

unlearn how to unlove

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by [doctoralhashimi](#)

Summary

The moment Yuna rises from her seat, Ilya knows Shane is going to follow. He is good, his Shane. A good hockey player; a good partner; a good son. A good person.

On his best day, Ilya might consider himself to be one of those things. It's purely quantitative; he has the accolades to prove it. But today is far from his best day, so when Shane grabs the grey cashmere sweater draped like a shroud around Yuna's vacated chair and leaves Ilya with David peering blankly at him across the table, he braces for a storm.

—

Ilya and David's conversation at the dining table.

Notes

david does tell yuna what he saw in the book, but christina chang plays episode 6 like she has truly no idea why shane and ilya have arrived at the cottage and it made me feel some type of way (read: quite emotional!) toward david. this fic practically wrote itself at that point.

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

And I think that's what a father is
— a blade that never stops cutting.

Desirée Dallagiacomo

I choose to stay present, to unlearn how to unlove,
to love, and to practice my worthiness of it.

Buddy Wakefield

The moment Yuna rises from her seat, Ilya knows Shane is going to follow. He is good, his Shane. A good hockey player; a good partner; a good son. A good person.

On his best day, Ilya might consider himself to be one of those things. It's purely quantitative; he has the accolades to prove it.

But today is far from his best day, so when Shane grabs the grey cashmere sweater draped like a shroud around Yuna's vacated chair and leaves Ilya with David peering blankly at him across the table, he braces for a storm. Sure, Ilya knows he will be nothing like Grigori; Shane has shared very little about his father, but Ilya has a decade of covetously watching them interact with each other, and while the list of things that Shane is good at is lengthy, one thing it does not include is acting, his many commercial spots notwithstanding. He wears his heart on his sleeve, his need in his eyes, his fear in the set of his mouth.

It follows that the ease between the two Hollander men is not a front. Still, Ilya worries. Grigori is his sole frame of reference; in his own personal tongue, a father is a vessel of shame and duplicity. What terrible things might David say in secret, then, knowing that Shane would believe him over Ilya? What ultimatums might he make? What accusations and epithets might he hurl?

"Some more vodka, son?"

Son.

And that—that's almost worse.

(When was the last time he was called someone's son? When he was twelve, the night before he found his mother? *Спокойной ночи, мой сын.* At his father's funeral, in the purposefully audible whispers of assembled mourners? *Abandoned by his own son, can you believe it.*)

Ilya swallows around the tightness that has formed in his throat. Kicks his frontal lobe, mercifully free of CTE-related atrophy, into action. "Yes, please. Thank you, sir."

"Please. It's David."

But you called me son, Ilya wants to protest, and this is how I know how to be one. Even as an orphan, look how well I play the part.

“Sir” kept Grigori at a distance, more so than the 4,400 miles separating Boston and Moscow. “Sir” shortcutted deference that Ilya didn’t otherwise feel. “Sir” did not infer belonging, not like the “Grigoryevich” that sat between his first and last names, a vestigial thing that bound him to Alexei, too. Not like that day on his couch, when he gasped *Shane* for the first time. Not like—

“David. Thank you.”

He watches David go: past the broad windows, not unlike those that precipitated the afternoon; past the lupine (*L. polyphyllus*, symbolizing renewal, happiness, overcoming trauma) in a vase on the table; past the framed photos of Shane at every stage of brilliant life. It takes David only seconds to procure the blue bottle from the kitchen, but each feels like hours to Ilya. Usually it is Shane who has the impulse to fill silence, but he finds himself gripped by the urge now, wishing he had thought to pull up *The New Yorker* website in the car on the drive over so he could recount some boring headline like “Is the Dictionary Done For?” or “What Does ‘Capitalism’ Really Mean, Anyway?”

Maybe he should double down on his assurances that he is no longer the playboy he is reputed to be. What might a father want to hear? That Ilya had hardly slept the night they spoke of Svetlana and green cards and had instead scrolled in the dark through pages and pages of wedding bands, flexible silicone things that Shane might be able to wear under gloves or keep pinned to the inside of his jersey, out of sight but close to heart?

Or maybe he should talk about hockey, that failsafe. But David Hollander certainly would not care to hear of the Raiders, and Ilya does not know anything about Milligan—or was it McGill? Besides, it all feels too familiar; he cannot recall a single casual conversation he ever had with his father that resided outside of the Venn diagram of *hockey* and *derision*, with most landing in the overlap.

For all of Ilya’s concern of saying the right thing, however, when David returns, what comes out of his mouth—much to his immediate horror—is, “You did not tell her?”

“Who?”

“Shane’s mother. You didn’t tell her what you saw. Or, that is how it seemed like when we arrived.”

David nods. Takes a long sip. “No, I didn’t tell Yuna.”

“Why?” he questions reflexively. He seems to remember himself then, and casts his eyes down to his hands. He’s picked one of his thumbs almost to bleeding, a manifestation of the culpability he feels as acutely as the still-present ache in his ribs. It is the last thing he ever wanted, to be responsible for bringing parental ire onto Shane. Shane, who has been exempt from it for so long. “I am sorry, I should not ask—”

David bats his concern away with a wave. “I knew Shane would tell us when he was ready,” he answers after some thought. “From the moment scouts entered our lives, there have been so few timelines that Shane has been in control of. It felt like the least I could do was let this be one of them.”

“That is very kind of you.”

“It’s what a father does.”

Inexplicably, Ilya’s vision goes a touch blurry. “A good one, yes.”

Ilya could have said it in any number of languages and David would have been able to pick up on the subtext. He has no illusions that recontextualizing the role Ilya Rozanov plays in their lives will be instantaneous, but it takes no time to see that in front of him is not some villain on ice, but a boy. A boy with recontextualizing of his own to do.

Ilya still has a faraway look in his eyes when David raises his glass and asks, “How do you say ‘cheers’ in Russian?”

It hardly feels like a moment of celebration, Ilya thinks, though perhaps there is some nuance he is missing with “cheers” as he did with “lovers.” And yet—their gazes meet, and David’s eyes may well be Shane’s, just as transparent. There is no irony there. There is no begrudging formality there. Just curiosity. Something else, too, like an olive branch.

“за здорóвье.”

“Za zdorovye,” David echoes. It’s clumsy, but it’s effort, more than he can say his own father ever offered.

The vodka soothes on the way down.

End Notes

Спокойной ночи, мой сын. - Good night, my son.

[Is the Dictionary Done For?](#)

[What Does “Capitalism” Really Mean, Anyway?](#)

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