

Remembering You

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Remembering You

by [OikawaHajime13](#)

Summary

Yuna Hollander notices something amiss with Ilya. They work through his grief together.

Notes

FYI: I sobbed while writing this, but Ilya is so loved by the Hollanders.

Grief and mourning are discussed in depth as Ilya tends to get sad before the anniversary of his mother's birthday each year.

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

The first time Yuna noticed it, she'd chalked it up to being the end of summer and the beginning of training. Professional athletes faced their own unique challenges—the pressure of the preseason, the physical toll on their bodies, and the constant scrutiny. But the second year, when Ilya's shoulders carried that same heaviness in late August, when his smiles didn't quite reach his eyes, and he grew quieter at family dinners, she began to pay closer attention.

The third year, she was certain.

It was a Thursday afternoon when Yuna let herself into Shane and Ilya's house with the spare key they'd insisted she keep. She'd brought over a container of borscht—Ilya's favorite. It was a recipe she'd perfected over the years, specifically because of how his face lit up when he ate it. Shane was at the Centaur's optional practice, but she knew Ilya would be at home today.

She found him in the garage, standing motionless in front of his workbench with a greasy rag in one hand.

"Ilya, sweetheart?"

He startled, shoulders tensing before relaxing just slightly as he turned toward her with eyes that took a moment to focus.

"Yuna. Sorry, I did not hear you come in."

"I brought soup." She set the container down on a clear spot on the workbench, studying his face. The shadows under his eyes, the tightness around his mouth. "Talk to me. What's going on?"

"Nothing, I'm fine."

Raising Shane had taught her that 'I'm fine' was an indicator of something hiding beneath the surface that was desperate to be brought to light.

"Ilya." She said his name gently but firmly, the way she'd learned to do over the years. He was so used to deflecting, to putting on a brave face and being strong for everyone else. Forever the captain and strong leader

"It's this same time every year. You try to hide it, but I've noticed. You aren't alone anymore, sweetheart."

For a long moment, he just looked at her. Then something in his expression crumbled, just slightly, and he set down the rag. "It's my mother's birthday on August twenty-eighth. She would have been fifty-three."

Yuna's heart clenched. She knew some of Ilya's story—everyone did, really. The tragedy that had shaped him, the loss that had driven him and Shane to create the Irina Foundation. But Ilya rarely spoke about the details and never spoke about the trauma of it all.

"Come here," she said, opening her arms.

He came to her like the son he'd become to her, letting her wrap him in a hug despite their height difference. She felt him take a shaky breath as he leaned his head against her shoulder.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I do not mean to—"

"Stop apologizing." She pulled back to look at him, fingers reaching up to brush his tear-stained cheek. "You're allowed to grieve. You're allowed to have hard days. She's your mother, Ilya. And you love her."

He nodded, swallowing hard. "My therapist says I should talk about her more. That I've spent so long trying not to think about it, trying to just... move forward, that I'm losing her all over again. I can hardly remember her voice anymore, Yuna. I try, and it's just... gone."

The pain in his voice nearly broke her. "What do you remember?"

"Fragments. The way she'd hum while she cooked. How she'd brush my hair so the curls didn't get tangled. She had this laugh—" He stopped, pressing his fingers to his eyes. "Gods, I was twelve. It's been almost twenty years, and I feel like she's slipping away from me. Like if I don't hold on tight enough, there'll be nothing left."

Yuna squeezed his arms. "Then let's make sure there's something. Something permanent. Something that honors her and gives you a place to talk to her."

He looked at her questioningly.

"You're good with your hands," she said, gesturing to the workbench, the various projects in different stages of completion around the garage. "What if we built something together? A bench, maybe. Something beautiful that could go up at the cottage, where you and Shane can sit and remember her. Where she can be part of your life in a tangible way."

Ilya's eyes widened slightly. "A bench?"

"A bench that says she was here. That she mattered and cannot just be erased. That she's still loved." Yuna smiled softly. "And we'll build it together. You can tell me about her while we work. I want to know her, Ilya. I want to know the woman who raised such an incredible son."

His breath hitched. "You'd do that?"

"Sweetheart, you're my son too. Of course I would."

They started the next day.

Ilya had sketched out a design—simple but elegant, with clean lines and a curved back. They'd chosen cedar for its durability and the way it would weather beautifully over time. Yuna wasn't sure how much help she would be with the actual building, but she was there to listen.

"She loved to read," Ilya said as they measured and marked the wood for cutting. "Always had a book in her hand. Russian literature. She would read passages out loud to us at dinner sometimes."

"What was her favorite?" Yuna asked, holding the measuring tape steady.

"The Master and Margarita. She must have read it a dozen times." He smiled, a real smile this time. "She said it was about love being stronger than death. I didn't understand it then."

"And now?"

"Now I think she was trying to tell me something."

They worked in comfortable silence for a while, the sound of the saw cutting through wood, the smell of cedar filling the garage. Yuna watched Ilya's hands move with confidence and precision, the same way they moved the puck on the ice—purposeful and controlled.

"She would have loved you," he said suddenly, not looking up from his work. "My mother. She would have loved Shane, too. She always wanted me to be happy being myself. Even when things were hard, when my father was..." He trailed off, jaw tightening.

"She protected you," Yuna said quietly.

"She tried. God, she tried so hard." His voice cracked. "I used to think if I'd just been better, less trouble, maybe she wouldn't have—" He stopped, shaking his head. "My therapist says that is not how it works. That depression is an illness, not a choice. But some days it is hard to believe that."

Yuna set down her tools and moved to stand beside him. "Ilya, look at me." When he did, she took his face in her hands. "You were a child. A child who deserved to be protected and loved, which is exactly what she was trying to do. The fact that her illness took her from you doesn't mean you failed her. It means she was sick, and she was suffering, and sometimes suffering wins. But that doesn't diminish how much she loved you. That love is still here." She pressed her hand over his heart. "Right here."

Tears spilled down his cheeks, and he didn't try to hide them. "I miss her so much."

"I know, sweetheart. I know."

Over the next week, they fell into a rhythm. Yuna would come over in the afternoons, and they'd work on the bench together. Ilya talked, and she listened. He told her about his mother's garden, how she'd grown flowers and herbs on their tiny balcony. About the way she'd sing him to sleep when he had nightmares. About her hands, always moving, always creating—knitting, cooking, fixing things around their apartment.

"She was strong," he said as they sanded the armrests smooth. "Stronger than anyone gave her credit for."

"She sounds remarkable," Yuna said, and meant it.

"She was." Ilya ran his hand over the wood, checking for rough spots. "I wish you could have met her. I wish she could have seen... all of this. The life Shane and I have built. The foundation. I think she'd be proud."

"I know she would be."

They worked on the backrest together, carefully fitting the slats into place. Ilya had decided to carve a small inscription into the top rail: "Irina Rozanova, 1968-2003. Beloved mother. Forever remembered."

"Shane suggested we add 'and inspiration,'" Ilya said, tracing the letters he'd sketched out. "For the foundation. But I wanted to keep it simple. She was my mother first. Everything else comes from that."

Yuna nodded, understanding. "It's perfect."

As they applied the first coat of sealant, Ilya grew quiet again, but it was a different kind of quiet than before. More peaceful.

"Thank you," he said finally. "For doing this with me. For listening. For... for being here."

"There's nowhere else I'd rather be," Yuna assured him. "You're my son, Ilya. Maybe not by blood, but by choice. By love. And that means your grief is mine to help carry."

He looked at her with such raw gratitude that she had to blink back her own tears.

"Shane is so lucky to have you as a mother," he said. "And so am I."

The bench was finished on a Sunday afternoon, two weeks after they'd started. It sat in the garage, the sealant fully cured, the wood glowing warm and golden in the autumn light. It was beautiful—sturdy and elegant, a piece that would last for decades.

"We'll take it up to the cottage next weekend," Ilya said, running his hand along the smooth armrest. "Put it on the point, overlooking the lake. She would have loved that view. She always loved water."

"It's a perfect spot," Yuna agreed. Then she took a breath, her heart beating faster. "Ilya, I have something for you. Wait here."

She went to her car and retrieved the envelope she'd been carrying with her for the past three days, waiting for the right moment to give it to him. When she came back, Ilya was sitting on the bench, eyes curious.

"I did something," Yuna said, sitting beside him. "I hope it's okay. I reached out to your mother's family. In Russia."

Ilya's head snapped toward her, eyes wide. "You what?"

"I know you lost touch with them after she died. I know your father cut off contact. But I thought... I thought maybe they'd want to know about the foundation. About what you and Shane have built in her name." She handed him the envelope. "Some of them responded. Your mother's sister, Katya, sent me this."

With shaking hands, Ilya opened the envelope. Inside was a slightly faded photograph of a young woman with dark hair and Ilya's eyes, laughing at the camera, holding a baby in her arms. On the back, in Russian: "Irina with Ilya, 1991."

Ilya stared at the photo, his breath coming in gasps. "I've never seen this before. Father did not keep pictures after—."

"Your aunt said she has more. Letters, too. Things your mother sent before..." Yuna's voice was gentle. "They want to reconnect, Ilya. They want to know you. They said they've thought about you every day, but they didn't know how to reach you."

"She's so young here," Ilya whispered, touching the photo with shaking fingers. "So happy. Look at her smile."

"You have her smile," Yuna said softly.

He looked up at her, tears streaming freely now. "Why did you—"

"Because you're my son who was hurting, and I wanted to help." She put her arm around his shoulders. "Because your mother deserves to be remembered by everyone who loved her. Because family isn't just about who's here—it's about honoring who came before. She made you, and you helped me know her. And I want to honor her memory every day for the gift she gave us."

Ilya turned and pulled her into a fierce hug, the photo clutched carefully in one hand. "Thank you, Yuna," he said, his voice muffled against her shoulder. "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

Yuna held him tight, this man who'd unknowingly completed their family, who carried his grief with such quiet dignity. "You don't have to thank me. This is what mothers do."

When he finally pulled back, he looked at the photo again, then at the bench. "She's not slipping away," he said, wonder in his voice. "She's still here. In this bench, in this photo, in the foundation, in me."

"She always was," Yuna said. "You just needed help remembering."

They sat together on the bench as the afternoon light faded, Ilya holding the photo of his mother, Yuna's hand warm on his shoulder. Outside, the world continued on, but in this moment, there was only love.

The bench would go to the cottage next weekend. It would sit overlooking the lake, weathering seasons and years, a testament to a woman who'd loved fiercely and suffered

deeply. And Ilya would sit there with Shane, with Yuna, with David, and he would remember.

He would always remember.

End Notes

Thank you for reading!

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