Closer to the heart

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Closer to the heart

by norgbelulah

Summary

She says, almost without thought, “He can stay with us, if he wants. While you’re gone.”

Yuna Hollander does want to open her heart to her son’s boyfriend, even if he is Ilya Rozanov. The first step is opening her home.

Notes

I thought I was going to write porn initially for this fandom but then I had all these feelings about the hockey parents. And Ilya’s precious heart put on display for them.

Anyway, it’s 24/7 Yuna Hollander loving hours in this house.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

After a quiet Monday night dinner at his cottage, Yuna takes a moment to gently remind Shane about the Reebok photoshoot in Toronto that Thursday because she's not sure Shane has been keeping track of the days since Ilya's two week stay was enthusiastically extended until training begins for them both in September.

Shane rolls his eyes at her in the same way he would when she needlessly reminded him to stow his gear after practice, or empty the hamper in his room before it got too ripe. He rarely needed her gentle nudges, but he never truly begrudged her trying to feel useful, included.

She knows he can get a little too focused on certain things to the neglect of others. She thinks Ilya Rozanov is probably one of them.

"I remembered," he says as he hands her a dish to dry. David and Ilya are in the sunken living room, pulling up some old highlights from the KHL and MLH in a friendly bout of, "yeah, but have you seen this incredible play?"

She smiles and says, "Of course you did," because she wouldn't have been surprised either way. She holds her tongue on some advice for the shoot. They're having a nice time tonight, despite recent upheaval, and she already sent him an email about it, which he replied to.

She probably wouldn't have, she thinks now, if she'd known he had a houseguest instead of lying about a meditation retreat just to get a break from all their hovering after his injury. Which is what she'd assumed was happening when he'd stumbled through an almost nonsensical explanation of a mountain lodge run by zen monks an hour away and how, "Rose thought it was just, uh, the best, I guess. And that I should try it. To relax."

Yuna remembers David carefully asking, "Do you need to relax?"

And Shane answered, this time truthfully, "Yes, I would like to."

She's setting another plate on the stack next to her to be put away later when he says, with some apprehension in his voice, "About that."

She braces herself.

"I'll have to be gone overnight since the shoot starts so early and, um, when I mentioned it to Ilya he uh—"

His hands stop in the water as he hesitates but his expression is something she's never seen on his face before, a little irritated, no, exasperated, but hopelessly fond. "He didn't say so, really, but," here he laughs and it's soft and fond too, another facet of him never before revealed. "He's such a city kid. He's nervous to stay here by himself. The loons freak him out."

"The loons?"

“He thinks they sound like wolves.”

She’s baffled, tucking the information away in the back of her mind because it’s too strange to examine right now and her son needs something from her. She says, almost without thought, “He can stay with us, if he wants. While you’re gone.”

Shane beams at her. “That’s what I was thinking—was going to ask. Thank you.”

“It’s nothing,” she says, because it’s true. “We’d be happy to have him.”

When Shane drops Ilya off Wednesday afternoon on his way to the airport, her son’s archrival-cum-boyfriend has a sheepish expression on his face and one of Shane’s overnight duffels clutched in both hands. “This is very silly,” he says, once Shane has self-consciously kissed him goodbye and reversed down the driveway. Then he says, "Thank you for having me.”

He’s speaking to them both, but he’s looking at Yuna. His lips twitch like he’s thinking of saying something else but then he just smiles tightly.

It’s David who draws him inside saying, “I’m sure you’re excited to see Shane’s old room. We thought we’d put you in there.”

His delighted grin is immediate and it completely transforms his face. “Yes,” he says, his accent thickening with amusement. “I know he must have big poster of me on wall. You didn’t let him hide it, did you?”

David laughs and goes inside. Yuna lets Ilya follow first, urging warmth and welcome into her smile. His gaze lingers on her as he steps past her through the door.

Ilya loves Shane’s room, or so he exclaims vehemently. “It is very him,” he says after setting his bag carefully next to the desk, eyes roaming over the bed and shelves, taking in every detail. He doesn’t elaborate and Yuna finds herself wondering exactly how Ilya knows what it is that makes Shane so very Shane, when it seems they’ve only spent snatches of time together over all those years, until now.

Then he adds, “But different side, yes? Baby Shane likes blue more than white and wood to cover walls. He thinks he is very grown up now—sophisticated—but blue is a good color. This…” he waves one hand vaguely at the walls, “shade. Is nice.” He says this like he somehow knows Yuna was the one who picked it for him. He looks at her. “Is there special word for this color?”

“Benjamin Moore calls it ‘Hudson Bay’,” she replies, quirking her lips. Remembering it specifically because she’d asked Shane over and over to pick between it and another called “Evening Dove.” She always suspected the decision actually did come down to the names for him.

“Benjamin Moore?” He frowns in confusion. “Lightning and kite man?”

At their confused expressions, he adds, “From a long time ago? C-colonial?”

Oh, he’s been living in Boston. “That’s Benjamin Franklin,” she says.

David cheerfully offers, “Benjamin Moore sells paint.”

Ilya’s smile is quick and smoothly self-deprecating. “Oh yes, of course. I knew this.” He nods, sagely. “Everybody complains Russians all have same first names but famous English men are this way too.”

David laughs and Ilya seems pleased with that outcome.

“Get yourself settled in, I’ll start dinner,” she says, turning away.

Ilya says something else she can’t make out that makes David crack up again as she walks down the hall.

She and David decided days ago they would make pasta for Ilya that night because he seemed to like it so much the first time he came over. David had stepped up and done a simple vodka sauce over spaghetti after they’d brought out the bottle for her round of panic drinks and Ilya had eaten two full plates of it.

They had brought chicken and salad fixings over for them all the other night at Shane’s cottage. Her heart warmed a little remembering Ilya telling them how funny he thought it was that Shane hadn’t thought to split a recipe for eight the previous week. Shane told him three times to shut up each with diminishing vehemence, blushing and smiling. “I just wanted it to be nice.”

Ilya had looked at him, tilted his head so slightly, catching Shane’s eyes and directing all his attention into them. He said, “It was very nice. This is nice too,” while taking Shane’s hand.

Shane had blushed even harder, pleased. David had to look away but Yuna kept her eyes on them almost all night, just drinking them in.

She had been so worried about him. Her lonely boy. She hopes, with someone like Ilya, it will be impossible for him to feel alone.

“Do you want help?” David asks her from the doorway to the kitchen, catching her staring at the package of salmon filets on the counter.

She turns and shakes her head. “I want to keep my hands busy,” she says, knowing her eyes are too bright. She tries giving David a look. “Entertain him, please? This isn’t a three person job and I’d hate to abandon him like that.”

David grimaces a little and lowers his voice as he says. “I showed him where the bathroom is and he disappeared in there. I think he’s embarrassed. Poor kid.”

Yuna shakes herself, and straightens her shoulders. “He’s got nothing to be embarrassed about. Who wants to be left alone on vacation?”

David smirks at her. “Well, honey, I think there are maybe two kinds of people.”

She rolls her eyes as she takes the filets out and pops them on a quarter baking sheet with some salt and olive oil. “Just fill a pot with water for me and go put something on the TV for him. Or show him your vinyl collection. Kids are back into that now, right?”

David just laughs at her from the sink. “Yeah, he’ll be really impressed by how close I am to having Rush’s complete discography,” he snarks.

She smiles and shakes her head. “You never know.”

Yuna bakes salmon and breaks it up, she adds it to a cream sauce, she boils pasta and throws some chopped kale in at the end. She puts a plate of it in front of Ilya Rozanov and he stares at her like she’s performed a magic trick.

“David said you were cooking,” he says intently after eating his first bite. “This is restaurant pasta. Five stars. You make this? For real?”

She can’t help but smile at him, absurdly blushing. She sees how Shane is so disarmed by him. “I’m glad you like it,” she says helplessly.

“Is so good,” he says, tucking further in with gusto, and she can’t tell if he’s playing it up or not. It hardly matters. It’s week night pasta. She might have made the same dish even if he hadn’t been their guest.

He eats two plates again and she wonders if he and Shane have been training or not. Shane was supposed to lay off weights at least until he saw the specialist about his collarbone. She holds her tongue on the question. He’s on vacation. It’s not really her concern. He can eat however much he likes.

Ilya drinks their wine, as well, eyeing the label, but making no particular pronouncements. When she asks him if he prefers another variety, he demurs, claiming to not know much about it. He asks if this kind is her favorite and she tells him her top three dry whites. She sees him cataloging the information for later. She wonders if it will be the very next time he comes over or another time, perhaps a birthday or Christmas, that he shows up with a nice vintage she’s sure to love. He asks David for his preference too, but David is easy and says so. He prefers beer if Ilya wants to switch to that later. Ilya doesn’t commit but he smiles when he says, “Maybe.”

He begs to help David clean up once they have finished. She sits at the table and directs him to various cabinets as he empties the dishwasher so they can load it again.

He’s quick on his feet, of course, and he seems happy to be of use, to be contributing, she thinks. When they’re finished washing up, David puts on a home renovation show. But Ilya seems content to pull out one of David’s old issues of the New Yorker from the drawer inside the coffee table and read it cover to cover.

Yuna spies him periodically looking intently at his phone and typing in short bursts with the magazine laid out on his lap. She wants to tell him he can ask her or David if there's something on the page he doesn't understand. She remembers helping her father with the heavy Webster's dictionary at the kitchen table back in Montreal when he needed to fill out forms. She knows how hard it is. But she doesn't know if Ilya would welcome that help. Maybe not yet.

She pulls out her laptop and sends some emails while David gives her his commentary on the house on the TV. She makes listening noises and looks up for the finished product, raising her brows and saying, "Oh wow, that does look great."

Ilya looks up as well, but he only smiles, glancing between them then back at the show. Maybe he's drinking them in too.

She shoves her laptop aside and gets up for another glass of wine while David pulls another episode up from their queue. Ilya only puts the magazine aside when Shane calls to check in. He says, "Your parents send their love," even though neither of them have said any such thing yet, and gives them a conspiratorial glance and a wink as he disappears into the hallway. Yuna sips her wine and lets her head fall back against the back of the couch. David pauses the show and says, "Do you think I should wait for him?"

"No," she says and wants to laugh even though her heart aches and aches.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Yuna Hollander can't sleep. Ilya Rozanov gains a family.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It’s 3:00 am and Yuna is sitting at the kitchen table with a cold mug of tea. Awake for no reason. Thoughts running a marathon from Juniors to Ottawa. Jesus Christ.

She sighs, trying to let it all out, when she hears Ilya creak in from the bathroom. She’d heard him groan, frustrated, a few minutes ago, thump as softly as possible out of the bed and across the hall. She thought maybe he would just head back to Shane’s room after a few minutes, but no.

His eyes must have been adjusting to the dark, because he seems surprised to see her when he walks into the kitchen. He’s wearing a Montreal Metros training t-shirt and white boxer shorts.

“Sorry,” he breathes, “I did not mean to…” He looks at her, slightly panicked.

She tries to smile. “You’re not disturbing me. And you didn’t wake me. I was up anyway. Insomnia.” She does not say, ‘the joys of menopause.’

“Ah,” he says softly and nods, the gesture seemingly muted, perhaps because of the hour or the dark or, she thought, uncertainty. She has never before thought of him as someone who could be uncertain. But then again, she chides herself, before last week, she’s never really thought of him as someone. A person. A boy who is the same age as her own little boy, who’s gone through all the same extraordinary things as Shane.

“Is the bed okay?” she asks.

“Yes, of course,” he says immediately. “Thank you.”

Yuna has clocked the way he’s said thank you every time she’s handed him something or said something even remotely nice to him, or brought him inside their home. It’s another fact she’s tucked away about him, waiting for the right time to take them all out and examine. Now, she feels a little compelled, here in the quiet of the night, with him here in her kitchen.

He thinks the loons sound like wolves. He believes there is danger in the night. How long has it been since someone told him he’s safe?

His thank yous are different for her than they are for David. They are so sincere. Almost reverent.

She read his profile when he came into the league. One of the Boston papers ran it. It mentioned his mother. She takes a breath. She aches again.

He shifts awkwardly and tries to explain, “It is maybe that I have only just got used to… sharing a bed with someone. Now, alone again.” He makes a face and adds, “But maybe you did not want to hear this.”

“No, it’s all right,” she tells him. Deliberately hoisting an olive branch, she says, “When I travel for work, I’m the same way. And David. He just falls asleep in front of the TV nine times out of ten if I’m not there.”

Ilya’s eyes seem to spark in the way that she’s noticed they do when something in English suddenly makes sense to him. “Bad for back, yes?”

“Very bad,” she confirms. “He falls apart if I’m not here.”

Ilya nods. He tilts his head further into the kitchen and she waves him on. She watches him find a glass in the correct cabinet and pour himself some water from the tap in the fridge door. When he comes back towards her, he takes a seat across from her at the table. He lifts the glass to his lips and takes three huge gulps.

It’s only after he sets the glass down in front of himself that he says, “I, too, am this way. With no Shane. Do not tell him I said so. He would be,” he hesitates, searching for a word, “insufferable.”

It’s a good word. She leans forward a little. “How so?”

“How insufferable or how do I fall apart?” he asks, brows raised, with an impish smile.

She raises her brows right back and he looks away, fingers fiddling with the etching on her pint glass. It’s a vulnerable question, but it’s late and dark and she wants to know this mysterious boy a little better. If he answers, she thinks he’ll make a joke out of it, but she’ll still see some truth there.

After a moment of hesitance, he seems to cave to the pressure of not answering, of disappointing her. “Normal way,” he replies, shrugging. “I drink too much. I dance with pretty girls in shady clubs. I smoke maybe,” he hedges, eyeing her like she might yell at him about it like she just knows Shane has already. He doesn’t know about her wild teens and twenties, or her secret pack of Parliament Lights.

He says, voice quiet, “Is easy to fill yourself up with the world when you are empty without someone. I did not know for a long time, this is what I was doing.”

Her heart aches more and more, thinking of Shane and his rigid routines, early nights, tasteless food. She’d been so happy when she thought he’d taken steps to break free a little.

She'd thought it was Rose Landry's influence. She'd never, ever thought it was the pressure of nearly a decade of secrets.

She thinks of Scott Hunter. The desperation in the way he kissed that boy at center ice. She thinks of his speech at the MLH awards. The loneliness he spoke of. The fear. She hates it. She hates it for her son. For this child sitting in front of her.

And because it's so late and he is here to hear her and it's been on the tip of her tongue for days, she says, hushed and small, "I'll never forgive myself that he felt like he couldn't tell me. All this time. He thought—"

"No," Ilya says, his eyes suddenly hard. He reaches for her hand. His grip isn't painful, but still unrelenting. "Do not say this. This," he pauses, gathering his words. "For Shane, these were things he didn't know and couldn't say. We were so young and he was–was so scared. Me too. Scared about what would happen if anyone found out. Even when we kept— kept going, we told no one. Not anybody. So when he knew–knew for sure about himself, it was all still, ah, wrapped up with me. This big big secret. I think it felt all the same to him. If he told one part, all would come out and out and out." He takes a breath and confesses, "He kept it locked away for me. Because of me."

Yuna knows what he's really saying is, 'It's my fault. Blame me.' She doesn't know what to do with that. She would never.

His eyes are shadowed by the light of the moon through the windows. She finds it peaceful here, usually, so late. The moonlight casts blue and silver on everything. Sometimes the lake reflects too and the light and the shadows dance when she can't sleep. It feels like a secret for herself. Something no one else gets to see.

But Ilya is here. His hand is gripping hers so hard she grips her other hand tight on the edge of the table just to maintain balance.

"How do you know that?" she asks.

"He told me," he says with a grimace and doesn't let go.

"He told you all of that?" She's never heard Ilya speak so many words at once. Not in any interview, and she's watched them all.

He tilts his head back and forth, gesturing the same way with the hand that isn't wrapped around her fingers. He says, "Shane said, sometimes I think I would have told them already."

She stiffens, something sharp lodging itself in her chest. "That's a shitty thing to say." To someone you love, she doesn't add.

Ilya gives her a look that screams, he's your son. He says, "Shane tells the truth. Always. I love this about him." He hasn't let go of her hand.

She smiles, helpless once again against the open vulnerability of his feelings for Shane. "I'm glad," she says, hushed, honest. "Maybe it didn't seem like it, but I'm so glad, Ilya."

He swallows thickly. He lets go of her to cover his face with both hands. This precious boy.

They are silent for a while. She wants to let him collect himself. She didn't mean for this to happen. She sips her cold tea.

After a while, he says, "There is something I must tell you."

"Okay," she replies. She wants to reach for him, but he's chugging the rest of his water. She waits him out.

Eventually, he sets down the empty glass and says, "For a long time there are things I will not talk about. Feelings too big to say in words. Grief mostly, for many years. But fear too and then, for Shane, this impossible, terrifying love." His face echoes those emotions. He's so expressive, right now, at least. She thinks of him in front of the cameras. Smooth, cool, smirking and winking. This is not the same boy. She kicks herself for not understanding it as what it is. An act.

He says, voice breaking, "I think, if I don't speak this, if I pretend it's not real, it can't hurt me or him. But that was very wrong. I did a lot of hurting this way. Hurt me. Hurt him. Shane was the one who said, we need to look, we need to talk." He looks at her, guiltily, "I didn't want to, it hurt so much. He is much much more brave than me." There are tears in his eyes. She wants to stand and go to him. To pull him into her arms, but she senses he isn't finished.

He says, "So please, do not say you can't forgive. Please don't carry that. Shane could have shut this away forever. I would have let him. But he didn't. I think, because you raised him to be this way."

Yuna is surprised to find that tears have spilled from her own eyes. She's never been a crier. Her eyes water and she can blink it away eventually. But these tears are heavy and they feel like relief when they fall down her cheeks.

He gasps when he sees her tears. "No, no," he pleads. "Oh, no. I'm sorry. Did I say it wrong?" The expression on his face is close to horrified.

She shakes her head, blindly getting up from the table, as he scrambles to do the same a beat later. "Please, please," he's still murmuring as she wraps her arms around his broad shoulders and pulls him in tight.

All the breath leaves his body and they sway, pressed together, for just a second before he steadies himself. He makes a small, pained noise, like a wounded animal, curling into the crook of her neck and she hushes him. She says softly, "What you just told me is a gift, Ilya. It was perfect."

"Thank you," he breathes, voice wet.

She pulls away slightly and takes his face in her hands. "Thank *you*," she tells him, making him look her in the eyes. She brushes a stray curl from his brow. "I couldn't be more grateful to you. For loving Shane, for understanding him. I see you."

She will love this motherless boy, not just for Shane, but for himself.

“You’re a treasure,” she tells him. “Okay?”

He gives her a watery smile and says, “Okay.”

“Come here,” she says, pulling away and tugging him by the hand. She grabs her purse and two zip ups by the front door and takes him outside. She herds him down the steps and around the side to the back so they can look out over the lake, and because the wind is blowing in the right direction.

When she unceremoniously pulls the pack of Parliaments out of her bag once they’re both sitting bundled up in the dewey grass overlooking the dock, he barks what sounds like a Russian curse in surprise. She looks at him and says, “Do you want your own or should we split one? I only buy one pack a year.”

He peers at her, flicks his eyes to the box in her hands, then looks back at her frowning. His eyes are red-rimmed, his face tear-streaked, and there is a rueful smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. “Let’s split,” he says, voice rough.

So she takes just one out of her three-quarters-full pack of secret cigarettes and slides a bic lighter out too. She leans a little towards him to try and block the night’s breeze as she lights it, puffs once, and hands it to him.

He takes the cigarette from her delicately, once again almost reverently. He lifts it to his mouth and takes a long drag. His exhale is trailed by a soft chuckle. “I would like to know more about you, Mrs. Hollander,” he says before he takes another drag and hands it back to her.

“Yuna, please,” she says before filling her lungs up with the dry smoke. She hadn’t had one after Shane brought Ilya over the first time. She usually reserves them for destressing after intense meetings with the Metros management or that guy she hates at Reebok. She never tells David when she smokes but somehow he always knows. He never calls her out, only pulls her close and says, “What’s going on, baby?” Sometimes she tells him and sometimes she shakes her head and he just lets her breathe.

She used to think she would shrivel up and die if Shane knew. But now she wonders. If they haven’t been trying too hard to be perfect for each other.

She smiles at Ilya as she hands the half-smoked Parliament back. “What do you want to know?”

“Let him sleep,” Yuna mumbles to David when he slips out of bed at 6:00 am, as usual. “He was up late with me.”

She catches a glimpse of David’s sweet smile for her before she covers her head with a pillow. “I heard him get into the shower at 4:30,” David says, voice muffled, though his

amusement is coming through. “Right before you came back.”

He’d said he would shower so he wouldn’t get the smell of the smoke all over their sheets. Yuna had told him not to worry about it, but he’d insisted as he waved her goodnight and wandered down the hall. She’d hung her bag back on its hook at the front door, rinsed with some mouthwash and crawled guiltily into bed. She hated it when David became a casualty of her insomnia.

“I’ll let you both sleep,” he murmurs, kissing her on the forehead, sneaking under the pillow. “Maybe I’ll go get some donuts.”

She only grunts before falling back to sleep to the sound of him getting dressed.

When she wakes again, she hears David and Ilya talking quietly in the kitchen. She smells coffee and Tim Hortons. It’s 8:30 and her body seems to have had enough of sleeping, even though she’d only gotten about five hours cumulatively.

She emerges fifteen minutes later, showered and dressed to find a crueller with her name on it set at her place at the table. David comes over with a mug of coffee which she gratefully accepts. Ilya is sitting across from her, bright-eyed as only someone in their twenties can be after so little sleep. He’s wearing a Raiders hoodie and a pair of black Adidas track pants.

“How many donuts is that for you?” she asks, glancing at the half-eaten chocolate old fashioned in front of him.

“Third,” he says proudly and she laughs.

His phone vibrates and he pulls it from his pocket, looking at the screen intently as she bites into her breakfast. He sets it down when he realizes she’s watching him.

“Don’t mind me,” she says, but he shakes his head and picks at his donut, pinching off little pieces and popping them in his mouth. She reaches out and stills his hand, looking straight into his eyes when they snap up to meet hers. “What’s the matter?”

His mouth twists, surprised at being caught out. “My agent sent a new contract from Nike,” he replies. “For a few more commercials next year. They always send them in Russian too and I read both, to make sure they are the same.”

“Are the numbers not adding up?” she asks, suspicious. “After the first few years, they always try to sneak one or two things past you. Have you had your lawyers look it over?”

David comes back over with another cup of coffee and the tablet he likes to read his paper on in the mornings. “Easy, mama bear,” he says and she rolls her eyes.

Ilya’s face breaks out into a grin. “The lawyers are good,” he assures her. “The commercials will mean a lot of travel. During times when I am not playing, when I could be–,” he breaks off, practically blushing, as they look at him expectantly. “Anyway, the contract was negotiated before…things changed for me.”

She nods in understanding. “So you want the timeline to be different?” she asks. “That’s not a huge ask.”

“It’s awkward,” he replies. “I pushed for shoots in LA, New York. Before, that sounded more fun. Distracting,” he says with a bit of a wince. “Now I want to take it back. Seems… unprofessional. I don’t like it.”

“But you don’t want to give up that time,” David says sympathetically.

Yuna frowns into her coffee. “Hmm,” she says.

“I will try and think of some excuse maybe,” Ilya offers. “Don’t worry, really. I will figure it out.”

But she does think about it. She thinks about it all morning, to the point of distraction.

Sitting out by the lake watching David show Ilya how to fish, her fingers itch for another cigarette, but she settles for playing solitaire on her phone.

When they’re making egg salad sandwiches for lunch and she almost throws a whole half an eggshell in the bowl, David finally says, “Let the kid handle it, Yuna. He said he would.”

Ilya looks between them, surprised. “What?” he asks. Then his eyes narrow. “You,” he points at her. “You’re just like Shane!”

She throws her hands up in the air. “He’s just like me,” she cries, pointing right back at him. “I’m going to solve your problem!”

Ilya buries his face in his hands and sinks into a chair at the kitchen table. “Fuck,” he says, laughing.

“Don’t look at me,” David says with a shrug. “I’m just along for the ride.”

“There is no stopping you. I see how it is,” Ilya says with a grin. He puts his hand over his mouth, clearly delighted.

“Exactly,” she replies and goes to get her laptop.

Later that afternoon, Shane returns with a tentative smile on his face and his car keys in his hand, as though Ilya is going to want to reverse right back down the driveway and speed all the way to his cottage.

He says, “Hi, it’s me,” just like always and Yuna lets Ilya be first to greet him.

“Hi, hi,” Ilya says excitedly, pushing into Shane as he’s walking away from the door. “Mm. Give me kiss hello.” David’s looking away again but Yuna just can’t. They’re both square in the hallway that opens up into the kitchen, not far off from where they landed the first time they came here together, but Ilya’s on the right instead of left and Shane’s face is bright red.

For a moment it looks like Shane's going to push Ilya away, but Ilya catches his hands and leans in for that kiss. It's very sweet, feather-light, in the corner of his mouth. "How was the flight?" he asks, petting the back of Shane's neck like he just can't help it.

"Fine," Shane says, almost annoyed, just embarrassed. "Short. The shoot took longer than I wanted. Sorry."

Ilya just beams at him. "Is okay. I have great time with your parents."

He's too excited to use articles. Yuna has to put her fingers against her lips to keep from laughing. David's doing something in the kitchen because they're too cute.

"Really?" Shane asks, like he can't believe it. Yuna scoffs, but he's only looking at Ilya.

"Yes, really," Ilya says. "They're great parents. Why would I lie?"

Shane just looks at him like he can't believe he's real.

"I read the New Yorker, Shane," Ilya says and that's when David breaks.

Shane cries, "Oh my God," and tries to make a beeline for the door, but Ilya pulls him back. "Wait, wait," he says. "We're making dinner for you. You have to stay." Shane glares at him, but he just preens, "Anyway, I'm staying for dinner. You wouldn't leave me here again, would you?"

Shane tosses his keys in the tray by the door and sighs. "What did you do to him?" he asks Yuna once he's been pulled back into the kitchen by his grinning boyfriend.

"Nothing…terrible," Yuna says while David's still laughing.

They're laying out the pan-fried pork chops and a cabbage slaw with some toast at the picnic table out back when Shane mentions, "Oh, Mom, Brian the marketing guy you hate was at the shoot." She groans, but Shane keeps going, "They want the next one to be in New York instead of Toronto. I didn't commit or anything, but that's what he said."

And everything falls into place.

Yuna takes her son by the shoulders. "That's it," she says, smiling like a loon, and turns to look at Ilya.

Shane's frowning at her. "What's it?"

"No, no." Ilya's waving his hands desperately at her, palms out, looking guiltily at Shane. "You really don't need to—"

"But it's fine," she says and snags her wine glass off the table. She takes a celebratory sip. "Reebok's fiscal year ends in December, but clearly they want to renegotiate the two shoots

we have left. And we haven't signed anything with Rolex or the fragrance for next year at all yet. Give me your dates, sweetheart."

Ilya looks at her warily, so she sets her wine down and extends her hand, curling her fingers up in a 'gimme' gesture. He doesn't move so she just says, "Ilya." She's about to start tapping her foot.

Shane gives her a double take while Ilya takes his phone out of his pocket. "What are you doing?" Shane asks.

"I'm sending her the dates," Ilya sighs. "Your mother is a terrier, Hollander. She taught you well."

"Send me the whole contract actually," Yuna says. "Are the hotels outlined or do they book them for you later?"

"Must be four stars at least, otherwise I don't give a shit," Ilya says, with a cocky grin.

"And that's in the contract?" She puts her hands on her hips.

"Mom!" Shane cries.

"What? He's got loyalty to you right? Now I've got loyalty to him." She leans over and pats Shane on his adorable cheek. "We're going to solve his problem, baby."

"What problem?" Shane asks, bewildered. His brows are furrowed and he's taking quick little breaths, but Ilya's already noticed.

He's over there in a second with his hands at Shane's hips, pushing him to sit down at the picnic table. "It's nothing," he says calmly, moving steadily forward, making Shane scoot back to accommodate him on the bench and tucking in close. "Not really a problem. Your mother is very dramatic. Just a scheduling thing. I asked for advice. She's good. She'll help me."

"What thing?" Shane asks dubiously.

"Nothing. Just that I was being stupid and thought a few months ago maybe it would be good if I was out of town for long breaks between games in the fall and winter. It was very dumb. You should laugh about what an idiot I am–"

"I wouldn't," Shane protests, still confused.

"That's very sweet. But is okay," Ilya says smiling. He tangles their fingers together as her phone buzzes with the emails he's forwarded to her. "Your mom is going to help me out so I can see you more."

"Help you out how?"

"We'll just demand that all your shoots be at the same time and in the same city as Ilya's," she says smugly, pulling up the contract to skim. She takes another sip of wine, knowing the

food is getting cold–well, the pork is anyway–but caring very little. She has figured it out. “As long as the game schedule works out.”

Shane twists around Ilya’s broad shoulders to look at Yuna pleadingly, “We can do that? Won’t it be suspicious?”

“You worry too much,” Ilya sighs right before Yuna says, “You’ve been the perfect partner with these companies for years, honey. You’ve earned the right to be more than a bit of a prima donna at this point.”

Shane squints at her.

David finally shows up with two cans of a local craft beer tucked into one arm and his own in his hand. “Who’s a what now?” he asks, good-natured as always.

Yuna smiles. “Shane, won’t it be such a funny coincidence when you and Ilya Rozanov happen to be on the same connecting flight to LA next November? And, wow, how crazy is it that you’re staying at the exact same hotel?”

Ilya starts cracking up. “Oh my god,” he says. “She’s a criminal mastermind!”

“Mom, I think that will be crazy suspicious,” he protests, but lets David hand him a beer, thank god. He takes a giant pull from it and says, “I don’t think either of you are worrying enough.”

“It will be a great way to dip our toes into not being hateful rivals in media,” Ilya says thoughtfully.

“Dip our toes,” Shane echoes, amazed. “Which one of them taught you that one?”

Ilya sputters, “I read the New Yorker now, for real this time, Shane. Please keep up.”

“Exactly,” Yuna agrees, ignoring them. “They won’t think you’ve both gone insane with the foundation next season if someone takes pictures of you chatting on an airplane. Or in a hotel bar.”

“They better not take pictures of us anywhere else,” Shane grumbles.

“We’ll be careful,” Ilya tells him, pulling him close. “I’ll take care of you.”

“Shut up,” Shane says, half-heartedly.

Yuna is having a hard time repressing her smile. Shane’s been reluctant to let her do any real media manipulation for him for most of his career, other than securing the endorsements and making sure he always comes off looking squeaky clean. Adding Ilya to the mix will be a fun challenge.

“Mom, you’re looking extremely evil right now,” Shane says as David is serving the pork chops and slaw.

“Shane Hollander, you take that back,” Ilya cries, a playful laugh at the edge of his tone. “Your mother is a saint.”

“You’ve never seen her in the room with the Metros’ management. Also, really. What did you guys do to him?”

Yuna doesn’t bother answering, typing a mile a minute on her phone into an email already addressed to the Rolex people. She’s thinking LA in the fall will probably work for them, as David shoves a plate in front of her. “Put it away now, Mrs. Manager,” he says sternly. “All that can wait until tomorrow. Who knows when we’re going to get these two back on the property again.”

She laughs and listens to him, while Ilya offers weak protests and Shane giggles silently into his beer.

After the food is eaten and the plates are cleared, they see the boys off with hearty waves and promises to text tomorrow. Yuna takes a long shower and crawls into bed. David’s hidden her phone somewhere and while she’s not exactly appreciating the heavy-handedness, she does wriggle into his arms very snugly and lets her mind drift until he turns out the light.

“He’s a good boy,” David murmurs into her ear.

“They’re going to be fine,” she tells him, like he doesn't already know. “We’ll make sure of it.”

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again to monj and legs for beta reading and new friend jess for Canada-picking at the last minute.

You can find me on Bluesky and almost never on tumblr.

End Notes

Thanks to monj and legs for beta reading. Chapter two should be up in the next few days, as long as I can figure out how to end it lol.

And yes, the title is also title of a Rush song.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!