

Hockey Moms Weekend

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Hockey Moms Weekend

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Summary

He was used to being without her.

The pain never went away but the sting became manageable; something he could tuck away and avoid ever thinking about.

Except when he couldn't.

Like during Hockey Moms Weekend.

Ilya's mother had died when he was twelve. By the time he was truly an orphan, Ilya had spent most of his life without her than he had with her in it.

He was used to being without her.

The pain never went away but the sting became manageable; something he could tuck away and avoid ever thinking about.

Except when he couldn't.

Like during Hockey Moms Weekend.

It was a tradition across the league where the players' mothers came for the weekend, spending time with the team for a brunch, a skate and some fun activities, and then traveling with the team to cheer them on at a game. It was fun! Everyone loved it! It was a way to appreciate the women in their lives who sat in the cold to watch them play and drove them to practice early in the morning and nursed their many bumps and bruises along the way.

Not that Ilya would know.

It wasn't his first time, of course. His whole childhood he had gotten used to not looking up. Not as his classmates cheered at the sight of their mothers picking them up from school. Not as a child when he had gotten hurt and wanted someone to comfort him like other children got when they skinned their knees. Not as his teammates turned into babies the moment they scored their first professional goals and saw their mothers in the crowds or heard their proud voices over the phones.

No.

Ilya had trained himself. He had gotten used to keeping his eyes fixed on what was in his hands and Ilya had always made sure there was something in his hands. A phone, a puck, tape. Something in his hands to keep him occupied so he didn't have to listen to what he never had.

In Boston it had been his gear and then his phone, texting *Jane* and wondering if Shane turned into the same gushy child the rest of the players in the league got the moment their mothers stepped into the locker room with skates in their hands.

His rookie year, the social media girl had admitted that she had made sure her team of interns knew not to pester Ilya that weekend for content. Her name had been Eliza and she had been kind. She hadn't made a big thing of it. Just quiet gave Ilya some peace when he'd been dreading it for weeks.

Ilya had made a fool of himself eating disgusting American snacks for a video for her to make up for the thoughtful gesture.

But Ilya couldn't hide away anymore.

Not now that he was in Ottawa.

For one, he was the captain and that came with a certain level of expectations. He was meant to set an example. Some people didn't know how lucky they were to have mothers who embarrassed them. For another, his new team was annoyingly perceptive of his mood. In Boston, his teammates knew when to avoid him and not push for more. Ilya never told them and no one ever asked and he'd liked it this way. But the Centaurs were a different team. They cared about him and he loved them more than he thought himself capable of loving a group of people.

The Centaurs were practically vibrating with excitement as the weekend steadily approached and Ilya didn't want to ruin it.

So, he put on a smile and tried not to wince at the sharp pain bursting behind his ribs as he forced himself to watch the first wave of mothers that came through the door for the team brunch.

Wyatt and Evan waved down their mothers as if they couldn't see them from ten feet away. Nick Chouinard took his mother's luggage while playfully teasing her about over packing. Bood picked his mother off her feet in a hug that made even Ilya's bones ache just watching.

Each of them, elite athletes in their primes who had knocked out a few teeth and had mouths that could make even him blush sometimes.

But they were all just big softies at heart.

Ilya tried to stay out of his own head.

He played his part. He stood up and greeted every one of their guests, charming and assuring them that yes, *their darling boys absolutely did not get up into any trouble at all in the hotel rooms. They were perfectly good, well behaved angels who were always in bed on time and never in threat of being arrested ever.*

Each and every one of them cooed and awed over him until their sons got jealous and then Ilya made his excuses to find a quiet corner to nurse his headache and the ache he couldn't shake from his lungs that made it hard to breathe.

The room was a labor of love. The conference room had a wall of windows that looked out over the skyline of Ottawa where snow was trickling from some soft grey clouds in the sky. Several round tables were draped in table clothes with the team colors. Strings of fairy lights had been wrapped around center pieces of beautiful flower arrangements of white roses and sprigs of lavender. Several of the mothers had made a stop at the mimosa bar where freshly squeezed orange juice was waiting next to bottles of champagne and garnishes of raspberries and cranberries and strawberries and pretty much any berry catering could get their hands on. Brunch was a relaxed affair with a buffet of eggs, waffles, bacon, sausage, steamed asparagus with hollandaise sauce, and more fruit arranged in the shape of a peacock. There was an entire table dedicated to chocolate sweets and cheese. Music was playing softly in the background and Harris had set up a photo booth where Ilya was sure many of the mothers would be dragging their sons after a few more mimosas.

Ilya would make sure of it. Harris worked hard on that balloon arch. They needed to appreciate it.

Overall the ambiance was nice. Relaxed. Cute.

Painful.

But that was Ilya's problem. Nobody else's so he stayed out of the way and made sure no one was left behind. Each of the mothers had been gifted a sweater with the names and numbers that matched their players so it was easy to make a head count until everyone arrived.

It could've been worse, he supposed. There was a weekend for fathers too but that was less merry and more... tense. Not always bad but Ilya didn't need to explain the complicated feelings men had when it came to fathers who expected great things from their sons. There was always one who couldn't put aside his resentment and bitterness that his glory days were done and another who forgot he couldn't drink like he was twenty-two anymore. His father never came to that weekend either. Ilya never invited him and his father never offered.

Ilya shook his head and smiled at Hayes' mother as she passed him.

No, he wouldn't get in his head. He had a whole weekend he needed to be present for and he couldn't drift away in the memories after one brunch. There was the family skate and then the bus ride and then the game. He had to stay focused.

He was used to it. She had been gone longer than she had been in his life and he was used to it. He'd celebrated the thirteenth year of the anniversary of her death drunk on good vodka and trying to numb the pain.

Ilya sucked in a breath through his nose and scanned the room to make sure everyone had gotten something to eat before he stood.

He wasn't particularly hungry but he could practically hear Shane's disappointed voice in his head. It was a very cute voice, all stern and exasperated. He would've been very displeased with Ilya if he knew he'd skipped a meal and then skated even if practice wasn't going to be particularly taxing. Boring and cute.

He wished he could call him.

Shane's flight had been delayed after nearly three weeks of being on the road which meant it had been too late for him to drive back to Ottawa to see him. Ilya understood. It was better Shane got sleep.

But Ilya missed him. Maybe the ache wouldn't hurt as much if he had gotten to wake up beside him.

Ilya filled his plate with a little of everything because even though it would taste like ash on his tongue, he couldn't say no to eggs Benedict. Even if he knew Shane would somehow find a way to disapprove of—

"Sorry I'm late! Rolex would not let me off the phone."

Ilya froze..

He knew that voice.

But it was wrong.

Ice gripped his chest and froze his lungs in a blizzard beneath his ribcage.

No.

No, he couldn't.

Not right now.

Not when he was feeling so raw.

Not when he finally knew what it was like to have a family.

He couldn't go throughout a weekend mourning his mother and pretend too.

It was too much.

"Yuna!" Ilya didn't know who it was that recognized her. Not over the ringing in his ears as he scrambled to put back on his mask.

Ilya wanted to shake the feeling away, fling his fingers out and roll back his shoulders until it disappeared from his skin and made it easier to bury but the plate was in his hands and he had nowhere to put it.

He settled for biting his cheek and leaned into the pain, stretching as much of a smile in his face as he could muster as he turned.

Yuna was as beautiful as the last time he'd seen her. It had been dinner at her home where she and David had fed him salmon and vegetables with a cream sauce Shane would've disapproved of and cookies he would've pretended he didn't want. They'd laughed and shared stories and called Shane to wish him luck before watching his game on TV. Her long dark hair was curled over her shoulders with two diamond studded earrings as her only real extravagance to her otherwise natural elegance. She was in dark skinny jeans with boots that only accentuated her height and a sweater in...

Ilya frowned at the colors of her sweater.

Black and red.

"I didn't think I'd be seeing you here," Diane, Wellsy's mother, said as she leaned in to share a kiss on the cheek with Yuna. Yuna embraced her warmly and let herself be inspected when Diane leaned back to take her in. "And in enemy colors no less!"

"Take a good look," Yuna said, holding her arms out. "After this weekend I'm back to my red and blue. But for now?"

She gave a small spin for the group surrounding them.

Ilya's heart punched against his chest.

It punched hard enough to bruise and pounded against his sternum like it wanted to break free as if he'd done nothing but bag skates for the last hour.

Because on the back of Yuna's sweater was his number: 81.

But that wasn't...

That couldn't....

That was impossible.

Except above his number was his name, Rozanov, and Yuna was there, smiling as if she knew exactly what she was wearing; as if it wasn't a mistake or a dream.

"This weekend I'm just a mom," Yuna said with a wave of her hand before her eyes narrowed and she pointed at the players around her. "Until Shane gets a goal then I'm a fan as a very close second."

Everyone laughed and no one was questioning a thing even though it didn't make sense. None of it made sense because—

"But you're not my mother." Ilya blurted out only to realize too late that the translation and the cadence of the English words was too flat to be considered anything but rude. Everyone stopped laughing then and the weight of what was happening was threatening to suffocate him as they stared at him.

The poor little boy with no mother.

Ilya winced. "Hollander—"

Yuna stepped forward and smacked him on the shoulder with a knowing smile, her delicate hand squeezing the tension his muscles as she swooped in to save him from his blundering. "Sorry Rozanov but you became an honorary Hollander after camp this summer. You have what's called a bonus mom now. Seriously, have you ladies heard what our boys have done with the Irina Foundation. They..."

Ilya didn't hear the rest of what they were saying. Too much was happening with too many thoughts and questions racing through his head for his mind to be able to translate into English. But his eyes were burning and he was still holding a plate of cold eggs and Yuna was talking about him, bragging about him, as if he was her own. She wore his number and laid claim to him in front of his team and in pictures like it was nothing.

He didn't understand what was happening or how it all worked but it... It felt... nice.

It felt good in his chest. Warm. It felt warm to be included. To be thought of.

Yuna somehow managed to steer the ship so that everyone's curiosity had been somewhat appeased before she was moving him back to refresh his plate.

"Your breakfast is going to be cold."

"Yuna..." Ilya tried because as warm as his chest was, the feeling of Yuna being there for him defrosting the winter that had taken up his insides, he was still painfully aware of the great divide between himself and the person that mattered the most to him.

People would ask questions. People were *already* asking questions! If Shane—

But Yuna simply helped herself to her own plate full of asparagus and scrambled eggs and two crispy slices of bacon before she made a face at the mimosa table. She shot him an excited glance before she shimmed her way over to pick up a flute.

Ilya tsked his tongue against his teeth as he chased after her.

"Yuna." He tried again, keeping his voice low so that only she could hear him. "You cannot be here."

"Sure, I can!" Yuna smiled up at him as she plotted a ripe strawberry into her mimosa. "I've cleared my whole weekend for this."

Ilya didn't know what had gotten into the woman but it wasn't sense. Shane was going to lose his mind when he found out and as much as he loved riling his boyfriend up, he really didn't want to do it when he could avoid it.

Something of his anguish must have shown on his face because Yuna's smile softened. Her eyes went serious but not unkind as she stepped just so that only Ilya could hear her.

"If you don't want me here, I'll go," she said simply and the thought of being left made the ache in Ilya's chest return tenfold.

Ilya swallowed as he shook his head.

"It's not..." Ilya tried before his throat tightened. He cleared his throat with a cough once then twice and snuck a glance around the room to make sure no one was listening before he said the only thing he could. "Shane."

"He knows," Yuna said, her long hair spilling over her shoulder as she tipped her head. Relief sucker punched into Ilya's chest and forced an exhale from his lips before he even realized he'd been holding his breath. "Even if he didn't, I would've been here anyway. You're part of the family now, Ilya."

His mother had been dead since he was twelve. His father had been dead for a little over a year and truly gone for almost seven years when the man he knew, bitter and cruel as he was, disappeared to a disease no one could fight.

Ilya hadn't been a part of a family in years.

He'd gotten used to it. He'd gotten used to being alone.

But there was Yuna, in his jersey, and it was almost too much to bear.

"I know it's not the same as having your mom. But it'd be my honor to step in her shoes this weekend if you'd let me," Yuna said like it was so simple.

Fuck. The burning behind his eyes shot up the back of his throat and nearly threatened to undo him right then and there.

His mother would've liked Yuna, he thought.

Ilya clenched his jaw to keep his chin from trembling.

"You'd do this... for me?" Ilya asked. When Yuna nodded, Ilya had to push past the tightness coiling in his chest and ask, "Why?"

"Because that's what moms do," Yuna said and Ilya didn't know that he broke a little until suddenly she was pulling him down and wrapping her arms around him.

"I wished she was here." Ilya confessed in Russian, quiet in the shelter of Yuna's shoulder.

Yuna squeezed him tighter and said, "I know."

Ilya was not playing it cool but he didn't care. No one bothered them and it felt like an exposed nerve knowing that everyone probably guessed why Ilya was having a hard time processing being included. But he *was* included. After so many years, he would finally get to be included and it was a feeling that he could only describe like flying he thought as he pulled away, using his arm to wipe his face.

"So I take it that's a yes?" Yuna prodded and Ilya didn't realize until his face hurt that he was smiling.

"Yes," he said, his accent thick with emotion. "I'd be honored."

"Good then. That's settled," Yuna said as she turned to scan the room. "Now let's go take some embarrassing photos with the balloon arch. Shane never lets me drag him to the photo booth."

Ilya learned very quickly why. There wasn't a prop Yuna didn't like.

But Ilya didn't complain. He saved every copy Harris sent him after the weekend was over and got one framed for his mantle. Maybe it was embarrassing but he had a lifetime without memories. Ilya just wanted to hold onto the ones he was making now.

Because he spent a most of his life without a family but maybe, just maybe, the rest of his life would be with one.

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