love in the time of AO3 metrics

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77028326.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV), Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov, Kip Grady/Scott Hunter, Shane Hollander & Scott Hunter, Scott Hunter & Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov, Kip Grady & Ilya Rozanov, Kip Grady & Shane Hollander
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov, Shane Hollander, Scott Hunter (Game Changers), Kip Grady, Yuna Hollander, David Hollander, Luca Haas, Zane Boodram, Evan Dykstra, Wyatt Hayes
Additional Tags:	Crack Treated Seriously, Crack, Unconventional Format, Mixed Media, Social Media, Fluff, Fluff and Crack, Fluff and Humor, Found Family, Secret Relationship, Coming Out, Tooth-Rotting Fluff, Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander, Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov, Established Relationship, Meta
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-03 Words: 14,156 Chapters: 1/1

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by pucksandpower

Summary

Ilya Rozanov has exactly one problem with his secret relationship with Shane Hollander: Scott Hunter has more fanfiction than them.

The solution is obvious. They'll just have to make the internet ship them harder. What could possibly go wrong?

Or in which two NHL players discover AO3, decide to manipulate their public image to generate more fanfiction, and not so accidentally come out in the process. Featuring: competitive nonsense, live television mishaps, and one very distressed Scott Hunter.

Ilya is sprawling across Shane's ridiculously expensive couch in Montreal when he discovers the betrayal.

"Shane," he says, and his voice has that particular quality that makes Shane look up immediately from where he's chopping vegetables in the kitchen. It's the tone that means Ilya has found something on the internet that will derail their entire evening.

"No," Shane says preemptively.

"You do not even know what I am saying."

"I know that tone." Shane points the knife at him, then seems to remember that's probably not safe and puts it down. "That's your 'I found something online and now I'm going to be weird about it' tone."

"I am never weird."

"You spent three hours last Tuesday looking up whether penguins could be gay."

"They can be! Was important research." Ilya sits up, phone clutched in his hand like evidence. "But this is different. This is *serious*."

Shane wipes his hands on a towel and comes around the kitchen island. He's barefoot, wearing joggers and one of Ilya's new Centaurs hoodies that he definitely stole, and Ilya's heart does something complicated in his chest. It's been nine years and Shane still makes him feel like he's seventeen and discovering what want means.

"What is it?" Shane asks, softer now, because he can probably see something in Ilya's face.

"Scott Hunter has more fics than us on AO3."

Shane blinks. "What?"

"Scott. Hunter." Ilya enunciates each word with deep offense. "Has more fanfiction than Hollanov."

"Hollanov?"

"Is our ship name. Keep up." Ilya scrolls aggressively through his phone. "Look. Scott Hunter/Kip Grady has one thousand two hundred thirty-seven fics. Ilya Rozanov/Shane Hollander has nine hundred and eighty-three."

Shane stares at him. "You counted?"

"AO3 counts for you. Is right there." Ilya gestures at his screen. "And is *bullshit*. We are much better love story than Scott and his little smoothie boyfriend."

"His name is Kip, and they're cute together."

“We are CUTER.”

“Ilya-”

“No, listen.” Ilya stands up, pacing now, phone still clutched in his hand. “We are generational talents. Best rivalry in hockey right now. Everyone says. The media, they love us. ‘Rozanov versus Hollander, the new Crosby and Ovechkin,’ they say. We have *drama*. We have *passion*.”

“We have to keep it secret or we’ll destroy our careers and possibly get death threats,” Shane points out.

“Details.” Ilya waves this away. “Point is, we are interesting! Scott Hunter is old and boring-”

“He’s thirty-one-”

“ANCIENT. And he is with normal guy who makes smoothies! Where is intrigue? Where is *fire*?” Ilya spins to face Shane, eyes bright with the particular intensity that means he’s gotten an idea, and those are always dangerous. “We should have more fics.”

Shane crosses his arms, and oh, Ilya knows that posture. That’s Shane’s ‘I’m going to be reasonable and you’re going to hate it’ posture. “We can’t have more fics because people don’t know we’re together. Because we’re not out. Because it’s complicated.”

“Maybe is too complicated.”

“Ilya-”

“Maybe we should make people *suspect*.” Ilya’s grin is sharp and reckless. “Nothing confirmed. Just … little things. Hints. Enough for people to write about.”

“You want to bait fanfic writers into shipping us more?”

“I want to beat Scott fucking Hunter, yes.”

Shane’s mouth twitches. He’s trying not to smile, which means Ilya is already winning. “You know this is insane, right?”

“You love when I am insane.”

“I really don’t.”

“You love *me*.”

Shane’s face softens, the way it only does when they’re alone like this, when the walls come down and he stops being Shane Hollander, Canadian Golden Boy, and becomes just Shane. Just his. “Yeah,” he says quietly. “I really do.”

Ilya closes the distance between them, and reaches down to cup Shane’s face. Ilya is four inches taller, which Shane will deny matters until his dying breath, but right now it means

Shane has to tilt his head back slightly to kiss him. It's slow and sweet and tastes like the coffee Shane made earlier, and Ilya tries to pour everything he feels into it — all the years of stolen moments and hidden touches and being so desperately in love with someone the world thinks he hates.

When they break apart, Shane's eyes are still closed. "This is a bad idea," he murmurs.

"Most of my ideas are bad ideas."

"That's not reassuring."

"Is why you love me. I am exciting." Ilya grins against Shane's mouth. "Come on, Hollander. Where is your sense of adventure?"

"I left it in Denver when you convinced me to sneak into your hotel through the loading dock."

"That was good plan!"

"We almost got caught by your rookie."

"Luca is sweet kid. He would not tell." Ilya pulls back, hands sliding down to grip Shane's arms. "Listen. Listen to me. We do small things, yes? I am at your game, you are at mine sometimes. People already think is weird, how much we watch each other. We let cameras catch us talking after. Not friendly, not yet. But not hostile. Confused middle ground. People love confused middle ground."

Shane is weakening — Ilya can see it in the way his jaw unclenches, the way his mouth curves into something that's almost a smile. "The middle ground of what, exactly?"

"Of 'do they hate each other or do they want to fuck each other?'" Ilya says cheerfully. "Answer is yes to both, but people don't need to know second part yet. They just need to *wonder*."

"You've really thought about this."

"Had whole walk from car to your apartment to think."

"That's three minutes."

"I am very efficient thinker." Ilya tugs Shane back toward the couch, pulling him down beside him. "Look. Look at this one." He pulls up a fic on his phone, tilting the screen so Shane can see. "Is called 'Sharp Edges.' Has thousands of kudos. Is about us but also is not about us because in this we are not hiding, we are just angry and then we kiss about it."

Shane reads over his shoulder, and Ilya watches his expression shift — surprise, then something that might be wonder, then the faintest hint of color high on his cheeks. "Oh."

"Is good, yes? They understand us. The … how to say …" Ilya struggles for the word in English, frustrated. "The *feeling* of us. The push and pull."

“Yeah.” Shane’s voice has gone a little rough. “Yeah, they do.”

They sit there for a moment, Shane reading while Ilya watches him, and it strikes Ilya suddenly how strange and beautiful this is — that strangers write about them, about a love story they’ve only glimpsed the edges of, and somehow they get it right. The intensity, the impossibility, the way they crash together like opposing forces that can’t stay apart.

“Okay,” Shane says finally.

“Okay?”

“Okay, we can … I don’t know. Be less hostile in public? See what happens?”

“Yes!” Ilya pumps his fist, then catches himself. “Wait. You are agreeing? Just like that?”

Shane turns to look at him, and his eyes are very dark in the apartment’s warm lighting. “I’m tired, Ilya. I’m tired of pretending I don’t want to be around you. I’m tired of leaving games without talking to you because someone might notice. I’m tired of-” He breaks off, jaw working. “If we can do this slowly, carefully … maybe it’s not the worst idea.”

“Is best idea,” Ilya corrects, but his voice has lost its teasing edge. He reaches out, threading their fingers together. “We will be careful. I promise. Nothing that breaks our cover. Just enough to make people think.”

“Scott Hunter is going to think you’ve lost your mind.”

“Scott Hunter can suck my-”

“Ilya.”

“-championship ring,” Ilya finishes innocently. “What? I was going to say championship ring.”

Shane snorts, pulling Ilya against his side. “You’re ridiculous.”

“You love when I am ridiculous.”

“Yeah,” Shane says again, pressing a kiss to Ilya’s temple. “I really do.”

They sit there, tangled together on the couch, and Ilya pulls up AO3 again, scrolling through tags. “Enemies to Lovers,” he reads aloud. “Secret Relationship. Sexual Tension. First Kiss.” He pauses. “Spanking?”

“Nope.”

“Just curious-”

“Nope.”

“-what people think we would-”

“Ilya, I’m begging you to stop reading sex fics about us out loud.”

Ilya grins, tilting his head back to look at him. “Later?”

Shane’s ears go red. “Maybe later.”

“Knew you were curious.”

“I’m curious about a lot of things. Doesn’t mean they’re good ideas.”

“Like me?”

“Like you,” Shane agrees, but he’s smiling, and Ilya decides that’s probably the most romantic thing anyone has ever said to him.

The next morning, Ilya wakes up to seventeen text messages from Scott Hunter.

Scott Hunter: What the fuck did you do

Scott Hunter: Why is hockey twitter talking about you and Hollander

Scott Hunter: WHAT DID YOU DO

Scott Hunter: Ilya I swear to god

Scott Hunter: If you’ve outed yourself to beat me in a fanfic competition I will kill you

Scott Hunter: Then I’ll kill you again

Scott Hunter: Kip says I should be supportive

Scott Hunter: I’m not being supportive

Scott Hunter: WHAT DID YOU DO

Ilya squints at his phone. Shane is still asleep next to him, face smushed into the pillow, and Ilya takes a moment to appreciate how unfairly pretty he is even with pillow creases on his cheek and his hair sticking up in seventeen directions.

Then he opens Twitter.

“Oh,” he says out loud. “Oh no.”

“Wha?” Shane mumbles.

“I think maybe we already did something.”

That wakes Shane up. He sits up fast, blinking sleep from his eyes. “What?”

Ilya hands him the phone. “Last night. When we came in. Your building has cameras.”

Shane looks at the screen, and Ilya watches his face go through several emotions at once — surprise, panic, and then, unexpectedly, something that might be relief.

The photo is grainy but unmistakable: Ilya and Shane in the lobby of Shane's building, standing close, Ilya's hand on Shane's arm. They're both smiling — not the sharp, competitive smiles they show the world, but real ones. Soft ones.

The tweet has forty-three thousand likes.

@HockeyGossip: Um??? Ilya Rozanov walking into Shane Hollander's apartment building??? After Montreal's game??? With THIS body language??? I am LOOKING respectfully 👀👀👀

"Fuck," Shane breathes.

"Is okay," Ilya says quickly. "Look, look at replies. People think maybe we were fighting. Or doing strategy talk. Or … oh, this one thinks we are video game rivals."

"Video game rivals," Shane repeats flatly.

"Is good cover story! I am very good at video games."

"Ilya-"

"No, wait. Wait." Ilya scrolls through more replies. "Look at this. From @HollanovShipper4Ever: 'I don't want to get my hopes up but also I am literally getting all my hopes up, someone write the fic where they're secret friends who meet up after games because they understand each other better than anyone else.' We have *shipper accounts*, Shane. We have people with dedication!"

Shane takes the phone, reading through replies with an expression Ilya can't quite parse. "There's already fanart," he says faintly.

"Show me."

Shane tilts the phone. It's a sketch — quick and loose but undeniably them, standing in what looks like a hallway, Ilya looking down at Shane with an expression that the artist has somehow captured perfectly, that specific way Ilya looks at him when he's forgotten to guard his face. Shane's hand is almost but not quite touching Ilya's shoulder.

The caption reads: *They're so soft for each other and I can't handle it #Hollanov*

"Oh," Ilya says quietly.

"Yeah."

They sit there in Shane's bed, looking at fanart of themselves, and Ilya feels something warm and terrifying unfold in his chest. This is real now, in a way it wasn't before. People are *seeing* them, even if they don't know what they're seeing yet.

“My agent is going to call,” Shane says.

“My agent already called. Four times. I have phone on silent.”

“Ilya-”

“We say nothing,” Ilya decides. “We do not confirm, do not deny. Is one photo of us in your building. So what? We are rivals who respect each other. We talk sometimes. People can think what they want.”

Shane worries his bottom lip. “And the next step?”

“Next step is we give them more to think about.” Ilya’s grin is sharp. “Ottawa plays Montreal next week, yes? Monday night?”

“Yeah.”

“So we make sure cameras catch us after. Talking. Maybe not friendly, not yet. But … interested. Like we cannot help ourselves.”

“That’s not even acting,” Shane mutters.

“Exactly! Is why will work.” Ilya leans over to kiss him, morning breath and all. “Trust me.”

“That’s a terrible idea.”

“You are full of complaints today.”

“I’m being realistic.”

“Realistic is boring.” Ilya kisses him again, deeper this time. “Come on, Hollander. Live a little. Take a risk.”

Shane’s hands come up to cup Ilya’s face, and when they break apart, his eyes are serious. “I’m already taking the biggest risk of my life,” he says quietly. “Loving you.”

Ilya’s breath catches. Shane doesn’t say it often — not because he doesn’t feel it, but because he’s not built for easy declarations. When he does say it, it hits like a slap shot to the chest, every single time.

“Then what is little more risk?” Ilya manages, aiming for light and landing somewhere in the vicinity of desperately in love. “We are already here. Already us. We just let people see tiny bit more.”

Shane is quiet for a long moment, thumb brushing over Ilya’s cheekbone. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Okay.” Shane’s smile is small and scared and brave. “Let’s beat Scott Hunter.”

Ilya laughs, pulling Shane down into the blankets, and when he kisses him this time it tastes like possibility.

The game on Monday is brutal.

Montreal wins 4-3 in overtime, and Ilya spends half the game in the penalty box for slashing and the other half shadowing Shane like his life depends on it. Shane gets two goals and an assist, and every time he scores, he doesn't celebrate — he just looks at Ilya.

It's something they've done since the beginning, since they were eighteen and convinced they hated each other. Shane scores, finds Ilya on the ice, and for just a second, it's only them. No crowd, no cameras, no expectations. Just that look that says *Did you see? I did that. For you, against you, because of you.*

Tonight, the cameras catch it.

After the game, Ilya showers quickly and dresses even quicker, ignoring Luca's curious looks. "Where you going?" His rookie asks.

"Nowhere."

"You're never this fast. Usually you sit in your stall and brood for twenty minutes about what went wrong."

"I do not *brood*."

"You definitely brood, cap," Zane calls from across the locker room.

"All of you can shut up."

But he's grinning as he leaves, and when he steps out into the corridor that leads from the visiting locker room to the main concourse, Shane is already there.

They haven't planned this — not explicitly. But Shane is leaning against the wall, hair still wet, and when he sees Ilya, something in his expression shifts.

"Hey," Shane says.

"Hey."

They stand there, three feet apart, and Ilya is suddenly hyperaware of everything — the fluorescent lights overhead, the distant sound of reporters talking, the way Shane's eyes are tracking over his face like he's trying to memorize something.

"Good game," Shane offers.

"You won."

"You made me work for it."

“Always do.” Ilya steps closer, closing the distance to something that’s too close for rivals, not close enough for what they really are. “Was good goal. Second one. Where you went five-hole on Wyatt.”

“Hayes left the slot open.”

“Hayes is almost as old as Scott Hunter.”

“So he should know better.”

It’s chirping — the kind of back-and-forth they’ve done for years — but there’s something different now. Shane isn’t smiling his media smile, he’s smiling his real smile, the one that crinkles the corners of his eyes.

“Maybe you should teach me better,” Ilya says, and-

That’s the moment the camera flashes.

They both turn, and there’s a photographer at the end of the hallway, camera already lowering. Not media — the credential hanging around their neck says ARENA STAFF. They look young and excited and mildly terrified.

“Sorry!” The photographer squeaks. “Sorry, I just—it was a good shot, and—sorry!”

They flee.

Ilya and Shane look at each other.

“Well,” Shane says.

“Well,” Ilya agrees.

“That’s going to be everywhere by tomorrow.”

“Probably.”

Shane should look worried. He should look panicked. Instead, he looks … lighter. Like something heavy has been lifted off his shoulders. “Want to get food?”

“Together?”

“No, Ilya, separately in the same restaurant while staring at each other longingly.” Shane rolls his eyes. “Yes, together.”

“Cameras will see.”

“Yeah.” Shane’s smile goes soft. “Maybe that’s okay.”

Ilya’s heart does something complicated. “You are full of surprises tonight, Hollander.”

“Come on.” Shane pushes off the wall, starts walking toward the exit. “I know a place.”

Ilya follows, and if he walks close enough that their shoulders brush, well. That's nobody's business but theirs.

(Except for the security cameras.

And the staff photographer.

And the fan in the parking lot who definitely takes a photo of them getting into Shane's car together.

And Hockey Twitter, which has a collective meltdown by the time they sit down for late-night poutine.)

@HockeyDaily: BREAKING: Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander photographed leaving tonight's game TOGETHER. Having a CONVERSATION. Smiling??? What timeline is this??? [Photo]

@HollanovShipper4Ever: I AM UNWELL I AM SCREAMING I AM CALLING MY THERAPIST

@PuckedUp2019: okay but the way Rozanov is LOOKING at him in that hallway photo … sir that is not how you look at your rival

@HockeyStats: Fun fact: Rozanov and Hollander have been on the ice against each other for 2,706 minutes in their NHL careers. Rozanov has 104 points in games against Montreal. Hollander has 97 points in games against Boston and now 5 points against Ottawa since the Centaurs acquired Rozanov. They are obsessed with each other and I mean that in the most hockey way possible

@HollanovShipper4Ever: "In the most hockey way possible" oh honey

@VoyageursNation: Still don't like Rozanov but I respect that he respects Hollander. That's how rivalries should be. Old school.

@RivalryPodcast: New episode dropping tomorrow: "What's Going On With Hollanov?" Special guest @ScottHunter discussing whether we're witnessing the evolution of hockey's greatest rivalry or something else entirely

@DefenseWins: something else entirely

@DefenseWins: I'm just saying

@DefenseWins: SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY

Ilya reads these out loud in Shane's car, and Shane keeps almost-swerving because he's trying not to laugh.

"Stop," Shane says. "Stop, you're going to make me crash."

“Cannot stop. Look at this one: ‘I have watched the hallway video seventeen times and I have concluded that they are either about to fight or about to fuck and I genuinely cannot tell which.’ Is art. Is poetry.”

“There’s a video?”

“Arena has security cameras. Someone leaked it.” Ilya pulls it up, tilts his phone so Shane can glance at it. “Is very … atmospheric.”

The video is maybe fifteen seconds long, grainy and without sound. Just them in that hallway, standing too close, talking in a way that looks intense. At one point, Ilya steps even closer, and Shane’s head tilts just slightly, and-

“Oh,” Shane breathes. “Oh, we look-”

“In love?” Ilya suggests. “Because we are?”

“I was going to say ‘suspicious.’”

“Same thing.” Ilya pockets his phone. “Is working, Shane. People are paying attention. And look-” He pulls up AO3. “Already eighy new fics posted today. One is called ’Overtime’ and is about us getting stuck in arena after everyone leaves.”

“Let me guess. We fight and then make out?”

“Close. We fight and then we talk about our feelings and *then* we make out. Is very emotional.”

Shane pulls into the parking lot of a small restaurant, kills the engine, and just sits there for a moment. “This is insane,” he says finally.

“Yes.”

“We’re letting the internet dictate our coming out.”

“Little bit, yes.”

“That’s insane.”

“You said that already.”

Shane turns to look at him, and in the dim light of the parking lot, his eyes are very bright. “I don’t want you to do this just to beat Scott Hunter,” he says quietly.

“Is not just for that.”

“No?”

“No.” Ilya reaches out, takes Shane’s hand. “Is also for us. You said yourself, you are tired of hiding. I am tired too. And maybe … maybe this is way we can stop hiding without having to

do big dramatic announcement. We let people figure it out. We let them write their stories. And when they get close enough to truth, we just … confirm."

"And if it goes badly?"

"Then we have each other." Ilya squeezes his hand. "Is what we always have, yes? Each other."

Shane's thumb brushes over Ilya's knuckles. "Yeah," he says softly. "Yeah, okay."

They go into the restaurant, and Ilya orders poutine even though it's a crime against Russian cuisine, and Shane laughs at him when he can't finish it because it's too heavy, and somewhere in there, someone definitely takes their picture through the window.

By the time they get back to Shane's apartment, #Hollanov is trending on Twitter.

By the time they fall into bed together, there are twelve new fics on AO3.

By the time Ilya falls asleep with Shane's heartbeat under his ear, Scott Hunter has sent thirty-six increasingly unhinged text messages.

Ilya ignores all of them.

He has more important things to do … like planning their next public appearance, and also kissing Shane senseless, and maybe reading one or two of those fics to see if they're getting close to the truth.

(They are, as it turns out.

Uncomfortably close.)

The next morning, Ilya wakes up to his phone ringing.

"Da?" He mumbles into it, not opening his eyes.

"Ilya." It's his agent and she sounds tired. "We need to talk."

"Is early."

"It's eleven a.m."

"Is early for me."

"Ilya, I'm serious. Have you seen the internet?"

"I live on internet. Of course I have seen."

There's a long pause. "You know what people are saying about you and Hollander?"

"Da."

“And you’re okay with it?”

Ilya opens his eyes. Shane is still asleep beside him, face peaceful in the late-morning light, and Ilya feels something warm and certain settle in his chest. “Yes,” he says. “I am okay with it.”

Another pause. “Ilya, I need you to be very clear with me. Is there something going on between you and Shane Hollander?”

“That is very personal question.”

“I’m your agent. I need to know these things.”

“Why? Is affecting my hockey?”

“No, but-”

“Is affecting my endorsements?”

“Well, no, actually-”

“Then why you need to know?” Ilya sits up carefully, trying not to wake Shane. “I am scoring goals. I am playing good hockey. What I do in my personal time is personal.”

“The internet seems to think your personal time involves the captain of the Montreal Voyageurs.”

“Internet thinks lots of things.”

“Ilya-”

“Trust me, okay?” He softens his voice. “I know what I am doing.”

“Do you?” She doesn’t sound convinced. “Because from where I’m sitting, it looks like you’re playing a dangerous game.”

“Maybe.” Ilya looks at Shane, at the way the light catches in his hair. “But maybe is worth it.”

She sighs, long and deep. “Just … be careful. Please. The league is better than it used to be, but it’s not perfect.”

“I know.”

“And if you need anything-”

“I will call. Promise.”

After he hangs up, Shane stirs beside him. “Your agent?”

“Da. She is worried.”

“Mine too. Called three times yesterday.” Shane rolls onto his back, staring at the ceiling. “They think we’re being reckless.”

“We are being reckless.”

“Yeah.” Shane’s mouth curves. “Feels good though.”

“Da?”

“Yeah.” Shane turns his head to look at Ilya. “Feels like … I don’t know. Like we’re taking control of something that’s controlled us for a long time.”

Ilya leans down to kiss him, slow and thorough. “Is because we are.”

They spend the morning in bed, trading kisses and scrolling through their phones, watching as the internet slowly pieces together a narrative that’s not quite true but not quite false either. Shane reads comments out loud in increasingly dramatic voices, and Ilya laughs so hard he almost falls off the bed.

“Listen to this one,” Shane says. “‘I have a theory that Rozanov and Hollander have been secret friends for years and they’re both terrible at hiding it and we’re all just now noticing.’ That one’s actually kind of accurate.”

“Except we are not friends.”

“No?”

“No. Friends do not do what we did last night.”

Shane’s ears go red. “Ilya-”

“What? I am just saying. Friends do not-”

“I know what friends don’t do, thanks.”

Ilya grins, leaning in to kiss the corner of Shane’s mouth. “You are cute when you are blushing.”

“I’m not blushing.”

“You are very much blushing.”

“This is your fault.”

“Most things are my fault. I am chaos agent.”

“You’re something, all right,” Shane mutters, but he’s smiling, and Ilya counts that as a win.

Ilya's next game is at home, and Shane drives up for it even though he shouldn't, even though it's suspicious, even though someone is definitely going to notice.

Someone does notice.

@HockeyGossip: Shane Hollander spotted entering the Canadian Tire Center THREE HOURS before puck drop. For a game he's not playing in. As a SPECTATOR. I am not okay. [Photo]

The photo shows Shane in jeans and a hoodie, baseball cap pulled low, trying to be inconspicuous and failing completely because he's Shane Hollander and people know his face.

By the time the game starts, #HollanderInOttawa is trending.

Ilya, sitting in the locker room before warmups, can barely contain his grin.

"Why are you so happy?" Zane asks suspiciously. "We're playing Calgary. You hate Calgary."

"I do not hate Calgary."

"You called their captain 'offensively boring' last week."

"Because he is! He does nothing interesting! Is like watching paint dry that also plays hockey!"

"You're weird."

"Thank you," Ilya says, like it's a compliment.

During warmups, he catches sight of Shane in the stands — section 107, row 9, trying very hard to blend in and failing spectacularly. Their eyes meet across the ice, and Shane's mouth curves in a smile that's meant only for Ilya.

Ilya scores two goals that night.

After each one, he looks up at section 107.

Shane is on his feet both times, cheering like he forgot he's supposed to be neutral, and the cameras catch it. Of course the cameras catch it.

@NHLNetwork: Is Shane Hollander … cheering for Ilya Rozanov? We need answers. #Hollanov

@HollanovShipper4Ever: I AM ASCENDING TO A HIGHER PLANE OF EXISTENCE

@PuckedUp2019: the way he's on his feet IMMEDIATELY and has that huge grin I am UNWELL

@HockeyAnalysis: Setting aside the shipping discourse for a moment: it's actually beautiful to watch two generational talents appreciate each other's skill. This is what hockey should be.

@HollanovShipper4Ever: "Setting aside the shipping discourse" NEVER

After the game, Ilya showers in record time and finds Shane waiting outside the arena, leaning against his car in the parking garage.

"You are terrible at being inconspicuous," Ilya says by way of greeting.

"I wasn't trying to be inconspicuous."

"No?"

"No." Shane pushes off the car. "I wanted to watch you play. Is that allowed?"

"Is allowed." Ilya stops in front of him, close enough that he could reach out and touch. "You liked what you saw?"

"You know I did."

"Say it anyway."

Shane's eyes are very bright in the parking garage's fluorescent lighting. "You were incredible," he says quietly. "That second goal — the way you deked around their defenseman — I've never seen anyone move like that."

"You are pretty good yourself."

"Yeah?"

"Da. When you want to be."

Shane laughs, and it echoes in the empty garage. "Come home with me."

"To Montreal?"

"No, to fucking Calgary. Yes, to Montreal."

"Is two-hour drive."

"I know how long it is, Ilya."

"We will not get there until very late."

"I don't care."

Ilya looks at him — at Shane Hollander, who drove two hours to watch him play, who cheered when he scored, who is standing in a parking garage asking Ilya to come home with him like it's the most natural thing in the world.

“Okay,” Ilya says.

“Okay?”

“Da. But I drive. You drive like old man.”

“I do not drive like an old man.”

“You drive speed limit. Is basically same thing.”

They argue about it the whole way to the car, and Shane only gives in when Ilya points out that his car is faster, and when they pull out of the parking garage, someone definitely takes a photo of them leaving together.

@HockeyGossip: Update: Hollander and Rozanov just left the arena TOGETHER (again). In the same car (again). Someone tell me what is HAPPENING.

@HollanovShipper4Ever: oh my god oh my god oh my god

@ScottHunter: @IlyaRozanovOfficial I know what you’re doing and it’s not going to work

@IlyaRozanovOfficial: @ScottHunter I have no idea what you are talking about old man

@ScottHunter: @IlyaRozanovOfficial I’M THIRTY ONE

@IlyaRozanovOfficial: @ScottHunter EXACTLY. OLD.

They’re halfway to Montreal when Shane says, “We should talk about what happens next.”

Ilya keeps his eyes on the road. “What do you want to happen next?”

“I don’t know.” Shane is quiet for a moment. “Part of me wants to just … keep doing this. Dropping hints. Letting people figure it out. But another part of me wants to just tell everyone and be done with it.”

“Which part is winning?”

“I’m not sure.” Shane shifts in his seat. “What do you want?”

Ilya thinks about it — about all the years of hiding, all the stolen moments, all the times he wanted to reach for Shane in public and couldn’t. “I want people to know,” he says finally. “Not because of fics or because of Scott Hunter or any of that. Just because … I am tired of pretending you do not matter to me.”

Shane’s breath catches audibly. “Ilya-”

“I want to hold your hand in restaurants. I want to kiss you when you score goals, even when you score them against me. I want people to know that Shane Hollander is most important person in my life and I am lucky to have him.”

“Jesus,” Shane breathes. “You can’t just say things like that.”

“Why not? Is true.”

“Because-” Shane breaks off, scrubbing a hand over his face. “Because it makes me want to do something stupid.”

“Like what?”

“Like tell you to pull over so I can kiss you.”

Ilya pulls over.

They’re parked on the side of the highway, Shane’s hands in Ilya’s hair, kissing like they’re eighteen and just discovered what wanting means. A transport truck roars past, shaking Shane’s car, and neither of them notices.

“We should-” Shane gasps between kisses. “We should get back on the road.”

“Da, we should.” Ilya doesn’t move, just kisses him again, deeper this time.

“Ilya-”

“Five more minutes.”

“You said that ten minutes ago.”

“And I meant it then too.”

Shane laughs against his mouth, and Ilya feels it like champagne bubbles in his chest. This, he thinks. This is what all those fics are trying to capture — the way they fit together, the way everything else falls away when they touch.

When they finally make it to Montreal, it’s past three in the morning, and they fall into Shane’s bed still half-dressed, too exhausted to do anything but hold each other.

“Next week,” Shane mumbles into Ilya’s shoulder. “Ottawa plays Montreal again.”

“I know.”

“Last game of the season series.”

“I know this too.”

“What if-” Shane pauses. “What if we just did it? Just came out?”

Ilya’s heart stutters. “You are serious?”

“I don’t know. Maybe?” Shane lifts his head, and even in the darkness, Ilya can see the uncertainty in his eyes. “I’m tired of this, Ilya. I’m tired of halfway measures. Either we do this for real or we stop.”

“We are not stopping.”

“Then we do it for real.” Shane’s voice is firm now, decided. “Next week. After the game. We just … we stop hiding.”

“Your agent will kill you.”

“Probably.”

“Your parents-”

“Will be fine.” Shane cups Ilya’s face, thumb brushing over Ilya’s cheekbone. “So we do it? For real?”

Ilya thinks about all those fics, all those people who saw something in them that they couldn’t show the world. He thinks about Scott Hunter, who came out with Kip two years ago and survived it. He thinks about being able to hold Shane’s hand in public, about not having to hide the most important thing in his life.

“Da,” he says. “We do it for real.”

“Okay.” Shane sounds terrified and elated in equal measure. “Okay. Holy shit.”

“Holy shit,” Ilya agrees, and kisses him until they both stop shaking.

The week before the game, Ilya can barely concentrate on hockey.

“Roz, you okay?” Troy asks after Ilya misses an easy pass at practice. “You seem distracted.”

“Am fine.”

“You just passed the puck directly to the boards.”

“Was strategic.”

“Strategic how?”

“Is … new play. You would not understand.”

Troy exchanges a look with Zane, who shrugs. “He’s been weird all week,” Zane stage-whispers. “Maybe he’s nervous about playing Montreal.”

“I am not nervous about Montreal.”

“Sure, cap. Whatever you say.”

Ilya wants to tell them — wants to explain that in three days, everything is going to change, that their captain is about to become only the second active NHL player to come out. But

Shane made him promise to wait, to do it together, so Ilya suffers in silence and scores two goals in practice just to prove he's not distracted.

(He's extremely distracted.)

Shane, for his part, is handling things in the most Shane way possible: by pretending everything is completely normal while simultaneously planning every detail.

Jane: What if we do it after the game

Jane: I'll probably get first star because we're at home

Jane: They always interview first star

Jane: You could skate over

Jane: Would that be too obvious?

Lily: Shane is 3am

Jane: I can't sleep

Jane: What if this is a terrible idea

Lily: Is best idea we ever have

Lily: Except for maybe that time I convinced you to try that thing with your-

Jane: ILYA

Lily: What? Was good thing. You enjoyed.

Jane: I'm trying to have a serious conversation about coming out

Lily: And I am trying to distract you from spiraling

Jane: I'm not spiraling

Jane: Okay I'm spiraling a little

Lily: Want me to come over?

Jane: It's 3am

Lily: So? I am awake. You are awake. We can be awake together.

Jane: You have practice tomorrow

Lily: And you have practice today. In four hours. Come let me in.

Twenty minutes later, Ilya is in Shane's hotel room, and Shane is tucked against his chest, breathing slowly evening out.

"Thank you," Shane mumbles.

"For what?"

"For being you. For being sure when I'm not."

Ilya kisses the top of his head. "Is what we do, yes? Take turns being sure."

"Yeah." Shane's hand finds Ilya's, threading their fingers together. "I love you."

"I love you too." Ilya holds him tighter. "And in three days, everyone else will know."

"Terrifying."

"Little bit."

"Worth it?"

"Very much worth it."

Shane falls asleep like that, and Ilya stays awake, staring at the ceiling and trying not to think about everything that could go wrong.

(Everything that could go right is somehow even more terrifying.)

Game day arrives with the weight of inevitability.

Ilya wakes up in his own apartment in Ottawa, alone, and stares at his phone for ten minutes before texting Shane.

Lily: Today is day

Jane: I know

Jane: Still want to do this?

Lily: Do you?

Jane: Yeah

Jane: Terrified but yeah

Lily: Then we do it

Lily: I will score on you and then kiss you about it

Jane: You're not going to score on me

Lily: Want to bet?

Jane: Ilya I swear to god if you turn our coming out into a competition

Lily: Is not competition

Lily: Is promise

The Centaurs' group chat is chaotic all morning, everyone hyped for the game, but Ilya can barely follow the conversation. Harris sends seventeen memes about Montreal. Zane posts a video of himself doing an elaborate pre-game ritual that involves way too much Gatorade. Wyatt just sends a single emoji: 🔥.

Ilya sends back a thumbs up and tries not to throw up from nerves.

By the time they get to the arena, Ilya's stomach is in knots. He goes through warmups on autopilot, muscle memory taking over while his brain spins through every possible scenario. What if the crowd boos? What if his teammates turn on him? What if Shane changes his mind at the last second?

But then he looks up at the stands, scanning for-

There. Shane's parents, section 112. Yuna waves when she sees Ilya looking, and that's when Ilya knows Shane told them what's happening tonight.

His phone buzzes in the locker room before the game.

Jane: My parents are here

Lily: I know. I saw them.

Jane: They want to take us to dinner after

Jane: After we … you know

Jane: Tell the world

Lily: That sounds nice

Jane: Ilya I'm freaking out

Lily: I know. Me too.

Lily: But we do it anyway yes?

Jane: Yeah

Jane: Yeah okay

Jane: See you on the ice

Lily: See you on ice. Try not to fall down when I deke around you.

Jane: Fuck off

Lily: <3

Jane: <3

The game is electric.

Montreal scores first — Shane, naturally, a beautiful wrister from the slot that beats Wyatt glove side. Shane doesn't look at the Ottawa bench after. He skates back to center ice with his head down, and Ilya knows he's already in his head, already overthinking.

Ilya scores eight minutes later, a one-timer from the point that goes top shelf, and when he skates away in celebration, he looks right at Shane. Shane's watching him, mouth slightly open, and for just a second, there's nothing between them but ice and inevitability.

The second period is a war. Montreal scores twice, Ottawa answers once. It's 3-2 Montreal going into the third, and Ilya can feel the energy in the building — everyone knows this is important, even if they don't know why.

With five minutes left, Ilya gets the puck at the blue line. Shane is covering him — of course Shane is covering him, they've been shadowing each other all night — and for a moment, they're standing so close Ilya can see the sweat on Shane's upper lip, the intensity in his brown eyes.

"Don't you dare," Shane says.

Ilya grins. "Watch me."

He dekes left, Shane follows, then Ilya cuts right and Shane's momentum carries him past. Ilya has a clear lane to the net. He shoots-

The goalie makes a brilliant save, and the rebound goes right to Troy, who buries it.

3-3.

Ottawa gets another goal with thirty seconds left. 4-3, final.

Ilya should be celebrating — they won, he got a goal and an assist, they're cementing their playoff position — but all he can think about is what comes next.

The handshake line is torture. Shane's hand is warm in his, grip firm, and their eyes meet for just a second.

"See you in a minute," Shane says, so quiet only Ilya can hear.

"Da."

In the visitor's locker room, Ilya showers and dresses faster than he's ever moved in his life. Zane is chirping someone about something, Evan is singing off-key, and their coach is giving a speech about playoff positioning, but Ilya hears none of it.

He checks his phone.

Jane: They're interviewing me in two minutes

Jane: First star

Jane: Holy shit

Jane: Holy shit holy shit holy shit

Lily: Breathe

Jane: I'm breathing

Jane: Are you really going to do this?

Lily: Are you?

Jane: Yes

Lily: Then yes. See you soon.

Ilya stands up, strengthens his resolve, and heads for the tunnel.

"Where you going, cap?" Luca calls after him.

"To make history," Ilya says, and he's out the door before anyone can ask what that means.

The interview is already underway when Ilya reaches the tunnel entrance.

Shane is standing by the bench in full gear except for his helmet, hair plastered to his forehead with sweat, talking to Michelle from the Voyageurs network. The arena is mostly empty now except for die-hard fans and media, but there are still cameras, still phones pointed at Shane, still the awareness that whatever happens next will be captured and dissected and shared.

"-really proud of the way the team battled tonight," Shane is saying, and his voice is steady but Ilya can hear the tremor underneath. "Ottawa played a great game, and-"

That's when Ilya steps onto the ice.

He's still in his gear, still wearing his Centaurs jersey with the 'C' on his chest, and heads turn immediately. You don't just walk onto the ice after a game ends, not when you're on the visiting team, not when the home team captain is being interviewed.

But Ilya does it anyway.

He skates across the ice — not fast, not slow, just steady and inevitable — and Shane sees him coming. Their eyes lock, and Shane's sentence trails off mid-word.

Michelle notices. "Shane? You were saying-"

But Shane isn't looking at Michelle anymore.

Ilya reaches the bench, and there's a moment — just a heartbeat — where they both could still back out, could laugh this off as Ilya being weird, could preserve the careful fiction they've maintained for four years.

Instead, Ilya reaches up, cups Shane's face with one gloved hand, and kisses his cheek.

It's chaste. It's brief. It's broadcast on live television.

The arena goes completely silent.

Shane's brain seems to stall out, his eyes wide and shocked, and Ilya can see the moment he processes what just happened, what it means, what's about to change.

And then Shane grabs the front of Ilya's jersey and kisses him on the mouth.

It's not chaste. It's not brief. It's desperate and real and four years of hidden touches compressed into one perfect moment, and somewhere in the background, someone drops something that clatters loudly on concrete, and someone else makes a noise that might be a gasp or might be a cheer, and Ilya stops caring about any of it because Shane is kissing him, really kissing him, in front of cameras and fans and God and everyone.

When they break apart, Shane's eyes are bright with what might be tears.

"Hi," Ilya says stupidly.

"Hi," Shane says back, and his smile is incandescent.

Michelle, to her credit, recovers faster than anyone else. "Well," she says, voice only slightly strangled, "I think … I think we just witnessed some breaking news."

Shane laughs — high and slightly hysterical — and looks at the camera. "Yeah. Yeah, I guess you did." He takes a breath, and Ilya watches him gather his courage. "This is Ilya Rozanov. He's … he's my boyfriend. Has been for years. And I'm tired of hiding it."

"We both are tired," Ilya adds, still holding onto Shane's jersey. "So now everyone knows. Surprise."

The silence breaks.

Someone in the stands screams — a good scream, an excited scream. Someone else starts clapping. Michelle is grinning so wide Ilya thinks her face might crack, and she looks

between them with something like wonder.

“How long?” She asks.

“Nine years,” Shane says. “Since … before our rookie season. Since we were stupid kids who thought we hated each other.”

“Turns out was not hate,” Ilya says. “Was other thing.”

“Other thing?” Michelle’s eyes are sparkling.

“The opposite thing,” Ilya clarifies. “The love thing.”

Shane makes a noise that’s half-laugh, half-sob. “Oh my god, you’re so embarrassing.”

“You kissed me on television!”

“You kissed me first!”

“Was just cheek! You made it gay!”

“It was already gay, Ilya!”

They’re bickering now, in front of cameras, in front of the world, and Michelle is just letting it happen, clearly understanding that this is television gold.

“So,” she says finally, “I have to ask. Was the rivalry ever real?”

Ilya and Shane look at each other.

“Da,” Ilya says. “We compete always. He wants to beat me, I want to beat him. Is very serious.”

“But also,” Shane adds, “I’m in love with him. So it’s complicated.”

“Is not complicated,” Ilya argues. “I am best center in NHL-”

“You’re literally not-”

“-and you are second best-”

“I have more points than you this season-”

“-and we are in love and also rivals. Is simple.”

“Nothing about this is simple,” Shane says, but he’s smiling, and his hand finds Ilya’s, and they’re holding hands on live television.

Ilya’s phone is definitely exploding in his locker. Twitter is definitely on fire. His agent is definitely having a heart attack.

But Shane is smiling at him like he hung the moon, and really, that's the only thing that matters.

"Well," Michelle says, "I think I speak for everyone when I say congratulations. And thank you for sharing this with us." She pauses. "Although I have to say, the fans on social media are going to lose their minds."

"Good," Ilya says. "They should. We are very cute together."

"Oh my god," Shane mutters.

"What? Is true! Have you seen us? We are like movie stars but hockey players."

"I'm going to murder you."

"No, you love me. You said on television."

"I'm regretting that now."

But Shane is laughing, and Ilya is laughing, and somewhere in the stands, Yuna is definitely crying happy tears, and this, Ilya thinks, is what those fics were trying to capture all along.

Not the hidden moments, not the stolen kisses.

This. The joy of being seen.

By the time they make it off the ice — together, holding hands, while Michelle wraps up the interview with barely concealed glee — Ilya's phone has approximately seven hundred notifications.

They end up in a storage room off the main corridor, door closed, just the two of them in a space that smells like equipment and ice melt.

"Holy shit," Shane says.

"Da."

"We just did that."

"We did."

"We came out on live television."

"We very much did."

Shane laughs, high and wild, and Ilya catches him around the waist, pulling him close. They're both still in their gear, sweaty and gross, and Ilya has never loved anyone more in his entire life.

“No taking it back now,” Ilya says.

“Good.” Shane’s hands come up to frame Ilya’s face. “I don’t want to take it back.”

“Even when internet goes crazy?”

“Especially then.” Shane kisses him, softer this time, sweet and sure. “Scott Hunter is going to be so mad at you.”

Ilya grins against his mouth. “Is going to be best part.”

They stay there for a long moment, just holding each other, letting the reality of what they’ve done settle over them. Then Ilya’s phone buzzes so insistently he has to check it.

The screen is full of notifications, but the first one he sees is from Scott.

Scott Hunter: You absolute LUNATIC

Scott Hunter: You came out to UPSTAGE ME

Scott Hunter: I don’t know whether to be impressed or horrified

Scott Hunter: Actually no I’m definitely horrified

Scott Hunter: Congratulations though

Scott Hunter: Genuinely

Scott Hunter: Even if you’re insane

Scott Hunter: Kip says congratulations too and that you and Hollander should come to dinner

Scott Hunter: I didn’t approve this invitation

Scott Hunter: But I’m extending it anyway because Kip is looking at me with his disappointed face

Scott Hunter: Come to dinner

Scott Hunter: We can talk about how you’re both idiots but also brave

Scott Hunter: Mostly idiots though

Ilya shows Shane, who laughs so hard he nearly falls over.

“We should go to dinner,” Shane says. “I want to see Scott’s face when you tell him about the fanfiction thing.”

“He will murder me.”

“Probably. But it’ll be worth it.”

Ilya’s eyes start to sting.

“Okay?” Shane asks softly.

“Da. Very okay.” Ilya swipes at his eyes. “Is just … is real now. Everyone knows.”

“Everyone knows,” Shane agrees. He pulls up his own phone, and Ilya can see the notifications counter climbing past four digits. “Twitter is melting down.”

“Show me.”

They huddle together over Shane’s phone, scrolling through the chaos.

@HockeyDaily: BREAKING: Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov came out as a couple during post-game interview. They kissed on camera. This is not a drill.

@HollanovShipper4Ever: I AM SCREAMING I AM CRYING I AM CALLING EVERYONE I KNOW

@PuckedUp2019: HOLLANOV IS REAL HOLLANOV IS CANON OH MY GOD

@ESPNHockey: In a historic moment, two of the NHL’s biggest stars have come out as a couple. Full story to follow.

@VoyageursNation: Okay but the way Rozanov just skated over like he owned the place and kissed Hollander on live TV … iconic behavior

@DefenseWins: THE WAY SHANE GRABBED HIS JERSEY

@DefenseWins: THE WAY THEY SMILED AT EACH OTHER

@DefenseWins: I AM UNWELL

@RivalryPodcast: Emergency episode recording NOW. Scott Hunter if you’re listening get your ass on Zoom.

@ScottHunter: I’m already on Zoom you don’t have to yell

@HockeyAnalysis: Setting aside personal feelings: this is huge for the sport. First active NHL couple. First high-profile players coming out together. The cultural impact cannot be overstated.

@HollanovShipper4Ever: “setting aside personal feelings” NO NO WE’RE HAVING ALL THE FEELINGS

The tweets keep coming, thousands of them, a tidal wave of shock and joy and support and yes, some negativity, but far less than Ilya expected. Mostly it’s just people losing their minds in the best way possible.

“Look at this,” Shane says, pulling up AO3 on his phone.

The Ilya Rozanov/Shane Hollander tag has exploded. There are already five new fics posted in the last twenty minutes, all of them tagged “Canon Compliant - Post-Coming Out” or “The Kiss” or “Based on Real Events.”

“We have our own tag now,” Shane says, slightly awed. “Like, an official AO3 warning tag.”

“What does it say?”

Shane shows him. There, among the standard archive warnings, is a new creator-chosen one appearing on some fics: “Real Person Fiction - Subjects Are Out and Together.”

“Huh,” Ilya says.

“People are writing fics about what just happened,” Shane continues. “One of them is called ‘Overtime Goals’ and it’s about us going home together after the interview.”

“Do we?”

“Do we what?”

“Go home together after interview?”

Shane’s smile is soft. “Yeah. Yeah, we do. After dinner with my parents.”

“And then?”

“And then we read fanfiction about ourselves and try not to die of embarrassment.”

“Is perfect plan.”

They stay in the storage room for a few more minutes, just holding each other and watching the internet lose its collective mind, until someone knocks on the door.

“Hollander? You in there?” It’s one of Shane’s teammates — Comeau, maybe, or Boiziau, they’re not good enough at hockey for Ilya to bother with telling them apart.

“Yeah,” Shane calls back.

“Your mom is crying in the corridor and she wants to hug you. Both of you. Also there are about fifty reporters outside and coach says you don’t have to talk to them if you don’t want to but the PR team is having a meltdown.”

Shane and Ilya look at each other.

“Ready?” Shane asks.

“For your mother’s hugs? Always. For reporters? Less always.”

“We can skip the reporters.”

“We should probably not skip reporters.”

“Since when are you responsible?”

“Since I became person in high-profile relationship who just came out on television,” Ilya says. “Must be mature now. Is very sad.”

Shane laughs, kisses him one more time, and opens the door.

Yuna nearly tackles them both.

“My boys,” she sobs into Shane’s shoulder while simultaneously trying to hug Ilya. “My beautiful, brave boys.”

“Mom,” Shane says, but his voice cracks, and then he’s crying too, and Ilya’s eyes are definitely not dry either.

David hangs back, but when Ilya meets his eyes, he nods — just once, but it’s enough. Approval. Acceptance. Support.

“We’re so proud of you,” Yuna says, pulling back to look at them both. “Both of you. That took so much courage.”

“It was Ilya’s idea,” Shane says.

“Was our idea,” Ilya corrects.

“You skated onto the ice.”

“You grabbed my jersey.”

“You kissed me first!”

“You kissed me better!”

“Oh my god, you two,” Yuna says, but she’s laughing through her tears. “Come on. Let’s get you away from the cameras and get some food. You must be starving.”

They are starving — Ilya realizes he hasn’t eaten since before they arrived at the arena, and that was five hours and a hockey game ago. They sneak out through a back entrance, avoiding the media scrum, and pile into David’s car.

Dinner is at a small Italian place that Shane’s parents apparently go to all the time, quiet and family-owned, and the owner takes one look at them — two NHL players in their pre-game suits, both still slightly sweaty — and just nods.

“Private room in the back,” he says in accented English. “No cameras.”

“Thank you,” Shane says, so sincere it makes Ilya’s chest hurt.

In the private room, they order too much food and Yuna asks approximately seven million questions — what the plan is now (Ilya: “Wing it?” Shane: “Please don’t say wing it“), whether they’re happy (both: “Yes. Very yes.”).

Shane’s father mostly listens, but halfway through the meal, he clears his throat.

“Son,” he says to Shane. “I’m proud of you. What you did tonight … that took guts.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“And you,” he turns to Ilya. “You take care of him, understand?”

“Always,” Ilya says seriously. “Is most important job I have.”

“Good.” David nods. “Then welcome to the family. Officially.”

They eat pasta and drink wine (just one glass each, they’re still technically in season) and Yuna shows them her phone, where the notifications are still flooding in.

“Everyone I know has texted me,” she says. “People I haven’t talked to in years. Everyone wants to say congratulations.”

“Or they want gossip,” Shane says dryly.

“Well, yes, that too.” She grins. “But mostly congratulations. Oh! And your grandmother called.”

Shane’s face goes pale. “Oh no.”

“She’s thrilled. Wants to know when she gets to meet Ilya properly.”

“Your babushka knows about me?” Ilya asks.

“Everyone in my family knows about you. You’re not exactly subtle.” Shane squeezes his hand under the table. “But yeah, my grandmother’s been asking for a year when I was going to bring my ‘handsome Russian’ home for Sunday dinner.”

“She called me handsome?”

“She called you a lot of things. Handsome was the most appropriate for mixed company.”

Ilya’s grin is enormous. “I like your babushka.”

“She’s going to love you. Fair warning: she’ll try to feed you until you explode.”

“Is okay. Russian grandmothers do same thing. I am trained.”

They stay at the restaurant until nearly midnight, until Shane is yawning between sentences and Ilya is starting to drift, and then Shane’s parents drive them back to their own cars in the arena parking lot.

“Thank you,” Shane says to his mom, hugging her tight. “For everything. For being here. For … for being okay with all of this.”

“Oh, honey.” She cups his face. “We’ve always been okay with this. We just wanted you to be ready.”

“I’m ready.”

“I can see that.” She kisses his forehead, then turns to Ilya. “Take care of each other.”

“Always,” Ilya promises.

The apartment is blessedly quiet after the chaos of the day.

They shed their clothes on the way to the bedroom — track pants, hoodies, socks making a trail across the floor — and collapse into bed in their boxers, exhausted and wired at the same time.

“We did it,” Shane says to the ceiling.

“We did.”

“The whole world knows.”

“The whole world knows,” Ilya confirms. He rolls onto his side, propping himself up on one elbow to look at Shane. “Regrets?”

“No.” Shane doesn’t hesitate. “Not even a little bit. You?”

“None.” Ilya leans down to kiss him, slow and thorough. “Best decision we make.”

“Better than that time you convinced me to try sushi from that sketchy place in Ottawa?”

“That gave you food poisoning. So yes, much better than that.”

Shane laughs, pulling Ilya down on top of him. They kiss for a while, lazy and content, until Shane’s phone buzzes on the nightstand.

“Ignore it,” Shane mumbles against Ilya’s mouth.

“Might be important.”

“Everything can wait until tomorrow.”

But the phone keeps buzzing, and eventually Shane groans and reaches for it.

“It’s the team group chat,” he says, scrolling through messages. “Everyone’s freaking out. J.J. is demanding to know why I didn’t tell him. Antoine is sending heart emojis. The rookie is asking if this means you’ll stop being mean to me during games.”

“I am never mean. Is competitive banter.”

“You told me I skate like a baby deer last Friday.”

“You were being wobbly!”

“I was exhausted. We’d played overtime the night before.”

Shane keeps scrolling, then stops. “Oh.”

“What?”

“Troy texted me. Your Troy.”

Ilya sits up. “What does he say?”

Shane hands him the phone.

Troy: Hey Hollander. Just wanted to say congrats. Cap’s been weird all week and now I know why. Take care of him yeah? He acts tough but he’s secretly soft.

Troy: Also if you break his heart I know where you live

Troy: But congrats! For real. You guys are cute together. Even if it’s gross that he’s cute with a Voyageur.

Ilya’s chest does something complicated. “I love that kid.”

“He’s threatening me.”

“Is because he cares.” Ilya takes his own phone, types out a quick message to the Centaurs group chat.

Ilya: Am dating Shane Hollander. Yes the Montreal one. Is serious. Has been serious for four years. Everyone be nice or I will make you do extra bag skates.

The response is immediate chaos.

Zane: WHAT

Evan: CAPTAIN WHAT

Troy: I already knew

Wyatt: YOU KNEW???

Troy: He’s been mooning over Hollander for weeks. Wasn’t hard to figure out.

Luca: I’m happy for you but also WHAT

Ilya: Is complicated story. Will tell later. For now just know: am happy. He makes me happy. Please be supportive or I will trade you all to Arizona.

Zane: You can't trade us

Ilya: Can try

Wyatt: Congrats cap. For real.

Troy: Yeah congrats. Even though it's weird you're dating a Voyageur.

Evan: Congrats! Can we meet him? Is he nice in person or is he secretly mean?

Ilya: He is very nice. And very pretty. And very good at hockey.

"Are you bragging about me to your team?"

"Da," Ilya nods seriously. "Is my right as boyfriend."

Shane's ears go red. "You're impossible."

"You love it."

"I really do," Shane admits. He takes his phone back, scrolling some more. "Oh god. AO3 has thirty-seven new fics posted in the last three hours."

"Show me."

They prop up pillows against the headboard and pull up AO3 on Shane's phone, cuddling together in the warm glow of the screen.

The tag page is beautiful chaos.

Ilya Rozanov/Shane Hollander

Works: 1,527

Recently Updated | Recently Posted | Sort by Kudos

"Wait," Ilya says. "One thousand five hundred twenty-seven?"

"That's …" Shane does math in his head. "That's almost four hundred new fics since this morning."

"We beat Scott Hunter."

"We didn't—this wasn't actually about beating Scott Hunter."

"No, but we DID beat Scott Hunter." Ilya pumps his fist. "Suck it, old man!"

Shane is trying not to laugh and failing. “You’re ridiculous.”

“Am winner. Is different.”

They scroll through the new fics, and the titles alone are gold:

“Overtime“ by stickhandling
Rating: Teen and Up Audiences | Words: 2,914 | Chapters: 1/1
Tags: First Kiss, Canon Compliant, Post-Coming Out, Fluff, They’re So In Love Your Honor
Summary: Five times they almost kissed on camera, and the one time they actually did.

“Sharp Edges (Now Smoothed)“ by hockeyfan_2018
Rating: Mature | Words: 8,234 | Chapters: 1/1
Tags: Established Relationship, Secret Relationship, Coming Out, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Happy Ending
Summary: Four years of hiding. Four years of stolen moments. And one very public kiss that changes everything. Shane POV.

“The Algorithm of Love” by IceQueen53
Rating: Explicit | Words: 15,672 | Chapters: 3/3
Tags: Rivals to Lovers, Secret Relationship, Social Media, Fanfiction Meta, Getting Together, Happy Ending
Summary: In which Ilya discovers fanfiction, decides he and Shane need more fics than Scott Hunter, and accidentally comes out in the process. Based on true events (probably).

“Oh my god,” Shane says, reading over Ilya’s shoulder. “That last one. That’s literally what happened.”

“Is because we are very predictable.”

“We came out on live television! That’s not predictable!”

“For us? Is kind of predictable.” Ilya clicks on the fic. “Look, author has note: ‘I started writing this three days ago as crack and then it ACTUALLY HAPPENED. Reality is wilder than fiction. God bless Hollanov.’”

Shane makes a noise that’s half-laugh, half-sob. “This is surreal.”

“Click on one. Let us read.”

“Which one?”

“That one.” Ilya points to a fic near the top of the recent updates. “Has good tags.”

“Four Years" by puckluck
Rating: Teen and Up Audiences | Words: 4,807 | Chapters: 1/1
Tags: Established Relationship, Secret Relationship, Coming Out, Post-Canon, Domestic Fluff, They’re Dorks Your Honor

Summary: The morning after the kiss seen round the hockey world, Ilya and Shane read fanfiction about themselves and try not to die of embarrassment.

“That’s,” Shane says. “That’s literally what we’re doing right now.”

“Is meta,” Ilya agrees. “But is cute. Read it.”

Shane clicks on the fic, and they read together, Ilya’s chin hooked over Shane’s shoulder.

The first thing Shane notices when he wakes up is that Ilya is already awake, which never happens. Ilya could sleep through the apocalypse and has, on multiple occasions, slept through Shane’s alarm.

The second thing he notices is that Ilya is on his phone, grinning like he’s just won the Stanley Cup.

“It’s seven in the morning,” Shane mumbles. “Why are you awake?”

“AO3,” Ilya says, like this explains everything.

Shane lifts his head. “What?”

“We have more fics than Scott Hunter now.” Ilya shows him the phone triumphantly. “One thousand five hundred twenty-seven to one thousand two hundred ninety-three. We win.”

“That’s …” Shane scrubs a hand over his face. “That’s what you’re thinking about? The morning after we came out? Fanfiction statistics?”

“Is important! We have been competing!”

Shane stares at him. Then starts laughing, helpless and fond and so completely in love with this ridiculous man that it hurts. “You’re unbelievable.”

“You love it.”

“I really do,” Shane admits …

“It’s scary how accurate this is,” Shane says.

“Is because we are predictable,” Ilya says again. “Writer understands us.”

They keep reading — the fic is sweet and funny and gets their dynamic eerily right, the way they bicker and love in equal measure. When they finish, Ilya scrolls to the comments.

iceicebaby: I CAN’T BELIEVE THIS IS REAL NOW

hockeyshipper2019: they’re so soft for each other i’m CRYING

stickhandling: This fic has made my entire life. Bless Hollanov. Bless these two idiots in love.

defensewins: remember when we all thought they hated each other? REMEMBER? we were so naive

“We should leave comment,” Ilya decides.

“Absolutely not.”

“Why not? They write nice story about us!”

“Because that’s-” Shane pauses. “Actually, I don’t know why not. That’s kind of sweet, actually.”

“So we comment?”

Shane worries his lip, then nods. “Okay. But keep it brief. Don’t be weird.”

“When am I ever weird?”

“Ilya. You organized your hockey sticks by emotional attachment last week.”

“Was important system!”

Shane takes the phone and types:

ShaneH_24: Hey, this is actually Shane Hollander. Just wanted to say this fic is lovely and really captures our relationship. Thanks for writing it. - S & I

He shows it to Ilya, who nods approval, and they post it.

The response is instantaneous.

puckluck: OH MY GOD

puckluck: OH MY GOD OH MY GOD

puckluck: IS THIS REAL

puckluck: I’M SCREAMING

puckluck: THEY READ MY FIC

puckluck: *THEY* READ MY FIC

stickhandling: WAIT IS THAT ACTUALLY THEM

Ilya is grinning so wide his face hurts. “We made them happy.”

“We made them lose their minds,” Shane corrects, but he’s smiling too. “Should we read more?”

“Da. Is research.”

“Research for what?”

“For understanding what people think about us.” Ilya scrolls through the list. “Oh, look at this one. Is rated Explicit.”

“Nope.”

“Why not? Might be educational!”

“I don’t need to read strangers’ interpretations of our sex life.”

“But what if they get it right?”

Shane’s ears go red. “Ilya.”

“Or what if they get it wrong and we can judge them?”

“That’s worse!”

“Is just curiosity!” Ilya’s grin is wicked. “Come on. One explicit fic. Just to see.”

Shane groans, but he’s laughing. “Fine. ONE. And if it’s weird, we stop immediately.”

Ilya scrolls until he finds one with a promising title.

“Ice and Fire" by romancewriter_86
Rating: Explicit | Words: 6,234 | Chapters: 1/1
Tags: Established Relationship, Secret Relationship, Hotel Rooms, Post-Game Celebration, Explicit Sexual Content, Emotions
Summary: After the 2018 All-Star Game, Ilya and Shane finally have a night alone. Set one year before they came out.

They read in silence for a few paragraphs. The writing is actually good — better than Ilya expected. The author captures something true about them, the way they come together after games like they’re trying to prove something, the desperation mixed with tenderness.

Then they get to the explicit part.

“Oh,” Shane says.

“Oh,” Ilya agrees.

They keep reading.

“Is that-” Shane clears his throat. “Do they think we-”

“Apparently yes.”

“That’s not even physically possible.”

“Maybe with practice?”

“Ilya!”

But Shane is laughing again, face buried in Ilya’s shoulder, and Ilya is laughing too, and they end up not finishing the fic because they’re too busy kissing instead.

When they surface, Shane’s lips are kiss-swollen and his eyes are bright. “I love you,” he says. “Even though you’re making me read porn about us.”

“Is not porn. Is erotica. Is classy.”

“It’s something.” Shane kisses him again. “But I love you too.”

They spend the next hour like that, reading fics and making out and laughing at the more ridiculous interpretations of their relationship. Some of the fics are surprisingly emotional, capturing the weight of hiding for so long, the fear and hope tangled together. Others are pure fluff, domestic scenes of them cooking together or playing video games or just existing in each other’s space.

“People really love us,” Shane says softly, scrolling through the kudos on one particularly sweet fic.

“Da. Is nice, yes? To be loved?”

“Yeah.” Shane’s smile is gentle. “Really nice.”

Around nine a.m., Ilya’s phone rings. It’s Scott Hunter, and Ilya answers on speaker.

“You’re insane,” Scott says without preamble.

“Good morning to you too, old man.”

“Don’t ‘old man’ me. You came out on LIVE TELEVISION to WIN A FANFICTION COMPETITION.”

“Was not just about competition-”

“Kip wants to know if you’re both okay. I want to know if you’ve lost your minds.”

“We are okay,” Shane calls toward the phone. “Really okay, actually.”

“Hollander! You’re there!”

“It’s my bed.”

“Oh god, I don’t need—whatever.” Scott sounds flustered. “Look. Congratulations. Seriously. What you both did was brave and important and I’m proud of you. Even if your motivations were questionable.”

“Our motivations were love,” Ilya says solemnly.

“Your motivations were beating me at fictional relationships.”

“Can be both.”

Scott groans. “I’m hanging up now. But come to dinner next week. Both of you. Kip insists.”

“We will be there,” Shane promises.

“Good. And Rozanov?”

“Da?”

“You did good, kid.”

Ilya’s throat gets tight. “Thanks, Scott.”

After they hang up, Shane pulls up Twitter again. Their mentions are still exploding — thousands of messages of support, some criticism (which they both immediately stop reading), and an overwhelming amount of love.

@NHL: Congratulations to Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander on their courage in coming out. The NHL is proud to support our LGBTQ+ players and fans. Hockey is for everyone. 🏳️‍🌈

@Centaurs: Our captain is one of the bravest people we know. Proud to have @IlyaRozanov leading this team. #HockeyIsForEveryone

@Voyageurs: Shane Hollander is a credit to this team, this city, and this sport. Today and always. 🏳️‍🌈 #Hollanov

@HockeyHallofFame: History made tonight. Congratulations to both players on their courage.

“Look at this,” Shane says, voice thick. “Our teams. The league. Everyone’s supporting us.”

“Told you it would be okay.”

“You said maybe it would be okay.”

“Was being modest.” Ilya kisses his temple. “Look. More fics.”

Shane pulls up AO3 again, and the number has jumped to 1,589.

“We’re definitely winning,” Ilya says smugly.

“This was never actually a competition.”

“Everything is competition if you try hard enough.”

“That’s not-” Shane pauses. “Actually, that’s very on brand for you.”

They keep scrolling, reading summaries and tags, occasionally clicking through to read a particularly sweet or funny fic. Around noon, they get hungry and order food, and while they wait for delivery, Shane suggests making it official.

“Making what official?” Ilya asks.

“Letting people know this is really us.” Shane pulls up Twitter. “We could do a joint post. Something simple.”

“Like what?”

“I don’t know. A photo? Something us.”

They spend ten minutes trying to take a selfie and failing because Ilya keeps making faces, and finally Shane just takes a photo of them in bed, Ilya’s phone showing the AO3 tag page visible in the frame.

@ShaneHollanderHockeyPlayer: Morning after. Reading your fics. Thanks for all the love. ❤️ @IlyaRozanovOfficial

@IlyaRozanovOfficial: We have more fics than @ScottHunter now. Is best day of life. (Also love of my life is in photo. Is bonus.)

@ScottHunter: I HATE YOU

@IlyaRozanovOfficial: No you don’t 😘

The photos go viral immediately. Thousands of retweets, hundreds of thousands of likes. People are crying in the comments. People are making edits. Someone has already turned it into a meme.

And on AO3, the fic count keeps climbing.

By the time they finally drag themselves out of bed that afternoon, they’re at 1,658 fics.

Scott Hunter and Kip Grady are at 1,298.

“We won,” Ilya says, showing Shane the numbers.

“We won,” Shane agrees. But he’s not looking at the screen. He’s looking at Ilya, eyes soft and fond and full of love. “In more ways than one.”

Ilya kisses him, there in the afternoon light of Shane’s bedroom, and thinks about all those fics — all those stories people wrote about them, about love and rivalry and finding each other despite the odds.

Turns out, the real story is even better.

Ilya is lying on Shane's couch in Montreal, laptop balanced on his stomach, giggling to himself in a way that immediately makes Shane suspicious.

"What are you doing?" Shane asks from the kitchen, where he's attempting to make dinner and failing spectacularly based on the smoke alarm that just went off.

"Nothing."

"You're doing your evil laugh."

"I do not have evil laugh."

"You absolutely have an evil laugh. You do it whenever you're about to do something that's going to make me regret my life choices." Shane appears in the doorway, wooden spoon in hand. "What are you doing?"

"Writing."

"Writing what?"

Ilya's grin is absolutely wicked. "Fanfiction."

Shane drops the spoon.

"You're WHAT?"

"Writing fanfiction! Is easy. I have laptop. I have account on AO3-"

"You made an AO3 account?"

"-and I have story to tell." Ilya gestures dramatically. "Is about Scott Hunter and Kip Grady reacting to us having more fics than them. Is comedy gold."

Shane walks over and looks at the laptop screen. His expression goes through several emotions at once — horror, amusement, resignation, and something that might be reluctant pride.

"Ilya. You can't write RPF about our friends."

"Why not? People write about us!"

"That's different!"

"How is different?"

"Because-" Shane pauses. "Okay, I don't have a good answer for that. But still. Scott is going to kill you."

“Scott will think is funny.”

“Scott will absolutely not think it’s funny.”

“Then will be even more funny when he reads it.” Ilya pats the couch beside him. “Come. Help me with English. Want to make sure dialogue sounds right.”

“I’m not helping you write fanfiction about Scott Hunter.”

“Fine. I do it myself.” Ilya squints at the screen. “How do you spell ‘whining’? One ‘n’ or two?”

“I’m not-” Shane sighs. “One ‘n’.”

“Ha! You ARE helping!” Ilya types enthusiastically. “Okay, listen to this part: ‘Scott looked at his phone and made sound like dying walrus.’”

“That’s actually pretty accurate.”

“I know! I am natural talent!” Ilya keeps typing. “Kip says, ‘Babe, are you okay?’ And Scott says — wait, what does Scott call Kip? Is ‘babe’? Is ‘honey’? Is ‘my little smoothie prince’?”

“He definitely doesn’t call him ‘my little smoothie prince.’”

“How do you know?”

“Because no one would call anyone that.”

“I would call you that.”

“Please don’t.”

Ilya grins, typing more. “Okay, so Scott is upset because we now have five thousand forty-three fics and he only has one thousand five hundred thirty-two-”

“You’re really keeping track?”

“Of course! Is competition!”

“It stopped being a competition when we came out.”

“Competition is never over. Is eternal.” Ilya scrolls through what he’s written. “Oh! And then I have part where Scott says-” He clears his throat and reads in a dramatic voice: “‘It is not FAIR, Kip! First Rozanov has better hair than me-’”

“I’m not sure if that’s factually correct.”

“Shh, is my story. ‘First Rozanov has better hair than me, then his dick has four inches on me-’”

“ILYA.”

“What? Is true!”

“How do you know that’s true?”

“Locker room, Shane. We have been in locker rooms together.”

“You were LOOKING?”

“Was impossible not to notice! He walks around like sad naked man!”

Shane is laughing now, face buried in his hands. “Oh my god. You can’t write that.”

“Already wrote it! Look!” Ilya shows him the screen. “Then Scott says, ‘And NOW he has more fanfiction than me! This is worst day of my life!’ And Kip is like, ‘Babe, you won the Cup,’ and Scott is like, ‘BUT AT WHAT COST, KIP? AT WHAT COST?’”

“That’s …” Shane is trying so hard not to laugh. “That’s actually kind of funny.”

“Is VERY funny! Wait, there is more!” Ilya scrolls down. “Then I have Kip trying to comfort Scott by making him special smoothie called ‘At Least You’re Not As Old As Jagr,’ but this makes Scott MORE upset because it reminds him he is old-”

“He’s thirty-one!”

“ANCIENT. And then Scott decides only way to beat us is to propose to Kip on live television to get more engagement-”

“Oh no.”

“-but Kip says no because, quote, ‘I’m not letting you propose to me out of spite for Ilya Rozanov, babe. That’s not romantic.’"

Shane is full-on laughing now, tears in his eyes. “You’re terrible.”

“I am ARTIST.” Ilya types more furiously. “Oh! And then at end, Scott texts me-” He switches to dramatic voice again: “‘Rozanov. You win. You and Hollander have more fics. You have better love story. You have stupid pretty face and apparently very large penis-’”

“I can’t believe you wrote that.”

“‘-but I want you to know I hate you. I hate you SO MUCH. Congratulations.’ And then I write that I text back: ‘Thank you old man. We could not have done it without you being motivating force of competition. Also your dick is fine size. Is very average. Nothing to be ashamed of.’”

“You’re going to get murdered.”

“Is worth it.” Ilya shows Shane the full document. “Look, I even have title: ‘The Fall of House Hunter: A Tragedy in Three Acts (Except Is Actually Comedy).’”

Shane reads over his shoulder, and despite himself, he's grinning. "The tags are insane."

"I worked hard on tags!" Ilya pulls up the tag section:

Tags: Scott Hunter/Kip Grady, Ilya Rozanov/Shane Hollander, Meta, Crack Treated Seriously, Ilya Rozanov Has No Shame, Scott Hunter Has Regrets, Kip Grady Is Long-Suffering, Competitive Nonsense, Fourth Wall? What Fourth Wall?, The Author Regrets Nothing, Attempt at Humor, Penis Size Discussions (It's All In Good Fun), Fanfiction About Fanfiction, This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things

"'This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things,'" Shane reads aloud. "That's perfect."

"I know!" Ilya beams. "And for summary, I write: 'In which Scott Hunter discovers that Hollanov has more fics than Skip, and he handles it with grace and maturity. JUST KIDDING. He handles it like whiny baby. Based on true events (the feelings, not the penis conversation. Probably.).'"

"You have to post this."

"You think?"

"Oh, absolutely. Scott deserves this for all the times he's chirped you about literally everything." Shane kisses Ilya's temple. "But maybe let me read it first? Make sure the grammar is okay?"

"You just want to make sure I do not say anything TOO embarrassing."

"That too."

They spend the next hour editing together, Shane fixing Ilya's grammar while Ilya adds increasingly ridiculous details. By the time they're done, it's nearly three thousand words of pure crack.

"Okay," Ilya says, finger hovering over the 'Post' button. "Is moment of truth."

"Are you sure about this?"

"Never been more sure of anything." Ilya clicks 'Post.' "There. Is done. Is out in world."

They sit there, watching the hits counter tick up.

"Oh god," Shane says. "People are already commenting."

stickhandling: IS THIS REALLY ILYA ROZANOV

stickhandling: IT IS ISN'T IT

stickhandling: THE WRITING STYLE

stickhandling: THE BROKEN ENGLISH

stickhandling: THE COMPLETE LACK OF SHAME

stickhandling: I'M SCREAMING

hockeyshipper2019: This is the funniest thing I've ever read. The penis discussion. The TAGS. Ilya if this is really you, you're a gift.

defensewins: "Scott walked around like sad naked man" I AM CRYING

iceicebaby: The fact that this is canonically written by one of the subjects of the ship he's writing about … META TO THE MAX

Ilya refreshes obsessively, reading each comment aloud in increasingly dramatic voices. Shane is laughing so hard he's wheezing.

Then, twenty minutes after posting, a new comment appears:

NotScottHunter: This is libel

NotScottHunter: Also you're banned from my house

NotScottHunter: Also my dick is NOT average it's ABOVE average

NotScottHunter: Also I hate you

NotScottHunter: Also this is actually really funny and I showed Kip and he's crying from laughing

NotScottHunter: But I still hate you

NotScottHunter: Congratulations on your 5000+ fics

NotScottHunter: I hope you're happy

NotScottHunter: (The fic is good though. You captured my essence.)

Ilya lets out a whoop of victory. "He likes it!"

"He said he hates you."

"Is how Scott shows love!"

IlyaRozanov: Thank you old man. Your essence is very whiny. Was easy to capture. Also you are not banned from your house, you invited us to dinner next week. Remember?

NotScottHunter: I'M UNINVITING YOU

IlyaRozanov: Kip will not let you uninvite us

NotScottHunter: …

NotScottHunter: Kip says you're still invited

NotScottHunter: But I'm not happy about it

IlyaRozanov: You love us really

NotScottHunter: I tolerate you

NotScottHunter: BARELY

The comments keep rolling in, and within an hour, Ilya's fic has two hundred kudos and is climbing. People are losing their minds that an actual NHL player wrote RPF about other NHL players.

@HockeyGossip: Ilya Rozanov just posted FANFICTION about Scott Hunter and Kip Grady reacting to Hollanov having more fics than Skip. This is the best timeline. Link in bio.

@HollanovShipper4Ever: I just read an RPF fic written BY ONE OF THE PEOPLE WE SHIP about ANOTHER SHIP and it's CRACK and I'm ASCENDING

@ScottHunter: @IlyaRozanovOfficial I'm going to fight you at dinner next week

@IlyaRozanovOfficial: @ScottHunter Cannot fight. Will be too busy eating Kip's cooking and basking in glory of having more fics than you

@ScottHunter: @IlyaRozanovOfficial I HATE YOU

@KipGrady: @ScottHunter @IlyaRozanovOfficial Boys. Behave. Also @IlyaRozanovOfficial that fic was hilarious, I sent it to everyone I know

@ScottHunter: @KipGrady BABE

By the next morning, Ilya's fic is the most-read story in both the Hollanov AND Skip tags.

"You broke AO3," Shane says, showing him the statistics page.

"Is gift," Ilya says smugly.

His phone rings. It's Scott, and Ilya answers on speaker.

"The dick thing," Scott says without preamble.

"Good morning to you too!"

"The DICK THING, Rozanov. Did you really have to include that?"

"Was important character detail!"

"It's not even ACCURATE! I'm very—you know what, I'm not having this conversation. The point is, Kip wants you to write more."

Ilya sits up. “More fics?”

“Apparently you’re ‘a natural’ and ‘have a great comedic voice’ and he wants you to write more crack about various hockey players.” Scott sounds deeply pained. “So congratulations, I guess. You’re now a fanfiction author.”

“Is best day of my life.”

“You said that when you came out with Hollander.”

“Every day with Shane is best day of my life. But this is ALSO best day.” Ilya grins at Shane, who’s trying not to laugh. “What should I write next? Maybe about you and Kip’s first meeting? When you ordered smoothie and fell in love with smoothie man?”

“His name is Kip-”

“I know his name! Was being poetic!”

“Just …” Scott sighs, long and deep. “Just come to dinner next week. And bring wine. Good wine. I need it.”

After he hangs up, Shane pulls Ilya into his arms. “You’re insane.”

“You love when I am insane.”

“I really do.” Shane kisses him, slow and sweet. “My fanfiction-writing, competition-obsessed, beautiful disaster of a boyfriend.”

“Is most romantic thing you ever say to me.”

“That’s really sad.”

“No! Is perfect!” Ilya kisses him back, deeper this time. “You see me. Real me. Even ridiculous parts.”

“Especially the ridiculous parts,” Shane corrects, but he’s smiling.

Ilya’s phone buzzes with another AO3 notification. Someone’s left a comment asking if he’ll write more. Someone else is begging for a sequel. Someone else wants him to write about the time Shane and Ilya first got together.

“Maybe I write more,” Ilya muses.

“Please don’t write about our actual sex life.”

“Why not? Would be educational!”

“Ilya, I’m begging you-”

“Fine, fine. Will write more about Scott instead. Is more funny anyway.” Ilya pulls up his laptop. “Maybe next one is about Scott trying to get more fics by doing increasingly

ridiculous things. Like adopting puppy on Instagram. Or learning to bake. Or … oh! Or starting his own YouTube channel where he rates smoothies!"

"That last one might actually work."

"Then I must write it before he thinks of it!" Ilya starts typing furiously. "You help me?"

Shane looks at him — at this ridiculous, competitive, creative, wonderful man who came out with him on live television, who reads fanfiction about them every morning, who just wrote RPF crack about their friend's relationship dynamics — and thinks about how lucky he is.

"Yeah," Shane says, settling in beside him. "Yeah, I'll help."

And that's how Shane Hollander, three-time Stanley Cup champion and Canadian Golden Boy, becomes a beta reader for his boyfriend's increasingly unhinged hockey RPF.

It's the best decision he's ever made.

(Except for loving Ilya in the first place.

That one's still number one.)

"Scott Hunter's Guide to Social Media Relevance" by IlyaRozanov

Scott Hunter has a problem. Actually, he has several problems, but the main one is this: people care more about Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander's relationship than they do about his. This is unacceptable.

"Kip," Scott says, sitting at their kitchen table with his laptop open. "We need to go viral."

Kip looks up from the smoothie he's making. "Babe. We're already viral. You came out two years ago."

"But not HOLLANOV viral. We need to be MORE viral."

"That's not how viral works-"

"What if we got a puppy?"

Kip puts down the blender. "A puppy."

"Yeah! People love puppies! We post pictures of us with puppy, everyone loves us, we get more fics!" Scott is gesturing wildly now. "It's perfect!"

"We're not getting a puppy just to compete with Ilya Rozanov."

"We're not?"

"No."

“But-”

“Scott.” Kip comes over, takes Scott’s face in his hands. “Babe. Light of my life. Love of my existence. We don’t need more fics to validate our relationship.”

“But Rozanov-”

“Is an insane person who writes fanfiction about us. That’s not a standard we should aspire to.”

Scott knows Kip is right. Knows that their relationship is real and good and doesn’t need internet validation.

But also: Ilya Rozanov is currently winning at fanfiction numbers, and Scott Hunter does not lose.

“What if we did YouTube channel?” He tries.

Kip sighs. “Scott …”

“Just hear me out-”

Author’s Notes: In which Ilya Rozanov becomes a fanfiction author and chaos ensues. Scott Hunter is fine. Probably. Mostly. (He’s not fine. He’s considering starting a TikTok.)

Kudos: 4,392
Comments: 812
Bookmarks: 1,203

Top Comment:

NotScottHunter: I hate everything about this. See you at dinner Sunday. Bring good wine. I’m suffering.

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