

short way home

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/75792001) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75792001>.

Rating:	General Audiences
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Yuna Hollander & Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander & Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander , Yuna Hollander , David Hollander
Additional Tags:	Canon Compliant , Post-Canon , Post-Book 2: Heated Rivalry (Game Changers) , Book 6: The Long Game (Game Changers) , Between Heated Rivalry and The Long Game , Fluff , Domestic Fluff , Ilya Rozanov-centric , POV Ilya Rozanov , Ilya Rozanov Needs A Hug , ilya gets the family he deserves , pre-chicken parm scene , how ilya and the hollanders got close enough to eat ice cream and play scrabble together , yuna mothers ilya rozanov , ilya rozanov gets terrorized by polite canadians
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-15 Words: 8,685 Chapters: 1/1

short way home

by [latertoday](#)

Summary

A few months after Ilya joins the Centaurs, his apartment gets a gas leak. It's a perfectly inconvenient time to be out of housing, but luckily, Yuna and David come to the rescue. Now, Ilya just has to survive a week living with in-laws that may or may not hate his guts.

As it turns out, his expectations could not have been more subverted.

有中文版！

Notes

set after heated rivalry and right before the start of the long game (though i haven't read it in a while so this timeline might be totally inaccurate)

also i know nothing about hockey so i pulled every hockey line in here out of my ass sorry <3

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

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: [意外归途 \(授翻\)](#) by [SLoan_1007](#)

A few months after Ilya joined the Centaurs, his apartment had a gas leak.

Ilya hadn't been there, but it was apparently serious. Ilya couldn't really understand the building manager through his thick accent. Which was funny, because it seemed like the building manager couldn't understand Ilya either, so the two of them ended up communicating via affirming or disapproving noises and hand gestures. In any case, Ilya would have to stay out of the building temporarily- a week or so while they fixed the line, if he'd interpreted correctly. And it was just his luck that this happened when they were gearing up for the season with regular practice times, so it wasn't like he could just load his car with groceries and stay at Shane's cottage. Perfectly inconvenient.

Ilya had just been on the precipice of booking a hotel whilst sitting in his parked Porsche after practice when his phone screen was interrupted with a call from Shane, who'd seen his earlier texts about the leak.

"You haven't paid for a hotel yet, right?" Was what Ilya was greeted with as soon as the call connected.

"Well hello and good evening to you too," replied Ilya faux curtly, though he was used to Shane's straight-to-the-point phone calls now. Shane, of course, ignored the antics and continued, "I told my mom what happened and she said you can stay with them. Do you have everything already or do you want my dad to go help you with getting stuff from the apartment?"

Ilya's teasing smile that had unconsciously formed dropped. "Um," said Ilya, because he didn't know what else to say. He understood all that English perfectly well, even if Shane was talking a little more rushed than usual. He was just... a little blindsided. Stay with Yuna and David? By himself? That would be... awkward, to say the least.

So far, after the cottage incident, Ilya and Shane had met with Shane's parents three times. Once right after, once out to dinner, and once at their home. The air was never outwardly tense, considering the circumstances, but Ilya could not imagine being alone with Yuna and David without Shane as a buffer, let alone sleeping in their home. He'd been on his best behaviour, showing absolutely zero hint of his snark on the ice nor any PDA towards Shane in his parents' presence, at least after that initial coming out meeting. Ilya presented as boring. Very boring, like a piece of cardboard, and he could sort of feel the cardboard politeness back as they discussed the weather (was it like Russia? How are Russian summers?) and the food (What exactly is borscht made of? David wanted to know). He didn't blame them.

"Yuna... said I could stay?" pressed Ilya, also wondering if Shane had somehow conjured that up. It wasn't that Ilya could feel any animosity from Yuna, especially after he'd made it so clear that Shane was his everything, even more than hockey, but he could understand her apprehension and residual looks from the decade she'd spent watching number 81 on ice as her son's mortal enemy. He wouldn't blame her or her husband at all if they still actively disliked him, actually.

"Yeah," replied Shane. "You have nowhere else, right?" Well, right. Ilya had gotten to know the Centaurs pretty well at this point, but asking to stay at someone's house after knowing them for only a few months was a bit much. Then again, wasn't intruding on your boyfriend's parents, who definitely didn't approve but kept their mouths shut in support of their son, so much more than that?!

"I can stay at a hotel," steered Ilya. "Is not like I am missing money."

"Yeah, but you're probably gonna eat junk all week if you stay in a hotel."

"AirBNB, then. Anyway I already do that."

Contemplative silence, then a loud sigh from the other end, muffled by static. "Yeah, okay. I get it. It's okay. I just- yeah. Alright. Love you."

If there was anything Ilya could say he improved since he and Shane had made it official, it was reading Shane like a book. Whether the 'fuck off' said with a completely straight face was actually a playful, happy 'fuck off' or a lights too bright, noises too noisy type of 'fuck off'. If that sniffle was just a residual cold or the start of an anxiety attack, Ilya knew it all too well.

"Wait," said Ilya, because he knew now, too. And now that he knew, he had to do it, he had to suck it up. "Actually... I will stay. Yes."

"Really?!" replied Shane, and Ilya couldn't stop the corners of his mouth from curling up when he thought of Shane's eyes lighting up at the prospect of his parents and boyfriend finally getting along. How cowardly Ilya had been, to try and run away and remove this hope from Shane. Even if the outcome wouldn't be what he wanted, Ilya still had to be the one to try. He owed that to Shane. He had to face it, for Shane. He was Ilya Rozanov, menace on the ice and beyond, what was he so afraid of?

"I'll text my mom and tell her to set up," said Shane. "Great," replied Ilya, trying to sound as well as possible.

"Text me when you're there, okay?"

Ilya promised, with his mouth a little dry.

"Hi Ilya," said Yuna, opening the door with a smile that Ilya wasn't sure if it was plastered on or not. "Come in."

Ilya wiped his free hand that wasn't clutching his bag on his joggers and took off his shoes, placing them neatly by the doormat. His hands were a little clammy, which he felt ridiculous for. He'd already met this woman four times at this point, they'd sat across the dinner table from each other at this very house making small talk. Ilya really didn't know what he was being so awkward for. In fact, he didn't think he had an awkward bone in his body before meeting Shane's parents. He could smooth talk anyone, glide his way through any conversation in any situation like cone drills. Except, somehow, these two very nice, very polite Canadians.

"Thank you for this," Ilya managed to say to fill the silence as they walked to the back of the house where the kitchen and dining room was.

"Oh, no worries," said Yuna, her voice still holding a pleasant lilt that may or may not have been feigned. "Shane told us what happened. Gas leak, right? Scary. Good thing you weren't there."

"Yes," said Ilya, and David's greeting from the kitchen counter saved him from having to think of what to say next. "Hey, Ilya! How are you?"

"Good, thank you, and you?" Like an English listening test. Ilya went in for a handshake with David for some weird fucking reason, maybe because he was used to this formal greeting with his own father, but immediately regretted it because he could see David's millisecond of confusion, though it thankfully quickly lapsed. But then Ilya realized how disrespectful it was to not have greeted Yuna the same way if he was going to do this.

Ugh. It was going to be a long night. Week.

But Ilya didn't have to think about it for long, because Yuna was beckoning him to put his bag down. "We don't really have a guest bedroom anymore, so you'll just sleep in Shane's old room, if that's okay?"

"Yes," replied Ilya, and he'd be lying if he said he wasn't a little too happy at that thought as he followed Yuna up the stairs. He'd never been to the second floor or seen Shane's bedroom yet, even though this was the house Shane had grown up in.

Even with the extent of Shane's wealth and his insistence on providing a bigger, newer, more luxurious house for his parents, they'd never accepted it, as Shane had complained. As much as Ilya knew of Yuna as a "hockey momager", this humbleness was something Ilya truly respected her and David for given that he himself had always had a certain leech to deal with. It was actually only after years of arguing that Shane had managed to be allowed to pay off their mortgage.

Ilya couldn't help but look at each and every framed picture lining the walls up the stairs. There were some of grandparents and cousins, but it was mostly Shane. A toddler with mud all over his shirt and a bewildered look in his eyes, a seven-year-old wearing a jersey too big

for him, a thirteen year old posing with that awkward stance he still had today outside the rink. One from his rookie year and a couple of Stanley Cup shots in there, too.

Ilya wondered, briefly, what it would be like to be loved that much growing up and still now.

They finally reached Shane's bedroom, and Ilya nearly held his breath in gleeful anticipation as Yuna swung the door open. "It's a little small, but the bed should still fit you," she said.

It was, somehow, exactly how Ilya had expected a nice Canadian boy's childhood bedroom to look. The walls were a neutral darkish blue, the furniture all a matching stained oak. Junior trophies and medals adorned the walls and shelves, and the window had a clear view of the tree in their backyard, now a vibrant late summer green. A Gretzky jersey hung from a hanger hooked on outside of the closet door.

"Bathroom's just across and you have it all to yourself," said Yuna. "I put a towel in there, too. Let me know if you need anything, okay? Dinner's almost ready, so just settle in and come down whenever."

"Thank you," Ilya said as she walked away, leaving the door slightly closed but not latched. He looked around, taking it all in. First order of business was not to unpack, but to uncover the dirty little secrets Shane had left untouched here. Honestly, Ilya doubted he'd find anything juicy, so it wasn't *really* snooping. He sat gingerly on the bed, then swung his head down to check underneath. No porn mags. Expected, but still disappointing.

Ilya swept a finger over the bookshelf, which was immaculately clean, probably dusted before Ilya came. There were some hockey books, some novels that looked like required readings. Some dictionaries and encyclopedias- boring. He opened the closet to find it had been turned into a linen closet, packed with things like sleeping bags and extra blankets and sheets.

Ilya turned his attention to the desk that was under the big picture window. There wasn't much on the desk, just a lamp and a cup with pens and pencils. The drawers were where Ilya nearly rubbed his hands together like a ridiculous cartoon villain. He was delighted to find that the bottom one was full of those folders that could hold loose leaf paper. He picked one up- yellow, and printed neatly on the cover: Français, Grade 9. It held pages after pages of methodically organized homework sheets, all in chronological order with the date written in French at the top left-hand corner of the page, and *Shane Hollander* on the right. Interspersed throughout, also with the identical date formatting, were what seemed to be quizzes. 5/5. 10/10. 6/6. Ilya snickered a little at the one that said 11.5/12 because it was uncharacteristically wrinkled and crumpled unlike the others. No doubt this was a source of anguish for fourteen-year-old Shane, but it was so endearing to think about Ilya couldn't contain it anymore. He snapped a quick picture of the godforsaken quiz, and sent it to Shane. *Bad student*, he wrote with it for good measure.

Shane's reply was almost instantaneous: *WTF???*

Shane: *Mom's letting you sleep in my old room??*

Shane: *Stop snooping!*

Ilya couldn't help but let a big, idiotic smile spread. *Did you argue with teacher*, he wrote back.

The text bubble appeared with three dots, then disappeared.

Shane: *How would I remember*

And then, a moment later, *Put that back and don't look at anything else you creep*

Too late, Ilya wrote back. *I have found your porn.*

Shane: *Nice try.*

The amusing adventure of snooping through Shane's schoolwork was long forgotten once Ilya was sat across from David and Yuna at the dining table. They weren't caught in awkward silence, but Ilya felt awkward anyway. He felt like an intruder, a rando who'd just burst into their house and was now sat there. They started by discussing the gas leak, then the weather, then the drive here. Ilya ended up talking about the Centaurs for awhile, because he and this nice Canadian couple only had two things in common: hockey, and loving Shane. And Ilya sure as hell didn't want to talk about Shane when he wasn't here to dilute the conversation. So Ilya just rambled for a while about his coach, his teammates, his contract. Differences to Boston. Yuna was definitely holding back her true opinions on the Centaurs in favour of polite *mhmms* and *Oh, interesting*; it didn't take a genius to get that. Although by the end of dinner, the conversation wrapped up with Ilya and Yuna having a cordial agreement of nice sounding words that essentially meant the Centaurs were shit from a butt. Yuna kind of had a mischievous glint in her eye when she said they had a history of 'trying their best', likely with an 'and failing' omitted. Ilya had to stifle a knowing smile at that, and instead said, "I will make sure they try even harder," to which the two acknowledged. Ilya might have been their son's archrival (not really), but he knew they at least respected his skills.

Yuna stood to clear their plates, but looked pointedly at Ilya. "Do you want seconds? I don't really know how to portion for a guy your size, so it might have not been enough."

"No, no," said Ilya, standing up as well to attempt to take over dish duty. "I am very full. Thank you. And very delicious," he said, looking to David who'd done the cooking. It wasn't just to be polite, the meal was *very* good while also being balanced. Spaghetti and meatballs in a well-seasoned tomato sauce that contained a multitude of different vegetables, with roasted asparagus *and* salad on the side. Healthy, balanced, but with actual taste and form, a quality Ilya couldn't recall enjoying the last time he'd shared a meal with a Hollander. The salad was a proper Caesar salad with Parmesan and croutons, something Ilya didn't even realize he'd missed.

"Well, if you get a hankering for a midnight snack, we've got a snack drawer and Coke in the fridge," said David, walking over to the counter to pull out and showcase said snack drawer.

It was packed. Sweet, salty, crispy, crunchy, soft, chewy, anything was in there. Ilya doubted he'd take up that offer out of politeness, but he definitely considered it a bit too long.

Though Ilya had wanted to do the dishes, Yuna had insisted that guests weren't allowed to do chores, plus they had a fancy new dishwasher installed. She was hard to say no to, so Ilya retired to his room with a grateful goodnight. He was not very surprised to find the exact same brand and scent of soap and shampoo in the shower as Shane had now, as he rarely switched. He must have decided on it when he was school-aged and had kept using it ever since. Ilya smelled like Shane after his shower, and he loved that. The room smelled like Shane too, even though he hadn't lived there in years. It felt like being in his presence.

Ilya flopped down a little too hard on the small bed, causing it to creak a little. It'd be embarrassing if it broke, so he shifted a little more carefully when he turned to his side as he took out his phone, waiting for Shane to pick up the video call.

The screen filled with a freckled face framed by glasses after a few rings. They just stared at each other for a while, taking in the other's face separated by a tiny rectangle of glass, before Shane broke into a warm smile. "Hi," he said, in that gentle tone Ilya basked in.

"Hi, *moya solnyshko*," murmured Ilya back, equally as gentle and a little quieter because he didn't know how thin the walls were at this house.

"How's it going so far?"

"Good," replied Ilya, because it was good. "Dinner was very good. The shower is very good. The toilet is very good. Very strong water."

Shane rolled his eyes. "I mean with my parents."

"Good. They are nice."

"What did you guys talk about?" Shane was looking into the screen a little more intensely. His phone was propped on his desk, where it seemed he'd been in the middle of journalling or brainstorming gameplay. He was leaning over on his elbows, giving Ilya his full attention now.

"Emm," said Ilya. "Weather. Traffic. Centaurs."

Shane narrowed his eyes a little. "Nothing else?" Aha.

"Yes," Ilya drew out slowly. "Yes. We did talk about something else." He paused, trying not to smirk.

"What?" Shane pressed impatiently.

"...The detour from Heron Road."

"Ugh," said Shane, and Ilya couldn't help but laugh with endearment. "No, we did not talk about you, sweetheart." Shane's annoyance seemed to soften up with the pet name, but he was still a little petulant. "You guys really didn't mention me? Not even once?"

Ilya laughed again and shook his head against the pillow. "I'm not sure if I should be happy or sad at that," Shane grumbled. "At least no one's complaining or gossiping about me."

Ilya wanted to kiss that grumpy little frown so badly, but settled for clutching the blanket that smelled like Shane's preferred fabric softener a little higher up his body. "You worry too much, *solnyshko*. Your parents love you the most, they would never say something bad about you."

"Sure, but they could say something *embarrassing*," said Shane. "Or you could. Who knows."

Ilya was about to retort with something dirty, but somehow it felt wrong in Shane's childhood bedroom, so he kept his mouth shut. This would remain a time capsule for Shane's childhood innocence, Ilya would make sure of it no matter how horny or pent up he got. He stifled a yawn instead, and Shane took notice.

"Go to sleep," Shane said, no trace of feigned vexation anymore. "You have practice tomorrow, right?"

"Mm," replied Ilya, already feeling like he could doze off. His belly was full, the shower pressure was just right, and the covers he was situated under were so warm. The mattress was just the right firmness too, not like the one currently in his gassed up apartment that was too soft but he couldn't be bothered to return. "You sleep too."

"I will, once I finish this," Shane said, and Ilya didn't have to ask to know that 'this' was some game strategy. Hockey nerd, he wanted to say, but couldn't conjure up the English word for it in time before his eyelids drooped. He watched Shane on the screen through half-lidded eyes, not wanting to sleep and leave Shane but feeling the heaviness overtake his body.

"*Ya lyublyu tebya*," Ilya heard, muffled by transmission. He wished he could hear it right next to his ear. "*Ya tebya lyublyu*," he managed to murmur before closing his eyes.

Ilya woke up the next morning with his phone at 5% battery and his legs a little sore from bending. Still, it was one of the best sleeps he'd had since arriving in Ottawa.

After making himself a little more presentable with the help of shaving cream that was conveniently under the sink and his own razor he'd thankfully brought, Ilya made his way carefully down the stairs. Yuna was nowhere in sight, perhaps already gone off to work or to run an errand, but David was sitting at the table with his toast well buttered and a Canadian Tire sale catalogue in his hand. He was wearing a rumpled and faded Voyageurs T-shirt and blue plaid pajama pants, which he clearly had no qualms about as opposed to Ilya who'd changed into what he'd wear to leave the house in out of self consciousness.

"Morning. Coffee?" David asked, shaking out his paper and sipping at his piping hot Voyageurs mug. "We have a Nespresso, the pods are in that little basket over there. And toast on the counter. I didn't make eggs, but you can if you want. I know how much you guys love your eggs."

"Good morning," Ilya managed first before processing that set of information. Ilya wasn't sure if *you guys* referred to him and Shane, or just hockey players and athletes in general, but chose not to ask. It didn't matter anyways because he hated eating this early in the morning, and opted to follow the directions to that fancy little coffee machine. "I am okay. Just coffee. Thank you."

David nodded approvingly, and his eyes wandered back to his paper. "You have practice today, right?"

"Yes," said Ilya, "I will be at the rink until evening."

"Oh good, Yuna packed you a lunch," said David casually without breaking eye contact with his paper, like it was the most normal thing in the world.

Ilya blinked. "Sorry?" Did he hear that wrong? Was he still asleep? Did David actually say 'Yuna packed you a punch' instead, and Ilya could expect a vengeful fist to collide with his face at any moment now?

"It's on the counter, don't forget it when you leave," said David. And Ilya's eyes scoped out the kitchen until he saw the little rectangular blue and red lunch bag, and it was the thermal kind with the silver lining inside. It was a bit worn and used, clearly a product of age, but spotless other than the name in black Sharpie on the upper right corner: *SHANE HOLLANDER*. It was a little shaky, with the A slightly larger than the other letters and the Es a bit wonky, probably written by Shane himself in elementary school.

Oh. Well. That was cute as fuck.

Ilya arrived at the rink with his gym bag slung over one shoulder, and the other hand carrying that little lunch bag like a kindergartner. Perhaps Shane had really carried this in kindergarten, Ilya couldn't help but imagine and smile stupidly at the thought of. He set it in his locker, on the top shelf away from everything else. He'd look forward to it later, but for now, he had a team to train to the finals.

Ilya managed to sneak off at afternoon break time. Everyone mostly did their own things, some splitting off into lunch groups that ordered in, others with group meals arranged by the team's dietician. Ilya was glad it was not a huge group affair. Instead of eating in the athletes'

lounge with tables, he brought that little lunch bag to a spot high up in the bleachers and set it in front of him.

Ilya expected a banana and a ham sandwich. Maybe two because he was a big guy with a big appetite. What he didn't expect was a whole meal consisting of: soup, kept warm in a thermos, salad left over from last night, a large oval container with a multitude of things he couldn't really identify, another container with sliced apples, and a pack of Oreos. *And* a spoon, chopsticks, and a fork that had probably been added just in case. Upon closer inspection, Ilya actually could identify what was in the oval container, it was just that it was arranged in a way he'd never really seen before. There was rice, packed into several triangles and held together by seaweed with what seemed to be smoked salmon in them; small sausages, except they were cut in a way that they made them resemble little octopi, a whole bunch of cut up fresh vegetables, and the spaghetti and meatballs except the noodles were twirled up neatly into bite sized portions. Ilya was unsure where to start. He'd never had rice for lunch, first of all, let alone a lunchbox this elaborate. He almost expected a note to be in there.

Ilya arranged all the different containers neatly and set the lunch bag they'd been contained in at the back, ensuring it was still visible in the picture he sent to Shane. He sent a heart, too.

Shane: *Wow*

Shane: *That's my lunch pack from like Grade 1*

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Ilya: <3

Shane: *Stop spamming*

Ilya: <3

Glad you're happy, came Shane's reply a little later, after Ilya was already halfway done. It occurred to him, belatedly, that nobody had really made him a packed lunch before. They had the *stolovaya* at school, so there really was no packing lunch culture like in Canada.

If there was, though, Ilya considered thoughtfully as he chewed the apple slices, his mother would have done so, like she cooked dinner every night even if his father was never home to partake. She would have done so even if her mind, body and soul were in an abyss. She put

her children first, until she no longer could. Ilya's heart clenched a little, and he shut that train of thought down as quickly as possible.

He won every practice match that afternoon and evening- he would have anyway, but he did so with an attitude and vigor he'd never exhibited before in practice rounds. Eating a full, hearty lunch rather than his usual bland cafeteria sandwich and Gatorade probably had something to do with it.

Ilya got back after dinnertime. It was Friday night, and he'd gotten a beer with Hayes and Bood after practice. If he was honest, he really had just wanted to get home- well, not home, but back to the Hollanders' house- as quickly as possible, but he knew better than to turn down an invite when team bonding was especially critical.

Ilya rung the doorbell, hoping they weren't in bed already. It was barely nine, but who knew? Thankfully, David answered the door relatively quickly, still dressed in what seemed to be his office attire. "Oops," he said as soon as he opened the door. "I was supposed to give you the spare key this morning and I totally forgot! Sorry."

"Is okay," reassured Ilya quickly, removing his shoes and placing them in that same neat spot by the doormat outside, as he'd done yesterday.

"Oh, sorry, you can put your shoes inside," said David, gesturing to the shoe rack that lined the wall in the foyer. David used the word *sorry* a lot, Ilya had noticed, as did many of his more well-mannered teammates, almost like an interjective word like *um*. Ilya had heard Canadians had this vocabulary quirk, but he'd never noticed with Shane. At least, not when Shane was interacting with him. That was a good thing, Ilya decided.

Yuna was pouring herself a glass of red wine when Ilya walked into the kitchen. A replay broadcast of a game was on- Oilers vs Canucks, from last year. "Hey," she greeted. "How was practice?"

"Good," answered Ilya a little stiffly. "Fun." *Fun?* Really?

"Have you eaten dinner yet?"

"Uhm," said Ilya, even though he hadn't. Beer and fries couldn't really be considered dinner, could it? He was hungry, but he didn't really want to inconvenience Yuna and David. The dishwasher was running already.

"We saved you a plate," said Yuna, settling down at the table with her wine. She picked up the remote to the TV that was visible from the dining room, and turned up the volume to hear

the commentary. "Have some wine, too."

Ilya was really just about to decline when his stomach growled. Louder than the TV. He could almost physically feel his ears turn pink, as much as he wanted to deny that Russians blushed. To his horror, both Yuna and David laughed lightheartedly, or at least he assumed it was. David brought over a plate and unwrapped the plastic wrap on it. Steak bites and potatoes! The embarrassment was quickly forgotten.

Yuna sipped her wine, eyes not leaving the game. "I'll pack more for your lunch next time, then," she said, traces of amusement still left in her voice.

"No, no," said Ilya quickly, "I ate very well." And remembering he was still carrying Shane's lunch bag in his hand, he continued, "Thank you very much."

Yuna waved a dismissive hand. "It's no problem. I pack my own lunch in the morning anyway."

David brought his own wine and another glass to the table, wordlessly sliding it in front of Ilya along with a fork, gesturing to the plate while sipping his own glass. Ilya obliged before his stomach made another embarrassing rumble and sat down. Even though the dish wasn't hot anymore, it still somehow tasted better than any fancy steak Ilya had had in Boston's upper end restaurants. It melted in his mouth, and the potatoes were generously buttery. He was so satisfied with this meal, in fact, that he couldn't stop himself from blurting out at some point: "Did you always pack Shane's lunch? In school?"

If Yuna was surprised by the sudden question, she didn't show it. She turned her attention away from the game, but with an air of nonchalance. "Hmm? Oh, yeah. He pretty much only rotated, like, five different foods, so it wasn't hard." She laughed. "They had a cafeteria in secondary school, but he refused to eat anything from it, so that bag you used today, it had been used for, what, thirteen years straight? Still in pretty good condition for that."

Ilya could imagine why. Shane was probably methodological in the way he packed his school bag before leaving school, same as he was with his gear now. He definitely wasn't swinging his stuff all around, hitting classmates with his backpack as Ilya had sometimes seen while passing by the elementary school near his apartment on a jog.

"I didn't really realize it until this morning, but I kind of missed packing lunch for a kid." A kid. Ilya was well into his twenties, thirties a looming shadow, and he'd lived alone for more than a decade. Still, he felt a little warm at being considered a child, something he couldn't quite explain as to why, and he would never admit it out loud. Maybe it was the wine.

Their attention turned back to the game when it was picking up, and the announcers' voices became more frenzied. The Oilers were close to scoring, picking up the puck and weaving it around the blue jersied Canucks. McCallan swung around, puck aligned perfectly with his body, and then-

Yuna and Ilya let out a simultaneous disappointed groan. "Oh, come on," complained Yuna. "He had it. It was right there, in front him." She tsked. "I will never understand why he was drafted instead of Kowalski. Nice guy, but he's too hesitant."

Ilya murmured an agreement. "He is a big guy. That is the only reason."

"Yeah, but there's lots of *big guys* that are actually *good*," Yuna criticized. Ilya nearly held his breath, waiting for Yuna to possibly mention him, but the moment never came, so he took chance into his own hands. "Like me," he said, hoping he was able to convey the jokiness and less arrogance. Though it was true, though, wasn't it?

Yuna scoffed, but not for the reason Ilya expected. "Please," she bantered, "You're tall for a normal person, sure, but come on. McCallan's, like, six-five."

"I am six-five," Ilya protested, even though he definitely knew it wasn't true. Yuna knew it too, and she laughed unabashedly. "You wish, Rozanov. If you're six five then David's six feet."

For some reason, Ilya liked the way Yuna said *Rozanov* here. It was oddly warm, almost like a term of endearment.

"Hey," David chirped. "I'm *almost* six feet. With high heels on."

And Ilya laughed extra at that because he swore he had heard Shane make the same argument before.

Ilya fell asleep with Shane on video call again, and awoke on Saturday with his legs bent up the wall because the bed was simply too short for him. Still, it felt nice. Maybe because the morning light in this room was so good, even better than his high rise. Maybe because he'd had good wine last night and laughed more than he had since coming to Ottawa. Maybe because he could hear shuffling and muted conversation downstairs, a pleasant contrast to the silence of his empty apartment.

Ilya was accosted by Yuna as soon as he stepped out of the bathroom. She was carrying a large white basket full of crumpled clothes. "Give me your laundry," she told Ilya instead of asking. "You haven't just been putting it all with your clean clothes in your bag, right? You've been using that basket in the room?"

"Uh," said Ilya, because he hadn't. He'd just been keeping his dirty clothes on a little mound on the floor. "I-"

"Come on, I'm gonna do the laundry soon," she said, and Ilya obeyed by picking up that pile and dropping it in the basket before realizing, belatedly and mortifyingly, that Yuna was going to see his underwear. It was too late, though, because it had been done and she'd

already started down the stairs. Ilya moved to pick up the basket from her to carry it, but got swatted away quickly.

"David made pancakes," she said, "Go eat before it gets cold." And she was already down the stairs and disappeared into the laundry room before Ilya could either help or save his underwear from being viewed.

They were blueberry pancakes. There was scrambled eggs and turkey sausage on the side, too. Ilya would have savoured the extravagant breakfast, but he ate at record speed and rushed to gather and wash the dishes before David could. He had to do something around here instead of eat the Hollanders' food and use their hot water.

David didn't stop Ilya, but told him thanks. When Yuna walked in, he set down the Costco coupon book he'd been perusing, telling her, "Grass is getting long. I'm gonna go cut it."

Ilya's head snapped up from where he'd been drying the dishes. "I will do it. I will cut."

He'd never used a lawn mower in his life, as lawns weren't really a common occurrence in Russia, but he'd seen people do it all the time since coming to North America. It seemed simple enough.

"Oh, you don't have to do that," said David.

"No, I will," insisted Ilya. "Is good exercise." He wanted to, genuinely, not out of obligation.

David chuckled and stood, seemingly understanding Ilya's feelings and not arguing further. "Sure then. Thanks, bud. I'll show you where the lawn mower is."

After a brief operating tutorial, David left Ilya to his own devices. It wasn't hard when one was an athlete, but the Hollanders' backyard was quite large, so it took Ilya a while to move on to the front lawn. By then, the sun was peeking out from behind the clouds, not so bright that it was uncomfortable but a nice backdrop. As Ilya pushed the lawn mower as straight as possible down the grass, he smile back politely to passing dog walkers and joggers. Sometimes they'd say good morning, and he'd say it back. Suburban Canadians, he'd come to discover, loved to greet random strangers.

At one point, as Ilya was about to finish up, a middle-aged couple on a morning walk passed by, eyeing him a little too much. Ilya nodded politely, and assumed they were on their way when his focus went back to his work. Just had he'd reached the end of the lawn close to the sidewalk and switched off the lawnmower to check the blade, he became acutely aware of two pairs of footsteps coming his way.

"Good morning," the man said. Was Ilya about to be recognized? Were they neighbours, or did they not know this was the Hollanders' house? Either way, Ilya was kind of apprehensive of this random couple knowing that Ilya Rozanov was mowing the lawn of Shane Hollander's parents' home. "Good morning," Ilya replied.

"Perfect day for mowing the lawn, hey?" the woman said. "Yes," said Ilya. "Is nice. Sunny." He was a master of North American small talk at this point.

"David must be really busy these days, huh," said the man, more so addressing his wife than Ilya. "Don't think I've ever seen him hire someone for yard work."

"Oh, I am not-" said Ilya, and then immediately regretted it and zipped his mouth shut. They were clearly neighbours and acquaintances of the Hollanders, but perhaps didn't watch hockey enough to recognize Ilya. He should let them believe he was an employee, because what was the alternative? What would he even refer to himself as in relation to the Hollanders without giving it all away?

The couple looked at Ilya expectantly after his interjection, obviously wondering what he was going to say. When he didn't, the man continued, "You seem like a fit guy, you could probably do, like, what, fifty of these a day, eh?" And laughed.

"Ha ha," said Ilya. "Yes. Ha ha."

"Have a good day," the woman said as the couple retreated. "You too, goodbye," Ilya said after them.

Jesus Christ.

Ilya's Saturday passed by uneventfully after that. He ended up telling David and Yuna about the neighbourly encounter, to which they'd both laughed way more boisterously than the situation called for.

"I'm gonna be getting some texts very soon from the ladies on the block about our handsome young Russian landscaper," David chuckled. "I'm surprised Linda hasn't heard the news and called me yet."

"Oh my god, yes," exclaimed Yuna. "She's a such a menace. If she had been the one to see Ilya she'd probably pretend to faint in front of him."

To which Ilya had sipped his glass of water a little awkwardly and a little happily. He knew he was conventionally attractive, but to hear it acknowledged by any Hollander always made his ears heat up a little.

Ilya texted Shane about the incident too, and he had found it amusing as well, thankfully. It was probably a well-deserved distraction from the boring, inane "business" the league had Shane attending to this weekend. Speaking of which, as a player on equal footing, the league had never requested Ilya to do these obligations. Strange, but welcome.

Ilya came back from a jog to find that his laundry had been folded up and placed on his bed. His boxers had been stacked neatly on the top of the pile without a care in the world. It should have made him embarrassed, but for some reason, it wasn't really anymore. Really, he only felt grateful.

After helping with dinner, washing the dishes again, and playing a few rounds of wine-fueled Scrabble that Ilya lost, Saturday came and went. Ilya jogged with David on Sunday, helped Yuna carry the groceries from the car, and went to bed again with his belly full. On Monday, Shane's lunch bag awaited him on the counter again, packed fuller than it had been the last time. The weekdays ticked through with each morning and evening more comfortable than the last. Yuna, Ilya picked up, was a little more open than she had been before, especially when they watched hockey together. She touted, complained, rolled her eyes at the screen and at Ilya's quips, but the corner of her eyes were always crinkled with the faint beginnings of a smile. Ilya, too, though he hadn't quite consciously noted it, had begun to loosen up from his cardboard cutout self as the days went by. Conversations turned loud, even playfully argumentative, thank-yous less stiff and more warm. By Wednesday evening, Ilya was almost beginning to feel disappointed as he waited for the building manager's inevitable all clear text that he knew would come soon.

Ilya couldn't stay with the Hollanders forever, he knew that. But it'd just been so long, really, since he'd woken up and gone into the kitchen to the presence of people that, he hoped at this point, didn't dislike him. He almost checked his texts with despair, dreading driving home alone and back to his empty, cold apartment.

Like he had, back in Russia. Like he had, since the day his mother died and he'd gone home to his father and brother, but ultimately, no one.

Ilya was a little too spoiled after only a few days. Spoiled by Yuna's caringly packed lunches, by David who, when he'd ask Ilya this and that with genuine attention, Ilya couldn't help but think of his own father who didn't even know Ilya's birth year, even before the Alzheimer's. He wondered, on Wednesday night after saying goodnight to Shane through the phone, how he'd cope with the cold tomorrow.

Ilya was on the treadmill at the training centre on Thursday when the building manager sent him a text. *Sorry*, it read. *Few more days delay*. Ilya tried not to be too happy. He bit his cheek to keep from smiling. But he was so goddamn happy that it scared him.

The Hollanders took the news well- rather, there wasn't much of a reaction, other than *of course you can stay a few more days*.

Ilya knew he was overstaying, no matter how much they insisted he wasn't. But he couldn't help but want to stay in the fantasy a little longer, like grasping at the edges of a dream on the precipice of waking up.

One night, Yuna had brought in a pile of photo albums out of the blue. The three of them sat on the couch for probably more than an hour, with Ilya just flipping through pages and pages of Shane's pictures. There was probably one for every year of his life until adulthood, filled to the brim with birthdays, rink shots, road trips, tournaments. At some point, David dug up a DVD he'd burned of a tournament in 2004, shot on an old Sony camcorder. Thirteen-year-old Shane's voice was on the border between squeaky and scratchy, and he talked as awkwardly to his dad behind the camera as he did unrehearsed to unexpected reporters now.

Ilya wondered what he himself sounded like at that age. He couldn't recall. He barely had any pictures of him taken, let alone recordings.

Ilya snuck a look at Yuna's and David's faces illuminated by the screen and reminiscing their son's childhood, reminiscing the excitement and buildup of the tournament. Shane had really grown up like this, Ilya realized. Loved. And that made Ilya want to cry a little for a reason he couldn't quite grasp yet.

Ilya helped Yuna weed the front yard late Saturday afternoon. He tried to look out for any potential Lindas, but managed to evade her, it seemed. Shane was supposed to be driving in from Montreal, but had been caught up in a road closure. Ilya sent him a selfie of himself wearing a gardening hat that was way too small for his head and posed with his gardening gloves visible. *I am having fun*, he wrote, knowing Shane's car's Bluetooth would read the message out loud to him. He wasn't expecting any response, because he knew Shane kept eyes and attention on the road always as directed by the rule book. "Thanks, sweetie," Yuna said to Ilya after they were done, and it made his stomach flip flop. In a good way, definitely, but also in a way he wasn't quite sure about.

When the sound of a car pulling up on the driveway could be heard, the sky was beginning to glow a dusky pink, and Ilya was in the middle of chopping onions next to David, who was stirring the pot on the stove. He heard Yuna greeting Shane at the door with a warm "Hey, you," and looked up from his chopping board.

It'd honestly only been a little over two weeks since Ilya had seen Shane, but he felt uncharacteristically shy all of a sudden when they made eye contact. No semblance of the hungry passion the two usually had when meeting in an empty apartment. Ilya wiped his

hands on a kitchen towel and walked over to press a kiss to Shane's cheek, and Shane did the same to him.

"I am helping make dinner," said Ilya. Shane's eyebrows quirked up a little. "I see that," he replied.

After dinner, of which Ilya was very happy when Shane actually ate a little of his cooking and complimented it, David and Yuna retired early for the night, possible to give the two more time alone which Ilya was grateful for.

Ilya let Shane shower first while he sat at Shane's desk by the window, staring a little absentmindedly at the streaks of pink in the twilighting sky. Ilya felt so odd today, he couldn't explain why. He was happy, probably the happiest he'd been since coming to Ottawa, but he just couldn't explain why his insides were tugging a little. He'd felt a lot like that, the past few days.

Shane came back into the room with his hair dripping and a towel around his neck. He was wearing Ilya's Centaurs T-shirt, which Ilya at least found amusing enough to have the corners of his mouth twitch. Shane looked down at the logo on his chest. "They need hire a better graphic designer."

Ilya couldn't agree more. He thought about it while he showered with Shane's soap and shampoo, what the look on Shane's face would be like when they faced off in the season and Ilya would carry the Centaurs to a win. He hoped it would be one of shock, awe, and turn-on.

When Ilya got back after meticulously drying his hair- he had to, or the curls would frizz- Shane had already put a foam mattress on the floor, makeshift bed all set up. He lay casually on his side with his glasses on, scrolling through one of those hockey commentary blogs. "Noo," Ilya immediately moaned in protest when he saw the mattress.

Shane looked up at him with disdain. "What, 'no'? There's not enough room for both of us on that bed."

"Then I will sleep here," said Ilya, diving down to lie next to Shane on the mattress. He swung his arm over Shane's side and pressed his face into the back of Shane's neck, settling himself closer. They used the same soap, same laundry detergent, but somehow Shane still smelled different. Sweeter.

Shane put his phone down and shifted to his other side so the two of them were face to face. Ilya lifted his hand and rubbed Shane's temple with his thumb sleepily, and Shane slow blinked at him. Like a cat, Ilya thought fondly.

"How was it, this past week?" Shane asked, even though Ilya had been giving him daily updates. Ilya knew what he meant, though. He wanted to know if his mother still thought Ilya Rozanov was an asshat who terrorized her son on the ice. Surely, that wasn't the case anymore, Ilya could say that much. Ilya hoped Yuna and David liked him, though. He hoped Yuna's laughs at his jokes were genuine, he hoped David asking what flavour of ice cream he liked the best was an invitation. He hoped he made a good impression.

"I think," Ilya said slowly, "Your mother doesn't hate me anymore."

The look on Shane's face was one of bewilderment. "Huh? Did you really think that she ever hated you? She never did, you know. I mean, maybe a little bit, unseriously, before she found out about us. But even then, that was because she's only seen those clips of you on TV. She didn't know the real you. She knows now. She's been texting me all week, you know."

Oh. "Really?" asked Ilya. He hadn't been expecting that. "Yeah," said Shane. "She's been saying you're actually really sweet. And nothing like how you are on the ice. And she's happy her and my dad got to know you better this week. And she hopes you'll come stay again."

"Oh." Ilya was getting that feeling in his heart again. Happy, but like there was a hand squeezing and wringing it.

"It's cute," Shane murmured into Ilya's chest. Ilya was about to protest, but settled on enjoying the moment instead, letting the silence wash over them. He felt the warmed metal of the cross sliding into his collarbone. They stayed like that for a while, as the late summer breeze blew the curtains of the window.

"I miss my mother," Ilya whispered into Shane's hair. It felt good to give that weight in his chest a name.

Shane didn't say anything in response. He didn't have to. His arm reached over Ilya and onto his back, where it stayed throughout the night.



When Shane turned the corner into the neighbourhood on the afternoon of December the twenty-fourth, a shiny black Porsche could be seen conspicuously parked in Shane's rightful spot on the curb in front of the yard. Shane sighed, and maneuvered to park across the street.

Shane knew Ilya had grown close to his parents these past few months, as evidenced by random texts Shane would receive from Ilya almost every week of Scrabble boards, brunch, cafe meetups, wine glasses, Shane's face at games broadcasted on the house's TV screen. He loved it. He loved that his favourite people in the world loved each other. He loved that his mother no longer thought of Ilya Rozanov as just a cocky little shit, but a son-in-law as well. He loved that Ilya, who perhaps hadn't been properly loved by a parent since he was twelve years old, was getting the attention he deserved.

Shane had yet to see for himself the extent of this in-law relationship after these few months of being away. He just hoped they were at least close enough now to skip all the inane small talk.

What Shane hadn't expected was to walk into his own house only to be immediately shushed by both Yuna and David at the same time. The TV was on, but it was droning quietly in the background with the volume on low. Yuna looked over at Shane from the couch, and the mop of curly dark blond hair on her shoulder shifted a little, making an unconsciously unhappy sound at the intrusive noise of Shane coming in. Yuna patted it, as if to tell the person it belonged to to go back to sleep.

Shane walked to the side of the sofa to check with his own eyes, and sure enough, Ilya was looking very snugly indeed with his whole body taking up the couch and head resting on Yuna's shoulder, almost in the crook of her neck. A Voyageurs logo blanket was tucked up to his chin. He was nearly drooling, and Shane watched in disgust as Yuna noticed and wiped at the corner of his mouth like she'd known him since he was a baby. Ilya, eyes still closed, murmured something unintelligible, possibly in Russian. "Shh," said Yuna, patting his shoulder over the blanket like he was a toddler and not a six-foot-three grown man. "Sleep a little more."

"He fell asleep after shovelling the sidewalk," whispered David from the armchair. Um, did he mean that tiny little section in front of their house that Shane used to shovel every winter throughout high school, spending only what, ten minutes?!

"That's-" Shane sputtered, and got another forceful "*Shhhh!*" in response.

Oh God. Shane's parents had spoiled Ilya rotten, hadn't they.

End Notes

mr tierney better put that chicken parm cookies and cream ice cream scene in s2 or i'll be penning a very strongly worded letter to him

Works inspired by this one

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