

bruises on his knuckles, honey on his lips

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by [yu_gin](#)

Summary

At first, Yuna thought she saw a ghost. When Rozanov appeared next to her son, at first she didn't recognize him. She had seen his picture on tv or on tabloids countless times, so it was not like she didn't know what he looked like, but in those ten years the antagonism between him and her son had grown so much that he resembled, in her mind, a mythological creature. It was like facing a folkloristic monster that you had seen in books and never thought could actually exist.

But there he is, standing still behind Shane, wearing a Boston's t-shirt – the audacity! – his hands crossed in the front like a young scholar waiting for the teacher to judge his polished uniform, in complete silence, while Shane is mumbling some sort of explanation.

And then Shane says: “This is Ilya.”

~ * ~

Yuna and David had known about Ilya Rozanov since he first crossed their son's path. But after that day at the cottage, they discover a whole new aspect behind the mask that Ilya has worn for all those years.

Notes

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

At first, Yuna thought she saw a ghost. When Rozanov appeared next to her son, at first she didn't recognize him. She had seen his picture on tv or on tabloids countless times, so it was not like she didn't know what he looked like, but in those eight years the antagonism between him and her son had grown so much that he resembled, in her mind, a mythological creature. It was like facing a folkloristic monster that you had seen in books and never thought could actually exist.

But there he is, standing still behind Shane, wearing a Boston's t-shirt – the audacity! – his hands crossed in the front like a young scholar waiting for the teacher to judge his polished uniform, in complete silence, while Shane is mumbling some sort of explanation.

He also remains silent while Shane proceeds to confess that he is gay – not that she is that surprised, she and David had already discussed that possibility. She is not surprised by Shane's confession. She is more puzzled by Rozanov's presence.

And then Shane says: "This is Ilya."

Of course he didn't need to introduce him, they know very well who he is, but it is the way Shane introduces him: Ilya. Not Rozanov, not the Russian bastard, not Boston's nightmare. No. Just Ilya.

From then on, she becomes more and more confused. Every new piece of information shatters her world in a way she didn't think was possible. Her boy, her sweet honest boy who has always been quiet and polite and well mannered, rarely swearing – and always apologizing for it with them – almost never indulging in alcohol, never a single scandal, an inappropriate girlfriend, nothing. Why him? Why the person he was supposed to despise not only for their well-known rivalry, but because he was the opposite of the sportsman that she thought Shane to be.

While Rozanov was standing behind Shane, he looked intimidating. He was not taller nor buffer, but his expression was harsh, his jaw tense, his nose was crooked, and the eyebrows were frown, the same expression he had in his official pictures where he looked like a bear ready to maul the opponents on the ice. Even the way he spoke was sharp, aggressive, but then she realized it was just his accent – and the prejudice that it carried. The way he said that word, "lover", that on his lips sounded almost like an insult.

But now that he is sitting at their table, sipping tea, she realizes that he is just a child, not older than her son, just as tired and scared as Shane.

Suddenly she starts to see the tension on his jaw melting and his accent no longer sounds aggressive but almost endearing. She has only seen him on the ice, yelling and cursing, crossing the path of his opponents and hitting the puck with the rage of a beast into the net, or during interviews, with his cocky smile and his way of teasing the journalists.

But the way he speaks to Shane, the way he touches him, it's quite the opposite. It is sweet and caring. Those hands that have, in the past, been clenched into fists to start a fight with other players on the field, are now protective and loving.

And when David calls him Rozanov, the man corrects him:

“Ilya”.

And while his surname sounds harsh, with that rolling er and that strong zed, his name sounds so sweet in the way he pronounces it, like a flower being kept between two loving hands.

That night, they have dinner at Shane’s cottage. They text before leaving the house – as promised – and when they arrive, the two young men are both well dressed. Rozanov – Ilya – has changed from his Boston uniform to a red flowery shirt that makes him look like an old white Florida man. Definitely not threatening.

Shane has cooked some hamburgers for everybody and they share the chicken and the salad that Yuna has brought. They chat, even though it is mostly her and Shane who do the talk, while Roza- Ilya speaks only to answer their questions and his sentences are short, split between one bite and the next. He eats voraciously, like a teenage boy that is still growing.

After they finish, Shane is about to stand up to clean the table but Ilya is faster. He puts his hand on Shane’s shoulder and pushes him down, almost aggressively.

“You cooked. I clean,” he says, without leaving any space to object. He takes the plates and disappears into the kitchen. Shane and David start discussing about his condo in Montreal and the fact that it is about time to sell it, and Yuna decides that her time is better spent helping Ilya in the kitchen. Not really because she thinks he cannot do it, but because she wants to speak to the man that her son has been in love with for years.

When she reaches the kitchen with the forks and the knives, Ilya is cleaning the dishes with a dish brush.

“You don’t need to do that, the kitchen has a dishwasher,” she says, opening it.

“I know. Dishes get out better like this. No food stuck in the dishwasher. The dishwasher live longer and Shane saves money.”

“It’s not like he cannot afford it.”

“No, of course. But he cares about these things. Mr. Businessman.” And saying this, the corner of his lips arises in a smile, and she wonders if this is some sort of inside jokes between the two of them.

“He has always been attentive with money, since he was eighteen and was able to manage them. An eighteen-year-old that spends his time on real estate websites, can you believe?”

“With Shane yes, I can believe.” He finishes cleaning the dishes and starts loading the dishwasher.

“Maybe he can help you buy your new apartment in Ottawa and sell your apartment in Boston. Admitted you want to sell it.”

“Yes, I want to sell. I don’t want to keep apartments where I don’t live. Is just headache.”

“You only own your apartment in Boston?” she asks.

“No,” he says, but then he corrects himself. “Yes. I gave my apartment in Moscow to my brother.”

“That was very generous of you! You must be very close to him.”

His expression changes. His lips contract in a smirk and his face becomes unreadable. “No. I am not.”

“Is it because—“

“No. He doesn’t know about me or Shane. If he did, he would have killed me years ago.”

Yuna holds her breath and tries to hide her emotions.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Is okay. He is an asshole. Like me, but bigger. Must run in the family.”

“Oh no,” she murmurs. “Don’t say that. You are not an asshole and I am sorry if we ever made you feel that way.”

“Everybody thinks I am asshole, even Shane thought that for a long time. Even I think so.”

“Well, ‘everybody’ doesn’t know you, and Shane has made it clear that he doesn’t believe it anymore. As for us, we are learning to know you. The narrative around you and Shane has always pushed him to be perfect and you to be bad, because the story of a heated rivalry between two opposites sells better than the reality.”

Ilya chuckles while he closes the dishwasher. “Big words. You speak like The New Yorker.”

“Sometimes I read it when my husband leaves it around,” she confesses. “But what I meant is that I was also fed this story. I was convinced that you two must hate each other, that you were the opposite of Shane, because it felt natural. But after knowing you for just one afternoon, I can see how similar you and my son are. I can see how you are both honest and kind and passionate. And when you say that you love him, I believe you.”

“What makes you believe me?”

She chuckles: “What man does pre-clean the dishes before loading the dishwasher if he is not in love?”

“Ah. Busted” he says and smiles.

They hear Shane's voice from the living room yelling: "What are you two talking about?"

"I am telling her that we are lovers."

"Fuck you!"

"Language!" she yells back. She looks at Ilya with complicity and yes, maybe that man in front of her has changed her son, maybe he is the reason why sometimes he indulges in alcohol or why he swears when he does, maybe he was the one dragging Shane in that relationship and not the other way around. But it is clear to her that it is not a game for him, it is not a challenge. "Just promise one thing," she says.

He nods.

"Don't go easy on him once you start playing for Ottawa. Because when Montreal will beat your ass mercilessly, I want to know that it was well deserved."

"Ah, Mrs. Hollander, don't worry. I never had mercy for his ass."

~ * ~

When David had seen Shane coming back from the lake, he was surprised to discover he was not alone. At first he thought of a teammate – even though he had never invited anybody to that cottage that was not family – but when they got close, he recognized Rozanov and he was left in disbelief of his own eyes.

Then he saw Rozanov pushing Shane against the wall and his first instinct was to intervene, thinking they were about to start a fight. Well, he could have not been more wrong.

He knew running away was not the best reaction, but he panicked. His son had clearly asked to be left alone – to meditate, he had said – and now he was understanding why.

So he was not so well inclined towards Rozanov when he saw him again at his house. He was the reason his son had lied to them, the reason he had been lying for God-knows how many years – seven, apparently.

But then, after speaking with him, after listening to the way Shane was speaking about him, the way they looked at each other, his opinion started to change, moving towards clemency.

After he called him 'Rozanov' the man looked so wounded that he regretted it immediately and promised himself to call him Ilya, no matter how hard it would have been at first.

And hours after finding out that not only his son was gay – he already suspected that – but that he had been in a secret relationship for seven years and, on the top of that, with the guy they had been hating on his behalf, after only five hours to wrap his mind around it there he

is, staring at Rovnov's – Ilya's – back from afar in the garden, while Shane is speaking to his wife and finalizing some details for the emails that she will send to the sponsors.

He steps outside and Ilya is startled by his presence and the cigarette nearly falls from his hand. David is surprised he can be scared: he thought he was some sort of impassible sphynx that fears nothing and nobody.

"Sorry. Canada can be scary with your wolf bird and whatnot."

"Wolfbird?" he asks.

"Lonely bird."

"The loon?"

"Yes. Loon. Will be useful word for crosswords."

"Ah, a crossword puzzles lover. I always do the New Yorker ones."

Ilya smirks. "Of course." His smile is wolfish, half hidden behind the hand that holds the cigarette.

"I wanted to apologize for today. I should have called Shane. I mean, I *did* call but I should have waited for him to answer instead of ambushing you two. I assume it is uncommon to be busted by your parents kissing your boyfriend when you are older than sixteen."

"Is okay. Shane was... not okay, at first, but he is now. He was scared."

"I can see that, especially after I ran away. I pushed him to come out instead of respecting his terms and his times and I regret it."

"Maybe is good. Maybe he needed that little push."

David smiles, shyly, less intimidated by Ilya than he was at the beginning of the conversation.

"At least you will be able to tell your family on your terms."

Ilya's face darkened and he took a deep breath into the cigarette. "I will not need to."

"They know already?"

"My mom is dead, my father is dead, my brother I don't speak to him."

"I am– so sorry."

"Is okay. My mother died a long time ago. My father would not be happy. He would not want a fag for a son." Then he adds: "Sorry, bad word."

"I am sure your father was proud of you."

"He has never been. Always told me do better, Ilya, be better Ilya, skate faster Ilya, score more, win more, earn more, more more more. You are lazy, Ilya, you are like your mother,

Ilya, lazy and weak, always looking for short way, easy way. And maybe he was right, maybe I am lazy.”

“You are *not* lazy. A lazy man would not be considered the eternal rival of Shane. A lazy man would not land a spot in an NHL team in his first year, he would not become captain so quickly, he would not lead his team to victory again and again.”

Ilya smiles, but sadness casts a shadow on his lips. “You are a good father. You raised a good son. My father was not a good father. He was a good soldier, but not good father and I can be a good hockey player but not a good son. Not a good man.”

“Listen, I apologize when I asked Shane if there weren’t good men in Montreal. I didn’t mean it that way. I meant if there weren’t... uncomplicated men. Well, *less* complicated men.”

“I am complicated.”

“You are, because of your job, because of your reputation and also because of your nationality. But you loved my son for seven years.”

“Not seven years—“

“Yes, I got that part. What I mean is that you were there for Shane when we couldn’t. While he was scared and confused about who he was, you were there for him. You could have chosen a woman, any woman, and your life would have been easy – well, easier, at least. But you chose Shane, despite all. You chose Shane over Russia, over Boston, over an uncomplicated life. These are not the actions of a bad man.”

After a long silence, he admits: “Maybe”. David knows that is the most he will be willing to admit that day.

“I know it can be lonely when your family is not there. And we are not your parents, but we will be there for you, if you need help. If you are important to Shane, you are important to us.”

Ilya is done with his cigarette. He takes one last breath and then puts it out on the barbecue. “I thought you came to tell me ‘don’t hurt my son’ or things like that.”

David laughs: “No, that is my wife’s job. I came to tell you that you are family to us. And also that you should not be smoking.”

“Ah, like father, like son. Can you believe this is almost the first thing Shane has said to me.”

“I do.”

And suddenly in front of him he doesn’t see the impassible sphynx, the frightening Russian skater that terrifies the opponents when he steps foot on the ice. He sees a boy that still craves his parents' love, that built a wall around himself so that he doesn’t have to admit that he needs to be loved, that he wants to be loved. That after all those years, he needs somebody to tell him that he is not lazy, that he is worthy, that he is enough.

~ * ~

That night, after Yuna and David leave, Shane crushes into their bed. Ilya undresses him and folds his shirt and his trousers while Shane pretends to protest, his mouth buried in one of the too-many pillows. Then Ilya gets off his clothes and throws them on a chair, climbing on the bed next to Shane. Shane raises an arm, inviting him to move closer and Ilya obliges.

Normally, they would have sex before falling asleep, but it has been a long day with a lot of conflicting emotions and they both deserve a good night of sleep.

“I can’t believe I survived this day,” he murmurs.

“Told you. So brave. My brave little boy,” he says while he casts a kiss on his head. Shane raises his head from the pillow to look at him and Ilya doesn’t miss the opportunity to brush his cheekbone with his thumb, caressing the freckles that the sun has made even more evident.

“Thank you. I would have not made it if not for you.”

“I thought I didn’t help.”

“The Boston t-shirt didn’t help. But you did.” He stares at him, enchanted. The sun has casted a nice tan on his skin that almost looks like a blush. He looks at his crooked nose and tries to remember when it was that he broke it – the first time. Was it against the Admirals? Maybe that is why he hated Hunter so much. Ilya has always looked so adult, crafted like a marble sculpture kept in the Hermitage, freed from the stone with a scalpel, using violence, while Shane feels like he himself has been shaped from clay, hugged and caressed since birth to become who he is. That Ilya has been made by removing while he was made by adding.

Ilya might have been shaped by harshness, by strict education and fear of the consequences, his nose might have been broken several times, and some of his teeth might have been knocked off and his body is always covered in bruises that slowly fade away in summer but never completely disappear, but his heart is full of love. For Shane, for his mother, for his father – despite everything, because love works in unfamiliar way and they know that better than anyone – for his niece that he might never see again, for his teammates that he is willing to let go for Shane. His words might be scornful, but even when they were still on surname bases, even when he still refused to call him ‘Shane’, the way he pronounced ‘Hollander’, the stress on the el, the rolling of the final er, it was like honey on his lips, and when Shane kissed him after he called him, he could taste it.

And tomorrow, when they will wake up together in the same bed, the sun will kiss his forehead and his curls will shine as if made of gold, and when he will open his eyes, two drops of spring water on a mountain creek, the first things he sees will be Shane’s smile, the first thing he tastes will be the sweetness of his name on Shane’s lips.

End Notes

I am normal about the finale. So normal that I started writing fanfic again after two years and a burn out.

If you want to be normal about it with me, I'm applepie4 on tumblr.

As Ilya said, English is hard, so forgive any mistake.

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