from the cold

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from the cold

by stammiviktor

Summary

It’s winter in Ottawa and Ilya has hunkered down in his big, empty mansion to weather a nasty flu. Then his phone buzzes.

— Guardian™ Security Alert: Movement detected at front door
— (1) Missed Call: Yuna Hollander

Or: The Hollanders have a new son to take care of. Ilya has no idea what’s going on.

Notes

Watched the finale. Entered a fugue state. Bon appetit.

Set during The Long Game but there's no real spoilers for that book, and it's a bit of a mix of TV and book canon.

See the end of the work for more notes

Ilya cursed his giant, expensive mansion. It was private and had a four-car garage and a training room, but his kitchen was very far away from his bedroom. He very much wanted to be in his bedroom right now. Instead, he was trudging down the stairs, taking care that the alpaca-fur-lined house slippers Shane had got him for his birthday did not slip on the glossy wood. The slippers were very warm and fuzzy but did not have great traction.

He pulled the blanket tighter around his shoulders as he appraised the pantry. It smelled faintly of spices, which was somehow enough to make his stomach turn. In the end, he grabbed a sleeve of Ritz crackers and two sachets of ginger tea. It was ridiculous how much his quads ached when he went back up the stairs. It felt like he'd played hard the night before, instead of watching his team lose without him on the TV. His head hurt like he'd been slammed into the sideboards, too.

"*Blyat*," he said, for no one's benefit but his own.

It took him longer than it should have to remember which closet in the upstairs hallway had his first aid stash. He fished around until he found a half-full bottle of Tylenol and a thermometer, nearly dropping the crackers in the process. It was only once he'd deposited his haul on his bedside table that he realized he'd entirely forgotten to make the hot water for the tea. Maybe if he closed his eyes and took a deep breath, a mug, a pitcher of filtered water and an electric kettle might magically appear in his bedroom.

"Blyat," he said, and shuffled to the bathroom. He rinsed out the porcelain cup that held his and Shane's toothbrushes and turned the tap water to hot. It still went against every one of his instincts to do this—his mother never let him drink from the tap, she said it had chemicals—but Shane did it and he was as careful as they came. Ottawa tap water was supposedly the "best in the country," whatever that meant. When the water was as hot as it would get, he filled the cup, opened the sachet, and dropped it in. The ginger smelled good. The steam helped his sinuses. He tried not to think about the chemicals, or that maybe he could taste peppermint toothpaste residue that he failed to clean out of the bottom of the cup.

The bed welcomed him back with no judgment, at least. It was such a relief being horizontal for everything except his sinuses, which immediately clogged up, so he gathered the strength to haul himself up until he was propped against the headboard. Beneath his ass, his phone vibrated.

It wasn't Shane. Shane was at practice; they had a big home game against the Admirals tomorrow. He'd offered to skip practice when they talked yesterday evening on the phone, which was ridiculous for a few reasons.

"You are not missing practice, *Captain."*

"But I—"

"You are not driving *four hours* just to fuss over me. I'm fine."

"You sound awful. Like a pack-a-day smoker."

“Is good thing I quit, then.”

“Ilya.”

“Shane.” Adoration cracked his creaking voice. “I will *not* get you sick.”

Shane had sighed. His responsibility to his team was something he could not argue with, not this close to the playoffs. Ilya’s team was never going to make the playoffs this year, though. Maybe they would if Ilya kissed the starting line players of every team in his division on the mouth. Maybe then the Centaurs could win the cup, with the help of some light—alright, heavy—biological warfare.

“I’m sorry you’re miserable,” Shane had said, sounding pretty miserable himself.

“Me too. You know what would make me feel better?”

Shane had made a choked sound. This was so easy. “You have got to be kidding me.”

Ilya had laughed. It turned into a cough. “Yes. Sorry.”

“Drink some tea. I have that ginger kind in the pantry, I think? Add honey and lemon. It’ll make your throat feel better.”

Ilya sighed and sipped his ginger toothpaste tea. He’d forgotten about the lemon, too. And the honey.

Anyway, the text wasn’t from Shane. It was from Rob, the team doctor, whose last name Ilya couldn’t remember because he always insisted on being called Rob. *How are you feeling this morning? Temperature check?*

Ilya rolled his eyes but stuck the thermometer under his tongue, then waited an eon until it beeped. *38.1,* he typed back.

Ilya had wanted to play last night. He’d been planning on it, and he was decently fine at morning skate, up until Wiebe caught sight of him in the locker room an hour before puck drop and said, “Absolutely not, Rozanov. You look like hell warmed over.” Then he shoved the back of his hand unceremoniously against Ilya’s forehead and said, “And you have a fever. Go see Rob.” Then Rob had taken one look at him and sent him home with explicit instructions to call if his temperature hit 39.5.

Ilya wasn’t about to argue with that. He didn’t want to jeopardize his team by being a liability on the ice *or* by giving them whatever flu nonsense he’d apparently caught.

Rob: *Still low grade. That’s good. Drinking lots of fluids?*

Ilya shot a disdainful look at the tea. *Yes.*

Rob: *Good. Are you still keeping food down?*

He thudded his head against the headboard, which was mistake, because it fucking hurt. He fished out a cracker from the plastic sleeve and chewed it until it was dust in his mouth, then washed it and a few Tylenol down with the tea, which was now lukewarm. *Yes.*

Rob: *Ok. My ringer's on. Call me if you need to.*

He must have drifted off even though he'd just slept through most of the night. An irregular buzzing dragged him back to the surface, the vibrations of his phone amplified through the mattress. Someone was calling him. It wasn't Shane, the pattern was wrong. He blinked open his crusty eyes and squinted against the light of his home screen.

— *Guardian™ Security Alert: Movement detected at front door (9:35 am)*

— *(1) Missed Call: Yuna Hollander (9:37 am)*

What the fuck.

His phone rang again. He answered it quickly. "Hel—" his voice cracked. He cleared his throat. "Hello?"

"Ilya! How are you feeling?"

"Fine. Alright. Is everything okay? Shane?"

Yuna huffed. "Shane is fine. *You* are sick."

"He told you?"

"Sportsnet told us, technically. But yes, he called."

When the pieces fitted together, Ilya felt ridiculous for not understanding sooner. "You are here. At my house."

"I brought some things you could use."

Oh, Shane.

"You can come in from back door. There is a keypad. 2481."

Through the receiver he heard the rustling of wind. It must be cold outside. He'd left Yuna Hollander standing on his front porch for—he checked the time—almost five minutes now.

"You know that isn't very secure," Yuna said.

His phone vibrated with another notification from the security system, letting him know the back door had been accessed.

"What?"

"Your code, it's based on public information. It's guessable."

Ilya scoffed. “No one guesses that I love #24 Shane Hollander.”

“I can’t imagine why,” she said quietly. It meant something, but he wasn’t sure what. The line went dead at the same time that he heard footsteps in the hallway and the rustling of bags. Yuna knocked on his half-open bedroom door, then entered before waiting for a response.

Her hair was windswept and her cheeks pink with cold. She studied him somberly in that way she had where you never quite knew if you were in for a lecture or an empathetic smile. He supposed he’d gotten the lecture already, so it shouldn’t have been a surprise when her lips pursed with sympathy.

“Oh, sweetheart,” she sighed, and Ilya’s stomach twisted so bad that he thought he might finally throw up.

“I have it handled.”

“I’m sure you do,” she said. There was no trace of sarcasm. She began unloading the contents of one of her bags on the top of the dresser. “Tell me your symptoms.”

“Uh. Headache, body aches, sore throat…” The word he wanted escaped him and he gestured helplessly at his nose.

“Congestion?” she supplied.

“Congestion,” he said, then coughed.

“Cough,” she added.

That made him laugh, which made him cough again.

“Sorry, sorry,” she said. She strode toward the bed and pressed the back of her hand to his forehead. It was so cold. The relief made his tongue lazy and his accent garbled.

“I will get you sick,” he said helplessly.

“It’s going around. I’m sure I’ve already been exposed.”

“But,” he started, then stopped, because you couldn’t argue logic with someone who wasn’t being logical.

“I’ll crack the window, get a bit of air flow. Okay?”

Ilya hummed. Soon enough, a wisp of cold air hit his face. It was nice, but Yuna’s hand had been better.

“Alright, I brought a bunch of fluids. You need to be drinking. I’m going to go heat up the soup. I want a quarter of this to be gone by the time I get back, got it?” She handed him a bottle of Gatorade. It was the cloudy white kind that tasted like fake cherries. “I brought a few flavors in case you didn’t want that one.”

“Is my favorite,” he said.

“You drink it on the bench, sometimes,” Yuna said. “I’ll be back up soon.”

When Yuna returned, Ilya was sitting up against the headboard with his hands folded in his lap over the smoothed sheets. A quarter-empty Gatorade bottle sat beside him. Yuna was carrying a baking tray that held a bowl of soup and cup of tea. Steam curled up from both and mingled in the air.

“Alright. We’ve got chicken soup—broth, mostly, though there’s a few chunks of chicken and carrot in there if you’re up for it. And ginger tea with honey and lemon.”

The tray was heavy on his lap. If he moved even a centimeter, he might spill it. “Thank you,” he said, then tried the soup. Then, embarrassingly, moaned. “Sorry.”

“You like it?”

“Of course,” and thank god it didn’t taste like his mother’s. He might have lost his composure entirely.

“It’s an old recipe from David’s family. I grew up eating rice porridge when I was sick. It’s called okayu, Shane loves it, but you probably could use something more familiar.”

“I would love to try it sometime.” Right now, though, he was glad for the clear, texture-less broth. He avoided the chicken.

“Do you still want this tea? It looks cold.”

“Definitely not.”

Yuna moved about while he ate. She took the toothpaste cup downstairs then started fishing around in the other bag she had brought.

“What is that?” Ilya asked.

“Medications. Have you taken anything?”

“Tylenol.”

“How much? When?”

“Um. Two of those.” He opened his phone and checked when he had texted Rob. “Two hours ago.”

Yuna hummed. A few minutes later, she sat down on the side of the bed next to Ilya’s legs and offered him a handful of pills. Any reaction to that, he kept buried deep. She described each—cough suppressant, antihistamine, other words Ilya’s tired brain could not parse—as she put them in his hand.

“You are trying to drug me. So Shane can win the Cup.”

She raised an eyebrow. "*Shane* will play distracted unless you get better."

"I will get better then. For Shane."

Yuna smiled and reached a hand up toward his face. He expected her to press the back of her hand to his forehead, but instead she cupped his cheek. Her fingers were cool. She was sitting so close to him and his germs. She was sitting on the bed where he fucked her son. She held eye contact with him in a way he wasn't used to; Shane rarely maintained it for more than a few tantalizing seconds at a time. But they had the same eyes, the same deep brown, and Ilya loved Shane Hollander so much. He loved his cold, boring hometown and his warm, *warm* family. The first time Ilya had been alone with Shane's parents was when they'd invited him over to watch one of Shane's playoff games. It had been the series against DC, game three at the Capital One Arena. The Centaurs' season was over at that point, obviously. Ilya had showed up with a bottle of the nicest Russian vodka money could (illicitly) buy in Canada—David was a man of taste, and learning that had been one of the first things that put Ilya at ease with Shane's parents during that nightmare of a first meeting. David had made chicken parmesan, which was rapidly becoming Ilya's favorite. Then Yuna crushed them both at Yahtzee. Ilya hadn't thrown the game (he had too much respect for her for that) but he was nervous enough that it compromised his normal strategizing. It was easier once the puck dropped and they could sit on the couch looking at the TV instead of each other. Looking at Shane. Commenting on Shane's playmaking and even, to Ilya's delight, his *slightly weak backhand.*

During the intermission before the third period, Ilya had caught Yuna staring. She had that look on her face that meant she was thinking some variation of *since before their rookie season.* Sometimes he looked at her and saw her face framed by elevator doors and wondered if she'd put the pieces together yet—that the first time they talked, he'd been on his way to devour her perfect son.

"Sorry," she had said with a small smile.

"It's okay."

"It's just—"

Ilya had swallowed and waited.

Yuna ran a hand through her hair and continued. "I don't know what kind of player he would be without you." She said it like it scared her, like the ice was shifting beneath her feet. He knew the feeling.

"I can be a bad influence," he said cheekily.

She did not take his offer of humor. "Not that I've seen."

"Oh," he'd said.

"It must be hard. Watching."

He had known what she meant. She meant that the Centaurs were a terrible team that had not made the playoffs in years. He pursed his lips and shook his head. “No. It is never hard watching him.” He paused. “Unless he gets hurt.”

Yuna had patted his hand in sympathy, and he managed to be normal about it. Just like he was managing to be normal now, with her palm cupping his cheek as she sat on the side of his bed. She studied him as he held himself forcefully together.

“Sleep,” she said. “Drink what you can. Call me if you need anything in the meantime, alright?”

Ilya wasn’t sure what this meant, *in the meantime.* He was sure he knew the idiom, but the context escaped him. The meantime of what?

Yuna withdrew her hand, patted his knee, then stood. He regretted it. “Call me,” she reiterated, then left.

…

Ilya woke sometime in the afternoon to puke his guts out. He managed to make it to the toilet, which was something, but his knees were going to bruise from how hard they hit the tile. He needed a rug in here. A nice, fluffy, shag rug. Maybe then he could just sleep here instead of worrying about returning to the bed when he was still at risk of heaving.

Eventually it was the cold that got him. He opened the cabinet beneath the sink and pulled out the green plastic bucket that held bottles of cleaning supplies. Shane would have hated the way he upended the bucket and left them just strewn about the floor, but Shane wasn’t here to see his mess, thank god.

The bucket was a good idea. Ilya threw up twice more in it and didn’t even have to leave the comfort of his bed, the luxury. It tasted like Glacier Cherry Gatorade, which was vile. He hoped it didn’t ruin the flavor for him. He probably should have thought of that. And it didn’t exactly make him eager to rehydrate with it, either.

He woke up again once it was dark. It was winter in Canada, so it could be 5pm or it could be midnight, but his phone said it was 6:30. He had missed a call from Shane a few hours ago. He’d probably been on the bathroom floor at the time. There were texts from Rob asking for another temperature check. There were, as of one minute ago, two missed calls from David Hollander.

And, on top of that:

—*Guardian™ Security Alert: Movement detected at front door (6:21 pm)*

—*Guardian™ Security Alert: Movement detected at back door (6:25 pm)*

—*Guardian™ Security Alert: Back door accessed (6:29pm)*

What the fuck.

Yuna had come back, then. But why was David calling him? He would have called out to see if someone answered, but his expensive, luxurious mansion was too big and his throat too sore.

Then there were footsteps coming up the stairs and down the hall, and a knock on the half-open door.

“You came back,” Ilya said, despising how it sounded.

“It’s only me, I’m afraid,” said David Hollander.

The room spun, Ilya sat up so quickly. “Easy, easy,” David said. “Yuna got pulled into a meeting, and I was passing by on my way home from work, so I thought I’d check in instead. How are you feeling?”

Ilya’s brain was focusing on all the wrong things. “The Treasury Board is downtown.” Ilya’s house was not *on the way* from downtown to the Hollander’s.

David looked at him strangely. “Yes. It is. Are you feeling okay?”

“I am fine.”

David continued to look at him strangely. “Ilya.”

Ilya swallowed. “I am…” he waved his hand around his head.

“Dizzy?”

“Yes. And nauseous.” He capped the list at the new symptoms. David didn’t need to hear the rest.

David’s eyes flickered around the room and landed on the puke bucket beside Ilya’s bed. Oh god. Ilya might throw up again.

“Do you need anything? Can I help you to the bathroom?”

“No, thank you,” Ilya said and pushed himself out of the bed. He did have to pee, actually. He hadn’t kept much down, but he also hadn’t peed in… a day? Jesus. David’s hands fluttered by his side as if he was going to ignore what Ilya said and help him anyway, but fortunately he didn’t.

Ilya went to the bathroom and didn’t throw up again. He peed sitting because he didn’t trust his balance, and there were still bottles of cleaning products discarded across the floor. A total tripping hazard. The mirror accosted him with his reflection when he went to wash his hands. Obviously he didn’t look good. He looked a little green, actually, and dewy from sweat. His hair was wet from it, too. There was a dribble of bile on the collar of his shirt. He pulled it off immediately and straightened his necklace, then picked his toothbrush up from the counter and brushed his teeth with a vengeance.

When he came back into the room, the window was cracked again to let in fresh air. David was standing at the dresser squinting at the label of a pill bottle.

The bucket by the bed was empty and clean.

"Blyat," Ilya exhaled.

"Sorry?"

"Nothing," Ilya assured him. "Thank you. I was going to— do that."

David was, again, looking at him strangely. Somehow, all these years of deciphering Shane's emotions did not help much with deciphering David's. Ilya was good at this, generally. His father did not do big expressions either, yet Ilya had been able to read every thought on his face in real time, even once the dementia took hold. Perhaps especially then. But talking to David was nothing like that, and nothing like talking to Shane, either. It was like skating blind. Maybe that was because Ilya understood Shane Hollander, or at least he liked to think he did. He'd spent a decade needling him, learning him. David, he could only guess at.

David, who apparently carried the contents of Ilya's stomach in a bucket to one of the guest bedroom toilets, dumped it out, then cleaned it by hand. And then placed it right back where he'd found it. "It's no trouble," he said. "It's why I'm here. Okay, it's been eight hours, time to take more meds."

David had, thankfully, brought a cup of water from the kitchen to wash them down with, so Ilya didn't have to drink more of the puke-tasting Gatorade. Sorry, Glacier Cherry—he'd need a bit of time.

David closed the window, then prompted Ilya to check his temperature. They waited an agonizing minute in silence while the thermometer worked. "38.9," Ilya read. "Still okay." He'd remember to text that to Rob once David left.

"That's high."

"Not terribly. Rob the doctor said to worry at 39.5."

David sighed. "Alright. Take it every few hours, please? If you can."

Ilya nodded sharply. "Yes. I will."

"I, uh, heated up more of the soup, if your stomach can handle it. Yuna left a container of it in the fridge, and I can make more later if you go through all of that and want more later. Oh, and some ginger ale." Sure enough, there was an open can of ginger ale and a clean glass on the bedside table that Ilya had not noticed, next to the steaming bowl of broth that Ilya also had not noticed. "It's supposed to help with your stomach, at least that's what my mom always said. Maybe that's why Shane likes it so much."

Ilya's brain had gotten stuck. "You made the soup?"

"Uh huh, it's an old family recipe."

Yuna had said that. And Ilya knew that David liked to cook—he was the master of chicken parmesan, after all. Somehow he had still assumed. Wasn't that kind of sexist? "Thank you. It is very good," he said. His mother used to put garlic and dill in hers, but David's had a lighter flavor, which in that moment Ilya deeply appreciated.

"You're very welcome. Listen, sorry for letting myself in unannounced. I'm really not trying to make a habit of it. But you weren't answering your phone and I was…"

Worried. He was trying to say worried. Ilya knew that pinched expression well from Shane.

"It's no problem," Ilya said.

"Good. Sleep well. Call if you need anything, alright?"

"Yes. Alright."

When the door closed behind David (he always closed doors behind him), Ilya sagged against the bed and ran his hands down his face. Then he took three cautious sips of ginger ale and called Shane.

Shane answered on the first ring.

"Ilya? Are you okay?"

Shane's voice hit him like a cool breeze. Ilya's smile was automatic. "Mm, mostly. Better now."

"I tried calling earlier, but you must have been asleep."

"Mm. How was practice?"

"Fine. JJ's nursing some bruised ribs, so we're considering swapping him out on the first line tomorrow. How's your fever? Are you drinking enough?"

"You sound like your mother."

"Oh, good, she came by?"

"She came by," Ilya said, "with soup and an entire pharmacy."

"Sounds like her."

"And then your dad came."

Shane laughed. "My *dad?"*

"After work. He said it was 'on his way.'"

"It's not."

"I know that." Ilya grinned. "You are not sneaky, Hollander."

“Sneaky?”

“You put them up to it, yes?”

“Uh, I mean, I told my mom you were sick and asked if she could come by and check on you. My dad really came by?”

“He cleaned my puke bowl,” Ilya stated.

Shane gave a startled laugh. “Oh my god. I mean. Yeah, I guess he used to do that for me, too.” Silence for a moment. “I’m sorry if they’re being overbearing.”

“Mm, no,” Ilya sighed. “Is nice. They are missing having a son in Ottawa, and I am happy to benefit.”

“I think they just love you.”

Ilya’s throat hurt very badly.

…

As if Ilya had not been embarrassed enough, the next morning, he accidentally called Yuna Hollander *mama.*

It wasn’t his fault. He was in a state of fevered delirium. He had not felt the vibrations of her phone call, or the chirp of the alarm system when the back door was accessed. He, honestly, had not thought to expect her to return. And he had been floating in some sort of hazy fog, hot and miserable and leaking from his pores, and he’d felt cool hands on his arm and his forehead. They stroked his cheek, all while a low, light voice murmured something soothing. And he opened his mouth but not his eyes and said “Mama.” And he clung to her wrist so she’d stay.

Yuna coaxed him up out of the fog quickly enough. Ilya was mortified and miserable and he wanted to sink back into it. But she had a new flavor of Gatorade this time and he was so thirsty that his tongue felt like a cotton ball.

“Sorry,” he mumbled once he’d had a few sips of Cool Blue.

“Shh,” she said, and pushed sweaty curls back from his face. “Drink.” Then she gave him more pills, and he noticed that his throat at least wasn’t so sore anymore.

He drifted off again after that. When he woke up again she was not there. But then the next time she was—afternoon sun streamed through the west-facing window and she was sitting in the chair where Ilya liked to deposit his half-dirty clothes, reading a book. He lay there still and silent, watching, until he drifted off to sleep again.

The next time he woke, the world was no longer cottony and distant. The bedroom felt real again. *He* felt real again. There was an immediacy to sound, to light, to touch—his brain

processed the information quickly and directly. He felt light-headed when he sat up, but the world didn't spin, and his body didn't protest every single muscle movement.

He grabbed the thermometer before he even checked his phone. He waited. It beeped. 37.3.

There were footsteps in the hall and a knock on the door. David pushed it open. "Your fever broke a few hours ago," he said. "Sorry, Yuna had to leave. How are you feeling?"

Ilya just stared. He probably looked like a fish. A silly fish. "Better," he said slowly. Then, after appraising his sticky skin and sweat-soaked sheets, added, "But, uh, gross."

David smiled at that. "I could draw you a hot bath."

"No, no," Ilya said, probably too quickly. "I can shower."

"Are you still dizzy? You could fall. I could—"

"I do not need help."

Ilya winced when he heard how harsh it sounded. He expected David to wince, too, but he just nodded. "As long as you're careful."

"I'm sorry."

"It's alright."

Alone in the bathroom, Ilya grasped the sink countertop with both hands. The mirror was kinder to him now than yesterday, but he was not feeling particularly kind toward himself. The bottles of cleaning products were still strewn across the floor and he had to be careful not to step on them as he walked to the shower. The hot water felt wonderful, though, and his shampoo smelled clean, nothing like Glacier Cherry and bile and sweat.

He emerged from the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist and found David replacing his dirty sheets with clean ones. He'd just tucked the final corner in and stood back with his hands on his hips, looking satisfied.

"Feel any better?" he asked.

Ilya could only stare. His throat was hurting again.

"Ilya?"

He blinked, then pursed his lips and nodded.

"Good. Come downstairs. You should eat."

He followed David downstairs and through his palatial mansion toward the kitchen. "Go ahead and sit on the couch, I'll bring it to you."

"No, I can do it."

“Ilya.” It was the sternest he had ever heard David Hollander sound, but he did not seem angry. “You’re sick. Let me.”

Let him what? Let him wait on Ilya hand and foot while Ilya sat there, recovered, like a lazy bum that couldn’t do anything for himself? The idea was so viscerally wrong that it tasted like bile on the back of his tongue. Was this how his father would have felt, toward the end? Ilya and Alexei bringing him pills and water and food he barely knew how to chew anymore? Maybe, if he’d remembered that self-sufficiency was once how he’d defined himself. If he’d remembered that he was supposed to be a fucking *man.*

Oh, fuck me, Ilya thought. He went and sat on the couch and stared at the TV. David had been down here watching Sportsnet; the commentators were gearing up for the Metros v. Admirals game tonight. The clock in the bottom right of the screen said that it was 6:40—the drop was in less than a half hour.

David brought him his food on a tray. There was a bowl of rice porridge, a mug of tea, and a cup of water. He placed it on the coffee table then sat down on the other end of the couch. “Yuna made some okayu before she left. It’s like congee, if you’ve had congee. There’s a bit of dashi in it—fish stock, it gives it a kind of smokey depth of flavor that I like a lot.”

“Will you eat, too?”

David smiled sheepishly. “I had some about an hour ago. I wasn’t sure when you’d wake up.”

“In time for the game,” Ilya observed.

“Yep. Yuna is coming back soon, she should be here during the first period. She had a few errands to run. Hope you don’t mind if we do a little watch party here?”

On the TV, Sportsnet showed live footage of the Bell Center. Shane would be in the locker room right now. And…

“Wait. This is a home game.”

David frowned. “Yes.”

“You and Yuna, you are not there. You are here.”

“Well. We don’t go to *every* home game.”

“Almost every.”

“Then this is the ‘almost.’”

“It is *Admirals,”* Ilya said, so startled that he dropped an article. The Admirals were the Metros’ fiercest challengers in their division this season. Sports commentators had been discussing this game for weeks.

“It’s not like it’s the playoffs,” David offered weakly.

Ilya shut up and ate his porridge. It was really good. Warm and plain and good. His mother would have called it *полезная*—healthy, beneficial, for the body and the soul.

He was going to cry.

He was crying into Yuna's porridge. He was crying in front of David Hollander. Maybe if he did not move, David would not notice? This was ridiculous. It was just that Ilya was so full of feelings and they needed somewhere to leak from. They soaked his face and he licked them off of his lips. He was so hungry and depleted of electrolytes that they almost tasted good.

"Oh, Ilya," David said, and Ilya had fucking blown it. He turned his face away and covered it with a hand for good measure.

"Blyat," he said wetly.

"Blyat," David echoed somberly, and Ilya burst out laughing. It was so Shane, both the delivery and the delight it startled out of Ilya.

Through his wet mess of emotions, he managed to say, "Shane has been teaching you bad words."

"Hate to break it to you, but that one was definitely you, kid."

Ilya laughed again, but it sounded like a groan. "I'm sorry. I don't know what is wrong with me right now."

David snorted. "The flu."

"I cannot blame flu for everything."

"You can probably blame it for this." David tapped his finger absently against the remote, clearly chewing on what to say next. "You know I raised Shane, right? I'm not bothered by crying."

"My father was," Ilya said, surprising himself.

"Yeah. So was mine."

"He did not like weakness."

Ilya did not like the letter *w.* His lips could not wrap around it.

David hummed. "You know, it took me a bit. With Shane. When it first became clear that he was… sensitive? I don't know, that's not the right word. He feels everything just, so deeply. And when he was a kid, I really thought that was a sign of weakness. I like to think that maybe I wouldn't have been worried about it if he weren't so passionate about hockey. I was thinking about how he'd be treated. But you know, he was always being treated like the odd one out anyway. Being half-Asian, being emotional or sensitive, being so damn good at playing hockey. I don't know. Somewhere along the line it became extremely clear to me that

all of that is what makes Shane so strong, and makes him *him*. He taught me that. And, you know, I've been kinder to *myself* since. Isn't that something?"

"It is," Ilya said. "It is something very important."

"You'll make a good dad, too. When you're ready."

"You will make me cry again."

"That's alright." Then, after a long silence, "I mean it."

Ilya nodded, not trusting his voice anymore. They let the sports commenters fill the silence with chatter about the upcoming game.

Yuna arrived just after the puck dropped. "What did I miss?"

"Shane won the face off," Ilya said. His voice didn't waver, which was hardly something to be proud of. "No goals yet. New York has already taken one penalty, but nothing from the power play."

Yuna's attention was clearly torn between the TV and Ilya. "You look much better!"

"I feel much better. Thank you for the… okayu? Did I pronounce it right?"

"Close enough." She pressed the back of her hand against his forehead as if she needed to feel it for herself. When she had confirmed he wasn't feverish, she nodded in satisfaction.

"There's plenty left on the stove," David told her. "Green onions are on the cutting board."

They ate together and watched Shane's game, and it was just like every other game they had watched together except that it wasn't. They were at Ilya's house, on Ilya's couch, watching Ilya's TV, and it was a home game that the Hollanders could have been seeing in person.

During intermission, he caught Yuna staring over her bowl of okayu.

"There is something on my face?" he wondered.

"No, no, sorry. I was just thinking that you look a lot better."

She had already told him that. He raised an eyebrow.

"Fine. I was thinking about all the times we've sat with Shane and watched *you* play."

"You did that often?"

"Not often. Usually just the playoffs when he had been knocked out of contention before you."

"Ah, those were the days," Ilya joked. When Yuna didn't respond, he said, "Are you upset? That he did not tell you then?"

She clicked her tongue and thought for a long moment. “I’m trying not to be. Really. It just upsets me, looking back, that I thought we were all sitting here cheering against you—but he was watching you and *loving* you, and he was doing it all alone.”

Ilya’s laugh was thin. “Well, he did not love me until recently.”

“Oh, I *sincerely* doubt that.”

Ilya wanted to protest, but he simply couldn’t find the words. It felt too good to sink himself into the version of reality that she offered: where Shane Hollander sat on his parents’ couch the year the Raiders won the cup—2014, after Sochi, after months of unanswered texts—and watched Ilya tear through the neutral zone or shove some lucky bastard into the sideboards, and wanted him to be *his.*

Yuna laid her hand on the couch between them, palm up like an offering.

“What really gets me now,” she said, “is that we could have loved you that whole time, too.”

Ilya took her hand. He was no longer feverish and her skin felt warm.

…

Later, once Montreal cinched a narrow victory over New York and the Hollanders had left, Shane called.

“Congratulations, Captain,” Ilya greeted.

“You’re feeling better?”

“Yes. Did your mom tell you?”

“No, your voice did. Did you watch?”

“Of course. We watched together at my place.”

“Oh. That’s nice.”

“Are you jealous that I stole your parents tonight? You should be jealous. She made me okayu.”

“Did you like it?” Shane asked, and Ilya could tell from his tone of voice exactly what his smile looked like. It was one of the dopey ones. Cute. But they were all cute.

“I did. And I liked watching you wipe the ice with Scott Hunter.”

“Hardly. It was a close one.”

“In that case, how embarrassing to almost lose to someone so geriatric.”

“Geriatric,” Shane echoed. “My dad teach you that word?”

“Yes. He left me New Yorker to read while I was sick.”

“He did not.” Shane laughed, then sighed. “I love you.”

Ilya closed his eyes. “And how long have you loved me?” Shane was silent for a long moment.

“I don’t know,” he said finally. “It was too long ago.”

“Too long ago like… 2014?”

“Before, I think,” he whispered.

Ilya took a long, deep breath. He wanted a cigarette, but really he wanted Shane’s thumb in his mouth, the world narrowed to a single pulsing point.

“I’m coming tomorrow. It’s a free day, and you can’t talk me out of it.”

“God, I wouldn’t dream of it.”

End Notes

Thank you so much for reading, I would love to know what you thought!

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