

morality clause

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morality clause

by [canadadry](#)

Summary

Morals Clause: *A contract provision that may be used in endorsement, spokesperson, and similar agreements to give the advertiser the right to terminate the deal, seek damages, or remove branding if the individual engages in actions bringing disrepute, scandal, or negative attention, protecting the brand's image and financial interests.*

Yuna does her research—apparently, a morals clause is common, in contracts like this.

It bothers her, a little, how vague it is, but ultimately, she doesn't see an issue with it—at least, not really.

Shane is many things, and she is so, so excited to see how much more he becomes... but, for all of the many things she imagines in his future, she doesn't think he's capable of doing anything that could be accurately described as *scandalous*.

She's wrong.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

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

Morals Clause: *A contract provision that may be used in endorsement, spokesperson, and similar agreements to give the advertiser the right to terminate the deal, seek damages, or remove branding if the individual engages in actions bringing disrepute, scandal, or negative attention, protecting the brand's image and financial interests.*

2017

Shane had always been quick—quick, as in clever, as in the first to see an opportunity on the ice ahead of him. Quick as in fast as all hell, as in the only skater on that ice that had the means to make the most of it—fast feet, faster hands.

The game has barely started, and already, Shane was flying: outpacing Rozanov, outskating Boston—until he wasn't.

Yuna's watching from the sofa, attention split between some unanswered emails and yet another Hockey Night In Canada, when Marleau folds Shane like clean laundry.

She gasps—grabs for David's hand before she realizes she's already holding it, shoots to her feet before Shane has crumpled all the way to the ice. Her iPad hits the floor.

Shane stays down. Yuna stays on her feet.

She wonders if this is it.

2008

Shane insists that they stay to watch the Russian team practice—insists that she stays, says he wants to hear what she has to say about the team, says he wants to know where *she* thinks their weak points are, says that she's better than the assistant coaches, anyway.

“Please, Mom,” Shane asks, and on top of the flattery, he’s turning his saddest, biggest brown eyes on her.

She concedes.

“So that’s Ilya Rozanov,” Shane says once they’ve taken seats in the upper bowl, practice underway. Well, Yuna’s taken a seat—Shane’s straddling an arm rest with his hands in his pockets, almost like he’s halfway between sitting and jumping out of a seat to jeer or shout, like he’s watching a game that matters. His expression is a little dazed and very serious as his eyes track the Russian prospect, who just flattened one of his own teammates during a scrimmage.

“That’s what his jersey says,” Yuna says, grinning up at her son. Then: “Honey, don’t chew on your hoodie strings.”

“Why, do you want them?” Shane says, spitting it out and holding it toward her without looking away from the ice.

“Gross,” she says, giving him a gentle shove.

“You love me anyway.”

“I do.”

“Now who’s gross,” Shane says, nose scrunched up, finally taking his eyes off the ice and offering her a half-smile... before turning his considerable focus *back* to Rozanov. Yuna sighs. She watches the rest of the team, unsure that Shane’s aware of the other players on the ice.

After, Shane insists that she gives him a minute—insists he’ll catch up.

He makes it to the car about ten minutes after she does, cheeks flushed from the cold and smelling faintly of... cigarettes?

She doesn’t even have to ask—she knows Shane would never, and besides. She knows that the best way to get Shane to answer a question is to not ask anything at all.

“I was just talking to Ilya Rozanov,” Shane says, after she doesn’t ask.

“What’s he like?” she asks, genuinely curious.

Shane thinks carefully about his response before he offers it, seeming to take stock of his first impression a second time before he speaks.

“Kind of a dick.”

Yuna's surprised to hear laughter coming from centre ice.

Not just because she's seated well into the stands, reviewing a Reebok contract and wishing the light in here was better, but because... well. Let's just say that Shane hadn't been thrilled to learn that this wasn't a solo shoot at the last minute.

It's just... Shane doesn't usually... laugh, through things like this. Professional engagements, she means. Photoshoots, pressers, interviews, the like.

It's not that Shane's unhappy to do them, he's just... serious. A little high-strung, anxious in a way he doesn't always hide as well as he thinks. Competitive, but quiet—sweet and shy. Organized—he's got priorities. Hockey's his priority, and he knows that professional engagements come with the territory.

She hears Rozanov apologize for fucking up the shoot. Then—then she hears *Shane* apologize.

Then she hears them laughing—both of them, loudly.

—

The contract from Reebok includes:

MORALS CLAUSE. If at any time, in the opinion of Company, Athlete becomes the subject of public disrepute, contempt, or scandal that affects Athlete's NIL or goodwill, then Company may, upon written notice to Athlete, immediately suspend or terminate this Agreement and Athlete's services.

Name, image, likeness. It gets shortened, often, to NIL.

Nil—like it's nothing.

—

“Sneakers, I heard!” Shane snaps, and honestly, she's just glad that he's heard *one* of the many, many words that she's said to him in the last five minutes.

“Okay, you have to be seen in your Reeboks—”

“—I know, Mom—”

“—because you cannot be in anything else.”

“Mom, I’m always wearing skates.” Yuna steels herself and chooses, bravely, to avoid pointing out that he isn’t wearing skates *as they speak*—

“But in case you’re not, just—this is a lot of money, Shane, and you’re the youngest hockey player they’ve ever signed to a deal. And... remember what else this means.”

“I remember.”

“A whole lot of kids are gonna be looking up to you—kids that don’t see themselves here a lot.”

“I *get* it, Mom.”

—

Yuna does her research—apparently, a morals clause is common, in contracts like this.

It bothers her, a little, how vague it is, but ultimately, she doesn’t see an issue with it—at least, not really.

Shane is many things, and she is so, so excited to see how much more he becomes... but, for all of the many things she imagines in his future, she doesn’t see him doing anything that could be accurately described as *disreputable*, *contemptible*, or, god forbid, *scandalous*.

—

The elevator opens, and Russia’s young progeny, Ilya Rozanov, is standing there.

She’s struck, first, by how imposing he is, even at nineteen years-old—and she did check, he’s about three weeks younger than Shane, almost to the day, in fact, but he’s taller by a handful of inches and broader across the shoulders, and he looks a little bit... tired, actually, in a way that no nineteen year-old should, and—

—and she remembers feeling tired, at nineteen, with too much to prove and not enough to show for the things she’d proven so far, and—

She’s struck by the fact that he’s alone.

Yuna remembers talking to the assistant director, earlier—*nope, no parents. I think it's just him.*

All the old thoughts ring through here mind, sounding like a bell: cocky, too confident, too brusque, first in the draft, not better than Shane—but all Yuna can do now is wonder where his mother is.

Later, she regrets that she didn't have enough time to shake his hand—and remembers the look of genuine surprise on his face as she moved to introduce herself.

2010

Yuna was not thrilled to learn that one of the MLH's thinly disguised ploys to create interest for the All-Star Game this year was centred on Shane.

Not surprised, but not thrilled either.

She's watching early press now, and they haven't even put effort into disguising it—for Team North America and Team Europe, would it not have made sense to have more than one single Canadian and one single Russian present at the table? Was there not a single Finnish veteran willing to sit down with the press? Had someone forgotten to call Scott Hunter?

Besides that, the questions haven't exactly been of what Yuna would call *All-Star* quality.

The most recent asked of Rozanov is a convoluted nightmare—legacies and ownership and individual responsibility. *She* can barely follow it.

There's a long pause afterward. Yuna hears someone in the crowd cough. She can see that Rozanov is working on it—not lost, necessarily, but. Working on it.

She's as surprised as anyone when Shane speaks up.

“Sorry—not to jump the gun here, but, um—with Rozanov's permission...”

She should be less surprised that Shane actually waits to see Rozanov nod before he continues—that's *her* son: he wouldn't ask a question if he didn't mean it, and he's got so much more *heart* than people tend to see.

Enough heart that he'll even step up and help someone he hates.

2014

Yuna gasps when she sees Shane throw off both of his gloves and clock Scott Hunter after the final buzzer of a game that Montreal's already *won*.

By the time that she's got the TV paused and has called for David, the scrum has escalated into an ugly tableau—Shane and Hunter are both spitting venom at each other, their teammates dragging them apart. The fans in the arena who had stuck around for the handshakes and three stars are jeering, rewarded for their patience, and the colour commentators are baffled, laughing in disbelief.

"I thought the game was over?" David says, towelling off his hands as he rounds the corner, blinking at the stalled screen.

"It was—it is."

—

She'd like to believe that Shane isn't screening her calls, but it does take her longer than she expects to reach him. When she does—

"Shane, you can't just—"

"It's hockey, mom, fighting is a part of it."

"That's not an excuse, Shane," Yuna says.

"It's not like you asked me *why* I did it, Mom. You just jumped straight into telling what a bad idea it was."

"Well—why, then."

"Because—Hunter was out of line. It was friendly chirping and then it wasn't, and I was just—I lost it, I don't know," Shane says, his voice breaking toward the end. Yuna's chest hurts, but she refuses to ask outright: *What did he say?*

She can imagine—hell, she doesn't *have* to imagine.

She did think Scott Hunter was better than that, but. As far as hockey players go, especially high-profile, white, American hockey players go, she's more often disappointed than

pleasantly surprised.

“Shane, you know—” *you can’t let them win, you can’t let them get to you, you need to go high when they go low.*

“—I *know*, Mom,” Shane cuts her off before she can commit to a thought, much less voice one. “I shouldn’t have reacted, and it won’t happen again.”

—

Before they called Shane *focused* and *disciplined*, they called him introverted, odd. *Quiet*, they said, *even for*—

Before the conversation turned to skill and speed, the conversation was about size: other parents, coaches, wondering out loud if Shane would ever be tall enough, big enough, broad enough—

Before Shane was known for his professionalism, his teammates and peers had decided he was boring—a goody-two-shoes, a buzzkill.

When they talk about his hockey IQ, it’s almost never about his decision-making, his instincts—nine out of ten times, someone brings up fucking *math*. It’s always *angles* and *analysis* and *balancing the equation*.

She can count on one hand the number of times Shane’s been described as a *natural*. It’s always *hard-working*, it’s always *dedication*, it’s always the way that he *studies the game*.

Yuna seethes. She doesn’t have to imagine what Scott Hunter had to say. She’s heard it all.

—

Shane comes back from Russia with a few things.

A gold medal.

An apology from Scott Hunter—one that Shane’s already fully accepted, apparently, for something that he still refuses to fully explain.

A pinched, frustrated expression that Yuna’s never seen on his face before.

2015

“Oh, wow,” Yuna says, very bravely not laughing as their son *very* obviously reads lines off a prompter at the MLH Awards in his stiffest, flattest voice.

She’s sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with her husband, and can feel him holding back, too—and then she’s remembering the only Christmas recital Shane ever participated in, in first grade, when it first became abundantly clear that her sweet boy was not meant for this *particular* kind of spotlight.

“So there’s a reason he’s never talking in the commercials, eh?” David says, an impossibly fond laugh escaping him—he’s always been just as proud to see Shane do something badly as he is to see Shane do anything at all. “He really can’t act to save his life, can he?”

“Well, Rozanov’s *performance* isn’t helping,” Yuna scoffs.

2016

“Are we expecting someone else?” The waiter asks.

“Oh no, it’s just the three of us. Thank you,” Yuna answers. “Honey, have you decided about Wimbledon? Rolex really wants you there. I think they’re worried their box is too.... tennis-y. I think.”

“Does that mean too white?” Shane asks, sounding... bored.

Yuna blinks.

“I thought you liked your deal with Rolex?” she says, instead of *yes, it probably does*.

“I do.”

“Well, you certainly love the money—and they’re great seats, I mean, they’re next to a prince. Or, no, actually—a Swedish princess,” trying not to wince as she hears the words leave her own mouth. She’s always tried not to be *that* mom—the helicopter parent, micromanaging, overattentive and demanding. It’s a challenge, given that she *literally* manages her son.

“I don’t think I should skip training,” Shane replies.

“Well, meeting a Swedish princess could be fun, right?”

“I don’t have time for that right now, mom. All my time is scheduled.” Shane sounds... not just upset. Overwhelmed. There’s something out of control at the beginning of the sentence before he looks up, a wobble in his voice—but it’s gone before Yuna has time to see it play out on his face.

“I just meant...” Yuna starts, before Shane continues:

“I get, like, two weeks off a year. I don’t want to spend it next to someone I don’t know, trying to make conversation about... what?” Shane scoffs. “Swedish politics?”

“Okay...” Yuna says, wondering what brought this caustic, unusual attitude on. He hasn’t spoken to her like this since he was a teenager, too young and agitated to realize the tone he was taking and under enough pressure that she usually excused it. She hasn’t missed it.

“Can I get anyone a drink?” The waiter returns to ask. Perfect timing. She wonders how long he’d been waiting for a less tense moment to interrupt.

“We’ll take this Chablis, please?” David asks, mildly.

“Three glasses?”

“Uh, I’ll have a ginger ale, please,” Shane says.

“Oh, we don’t have that. Sparkling water?”

“Sure, thank you.”

“I’m sure you could have a glass of wine if that’s what—” She tries again.

“No, I can’t. Not during the season.”

“Shane,” David says, and Shane looks at him with his jaw set.

“Yeah?”

“Is everything alright?” he asks, without malice or expectation.

“Why, ‘cause I don’t want wine?”

“Well... you just seem... tense.”

“I’m fine.”

“Well, I think a little trip to London next summer, for Wimbledon, just the three of us... would be fun, and I think you should think about it. We could make a week of it: go to a play, see Big Ben,” David offers—carefully leading the conversation away from scheduled time, and training schedules, and Rolex. “You loved it when you were a kid.”

“You guys should go. You’d have a great time—and you’re the tennis fan, Dad,” Shane replies. Yuna frowns, because that’s not—

“They’re not gonna send us the tickets, honey,” Yuna says—because this isn’t... some kind of roundabout way to take advantage of the tickets that are being offered to *Shane*. They’re *his* tickets—he earned them. “It’s you they want, we’re just the parents. You’re the main attraction.”

“Well, then, I’ll just lie, tell them I’m coming. They won’t kick you out—and... you can just tell them I’m sick or something.

“Honey, I—I... I don’t want you to lie,” Yuna says, wondering where this conversation went *all* wrong. “That’s not... who you are.”

“Sorry, I’m in a weird mood.”

“It’s okay. Anything you wanna talk about?”

“Let’s, um. Let’s think about London, maybe it could be fun. I’m just gonna use the washroom,” Shane says, all but fleeing the table.

“A Swedish princess?” David asks her.

“I don’t know,” Yuna sighs. She was just... talking.

David reaches out and grabs her hand.

When Shane comes back to the table, he does seem to have settled—her stoic, considerate son takes his seat, and if she didn’t know any better, she wouldn’t know that there was anything wrong. She can see it, though, in the small things: his words just a bit too cool, his answers measured carefully, his eyes wandering to the windows and corners. David seems to take it in stride, humouring a brief discussion about a trip to London that she will absolutely not be booking.

Yuna wonders, her heart close to breaking, if her son is a better actor than she’s been giving him credit for.

—

MORALS CLAUSE. Neither the Talent, the Talent’s Representatives nor the Talent’s Key Personnel shall commit any act or do anything which might reasonably be considered:

- 1. to be immoral, deceptive, scandalous or obscene; or*
- 2. to injure, tarnish, damage or otherwise negatively affect the community and/or the reputation and goodwill associated with the Company.*

If either the Talent, the Talent's Representative or the Talent's Key Personnel is accused of any act involving moral or ethical issues, dishonestly, theft or misappropriation, under any law, or any act which casts an unfavorable light upon its association with the community and/or is accused of performing or committing any act which could adversely impact the Talent's events, programs, services, or reputation, the Company shall have the right to terminate this Agreement upon fifteen (15) days written notice specifying the reason, within which period the Talent may address such offense. The determination of whether and to what extent the offense is addressed shall be made by the Company at its sole discretion;

It's while they're driving back to Ottawa, as Yuna's still trying to figure out the right question to ask, or maybe where that conversation had gone wrong, or maybe where things had gone wrong well before that conversation, when David offers, simply and sadly:

"I'm worried about Shane."

"Me too," Yuna says.

"I'm worried that there's something he's not telling us," David says, eyes on the road, hands at two and ten, voice steady. "I'm worried that there's something he feels like he can't tell us."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you think there might be someone in his life that he'd like to spend his time off with? Someone he *does* know, that *we* don't know about?" His question echoes Shane's earlier words: *I get, like, two weeks off a year. I don't want to spend it next to someone I don't know.*

"Why wouldn't he tell us if he'd met someone?" Yuna asks in earnest.

"Well," David says, seeming to choose his next words carefully. "What if it wasn't... somebody he could take to Wimbledon?"

It's not like she hadn't considered, perhaps, that her sweet, shy son, who had never had a girlfriend for more than a handful of months, could be gay.

What she had never, ever considered was that he wouldn't feel comfortable *telling* her.

2017

The MLH All-Star Game is back, and while they seem to be fresh out of gimmicks this year, they've got a couple new talking points.

Though, not *that* new: anything said about Shane is, once again, tangled up with Ilya Rozanov.

Shane's the captain, at least. The people have spoken.

"They're about to start the first game," David calls to her from the living room, where he's been poking at a crossword puzzle for the better part of the last hour. She'd gotten bored enough with the All-Star coverage that she'd left to start packing for their upcoming Mexico trip—but she does want to see this.

All-Star tournaments being what they are, she wasn't surprised to see that Shane and Rozanov would be starting on the same line—at least, insofar as you could call them *lines* in a game of three-on-three. Joining them on the ice is a rookie defencemen—a splashy first round pick from the west coast who's probably as many years younger than Shane as he is inches taller.

Shane takes the faceoff (*of course*) and wins it handedly (*of course*) and—

Sends the puck directly to Rozanov.

This seems to surprise the other team as much as it surprises Yuna. The commentators are obviously delighted by the twist.

The other team is only surprised—flat-footed, really—for a second. But that's all Rozanov needs to take the puck past them all, staring down a goalie who has every right to look as shocked as he does, standing all alone between Ilya Rozanov and the net.

Poor guy. Better goalies than him have tried and failed.

Eight seconds into the first, and it's 1-0.

After that, it's less like hockey and more like poetry. All instinct, no angles. *Chemistry*.

They're *terrifying*.

She asks Shane about it, after.

Shane just laughs—a little louder, a little brighter than usual—and brushes her off.

—

The game had barely started, and Shane had been flying: outpacing Rozanov, out-skating Boston—all until he wasn't.

Shane's still down on the ice, and Marleau has his hands up—like a surrender. He's already backing off by the time Hayden has him pinned the boards about ten feet away from where Shane's—from where Shane is.

Rozanov, she notices, is looming. She's noticed, before, that they'll take each other arm-over-arm in a scrum—which did strike her as odd, at first. Rozanov fights. Shane does not. But they're captains, and rivals, and whatever—ultimately, she was grateful that Rozanov seemed to have no authentic interest in anything more than trading barbs.

But now, Rozanov's too close, unmoving, and he looks... it's not an expressions she's seen on Rozanov before. It's a strange enough expression that she can't quite place it, now.

The man looks stunned—winded, maybe.

Scared, maybe.

Rozanov's saying something as the paramedics get out to the ice—whatever he's saying is getting ignored by the athletic therapist, and then by the paramedics, and then she can see his mouth making a familiar shape.

Hollander.

And Shane—thank god, Shane *replies*.

She can't make it out, not from this distance, not from behind the glass, but she sees that her son is speaking—blinking furiously underneath the arena lighting, curling in on himself a little, clearly in pain.

But he's saying *something*.

—

The drive isn't long, and the hospital is very accommodating—this is the Captain of the Montreal Metros we're talking about, of course they are.

Shane will be fine—concussed, fractured collarbone, out for the rest of the season.

The bruising around his eyes is the thing that upsets Yuna the most—she'd been googling stuff on the drive over, found a page on *periorbital ecchymosis* and came into the hospital with a terrified certainty that Shane had fractured his skull. The doctors have assured her that, no, Shane does not have a basilar skull fracture, and yes, they did check.

She's pleased that they're allowed, against hospital policy, to visit him at nearly midnight. He's conscious, but rambling, a little incoherent—in pain, on painkillers, concussed. The doctors promise them that this is normal.

He protests when David starts talking getting about a hotel—offers them a garbled statement about *being ready for company anyway* that turns out to be him insisting that they stay in his condo for the evening.

—

When Yuna gets back to the hospital pretty damn close to first thing the next morning, and she's surprised to learn that Shane already has a visitor.

Before she can ask the nurse at the desk *who*, Ilya Rozanov exits Shane's room.

He's got his hands pushed so deep into the pockets of his jacket that the fabric is straining, fighting against his shoulders, which are raised around his ears. Yuna's expecting him to walk right past her, honestly, with the way that he's staring at the ground in front of him—but discovers that the only thing that could surprise her more than seeing Rozanov here at all is seeing him... stop. It's almost like he stalls, standing totally still, before running both of his hands roughly over his face, through his carefully styled hair, shaking loose curls that lose their definition under the fluorescent lights of the hospital hallway.

Yuna can't help herself.

"Rozanov?" she asks, and his eyes snap up to meet hers.

"Ah," he says, clearly steeling himself—hands finding their way back into his pockets. "Mrs. Hollander."

"What are you doing here?" she asks, polite but firm.

"Oh, yes—it's," Ilya Rozanov says. "I was worried, wanted to make my apology—our apology, that's... team apology—in person."

"That's very considerate of you."

“Marleau—he did not mean to cause any injury.”

“I’m sure,” Yuna says, her tone perfectly dry. Rozanov pauses. Considering, she thinks, what it is he wants to say to that. She’s ready for a soundbite when he speaks.

“It was... mistake. Bad angles. No one’s fault,” Rozanov pauses to clear his throat, then: “Nobody wanted to see Hollander hurt. Hockey is better with him on the ice—but, I’m sure you know this. He says you are the best analyst out there. Unfair advantage for him, it seems, to have learned from the best.”

“Oh?” Yuna replies, genuinely touched and truly, completely taken by surprise.

She’ll wonder, later—much, much later, too late, but forgive her, she was as distracted as she’s ever been—when and why the hell Shane would’ve said that Rozanov, of all people.

In the moment, she says:

“Well, thank you... I think—and, thank you, for taking some time to visit,” and extends a hand to shake his.

When he takes hers, Rozanov’s hands are calloused and rough, but his grip is gentle. He offers her a parting smile, and something about it breaks her heart.

—

She’ll remember, later, the aborted introduction, elevator doors cutting them off from each other in 2009.

—

The next day, when they take Shane home, she asks:

“David?”

“Yes?”

“Do you think Shane is happy?”

“I think anybody riding out a dose of painkillers that generous can’t be anything *but* happy.”

“I’m being serious,” she says. David’s wry smile falls—he looks to her.

“Is something wrong?” he asks. “Did Shane say something to you?”

“Not—no, not exactly,” Yuna, all but wringing her hands. “I’m just worried he’s... lonely.”

They’d been there for Shane at the hospital, obviously. Hayden—who Yuna is forever grateful for, her son’s best friend—had stopped by with a baby strapped to his chest, calling her son *Uncle Shane* and telling him that Jackie would be excited to have the company during the playoffs, his bravado not quite hiding his concern. Shane had texts that he couldn’t read on a phone that he would not let her unlock—message notifications on his lock screen from a few names she recognized and a few that she didn’t.

But the only other visitor Shane’d had was the captain of the team that ended his season, there to offer polite, perfunctory condolences.

“Oh, hun,” David sets down the dish he’s drying and beckons her over.

—

“He’s playing hurt—it’s his ribs, I bet,” Yuna comments, watching as Rozanov guards his right side. It’s subtle—Rozanov’s got a sprawling, big build, and he throws his weight into gaining speed—and right now, his elbow isn’t coming up as high as it needs to for him to build momentum without losing balance. He’s taking checks he would usually outpace, and taking small moments in the aftermath to breathe through the pain.

“How do you know that?” Shane asks, incredulous.

“Am I right?” She asks, remembering her short conversation with Rozanov at the hospital.

“I don’t know, just—”

“Your mother is a witch. Okay—the Raiders have lost. Dinner to celebrate.”

“Dad!” Shane protests, seemingly without realizing that it’s out of character.

“What? We don’t hate him anymore? I can’t keep up!”

“No, we do, just...”

“Rozanov went to see Shane in the hospital.”

“Oh, so now you like him.”

“Well, now I hate him less,” Yuna concedes. “—and good for Scott Hunter!”

They continue, the back-and-forth of her little family warm and familiar, despite the circumstances.

Until only a moment, maybe two, later, when Shane trails into the kitchen after her and clears his throat before asking:

“How did you know that Rozanov visited me in the hospital?”

“Oh—I ran into him as he was leaving, that first morning,” Yuna says. “You were still pretty out of it.”

“Haha, yeah...” Shane says before he clears his throat again.

“Are you feeling okay, honey? I can make you a tea, if you’re—”

“—no, nope. Mom, I’m fine. Thank you, but I’m fine.”

“... if you’re sure?”

“I’m sure,” Shane says, frowning like he isn’t sure. “I’m so totally sure.”

“What’d Rozanov have to say?” David asks.

“Nothing,” Shane says, quickly. David was looking at Yuna when he asked, but Shane isn’t looking at either of them. David raises an eyebrow. Yuna shrugs, frowns.

—

She has to search to find one:

MORALS CLAUSE. Employer agrees that it shall not include or enforce a so-called "Morals Clause," as that term is commonly understood in the motion picture and television industries, in any contract of employment or deal memo for the services of an Employee.

But she does find one.

—

They’re watching Scott Hunter win the cup—well, Yuna’s watching. David’s getting her a glass of wine. Shane’s texting. *Again.*

Well, not really *again*, more like *still*.

Whoever it was, Shane was being *very* careful with his phone. Shane had given her a few different answers, on the rare occasions she’d asked directly who he was texting. Hayden, J.J., just a friend. He’d answered Rose, but only once—Shane had endured her *genuinely*

innocent follow-up questions with the pained stoicism of a man being tortured for intelligence by the CIA.

Yuna had only managed to get a single glimpse at the screen in all of the weeks that Shane had been staying with them—and it's not like she was really trying to, alright? Except, Shane had been so meticulous about placing his phone face down, or planting it in his back pocket, settling himself into the far corner of the sofa and angling his body just so to keep his screen out of sight, and—Yuna's curiosity gets the better of her, okay? She's his mother, for one thing, and for a second, she's never met a problem she didn't want to solve.

Anyway.

Shane must've fallen asleep in the middle of a conversation—even though he should've still been avoiding screens, for the love of god—with his phone gripped loosely in one hand. His glasses were askew and his feet weren't covered by the blanket.

Yuna had reached over and touched his shoulder. Reflexively, his hand tightened, and the screen of his phone lit up:

Lily

3 iMessages

Yuna's never heard Shane mention a *Lily*, and she definitely can't think of a way to broach that subject without admitting that she'd been snooping, so she sticks to her guns.

“Who're you texting?” She asks, again, wondering if she'll get the real answer this time.

“Hayden.”

“Oh, how's the baby?”

“Great,” Shane tells her, without looking up from his phone.

Yuna can only hope that Shane's not *actually* texting Hayden—not this incessantly, when Hayden should *absolutely* be lending his wife a hand with one of their *many* children, and certainly not while Shane looks quite so... smitten, with whoever's replying to him right now.

Shane's so focused on his phone that he doesn't actually look up to see the final seconds of the game, only shifting his attention back to the broadcast when they hand the cup over to the Admirals officially.

“Good for Scott Hunter,” she repeats.

“Yeah, yeah, you called it,” Shane laughs.

The New York Admirals take their turns, circling with the cup. Yuna watches, sentimental and aching with pride, as the loved ones of the players flood the ice—she remembers running toward Shane on the ice, half-falling into her son.

The ache isn't all pride, though, as she watches wives and girlfriends and children of all ages cling to their parents. She wonders, not for the first time, if she's taken something from Shane without meaning to, bartered some part of his life away in brand contracts.

She's feeling melancholy, letting tears swim in her eyes with the weight of it, when she notices that Scott Hunter is waving someone down from the stands—a handsome young man in a denim jacket.

He goes so far as to offer the man a hand when he steps onto the ice, and then... doesn't let go. Draws him ten, maybe fifteen feet away from the boards, turns to face him. The cameras are tracking him now, focused on the two men, Scott Hunter smiling as he speaks, and then—

They're kissing.

“Oh, wow,” she says without meaning to say anything at all.

The fans in New York go wild, raucous with their applause. Scott Hunter's team is joining in, cheering for their Captain. *Good for him—good for Scott Hunter.* The announcers are already talking about how huge this is, for the league, for the game, for the man himself.

She's still more stunned than anything else when Shane bolts from the couch.

—

“A whole lot of kids are gonna be looking up to you—kids that don't see themselves here a lot.”

“I get it, Mom.”

Chapter End Notes

in a totally predictable turn of events, heated rivalry has bewitched me

when does the chirp-fight happen. only god knows the sacred timeline.

ty always to [eden](#), who makes all things better, including my writing.

find me on [twi](#) if you'd like, and as always: xo

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

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

Yuna

“Get your charger?” Yuna asks without looking up from her iPad on the sofa. David makes a beeline for the kitchen, presumably to plug in his phone.

“I did,” David says. After a moment, he calls to her from the other room: “Do you want coffee?”

“Sure,” she calls back. She’s reading Under Armour’s statement on their partnership with Scott Hunter, seeing none of the red flags she’s come to understand as a brand soft-dropping a partner. *Good.*

Good for Scott Hunter.

She wanted it to be true so badly—she wanted it to be good for Scott Hunter, a man who’s hand she’s shaken exactly once, at the MLH awards at the end of Shane’s rookie season. A man who, Shane had promised her, years after their bizarre, belated scuffle at the end of a game, had not said anything *like that, Mom, Jesus*. A man who wanted to play great hockey, and just so happened to be gay.

“Did you see Shane?” Yuna asks a handful of minutes later, when David sets her coffee down in front of her and takes a seat. It takes her a moment to realize that he didn’t make himself one.

“I did,” he says, offering her an expression that’s more of a grimace than a smile.

“He wasn’t furious with you for interrupting his... what did he call it, a silent retreat?” she asks. Shane could be... particular about certain things, meals and meditation and the like. He didn’t like surprises, small or large, and never had.

“Well,” David says, sounding... odd. “We didn’t actually speak, if you can believe it.”

“He seemed okay, though?” she asks—and when David doesn’t answer her, continues: “Are *you* okay?”

“I think Shane will probably be coming by shortly,” David says.

“What? Why?”

“Well...” David answers, and Yuna hears car doors closing in the driveway.

Yuna looks to David for the answer to her question while David looks for the right words. He doesn't find them before someone's coming up the path to the front door. Yuna turns, feeling disoriented, and sees Shane walking up to the front door with... Ilya Rozanov trailing behind him.

"What—" she starts to ask, turning back to David, who doesn't seem surprised. Yuna stands, for lack of anything better to do, and David joins her. There's a thousand different thoughts and questions ricocheting around the inside of her skull, all moving too quickly to latch onto.

"Hey, it's me? Shane?" Shane calls, as if they both hadn't watched him approach through the window—as if anybody else would be walking through their cottage's front door in broad daylight without knocking. Shane steps into the entryway, into view, with his thumbs hooked into his pockets. He's disheveled, visibly upset. "Hi," he says, before looking back toward the door—which is when Ilya Rozanov steps into view.

Without speaking, he moves to stand behind Shane's right shoulder. There's no mirth in his expression, no smirk on his face. He's got his hands folded in front of himself, almost politely—like he's trying to make himself smaller, less imposing.

She stares at him.

He stares back.

"I left my charger at your place, and it's the old one that fits into my phone, and all the other charges we have are newer, so—" David is rambling, voice wobbling the same way Shane's does when he's emotional

"It's—it's okay, Dad," Shane says. "I'm sorry, you shouldn't have found out that way."

Yuna looks away from Rozanov, eyes snapping first to her husband and then to her son.

"Found out what, exactly?" she asks Shane directly—and Shane looks *scared*, nervous hands working the fabric of his pockets between his thumbs and forefingers. His eyes keep finding the empty space between her and David, not exactly like he's looking for a way out, but like he's looking for a way through.

Despite that, he meets her eyes when he answers:

"I'm gay."

She feels her eyebrows go up, but can't seem to compel her face to do anything else.

"—Which, I was going to tell you soon. I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner, I... Yeah—and this is Ilya. Rozanov. But you already know that."

"Hi," Rozanov offers.

Yuna sees David acknowledge him out of the corner of her eye.

She still hasn't moved.

Shane still isn't looking at her when he continues:

"He's visiting, and we're... um..."

"Lovers," Rozanov says, for some reason, placing a hand on Shane's shoulder.

"No, Ilya, that's gross," Shane says, almost winded with exasperation. Rozanov withdraws his hand. Yuna can't help but notice that Shane hadn't shrugged him off.

"But... you hate him," Yuna says, and she can't stop the little punched out sound of disbelief that leaves her after the words spill out—it's something that might've been a laugh, in another conversation, another context.

"No," Shane disagrees immediately, sounding certain. "I—I mean, I get that, but no. I actually, uh... I love him."

Yuna blinks, swallowing Shane's words like a stone. She feels every inch of it, feels it settle like a fist in her stomach.

I love him—

—and Yuna had *no* idea.

Shane sighs through his teeth, and then—with incredulous, nervous laughter:

"I did not want this to be how I told you—uh—I'm sorry," he says, and David shakes his head, once, at the apology.

She should be doing that. She should be saying something, responding to Shane, making sure he knows—

Instead, she's staring at Ilya Rozanov again.

Rozanov, who has only said two words.

Rozanov, who has been a photo negative of her son for as long as she's known he existed—Shane's opposite in all of the ways that matter, from discipline to disposition.

Rozanov, who meets her eyes again, his gaze even and impassive.

Rozanov, who stares back, while she fights the urge to tell him to *leave*.

It's just... he shouldn't *be* here. This is not part of the plan.

Not that there's a plan, really. It's just that—when Scott Hunter came out with no warning on what might've been the biggest and most public stage the man would ever have access to, Shane had all but sprinted into the other room. She knew he'd been talking to someone—his hushed voice not enough to hide the fact that he was on the phone. She'd looked to her husband, making a less-than-confident gesture to stand and check on Shane, only for David to shake his head vigorously at her, *no*.

It's not a plan, but Yuna's been following the consequences of Scott Hunter's coming out with the diligence of someone who might need to make a plan, one day.

And Ilya Rozanov is not a part of any of her plans, or even her plans to *make* plans.

"Can we just... sit down? Please?" Shane asks—begs, sort of.

"Of course," David is the one to reply, because Yuna is seriously fucking dropping the ball right now. Rozanov nods, looking to David as he does so—and that's all David needs to excuse himself in the general direction of the kitchen, seeming to assume that everyone will follow. Then, Rozanov focuses on Shane, leans toward her son to speak quietly, without being overheard, and suddenly *she's* the outsider, and—

"I'll get us some coffee," Yuna says, taking off after her husband.

"*What,*" she hisses to David as soon as she's around the corner.

"I saw them together, I didn't know what to do—"

"You saw them *together*?" Yuna gets as close to shouting as she can while still speaking at whisper volume, horrified on both her son's and her husband's behalf.

"Not—no, *Jesus*, not like that, just... clearly together," David whispers, and Yuna isn't impressed with the degree of ambiguity *that* leaves. "I didn't know what to do, I just left."

"You *left*?" she says, briefly furious at her husband—but, then again, what's the *right* thing to do in a situation like that? She thinks she might've screamed, or something equally ridiculous.

"I panicked!" David says, taking a seat at the dining table—his usual spot—and putting his face in his hands for one breath, then another.

She shakes her head and goes into the kitchen proper. She sees the full pot of coffee that David had made in the last fifteen minutes—presumably anticipating its necessity. She starts the kettle—Shane rarely drinks coffee, and, quite frankly, she thinks that introducing caffeine into his already frantic system at this moment might drive him into full-blown psychosis.

She realizes, belatedly, that the coffee David had made her is going cold on the coffee table in the next room. She would have to cross the dining room, the living room, conspicuously, to retrieve it. She would have to see if Rozanov was still standing, sentinel, behind Shane, as though her son needed protection *here* of all places.

So, she makes herself a new coffee, and puts David's together. She stirs together ginger, hot water, honey, and lemon for Shane.

Then, a pause, as she considers the fourth mug.

"Coffee or tea?" she calls from the kitchen.

Both her husband and her son know that she's not asking *them*.

Given the delay, Rozanov doesn't realize that she's asking him, either.

"Coffee, please," she eventually hears.

Right.

She breathes in, holds it for a moment, then lets it out slow.

She pours a cup of coffee for Ilya Rozanov.

She brings hers and David's over first, setting them down without really pausing to assess the table. She makes a second trip for Shane's and Rozanov's, delivering them to the table with as much ease as she can muster. She reaches between them to set down the mugs, which startles a quiet *thanks* from Rozanov and inspires no reaction whatsoever from Shane, who is seated with his arms crossed and his eyes downcast, potentially attempting to reverse time with his mind.

Yuna trails a warm hand across his shoulders as she rounds the table—a reassurance.

"I think we thought, maybe, you were gay," she says, as casually as she can manage.

"You did?" Shane asks, disbelieving, but meeting her eyes fully again.

"I think we thought it was certainly possible," David volunteers, and even though the tone of the conversation has shifted, now—less shocked, softer edges—the admission unsettles Shane.

"For how long?" he asks, not quite an accusation.

"Mmm, for a while, I guess," she answers, remembering the restaurant in Montreal, remembering the conversation she and David had shared on a drive home that'd felt longer than usual. Remembering a handful of small moments, nothing too conspicuous.

An airport Starbucks, Shane trying so much harder than he usually did to make small talk with the barista. The marketing intern that worked for the Metros during Shane's second season that he'd taken book recommendations from, studying the memoirs with an unusual diligence and urgency, the only time in his life she's ever seen him read fiction.

How quickly he'd bolted from the room when Scott Hunter was kissing his boyfriend on TV
—

—and that someone had called him, or he'd called someone. She remembers the timbre of the hushed, urgent conversation that followed. She remembers choosing not to push, not to ask.

"We both know you pretty well, Shane," David says, and he must be remembering moments of his own. The things that Shane showed, with or without meaning to, but never told them. He never *told* them—fuck, he wouldn't be telling them now if he didn't feel like he had to, he'd said *soon*. "I mean, what we did not suspect was that you were so... friendly, with Rozanov."

“Ilya,” Rozanov corrects him, a small but particular interruption, his eyes skating from David to Yuna and back again.

“Ilya, sorry,” David corrects, and the apology is brief but sincere.

“I know,” Shane says, shaking his head, staying on track, not looking at her, not looking at his father. “It’s a long story.”

He looks to Rozanov when he says this, eyes going wide when he finds that Rozanov is already looking back at him. Shane shifts in his seat and goes back to staring at the table between them.

“When did this happen?” David asks. Shane still looks like he’s on the verge of tears.

Yuna looks at Rozanov—who continues to meet her gaze intermittently and more evenly than she expects, but offers no answer.

“Wait,” David says, and Yuna turns to face him. “The All-Star Game—you two had so much chemistry.”

The thing is, they had—she remembers watching all twenty minutes of the game. It’d been remarkable, to watch Shane play alongside someone who could truly keep up with him—

—but Rozanov is shaking his head, no. He still doesn’t speak—but heaves a small sigh and grins, almost like he can’t help it. Shane looks to Rozanov, who tries to give him a subtle nod that Shane does not pick up on at all.

“No. It was before then,” is all Shane says.

“Wow!” David says, while Yuna takes a sip of her coffee and, in tandem with her son, tries her best not to cry. The All-Star Game had been six months ago—this had been going on for so long, and Shane hadn’t told them a thing about it. David continues, “—wow, wow—” and Yuna nods her agreement while she blinks back tears. *Wow*.

“So, when?” she asks, knowing that she’s not hiding her upset as well as she’d like to be.

Shane is shifting in his chair, unhappy, arms crossed like he’s physically holding himself together—and Rozanov’s posture changes, too, as his attention sticks to Shane’s obvious discomfort.

“Since our, uh, rookie season,” Shane says.

“Since your *rookie* season?” she parrots back, stunned.

“No, it’s not true—since before that,” Rozanov corrects, focus staying on Shane.

“Not helpful,” Shane mumbles, shaking his head and stealing a glance at the man sitting beside him.

“Before?” Yuna insists.

“The summer before,” Rozanov answers, still speaking exclusively in Shane’s direction—like it matters, like it’s important, like he wants to get it right, like he wants *Shane* to get it right.

“So you’ve been in love since—” Yuna can’t help but rock forward, bewildered.

“No!” Shane says, immediately.

“No—no, no—” Rozanov’s voice joins in on a chorus of denials.

“—No. *No*, no—” Shane also denies, denies—but there’s something heartbroken in it.

“—no no, no—” Rozanov laughs. “Just, uh...”

“Just what?” Yuna asks Rozanov, not quite scowling at him. Shane is miserable, withdrawn, and Rozanov is *laughing*.

“Uh—just...”

“Just...?” she asks, eyebrows flying up.

“Just... just—” Rozanov starts again, only for Shane’s quiet voice to cut him off at the pass.

“—Ilya.”

Ilya smartly retreats behind his coffee.

“*Oh*—kay,” Yuna nods in understanding. *Christ*, Shane.

“Just what?” David asks, oblivious to the fact that the subject had been, mercifully, about to drop. God bless her husband and her son.

Yuna breathes deeply, clears her throat.

“*Lovers*.”

“Okay, no one is allowed to use that word again,” Shane says, loud and obviously mortified at the same time as Rozanov nods a confirmation in her direction. Chastised, she watches Rozanov’s hand drop—watches him turn to Shane, swallow. He doesn’t quite get his guard back up in time, and Yuna sees it—something like sorrow, something like fear.

It’s something she’s seen in him once before.

At the hospital, after Shane’d been injured in the game against Boston, when he’d offered her a smile that didn’t match the question in his eyes—like he’d lost something.

She sees it, now: as Shane’s palpable, directionless anxiety begins to wear even Ilya Rozanov’s practiced stoicism thin.

“Well,” Yuna says, trying to break the tension. Not for Rozanov’s sake—for all of their sakes. “*I would love a drink.*”

She makes sure to grip Shane's shoulder firmly as she passes him, retreating to the kitchen.

A reassurance—for both of their sakes.

—

Yuna's swimming in her own thoughts, standing in the kitchen and making no gesture to choose, pour, or much less *serve* a drink by the time David joins her.

"I was thinking vodka," he says, tone mild—like he's commenting on the weather.

"I can't believe this is happening," she whispers, knowing that her voice is too soft to reach the dining table—and besides, she can see across the open floor plan that Rozanov is taking advantage of their time divided, mumbling something to Shane that she can't make out.

"I can't believe this is happening, either," David says, then shrugs: "But that doesn't change the fact that it's happening."

It's a gentle nudge, without malice. He's telling her to get it together.

She watches as David gathers four glasses and pulls an expensive bottle out of their freezer, returning to the table like it isn't the middle of the day on a fucking Tuesday.

She braces herself with both hands on the countertop, breathing deeply, before she returns to the dining table.

"If my math is right, we're talking about eight years," David says, pouring a glass of vodka for her, and then a glass for Shane.

"Yes, Dad," Shane replies, making a face at his first sip of vodka.

"... and there were no nice men in Montreal?" David asks, pouring for Rozanov and then himself. It's a joke, she thinks. Mostly. Kind of. She's not quite ready for jokes. It doesn't seem like Shane is, either.

Yuna realizes that when she'd started thinking carefully around the subject of her son's potential, *theoretical* coming out, she'd still been picturing Shane in isolation. She'd assumed that the *someone* of it all would come after.

She just...

She thought he'd have told her.

Now, Yuna tries to picture Shane with a nice man from Montreal—a sports analyst, or a physical therapist, maybe. Maybe someone who had nothing to do with hockey at all, someone who didn't recognize Shane the first time they met. She tries to picture this nice

man from Montreal, someone they'd have been excited to meet, someone who they could bond with over their different experiences at McGill, or that they could take skating as a family, or something—and finds that she just... can't.

It wouldn't be a challenge, she realizes, and Shane is only really ever himself with a challenge in front of him.

"I don't know? Probably, there were?" Shane answers without humour, voice thin and high.

"And do your teammates know?" she asks—*speaking of nice men in Montreal*. She thinks about Shane's Montreal family, Hayden and Jackie and four kids who will grow up calling him Uncle Shane—she can't decide which she likes less: that they do know, or that they don't.

"No—*nobody* knows," Shane answers like he's being threatened with a gun. Next to him, Rozanov's expression is flat, a little bit sour, solemn—and Yuna is struck by the realization that he is *also* responding to all of this like he is being threatened with a gun. He would just react differently to being threatened with a gun than Shane would.

Rozanov clears his throat, gently—nods to David.

"This is good vodka."

"Thanks," David answers in earnest. "I try to buy the Russian stuff."

"Mmm," is Rozanov's only answer, aside from a thin, forced smile. Shane takes a healthy swig of his vodka, closing his eyes and keeping them closed for a long moment after. Yuna watches concern write itself across Rozanov's already drawn expression at the gesture.

"You never... I mean, you never let him win, did you Shane?" she asks, even though she knows the answer. She still needs to hear him say it. Shane meets her eyes, something like outrage colouring his features—which, it's not great, but it's nice to see him look something other than miserable or panicked.

"Do you let Dad win at cards?"

"I'd rather die," she answers, simply.

"Same here," Shane returns, sharply.

"Alright," she accepts, aware that David is trying not to smile at the exchange, eyes familiar and fond.

"So is your plan to... what? Just keep doing this in secret until you both retire, or..." David asks, pragmatic.

Shane looks to Rozanov—Rozanov looks to Shane.

"Probably," Shane answers. "I don't know."

“Prob—probably, yes,” Rozanov echoes Shane’s answer.

“Oh—no, that’s... sad,” Yuna speaks before she thinks and gets the response she deserves. Rozanov gives her a shrug and a wave of the hand that isn’t white-knuckling his glass, a gesture that she roughly translates to *no shit*, before he turns to stare out the window, while Shane answers:

“I know. *We* know,” he says. Rozanov turns to him at the use of *we*, nods. “We just can’t come out, and like... announce it.”

—and he’s right, is the thing. It might be different if they were teammates, or if they weren’t both star centres, or if they weren’t famously in competition, or if the hockey world at large didn’t know them as enemies. It might be different if they weren’t Hollander and Rozanov—but that, she supposes, is the seed that starts this story. They critically are Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov—and they always have been.

The wave of silence that washes over the table is solemn—a sort of sticking thing, a glue trap they’ve only just realized they’re standing on. There’s nowhere to go.

“Ilya, I gotta say, I’m surprised. You have such a reputation as a ladies’ man,” David says, without cruelty. Yuna knows—has heard, has been learning, as she had started to think about a plan—that high profile celebrities hide their sexualities differently. Some go big, with fantastic displays and playboy reputations. Some stay quiet, emphasizing privacy and refusing to engage with speculation. She looks between Rozanov and Shane, and back again.

“Mm,” Rozanov replies. “Is not untrue.”

Yuna blinks.

“Ilya likes both,” Shane volunteers.

“Oh,” Yuna says, instead of shouting at him across the table, *why*.

It’s not fair, and Yuna knows, objectively, that it’s not fair, but she can’t help but wonder why he would do this to Shane, to himself, if it wasn’t his only choice.

“It’s true, I’ve been with many women, but...” Rozanov offers, looking to Shane, speaking carefully, *seeing* him. “I have only been in love with one person.”

“Same here,” Shane echoes—and for the first time since he walked through the door, some of the rigid anxiety leaves him. He breathes. “Only one.”

And—this is... Yuna can feel herself welling up. There’s shock, yes, but what overwhelms her now is *sadness*.

Her son is in *love*.

He didn’t *tell* her.

It's not just that: it's that he *hadn't* told her, and didn't choose to tell her today—David had *caught* them, like they were doing something wrong.

“Well. Just...” she half-excuses herself, pushing back from the table, gathering her own mug and glass and bringing them to the sink. When the sob that she's been holding back threatens to choke her, she turns off the water, and leaves through the back door.

She just needs a minute.

David

“You should follow her,” David says, looking between the two obviously frightened young men sitting across from him—looking at his son, who is one half of his family, who is the only person he loves as much as his wife, who is half of his *world*, who has been fighting back tears for most of the last twenty minutes, and who had started to lose the battle when his mother stood up and left the table without making an excuse.

“But—” Shane starts, and Ilya interrupts.

“We will be okay,” Ilya says. “We have good vodka, plenty to talk about. Go.”

“Shit. Okay,” Shane says, shoving back from the table and taking off for the backdoor. He makes it about halfway there before he stalls out completely, jogging back to the table and snagging his mother's cardigan off the back of her chair before he darts outside.

This coaxes out the first genuine smile that David thinks he's ever seen on Ilya Rozanov.

God bless his wife, but she's been so wrapped up in her *idea* of Rozanov—Ilya—that she hasn't really been giving him a chance, much less a reason to smile. Hell—she'd scared some nervous laughter out of the kid and then immediately mistook it for humour.

And he is—scared. A *kid*.

Younger than Shane, if David remembers correctly, by some handful of weeks—but so, so much better at hiding it than his son has ever been—being scared. Being *young*.

Which, David knows, is not a skill that kids often come by naturally.

Even if that wasn't what David was seeing now, even if Ilya's brave face hadn't been slipping every ten seconds for the last ten minutes, even if he was everything they'd always thought he was, a cartoon villain invented by the universe to steal accolades from their gifted, beautiful son, that wouldn't be the end of the story—because Shane *chose* Ilya.

Shane *loves* him.

After David got over the shock—and that had taken him longer than he was proud of, Jesus—he found that he was... relieved. Grateful, oddly, to hear just how long this had been going on, with him and Yuna far-from-blissfully ignorant.

It's just... they'd been so worried that Shane was lonely. *Alone*.

"You two were about to make something to eat, earlier," David says.

Ilya offers him a scrunched up sort of face that David has no clue how to interpret—probably some version of displeasure at the reminder of earlier, no matter how general—and a nod.

"Well—I'm pretty confident that you and Yuna can both manage a glass of vodka on an empty stomach, but Shane is another story," David grins, and he's rewarded with not just the second genuine smile he's ever seen on Ilya Rozanov, but the beginning of a surprised laugh. "Why don't we get started on an early dinner?"

They do.

Yuna

"Mom, um... I need you to know that I *did* really try. I tried really hard, but, um..." and Shane shakes his head. "I just can't help it—and I'm sorry."

His voice breaks, and Yuna shatters.

"Oh, no—you have nothing, nothing to apologize for. Look at me, *look* at me."

Shane doesn't.

He shakes his head, closes his eyes. Keeps his thumbs in his pockets.

"Look at me," she insists.

Shane does—tears caught in his eyelashes, he meets her eyes—but it takes no time for his gaze to drop, ashamed, and Yuna can't let that stand. She ducks down, doesn't let him look away.

"I'm sorry that I made you feel like you couldn't tell me."

Shane nods. The first tear falls, and more follow.

“Hey... I am so, so proud of you, okay?”

He nods again—and Yuna thanks every force in the universe she can think of that he’s willing to recognize that this is true as well.

“Please forgive me,” she asks, folding him into her arms like she should’ve done twenty minutes ago.

“I forgive you, Mom,” he says. “I love you.”

“Oh, I love you too—so much.”

Yuna holds him, her son, takes in the bulk of his shaking shoulders, and remembers him smaller—remembers him at five years-old, mournful tears at the end of his first real season of hockey, at eight years-old, lonely tears after the practice where Ryan Cheung had snapped at Shane that they *weren’t* friends, at twelve years-old, frustrated tears when a coach had pulled Shane off the first line because he’d *never be big enough to cut it professionally*, giving the spot to *a player who actually had a chance*.

A few disappointed tears, at seventeen years-old, on the flight home from Saskatchewan, while Yuna rubbed a circle between his shoulder blades.

“You okay? Yeah?” she asks, taking his face in between her hands.

He nods.

She chooses to believe him.

“Alright. Okay—okay, okay, enough,” Yuna says. She watches Shane take a deep, bracing breath—mirrors it with one of her own.

When Shane had been young, in second grade, his teacher had asked Yuna to meet with her privately—Shane wasn’t in trouble, of course he wasn’t, the teacher had insisted, but there was something important that she wanted to discuss, better done in person. Yuna’d walked into that meeting expecting to hear that Shane was maybe struggling in French. She’d walked out with a brochure about *Asperger’s Syndrome* and a bitter taste in her mouth.

Is he struggling, Yuna had asked, direct and dry after the teacher had spent a sentence too many speaking softly, like she was trying not to startle her. The answer: *academically, no—but socially...*

Surely, Yuna had thought sarcastically at the time, *you cannot think that an autism diagnosis would help with that?*

She’d brought the brochure home, showed it to David.

He’s happy, she’d insisted, *Shane is happy*—happy with his few friends, happy with his good grades. The eager, abundant joy that hockey brought him didn’t feel, to her, as though it was something that needed to be pathologized. *Treated*.

David had agreed—if Shane wasn't struggling, if he was happy, then there was no reason to invite the possibility of a label that might do more harm than good.

They'd thrown the pamphlet in the garbage.

In recent years, she's begun to wonder if that was the right decision—knowing the things she knows now, without forgetting just how differently children with special needs were treated twenty years ago.

There's no easy answer.

"Alright—what's the plan," she asks—a question for which there is no easy answer now.

He laughs—and she can't help but laugh a little, too. Another tear gets away from him, and Yuna dutifully thumbs it away.

She's not sure where Shane got the idea, but he's lived by it—still lives by it.

As long as the tears don't fall, he's not crying.

She wonders if this is yet another rolling hill in the province of her decision-making, another lesson she taught Shane without meaning to. She wonders if there was ever a time when he'd *almost* told her, and she'd missed it, or redirected, or assumed. She wonders if she's failed him. She wonders at how easily he forgave her—but.

If she's going to trust him, she's going to trust him absolutely.

She wonders what the plan is.

And he tells her.

Another year. Free agency. Ottawa. A charity—a foundation, really, to build a new story. Hollander and Rozanov—rivals, yes, but with respect, and then friends, and then, one day, maybe more.

That's as far as he's gotten—or, as far as *they've* gotten.

She tries to silence the part of her brain that's been planning for this—*but not well enough*—accounting for sponsorships, for the support of the league, for legacy, for everything else.

She tries to imagine that NIL really is nothing. There will be time for all of that after—later.

She's coaxed him into sitting on the edge of the dock with their feet in the water, shoulder-to-shoulder, and before she knows it, Shane's talking—*really* talking to her.

Grappling with exactly how much he's been holding back is going to make her cry again, cry more, so she's saving it for later.

Right now, she can't help herself.

“So,” she finally says, leaning in to bump his shoulder with her own. “Ilya Rozanov.”

Shane laughs—that brighter than usual, louder than usual laugh—and scrubs the heels of his hands over his face.

“How’d that happen?” she asks.

Later, he will tell her about the CCM shoot—that Ilya had been the one pulling the strings, that had requested that Shane and him feature together. That he hadn’t wanted to wait until October.

Later, he will tell her about the years of silence and missed connections: flights and games, competition and conversations and some fighting, yes, but always building more than they were breaking down.

Later, he will tell her how—and when—things started to change.

Today, his answer is simple, but just as honest:

“Sort of... by accident.”

—

“We need a statement prepared in case anything leaks—something classic, and simple,” she says, getting down to business—playing to her strengths, really. She didn’t handle the first part of this conversation as well as she should have, but she can manage this part to the best of her considerable ability.

She watches as Shane pushes Rozanov’s—Ilya, she thinks, *Ilya’s*—hand down while the man lifts a quite frankly ambitious forkful of spaghetti toward his mouth.

“Mom—”

“—and I’m going to quietly reach out to the premium brands, or maybe just Reebok, and Rolex, and Speedo. They’ll be thrilled, I think, once they wrap their minds around... this. There’s a world of opportunity here, if they do it right,” she says, gesturing with a glass of white wine as she talks it all through.

She’s thinking about the morality clauses again—a kill switch on a contract that’s predicated on something as vague as *becoming the subject of public disrepute, contempt, or scandal*.

These were brands that privileged precision, achievement, and excellence—its why they worked with Shane, or why Shane worked with them. Regardless of how this goes—if it goes at all, not just Shane coming out, but Shane and Ilya coming out together—there will absolutely be dissenting parties. Public contempt—though, hopefully marginal—is patently unavoidable.

There is no world where *everyone* takes this well.

Fuck, *she* hadn't taken it well.

Best case scenario: they stay in complete control of the narrative, deciding who knows what and when. The charity kills the rivalry, and Shane and Ilya can start to build something that exists beyond closed doors and silent retreats. Both boys continue to have long—but not too long—hall-of-fame careers that are not seriously negatively impacted by the league's or the public's knowledge of their relationship, no matter how little or much of that knowledge is willingly shared.

Worst case scenario: this gets out, somehow. The league—both in terms of the organization and the players themselves—and the public react poorly, feeling betrayed by Shane and Ilya. Hockey fans and players alike are deeply invested in their franchises, identifying with the teams, feeling every loss and win, quick to lay blame when things don't go the way that hockey fans think they *should*. This unexpected truth ruins them. Shane and Ilya are benched, suspended, or, perhaps more dangerously, they play and find themselves targeted on the ice, left without the protection of their teammates, in a full contact sport that has famously resulted in both career and life ending injuries.

Or, they're bought out of their contracts, or left to rot until free agency, finding themselves without offers despite their skill—skill that the league has been eager to celebrate for the entirety of their respective careers.

"Mom, can you just take three steps back, please?" Shane asks, exasperated. "I'm not gonna come out or anything yet," Shane looks to Ilya, pauses. Ilya gives him as much of a smile as he can probably manage with his mouth completely full. "We just want a... a future. I don't know."

His voice falls, toward the end—flattened, she thinks, with something like sadness. Pessimism, maybe.

Yuna shifts her attention. It's less about focusing on Ilya and more about moving her focus off of Shane, who seems to be wilting—and besides, she does want to hear it from him—some confirmation of the plan that Shane had shared with her on the dock.

"You play in Ottawa?" she asks, knowing that she's not managing to keep her skepticism off of her face. It's just... Ottawa is kind of awful? It's a team locked into what feels like a perpetual rebuild in a city with far fewer fans than most Canadian markets.

"Yes," Ilya nods, not giving away any sense of reproach, resentment, or even hesitation. "We would be closer, and with the charity..."

"Hmm—and you have no loyalty to Boston?" Yuna asks, failing to understand a world where this is a simple decision—an *easy* decision—for a player of Ilya's caliber to make.

It's a question worth asking, because it's fair. Rozanov went first overall in the draft, in *Shane's* draft, to a team that he's apparently comfortable just walking away from. And yes, Yuna had always thought, *privately*, that the writing was sort of on the wall with the draft—

that Shane was undoubtedly the better athlete, but that Rozanov's style (*vicious, irritating, brazen*) was much closer to Boston's style. And nevermind that, at the end of the day, she was happier to have her still *teenage* son a couple of hours away at the beginning of his historical career.

She'd also always had complete faith in the fact that Boston would go on to regret taking Rozanov over Shane, and wildly, she *is* currently experiencing vindication—Ilya intends to abandon them at the end of his contract for reasons that have very little to do with the Raiders themselves.

"Jesus, Mom!" Shane cuts in.

"What? They drafted him—you would leave Boston for Shane?"

"Yes," Ilya answers again, without fanfare or further explanation.

She's *actively* searching for a split second of uncertainty, for even a sliver of bitterness that could take root and proliferate, for any sign of the animosity that's defined both of their careers.

She can't find it.

"Hmm."

"Mom?"

"Loyalty is important," she shrugs.

"He's trying to be loyal to *me*, not Boston," Shane says, emphatic.

She wonders if there had been any negotiation, if Shane had considered leaving Montreal. If you'd have asked her this morning, she'd have laughed a question like that off. Now, she doesn't know the answer—doesn't know if she actually *wants* to know, either.

"Well..." is all she says.

"My mom cares a little *too* much about hockey," Shane tells Ilya.

"Now I see where you get it from," Ilya says, with his mouth full and smile genuine, joking.

Still, Shane's words hit Yuna like a brick. She drops the topic.

"Have you talked to Scott Hunter?" David asks, and she realizes sharply that David is thinking in parallel.

Ilya is leaving Boston for Ottawa *largely* because Ottawa is close to Montreal. If Ilya stayed in Boston, Shane's best option—their best option, for Shane—would be New York. The Admirals are the current champions, a much more competitive team than Ottawa—with the right moves, they could afford Shane, and with Scott Hunter running the locker room, it would pretty much guarantee Shane a soft place to land.

“No,” Shane answers, at the same time as Ilya responds:

“I did.”

“You did?” Shane asks—as surprised as Yuna is, it seems. David’s just... nodding along.

“Yeah—briefly,” Ilya says, talking with his free hand while he simultaneously tries to use it to cover his somehow still full mouth. “After MLH award in June.”

“And what did he say?” Yuna asks, genuinely curious. *Nobody knows*, Shane’d said.

“Nothing—I didn’t tell him about Shane and me, but what he did, it was...”

“Yes, it was very brave.” Yuna says.

“It changed things, for me, at least,” Ilya nods. “Maybe for us.”

Shane’s forehead hits the table with a dull thud, and Yuna—

—Yuna was focused on Ilya, thinking about New York and Scott Hunter and whether something can be brave if it’s necessary, and Ottawa and its ailing franchise, Shane’s hometown, the poster on the wall in his childhood bedroom now feeling prophetic.

Ilya shifts quickly as Shane deflates—letting out a sound that Yuna knows well as a sign that Shane is panicking, shutting down.

Ilya seems to recognize it as well—he glances up from Shane, looking to her first, and then David, and then back to Shane, all within a second or two. Then, he’s resting a hand on Shane’s leg, saying his name. Repeating it.

“I’m okay. I’m just freaking out,” Shane chokes out. “I’ll be okay in a second.”

Ilya doesn’t give him a second—he moves his hand to Shane’s back.

“Hey,” Ilya says. “Hey, hey—hey, we’re good here. Your family is here. Your boyfriend is here. You’re good here, okay?”

Ilya—he’s touching Shane, which usually makes Shane spiral harder, with a rough hand—real pressure. Not unselfconscious, but...

“My boyfriend?” Shane mumbles, lifting his head just enough to get eyes on Ilya.

“I mean... yes. I think so, probably.”

Ilya says it seriously, but there’s a certain... joy in it—in having said it at all, Yuna thinks. It’s clear it’s not a word they’ve used—*had* to use—before. She supposes that not telling a soul about your years-long relationship does contradict the need for labels.

Ilya leaves a hand on the back of Shane’s neck, and uses the knuckles of his now free hand to guide Shane into a brief, earnest kiss. There’s joy in it, too.

“Since rookie season...” Yuna says.

“The summer before,” David corrects out of the corner of his mouth, eyes shining.

—

“I’ll bring the chicken and some salad stuff—pick up beer in town.” David instructs.

This had been the deal—arising from first Shane, and then Ilya, trying to insist on helping to tidy up after the meal.

David had brushed Ilya off, reasoning that he’d already helped make the food, which made him exempt from clean-up duties. Yuna’d just blinked at that, adding it to the long, long list of smaller, individual surprises that had followed that first shock.

As for Shane, she’d brushed him off with both hands on his shoulders, steering him toward the door—he was clearly exhausted, wrung out and rattled, but secure, she thought, in the knowledge that his parents loved him. That they supported him, and wanted to try and support *them*.

So, a deal had been struck: Shane—and Ilya too, she supposed—would host dinner the following night, and she and David would leave the dishes for them.

“Please text,” Shane calls, a final addendum to their plans.

“Why? We’ll just be there around five,” Yuna asks, entirely joking.

“Please text,” Ilya calls back to them.

“We’ll text,” David agrees, then— “Just pay attention to your phones.”

There are shouted *thank yous*—Ilya, first, for the pasta, and Shane a moment later, without specification—a *drive safely*, and *I love yous*.

It’s a chorus that she can imagine getting longer, in the near future. Shane has always loved things very intensely—his small family, his sport, his cottage. Yuna has always found it easy to love what Shane does, to love it alongside him. If she ignores everything else, at least for now, she knows that this could be easy, too.

They watch the two of them pull away from the cottage, standing in a comfortable but still somewhat stunned silence.

“What *exactly* did you see?” Yuna asks after a minute, only half-joking.

David pinches her side and refuses to answer.

She finds her iPad—opens a new tab.

Not for the first time, she searches the name *Ilya Rozanov*.

She'd done the research before, and had drawn many of the same comparisons and conclusions as sports analysts and talking heads had.

They're both playmakers, strong in both directions. They're both working fast, both capable of creating huge opportunities. Both working with better instincts, vision, and accuracy than pretty much anyone else on the ice.

Season over season, the numbers skew slightly towards one or the other in predictable directions—goals over assists, power play over penalty kill, offence over defence, the list goes on. Both of them are elite players, with near-maximum value over replacement.

In her mind, the technical difference between them is simple:

Shane skates by other players. Ilya skates through other players.

This time, she's not looking for the updates to his three-year weighted averages.

She's looking for the man she met today.

Or maybe she's looking for the man who'd visited Shane in the hospital, just a couple months ago—the man she'd met in the hallway, trying to hide inside of his own jacket.

Or maybe, she's looking for the kid in the elevator at the CCM shoot, all those years ago—who'd cracked Shane up, who'd laughed with him, who'd seemed shocked that she would have any interest in introducing herself or shaking his hand. The kid who'd been alone in his new life.

Maybe, though, less alone than she thought.

Since their rookie season—the summer before.

Chapter End Notes

I guess I wasn't done with this. Yuna Hollander you have bewitched me

deeply grateful for the love that folks have shown for this so far, and looking forward to potentially taking the opportunity to write through the fabled post-cottage outing dinner

some fr hockey talk in this one, gang.

in the section where Yuna's considering the critical differences in shane and ilya's style of play, I'm parroting the kinds of conversations that happen when players are getting compared to mcdavid and crosby irl—or when they're getting compared to each other. I'm a lifelong hockey fan, and I have made my girlfriend participate in 4+ hours of discussion regarding the way that I think shane and ilya would actually differ on the ice.

ty to my darling [eden](#), who is writing fabulous heated rivalry outsider pov as we speak

find me on [twi](#) if you'd like, and as always: xo

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