. “Was it all-stars? When you played together?”

“No,” answered Shane. “Much earlier.”

A beat of silence rang throughout the room as everyone.

“RIVALS TO LOVERS IS A REAL THING???” Luca exclaimed. “LIKE ACTUALLY REAL???”

Everyone just looked at him. “Geez Haas,” Wyatt said. “I think you’ve been reading too many romance books lately.”

Luca blushed, then through a pillow at him.

“As captain, I think I should just tell you the answer before we have an injury.” Ilya joked. He looked at Shane. “ We started being us.. Being something anyway… in 2008. Also, I'm bisexual. Shane is super gay.”

Harris dropped his phone.

Luca screamed into a pillow. Where did he get another one? If Ilya didn’t know any better he would think Shane’s decorator snuck into his house.

“I feel like I need to clarify we weren’t officially dating until a few years ago,” Shane stated, eyes flickering around the room. “Before that we were just… uhh..”

“Hooking up?” Ilya so helpfully injected.

“In so many words…” Shane glared. "Also, I'm just REGULAR GAY."

Chouinard clutched his heart. “This is better than Netflix.”

Wyatt nodded. “Yeah. Five stars.”

Troy leaned forward. “So, serious question: Shane… you coming here next season?”

Shane waved him off quickly. “I’m still under contract with Montreal.”

Ilya looked away, hiding the flicker of hope in his eyes.

But when Shane’s hand slid over his under the table, intertwining naturally.

Yeah. He hoped. A lot.

As the hours passed, the team eventually began heading out the door one by one, still dazed, still buzzing with gossip energy.

“Congrats again,” Luca said for the eighth time.

“I still don’t understand ANYTHING,” Bood muttered, “but I’m happy.”

Harris hugged them both. “You two are going to break the internet.”

Wyatt just patted Shane’s shoulder like he’d known him as Ilya’s partner for ten years already.

Troy gave them a small smile. “About time you stopped pretending.”

Soon the house was quiet.

Warm.

Home.

Shane leaned into Ilya on the couch, head resting on his shoulder.

“That went… better than I expected,” he murmured.

“Da,” Ilya agreed, pressing a kiss to the side of his temple. “They love you.”

Shane’s fingers curled in the fabric of his shirt. “You’re the only one I care about loving me.”

Ilya felt his whole chest soften.

“Then we are both lucky,” he whispered, “because I do.”

Shane kissed him softly, slow and warm, the way he did when he forgot anyone else existed.

Ilya had never been happier.

Chapter 3: The extraction

Chapter Summary

Shane's team finds out

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ottawa wasn’t skating that morning, so Ilya drove his brightest, most offensively orange Porsche two hours to Montreal’s training facility.

He parked right outside the exit. Very visible. Very in your face.

His heart thumped, not with fear, but with an almost feral determination. They needed to do this. He and Shane had agreed Montreal probably wouldn’t react in the best way, so they decided to just drop it on them and leave.

Quick and efficient. Effective.

While Ilya was happy to smugly rub this in Montreal's face, he was mostly worried about Shane. He was the one who would have to deal with them. Their smugness, their jealousy, their constant muttering behind Shane’s back.

Ilya hated how they took Shane’s endless effort for granted. He hated how they leaned on him for wins but never cared about him as a human being.

He hated, most of all, that they did not deserve him.

And today, they were going to learn who did.

Shane deserves to be chosen.

Shane deserves to be claimed.

They deserve to never hide again.

He watched through the tinted windows as players trickled out, laughing, shoving each other, tossing their bags into trunks.

Then—

Shane appeared.

Hair damp from the shower, backpack slung over one shoulder, beautiful and tired and so clearly anxious he almost vibrated.

But when Shane saw the Porsche…

God.

His whole face lit with something soft: love, belonging, relief.

That alone made every risk worth it.

Ilya got out of the car with slow, deliberate grace. He opened the passenger door like a man performing a sacred ritual.

Players began turning their way. One by one. Confusion spreading like a cold wind.

Shane reached the car, eyes wide.

“You sure?” he whispered.

Ilya leaned in, pressed a soft kiss to his cheek, a kiss that lingered just a heartbeat too long to be friendly.

“For you?” Ilya murmured. “Always sure.”

Then he took Shane’s bag off his shoulder, placed it in the car, and rested a hand at the small of his back as Shane slid inside.

Montreal froze. Fully froze.

It was like watching a pack of startled deer mixed with middle-school gossip circles.

Comeau’s jaw dropped so far he might have swallowed a bug. Drapeau almost fell backward into the snowbank. Martin looked like he’d witnessed a demon rise from the parking lot.

And JJ?

JJ looked betrayed, furious, horrified, and dizzy all at once, like someone had dunked his head in ice water and threw him into a spinning teacup.

Hayden, at least, didn’t look shocked.

Instead, he looked… relieved.

For once, Ilya appreciated Hayden’s presence.

Ilya’s eyes tracked each reaction with precision, cataloguing who would hurt Shane, who would laugh, who would whisper.

He wanted to punch most of them. He would definitely get his chance in their upcoming games, but not right now. For now, he left them alone.

Instead, he got in the driver's seat.

He started the engine.

He turned to look at Shane. Really look.

Shane was staring straight ahead, hands in his lap, breathing too fast.

"Sweetheart," Ilya said quietly, touching his knee. "Talk to me."

Shane swallowed hard. "That was… loud."

"Do you regret it?"

"No." Shane shook his head. "Not even a little. I just—"

His voice cracked. "I don't know how bad it's going to be."

Ilya covered his hand fully with his own. "I know. I'm sorry."

Shane's lip trembled. "It's not your fault."

Ilya drove.

As soon as they hit the main road, Shane's phone began vibrating nonstop.

He closed his eyes. "Here we go."

He opened the Montreal team chat and Ilya watched the color drain from his face.

HABS LEGION
JJ: WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT
Comeau: HOLLAN—ROZA—THE HELL IS HAPPENING
Drapeau: DID YOU JUST KISS ROZANOV???
Martin: YOU'RE JOKING RIGHT
JJ: SHANE ANSWER ME NOW
Hayden: Everyone calm down.
JJ: CALM DOWN??? YOU KNEW???
Hayden: Yes.
Comeau: HOW LONG HAS THIS BEEN GOING ON
Drapeau: This isn't cool dude.
JJ: SHANE. ANSWER.

There was a separate text from his coach: See me in my office Monday.

The text kept coming. None of them good.

Shane curled in on himself, shoulders tight. Ilya could see the shame rising in him, not because he regretted kissing Ilya, but because he feared hurting people.

Ilya hated that.

“Read it aloud,” Ilya said softly.

Shane did.

Ilya listened with a rising fury.

“You answer now,” Ilya said firmly. “Before they twist story.”

Shane nodded. But his hands shook.

Ilya took the phone gently, placed it in Shane’s palms, and kissed his knuckles.

“I am here,” he said. “You are not alone.”

Shane inhaled shakily and typed.

Shane (finally):
I’m going to say this once.
I’ve been with Ilya for years.
We’re engaged.
This does not affect my play, my leadership, or my commitment to this team.
I would appreciate your support instead of your judgment.
If you can’t give it, that’s your problem, not mine.

Then he turned off the screen and leaned his head back against the seat, exhaling like he’d run a marathon.

Ilya felt something fierce and proud burn through him.

“You did perfect,” he murmured.

Shane let out a weak laugh. “I think JJ is going to show up at my place.”

“He will,” Ilya agreed, not happy about it. “But he will get over himself.”

Shane looked down at their joined hands, his voice soft.

“Thank you… for doing this. Being here. Being mine.”

Ilya cupped the back of his neck, thumb brushing lightly.

“I want the world to know you are mine and I am yours.”

Shane's breath hitched. Ilya kissed him. Slow, warm, grounding.

Then Shane whispered: "I'm terrified."

"I know," Ilya said. "But I am not. I will fight anyone who hurts you."

Shane's eyes softened.

"I know that too. But, please don't punch JJ."

Shane barely had time to shower before JJ was pounding on his door. Ilya stayed sitting at the counter, arms crossed. Visible, calm, immovable.

JJ pointed at him instantly.

"YOU. OUT."

"No," Ilya replied simply.

Shane placed a hand on JJ's chest. "Stop."

JJ looked like someone had ripped the ground out from under him.

"Please tell me this is some joke," JJ started.

Shane took a breath, gesturing for JJ to sit down. Taking a seat himself. "It's not. I love him."

JJ mumbled something in French. A slur, maybe. Ilya knew it didn't sound kind.

"How—how could you not tell me?" JJ's voice cracked. "Your best friend. I thought we trusted each other!"

Shane's throat closed.

"It wasn't about trust," he said quietly. "I was scared."

"OF ME?" JJ demanded miserably.

"No. Never you. I just… wasn't ready."

He took a deep breath.

"No one knew for a REALLY long time JJ. If I told you, that would've made it real, and for a majority of this…" He pointed between himself and Ilya. "I wasn't even ready to admit that to myself. Telling you. Telling anyone would been too much for me to handle."

JJ just stared at him.

"Hayden knew."

Shane looked at him, pleading with his eyes. “Hayden figured it out. I didn’t mean for him to know.”

He blew out a breath. Ilya knew he was struggling to convey his feelings. “I never wanted to hurt you JJ, but I knew it would be a big deal, which is why I waited so long. And maybe I should’ve told you separately before we showed up today. But I was already so stressed out, I.. I… I’m just sorry. Sorry for messing this up.”

JJ exhaled shakily, rubbing his hands over his face. “I’m still pissed. I’m still confused. I don’t get it. But—” He pointed at Shane. “I love you. And if he’s what you want… I’ll try.”

Ilya stood, stepped forward, and extended a hand.

JJ glared at it. Then sighed and shook it anyway.

It wasn’t perfect. But it was a start.

Later, when JJ had left, and the house was finally still, Shane curled into Ilya on the couch, tucking his head under Ilya’s chin.

Ilya held him gently. Carefully. Like something precious.

“You did something brave today,” Ilya murmured.

Shane huffed a soft laugh. “You did something reckless.”

“It was for love.”

Shane kissed his jaw.

“We’re really doing this, huh?”

“We are,” Ilya said. “And I am very, very happy.”

Shane smiled into his chest.

“So am I.”

And Ilya held him tighter, not because he feared losing him, but because for the first time… they were stepping out into the world together.

Chapter End Notes

I tried to make JJ nicer. i hate how he reacts in the books.

Chapter 4: "#f"????

Chapter Summary

Ilya posts some photos

Chapter Notes

felt like being random. idk

Ilya chose the photos slowly.

Carefully.

Tenderly.

Like assembling a shrine.

He told himself it was strategic, soft launch, phase three, but in truth, each picture was a piece of Shane he wanted the world to know he loved. He wanted them to see the truth without actually being told.

Photo 1: Their first photoshoot.

Both of them in too-big gear, faces still round with youth, bent down face-to-face, giggling.

Reporters had called it a rivalry even then.

Ilya remembered the moment the photographer snapped that shot, how Shane kept glancing at him each time they would reset, nervous but determined, and how something inside Ilya had clicked into place.

This one. His heart had said. This one will matter.

Posting it now felt like reclaiming something stolen from them by years of hiding.

Photo 2: A blurry picture of Shane laughing in a hoodie.

Ilya's favorite.

He'd taken it three years ago in Shane's kitchen. Shane had been complaining about Ilya's terrible pancake form, waving his spatula around, hair sticking everywhere.

He'd been radiant. That photo meant warmth. Safety. Home.

Shane had never posted it. Shane didn't post anything personal.

But Ilya did.

Because the world deserved to know that the legendary Shane Hollander, stoic, perfect, polished, laughed like that when he was loved.

Photo 3: Their hands brushing during an All-Star practice.

Ilya stared at this one the longest. He remembered seeing this photo for the first time. How his heart skipped a beat at the simple gesture being caught on camera.

It wasn't anything out of the ordinary, but to Ilya, it was special.

It looked accidental. It wasn't.

He remembered skating beside him, fingertips brushing Shane's glove because he couldn't help himself. Because the moment felt bright and simple and too good to ruin.

That picture looked like a beginning, even though their beginning had been years before.

Photo 4: Two mugs labeled "S" and "I."

His idea.

He bought them secretly in a tiny Ottawa boutique. Shane had rolled his eyes when he saw them.

"We don't need matching mugs," he'd said.

But he used them. Every morning. Ilya always noticed.

Photo 5: A sunset over Shane's cottage lake.

To the world, it was just a pretty landscape.

To Ilya, it was the first place Shane ever said "I love you" without running from it.

They'd stood barefoot in the grass, the water gold and still, the trees whispering behind them.

Shane had said it so many times that day. Ilya cherished them all.

Posting that picture felt like putting his heart on a windowsill, visible but not explained.

When the carousel was ready, he typed the caption:

"#f 🙂"

He didn't clarify. He didn't explain. Let the world wonder. Let them argue. Let the chaos begin.

He touched "post."

And instantly—

His phone vibrated with notifications exploding like fireworks.

@hockeygirl92:
Omg best friend soft launch?? Or friend soft launch? Who just posts an f??

@thatonetumblrbltch:
F = fiance! You idiots. WAKE UP

→ @hockeystrong5
That is the stupidest thing I've ever heard.

@nhlinsider:
Uhhh did Rozanov just post a years-long friendship reveal??

@rivalryromantics:
No no no I don't care what the caption says they are in LOVE.

@stats4life:
Historical photo documentation of an enemies-to-lovers arc.

The press room in the Ottawa arena had a particular ambiance. Bright overhead lights humming softly, reporters shifting in their seats, laptops glowing, and camera shutters clicking in rhythm.

There was always the faint smell of coffee that had been brewed three hours ago. It was always restless in there.

Tonight, it felt charged.

As soon as Ilya stepped onto the podium, he felt the shift, like the air had thickened with curiosity.

The first reporter raised her hand.

“Rozanov,” she began with a too-pleasant smile, “fans were excited about your Instagram post. Can you clarify the meaning behind ‘#f’?”

Ilya clasped his hands on the table.

“Is accurate caption.”

Soft laughter rippled through the room.

“Accurate in what way?” she pressed.

“Accurate to situation,” Ilya said, tone bland.

“And what situation is that?”

Ilya leaned back, giving nothing.

“Does anyone have hockey questions?”

A low murmur swept across the room like wind.

A rumble of amusement followed.

Someone whispered, “He’s enjoying this,” and they were right.

Because beneath all the tension and careful non-answers, Ilya felt Pride.

Pride that he could say Shane’s name out loud in a room full of cameras and not feel fear choke him.

Pride that their story, quiet, hidden, precious, was finally stepping into the light, even if only in fragments.

Pride that he and Shan were finally choosing each other openly, even if no one understood the depth of it yet.

Ilya returned home late that night, tired from the game, buzzing from the chaos.

He found Shane curled on the couch, waiting for him, scrolling through comments with a look caught somewhere between exasperation and amusement.

When Shane looked up, Ilya saw joy in his eyes.

Actual joy.

“You posted our mugs,” Shane said, laughing under his breath.

“They are symbolic,” Ilya said.

Shane shook his head, fond and helpless.

“And you used the caption ‘#f?’ That’s not confusing at all?” Ilya nodded, crawling on top of Shane, wrapping his arm around him, and snuggling into his side.

Ilya shrugged. “Is true.”

“Which version of true?” Shane teased. “Friend or fiancé?”

Ilya smirked. “Friend. Fiancé. Soulmate. All fit.”

Shane’s face softened, warmth blooming across his cheeks.

“You’re ridiculous,” he murmured.

Ilya kissed his neck.

“And you love me.”

Shane brushed his fingers through Ilya’s hair.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “I really do.”

Ilya nuzzled into him, letting the weight of the day settle into something warm and full.

Shane stroked his hair again and said, with the softest laugh:

“You posted our whole relationship without telling them anything.”

“Good strategy,” Ilya said.

“Terrible strategy,” Shane corrected. “But very you.”

Ilya looked up at him, smiling crookedly.

“Is only beginning.”

Shane looked at him the way he always did when love threatened to spill over, bright, aching, forever.

“I know,” he said.

And Ilya smiled as he rested in his fiancé’s arms.

Chapter 5: How to forget when Scott is standing there

Chapter Summary

Scott finds out.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The All-Star Game was supposed to be low-stress.

A fun weekend.

Silly drills. Too many cameras. Goalies pretending to care.

But for Ilya?

It was an opportunity.

A chance to soft-launch Shane in a way that wasn't subtle at all.

Shane was on Team America. Ilya on Team Europe. Scott Hunter, with his perma-frown, was also on Team America.

Perfect audience.

Ilya had plans.

The rink was loud with All-Star energy, music blasting, kids screaming, commentators yelling like this exhibition game meant something.

Ilya only cared about one thing:

Shane Hollander on the ice.

Shane skated past him, cheeks pink from exertion, hair damp under his helmet, eyes sharp.

Beautiful. Predictably irresistible.

Ilya drifted close like gravity.

"Pretty boy," he murmured in passing, low enough that only Shane would hear.

Shane's stride hitched almost imperceptibly. But Ilya saw it. He always saw Shane.

He chased him a moment later, tapping his stick against Shane's blade.

"You skate slow today," Ilya taunted. "Too busy admiring me?"

Shane shot him a devastatingly controlled glare, the kind that meant he was flustered.

"Ilya," Shane hissed under his breath, "stop."

But his lips twitched.

He was enjoying this.

Ilya almost purred.

Scott Hunter, skating beside Shane, blinked at them like he was watching a wildlife documentary.

He opened his mouth. Closed it. Opened it again.

Meanwhile, Ilya leaned in close enough that his visor brushed Shane's.

"You look good," Ilya added casually. "Red suits you. Makes you look like snack."

Shane nearly tripped.

Scott nearly dropped his stick.

The play moved, but Scott slowed, eyes huge as he stared between them.

Shane elbowed Ilya lightly.

"Behave."

"No," Ilya replied.

It was intoxicating, having the freedom, however small, to tease Shane openly. To watch Shane flush. To watch Scott try to compute basic reality and fail.

Late in the second period, Shane lined up for a ceremonial, meaningless face-off.

Ilya skated up beside him, not even pretending to keep an appropriate distance. He brushed his glove against Shane's.

Shane's breath stuttered.

Scott's soul left his body.

“You are very cute when trying to look serious,” Ilya murmured.

Shane’s eyes snapped to him, mortified.

“Ilya—people can hear—”

“Good.”

Ilya won the face-off.

During a bench change, Ilya reached out, snagged the back of Shane’s jersey, and tugged him close by the hip.

Not forceful. Not crude. Just intimate.

A gesture years in the making.

Shane’s fingers curled automatically around Ilya’s wrist for balance. That tiny movement was louder than any words they could have spoken.

Scott watched the entire thing.

Eyebrows near his hairline. Mouth slightly open. Expression a perfect blend of: horror, awe, confusion and a touch of “do I need medical attention?”

Scott stared at Shane.

Then Ilya.

Then Shane.

Then checked the scoreboard like maybe he had hallucinated it.

Ilya gave him a polite nod.

Scott blinked rapidly, like someone rebooting.

Scott cornered them the second the final buzzer sounded.

“Hollander,” he said, pointing between them. “Rozanov. You two. What was that?”

Shane flushed red down to his collarbone, making Ilya smirk.

Scott threw his hands up.

Then whispered, “We’ll… talk later. I need…I need a drink.”

He walked away slowly, like a man unsure if the floor beneath him was real.

Ilya snorted.

“This will be fun.”

Shane gave him a helpless look.

“It wasn’t supposed to go like that.”

“What? Me flirting with you?” Ilya teased. “Touching your hips? Whispering in your ear during face-off?”

“Yes,” Shane hissed. “Exactly all of that.”

Ilya cupped his cheek, thumb brushing just under Shane’s eye.

“You looked so beautiful,” he said simply.

Shane’s breath caught.

His blush deepened.

And Ilya felt warm all the way down to his bones.

They met him at a quiet bar down the street, the kind dimly lit and filled with soft music, where the walls smelled like whiskey and old wood.

Shane arrived first.

Scott nearly fell off his stool when Ilya walked in and greeted Shane with a hand at the small of his back.

“So you’re…” Scott said, pointing again. “Together?”

“Yes,” Ilya replied.

“For how long?!”

Shane hesitated.

“Years,” he admitted softly.

Scott froze.

“YEARS?! I thought—okay, look, I knew something was going on, but then I was like no, that’s insane, they hate each other, that’s the whole bit, the rivalry—”
“Rivalry is foreplay,” Ilya offered.

“Oh my god. Please stop talking,” Scott begged.

Shane was hiding his face in his hands, shoulders shaking with silent laughter.

“But seriously,” Scott said, lowering his voice, “I’m not crazy? I wasn’t imagining it all these years?”

“No,” Shane admitted gently.

“You two actually, I mean, back then? Your rookie year?”

“Yes,” Ilya said with a wide smile.

Shane buried his face deeper.

Scott just shook his head. “Jesus Christ. I need another drink.”

But then he lifted his glass toward them.

“Well… I’m happy for you freaks,” he said finally, eyes softening. “Really. Just… maybe warn a guy next time before you start whispering sweet nothings in the middle of a televised game or give room numbers for hook-ups.”

Shane groaned.

Ilya laughed.

Scott sighed.

“But yeah… it’s good to see you both happy. Even if this explains WAY too much.”

At the end of the night, Scott patted Shane’s shoulder and said:

“You deserve it, man.”

Then looked at Ilya.

“And you… don’t break him.”

Ilya’s voice softened.

“Never.”

Chapter End Notes

Realizing I write like a journalist

Chapter 6: HARD LAUNCH

Chapter Summary

They go to a gala together.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The limo smelled like new leather, roses from the centerpiece on the console, and Shane's cologne.

The last one was Ilya's favorite. Clean. Sharp. A little sweet at the end. Like the man himself.

Shane sat beside him, nervous energy crackling under his skin. He smoothed his suit jacket, navy, perfectly tailored, Yuna-approved, a third time.

"Stop," Ilya murmured, catching Shane's hand mid-fidget.

Shane froze. "I just—my cuffs feel off."

"You look perfect."

He tugged Shane's hand into his lap. Threaded their fingers together.

A simple thing. But for Ilya? It was everything.

Because tonight they weren't hiding. Not ducking out separate exits. Not pretending to be rivals or "just friends." Not peeling their hands apart the moment someone walked into the room.

Tonight, they existed together. Together.

Shane drew a shaky breath. "Ilya… after this, there's no going back."

"No going back," Ilya echoed softly. "Good."

Shane's nervous smile gentled. "You ready?"

"I was ready to be yours long time ago."

Shane's eyes warmed, softened… melted. And then, shockingly, he leaned in first. A soft kiss. Quick. Barely there. But in public. In view of the tinted windows and the driver and God Himself.

Ilya's breath caught.

"You kissed me," he whispered, fingers flying to Shane's jaw like he needed to confirm the moment was real.

Shane's cheeks flushed. "Well… yeah."

"I am supposed to do that," Ilya said, dazed. "Is my job to kiss you senseless."

Shane laughed quietly, the nervous edge easing from his shoulders.

And just like that, Ilya Rozanov felt like he could carry the world.

Because if Shane, careful, cautious, private Shane, was kissing him before the cameras even started?

He was more ready than he thought.

The limo slowed.

The red carpet awaited.

Ilya squeezed his fiancé's hand. "You follow me, sweetheart. I protect you."

"I know."

"And if someone is rude, I body-check them. Even if they are old."

Shane snorted. "Please don't body-check philanthropists."

"No promises."

The door opened.

Light poured in.

Noise erupted, voices, shouts, camera clicks.

Ilya stepped out first, turned, and held out a hand.

Shane took it.

And the world changed.

The photographers didn't scream at first.

They gasped.

Ilya Rozanov, holding hands with Shane Hollander, was apparently worthy of biblical shock.

Shane's fingers tightened around Ilya's, just slightly. Only someone who knew him as deeply as Ilya did would notice how nervous he was. Ilya shifted closer, shoulder brushing Shane's suit sleeve. A wordless I'm right here.

Reporters shouted immediately:

"Rozanov—are you two here together?"
"Hollander! Is this a PR thing?"
"How long have you known each other?"
"Are you dating?"

Shane stiffened.

Ilya didn't.

"We are together," he said simply, with a soft pride that made cameras click faster. "This is my fiancé."

A ripple spread across the press line, shocked murmurs, frantic camera flashes, someone cursing into their mic.

Shane swallowed visibly but didn't pull away.

Instead, he stepped half a pace closer.

As if leaning toward sunlight.

And Ilya… could have lifted him up off the carpet and spun him around with joy.

Inside the ballroom, warm gold lights dripped from the ceiling and crystal chandeliers reflected against champagne glasses as live string music floated through the air. Rich people laughed too loudly. Hockey players looked uncomfortable in tuxes. And in the center of it all, Ilya Rozanov absolutely refused to be subtle.

He stayed glued to Shane's side. Knee knocking knee when they sat, hand on the small of Shane's back as they walked, and his fingers brushing along Shane's wrist because wouldn't the world like to know how soft he is?

Shane was tense for the first twenty minutes. Then ten. Then five.

Then… he melted.

Exactly the way he always did when Ilya coaxed him gently out of his shell.

"Dance with me," Ilya said, leaning close to Shane's ear as violins swelled.

Shane stiffened immediately. "Ilya, I'm not, people are watching—"

“Good. Let them.”

“I don’t dance,” Shane insisted. “Ilya. Ilya. Stop smiling like that.”

“Like what?” he asked innocently.

“Like you’re about to ruin my night.”

“I will make your night perfect,” Ilya promised, taking his hand before Shane could protest further.

He dragged him onto the dance floor.

Shane whispered, horrified, “Ilya I don’t know how to waltz!”

“You don’t need to know,” Ilya said, placing one hand on Shane’s waist and pulling him in close enough to feel his breath. “Just follow me.”

Shane exhaled slowly.

And then… He did.

He followed Ilya’s movements, stiff at first, then looser as Ilya guided him effortlessly across the floor.

By the thirty-second mark, he could tell Shane was no longer thinking about the cameras. Or the attention. Or the world exploding outside these chandeliers.

He was looking at Ilya like he was the only person in the room. Like he always had in the comfort of their own homes.

Ilya dipped his head until their foreheads touched.

Shane’s breath hitched.

And then—Shane leaned in and kissed him.

Not a nervous kiss. Not a questioning one.

A real one.

A kiss that said: I choose you. Let them look.

Gasps rippled through the ballroom.

Ilya smiled into the kiss, heart a wildfire in his chest.

He didn’t care. About the cameras. About the noise. About the entirety of the NHL losing their minds tomorrow.

He kissed his fiancé again.

Because he could.

Because he had waited a decade to do so in public.

Because Shane Hollander was the love of his life.

After that, it didn't take long for guests to swarm.

"Ilya! Shane! How long has this been going on?"
"Since when were you two… friendly?"
"Is this serious?"
"Do you think the league will support you?"

Shane answered carefully.

Ilya didn't bother being careful.

He kept one hand on Shane at all times. Thumb brushing Shane's knuckles, his fingers curled around his waist, or his palm pressed to his back.

Shane relaxed with every touch. Every small, grounding gesture.

And every time someone asked if this was real, Ilya answered:

"Yes. Very real."

Shane would glance sideways at him, soft-eyed, embarrassed, charmed.

Ilya lived for it.

Later, in a quiet hallway away from the noise, Shane leaned against Ilya's shoulder.

"I think we should post something," he murmured.

"You want to?" Ilya asked, surprised, and delighted.

Shane nodded, cheeks pink. "It'll feel good to just… own it."

Ilya cupped his jaw. "Then we do it."

He snapped a selfie:

Shane, in his tux, hair mussed, smiling the shy smile he saved for Ilya. Ilya kissing his cheek, eyes half-closed in pure, stupid bliss.

He posted it with a caption:

“Always.”

Shane posted one too:

“No statement.”

Together, they hit upload.

The internet detonated. Millions of likes. Thousands of comments. Articles appearing within minutes.

@nhlfangirl04: ARE YOU KIDDING ME
@softboihollander: I THOUGHT THEY HATED EACH OTHER
@rozanovsrevengesociety: I KNEW IT. I ALWAYS KNEW IT.
@officialnhl: Congratulations to both players
@hockeybros22: bro what

And among all the chaos… He felt Shane exhaled. Long. Slow. Freeing.

He leaned into Ilya’s chest.

“I’m scared,” he whispered. “But I’m happy.”

Ilya wrapped both arms around him, pressing a kiss to the top of his head.

“We face everything together now,” he murmured. “The league. The fans. The teams. Your terrible coach. All of it.”

Shane huffed a soft laugh.

“Our battles,” Ilya said, tightening his hold, “will always be ours. For whole life. Yes?”

Shane didn’t answer with words. He kissed him.

And when they pulled apart…

Ilya felt invincible.

Chapter End Notes

THE END! LMK your thoughts :)

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I love comments :)

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