

Dancin' with my eyes closed

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Dancin' with my eyes closed

by [stargazingstormtrooper92](#)

Summary

"Sorry. Just realized something just now.," Ilya laughs.

"What?"

"Loons," Ilya says and laughs again.

"Loons?" Yuna repeats confused.

"When I went to the cottage last summer Shane made fun of me because I never heard the loon call before. I was so scared. I called it stupid canadian wolf bird," Yuna lets out a little laugh, Ilya continues - "I just realized that these ducks on my baby blanket, they look like..."

"Loons," Yuna finishes with smile tugging on her lips.

"Yes. Loons. Shane will make fun of me," Ilya groans but not maliciously. He takes the blanket out of Yuna's hands and brings it to his face, trying to see if it still smells like home, like his mom. But the smell was gone and his heart lurches.

(...)

"Tell me the stories. All of them."

Or: Ilya has the flu when he receives a package from Svetlana containing his childhood memorabilia from Russia. Mother son duo Ilya Rozanov and Yuna Hollander strikes again



Notes

Ask and you shall receive. More Yuna and Ilya heartfelt moments 🥺❤️ no direct timeline, maybe a limbo between Heated Rivalry and The Long Game when Ilya plays for the Centaurs and Shane is still with the Voyagers. The only changes from the books is that I made Svetlana his childhood friend as it is in the show. Mild spoilers for the Long Game.

TW: mention of childhood abuse, domestic violence, homophobia, depression and suicide. Nothing too graphic but proceed with care either way.

Disclaimer: the memorabilia I'm describing are partially based on my own. I'm not Russian but am Slavic and was born and raised during the 90s in former Yugoslavia. So, there will be

some inaccuracies about the setting from the photos (and explanation for the holidays) but I kinda think we shared the same childhood wherever we lived during that particular time in Eastern Europe (if anything is remotely off culturally it's my fault, I described it from my own lived experience and I'm aware that there are differences don't jump at me please I'm fragile 😊). Also, I'm the youngest child and have barely one photo album from ages 0 through 14 so I really empathize with Ilya in this fic (or I'm severely projecting my own feelings onto his, but whatever) 😊 Have I mentioned that my mom died 13 years ago? Yeah, Ilya Rozanov is really my close personal friend and I will not elaborate why (proceeds to write an entire fic on the subject) 🙄

Title from 'Eyes Closed' by Ed Sheeran. Once again, bonus points if you listen to the song while reading the fic. 'Supermarket Flowers' would also do, as well as "Matilda" by Harry Styles, "Never Grow Up" and "You're on your own kid" by Taylor Swift. I chose violence with song choices today 😊

Kind reminder that English is not my first language and that typos are my worst enemy ✨

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

Ilya was so sick with the flu that even the idea of lifting a single finger pained him. He thought he could push it through, be there for his team but alas. No, this one was going nuclear on his bones, joints and his brain. He felt like he was rotting from the inside out. High fever, his whole body was in pain, he could barely breathe and felt as if he moved even an inch he'll fall from the edge of the Universe.

The worst thing was that he was missing the game with Montreal today and he was so looking forward in seeing his boyfriend. They haven't seen each other in over two weeks and was already running on fumes and being borderline touch starved. At this point it wasn't just about the sex, it was about snuggling into Shane and absorbing as much sunshine as he could before their next meet up.

Being sick didn't help. Shane couldn't just drop everything and come to nurse to him to health, not when he was this sick and they were both aware of it. It was the single reason why he didn't follow his team to Montreal to at least be emotional support from the bench even though he couldn't really play. It was dangerous for everyone, and he didn't want to jeopardize their season.

Shane could get the flu too and then infect the rest of his team. Ilya, though, had to admit that the idea that he, Ilya Rozanov, could be the sole reason Montreal was out from the playoffs was tempting - but ultimately childish.

In the end they just couldn't risk it. Ilya didn't allow it. Which was a sudden change in pace considering that usually Ilya was the hot headed one. This time he almost had to order Shane not to come. They had a long discussion (read: fight) last night where by the end of it Ilya was half asleep trying to battle the fever and simultaneously wanted to stay as long as possible with Shane on the call.

Shane was going on and on how he could use hospital grade masks and gloves and still be there for Ilya but the idea of Shane being here without actually touching him made Ilya want to throw up so he urged Shane to stay put.

So, here was Ilya all bundled up in blankets and comforters in his living room burning up with fever barely keeping one eye open to watch Voyagers vs Centaurs game. It was half an hour before the game when his phone rang. With a groan Ilya opened the other eye and glanced at the too bright screen smile tugging on his face.

"Hey, how are you doing?" Shane asks concerned on the other line, his voice tender and like a hug enveloping Ilya's heart. He wanted to kiss his little nose scrunch he imagined Shane had right now.

"Waiting to see how my boys crush you," he tries to throw in a joke just to make fun of himself and not burst into tears just by hearing his boyfriend talk, but instead starts coughing his lungs out. Shane waits until Ilya calms down and sighs.

"Are you drinking tea?" Shane's voice is now stern.

Borderly annoyed.

Ilya loves it.

It fuels him.

"Yes," Ilya rolls his eyes but fondly smiles.

"Have you eaten anything today?"

"Maybe?"

Ilya sneezes and curses under his breath. Traitorous sneeze be damned.

"Ilya?" Shane's voice gets all dark and serious. Ilya loves him so much when he gets like this, he can't control himself in making fun of him every now and again so he punches back.

Lovingly.

Did he mention how angry kitten Shane fuels him?

"Shane?"

"Hey, I'm being serious right now."

"Ugh, you're no fun. Yes, some soup. The noodle kind, you know," Ilya caves but throws another joke in there, waiting for Shane to pick it up.

He. Does. Not. Pick. It. Up.

"Instant noodles you mean? The ramen packets?" Ilya could hear Shane's annoyance on the other line.

God, he really loved his neurodivergent little brain.

"Mhm, the spicy one," Ilya goes on with the joke. It's not that he's making fun of him, they already talked about this and Shane agreed that if the jokes are within reason he'd allow them.

In Ilya's book, this was severly within reason. But he knows he won't torture him for long now, he was tired and he missed Shane - he just wanted to hear that exasperated smile of Shane's after he gets the joke.

"Ilya, that... That has tones of sodium and is spicy, really? In your state? Is that even recommended?"

Ilya starts laughing and Shane connects the dots.

"Asshole. I hate you," Shane smiles and his voice goes all syrupy.

"You love me Hollander. And I love when you're all worked up. I ate real soup you freezed for me and some crackers. My stomach is bad right now," Ilya admits steering off into normal

conversation. He could hear someone passing Shane in the hallways, muffled sounds then returning to the microphone.

He knew that Shane was being extra careful, but he hated this little moments. No one knew who was on the other line, if they omitted the names they could speak normally. Yet Shane was absolutely terrified of it.

And yes, Ilya understood. It was too much on stake.

Yet someday he wished he didn't understand. He wished that he could climb on top of the tallest building in Canada and yell from the rooftops how much he loves Shane and that not even a zombie apocalypse could make them destroy everything they've built together.

Ilya tries to push off thoughts that haunted him on lonely nights and focus on the sound of Shane's voice. The only tether to reality.

"Okay. Fever?" Ilya imagined Shane going through some fictional clipboard in his mind checking off symptoms before calling 911.

"Still high but I took medicine."

Ilya closes his eyes and focuses on Shane's calming voice. He took the pills not even half an hour ago and if everything was fine he'll be fever free in about thirty minutes or so.

"What did the doctor said?"

Ilya smiled when he heard more people passing Shane but this time he didn't lower his voice or stopped talking.

Little victories.

"Rest. Fluids. Antibiotics just in case. They think it's a superflu or ... I don't know моя любовь. I just listen to them, I don't care what it is."

Ilya turns his body all the way towards the tv screen now showing a commercial for ginger ale. He smiled to himself.

"Okay. Okay."

Ilya could hear Shane's breath stop for a beat on the other side of the line.

Shit, he's panicking. He closed his eyes again and tried his hardest to summon his normal, not cough induced flu ridden voice and pull Shane down to earth.

He needed to be level headed. The game is about to start and even though Ilya wanted The Centaurs to win he didn't want it to be on expense of his boyfriend having panic attacks.

"Hey. Shane. Моя любовь. I'll be fine. The fever is barely there. The medicine will work and I have your game on to keep me company. Okay?"

"I know. I know. I put things in motion," Shane exhales heavily and Ilya can imagine him nodding and shaking his shoulders and fingers.

But then Ilya realizes what Shane just said.

"What? What does that mean? What did you do?"

"You'll see. I have to go now. Will text you when we beat you," Shane sing songs the last part making Ilya smile.

Crisis called panic attack averted, but what did Shane actually do? Ilya hated surprises when he wasn't in a condition to get away from them. So, he did the next best thing.

Rage baiting.

"You wish. My boys will crush you."

"In your dreams Rozanov," Shane bit back.

"Love you."

"Love you."

Even the 'Love You' wasn't whispered - Ilya melted into couch. He was very well aware of how pathetic he sounded right now but he didn't care. He would trade his entire career for a future with Shane in a heartbeat.

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The fever was reaching it's peak. He was hot then cold, all sweaty and loopy and the medicine was slowly kicking in but he wanted to crawl out from his skin how awful he felt. He couldn't remember when was the last time he was this sick.

As a child maybe.

Never as an adult.

Or maybe he was, he just didn't let himself feel it - always hovering over fight or flight response and caring about other people's ... his team's needs before his own.

He remembered how his mom would make him Shchi when he was sick and how one time he insisted on extra scoops of sour cream then vomited everything not even thirty seconds later.

That memory always made him smile.

He glanced back at the screen and the game was about to start and on top of his phone notifications there was a message from Svetlana he yet had to answer.

Apparently she sent him an early birthday present and just wanted to let him know it'll be arriving soon. His birthday wasn't for another few months so he was genuinely curious what

it was all about but his legs weren't strong enough to go all the way down the driveway to pick it up. He just hoped that whatever it is it won't soak if the rain starts again.

As he was putting his phone on the coffee table he glanced over at the screen and immediately groaned. Not even thirty seconds in and Voyagers were already leading with 1:0. But as soon as he was stretching back to the couch he heard the signature sound of a key in the lock and door opening not a second after that. He turned so fast he almost fell to the floor.

"Hey hon, it's just me. You had a package by the gate, I picked it up for you. But boy is it heavy. Is it some kind of a brand deal or? I don't remember if they checked with me before sending something?"

Yuna barrelled through the front door holding an insane amount of things in her arms - huge package from the post office, overstuffed tote bags on both of her shoulders and some flowers (Lilies, Ilya noticed), ice coffee and both her phone and house keys.

Ilya just blinks in confusion trying to see if Yuna somehow shapeshifted into an octopus because how on earth was she handling everything with ease.

Then, like being burned Ilya realizes that he is in fact extremely sick. And that Yuna, even though with excellent health and not that old, still probably has weaker immune system than he does and jumps on the couch bringing the blankets over his mouth and nose to prevent the disease from spreading.

"Yuna?" Ilya says muffled by everything he pulled on his face making Yuna turn to see him.

He probably looked like he jumped from some kind of a cartoon, all sweaty, eyes bloodshot, sneezing, voice hoarse, covered with three blankets and comforter with half of his face shawled off like a makeshift plague mask.

Yuna snorts a laugh and starts approaching him with her hand extended to check on his temperature. Ilya smacks her hand and says all panicky:

"No, stay there. I get you sick. Why are you here?"

Yuna huffs a laugh then proceeds in checking his temperature. Ilya for a moment leans into her touch and closes his eyes, all tired.

"Oh baby, don't worry about it. Both David and me had that beast two weeks ago. I'll be fine."

Ilya just lets out a little: "Oh."

"Yeah. Oh. Oh wow, you really have high fever."

Yuna murmurs now placing her hand on Ilya's cheek where his blankets slid off clicking her tongue like she disapproves. Ilya just relaxes in her touch, the faint smell of fresh flowers from where she was holding them against her body was lingering on her skin and he could smell it.

"Yeah. Tired," he barely manages to let out.

"We'll fix it right up. I went to that little Russian restaurant you like and got you some things. Actually I kinda took the entire menu, Marija says hi," she kisses his forehead and smooths over his wet curls. Ilya pulls on a little smile.

Ilya liked Marija, the old Russian lady working at the restaurant. At this point the woman was probably eighty but she was so stealthy that Ilya was convinced that she'll outlive him - a professional athlete. She always gave him extra food she made for her grand nieces and nephews which weren't normally on the menu and he welcomed it every time.

It was like a piece of his soul coming back to him in small bites. The memories of his great grandma and grandma making memories over the holidays in loud kitchens and clinking of the pans.

He didn't even realize that he closed his eyes for a second when he heard Yuna taking out the containers out of the tote bags.

And suddenly he realizes how sweaty and disgusting he is. The medicine probably kicked in and for a brief moment he felt like he needed to use up this energy while he had the time.

"Mmm thank you Yuna. But I think I need shower first," he says extracting himself from the blankets, his clothes all ruffled up and clinging to his body. Yuna looks him up and down then asks seriously:

"Can you manage yourself? Or do I need to get the hose from the backyard and rinse you off?"

She smiles and Ilya huffs out a laugh. He really didn't get where from Shane got all his boring from. Yuna was a fierce warrior, puns and jokes right up on her sleeve and David was... Well, okay. David was borderline boring but he knew how to get the good Vodka so in Ilya's mind that was not as boring as he thought it would be.

"Yes. I think. Watch your son losing meanwhile," Ilya jokes sticking his head into a steaming container of Shchi and smiling with his eyes closed. Yuna hits him on the head with the lid and he jumps around the kitchen island trying to get away from her, all while giggling.

"Ilya," Yuna warns.

"What? Is not untrue. See. We are leading," and yes, somehow the Centaurs are now leading with 2:1.

He waved a little dodging a flying scrunched up paper towel coming his way and slipped into the shower.

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It took all his strength to shower, and suddenly he felt like crying. He hated this. Hated the way fever and flu controlled him. How his brain wasn't able to keep those walls up and how quickly he could melt into a gooey pile of desperation.

This time he almost cried when he found Shane's stretched out and faded t-shirt and shorts folded neatly in Ilya's part of the wardrobe. He guessed that Shane deliberately put it there just in case.

He was such a weak weak man because he couldn't get it together, putting on his boyfriend's clothes even though it had the logo of the Voyagers on it. Smelling like Shane's Montreal fabric softener.

When he got back to the living room he saw that the blankets were replaced with clean ones from the guest bedroom and the faint noises from the washing machine were coming from down the hall.

If he wasn't afraid that he'll severely infect Yuna he would go and crush her in a hug right now. And as soon as he took his seat next to her she drapes him with the blankets and turns up a volume for the game.

"3 to 2 for Voyagers," Yuna says eyes glued to the tv screen. Ilya groans.

"Ugh, did at least Shane score?"

"You bet he did," Yuna said proudly still smiling.

"Okay. Then is forgiven," Ilya watches the game in silence for another minute or two before he sees the package Svetlana sent him set on the coffee table.

He eyed it from the couch trying to see if he could open it without really touching it, suddenly feeling like it was a can of worms.

He didn't even realize that Yuna stood up to get the food for both of them until she spoke.

"Do you want sour cream with Shchi?" He snapped from the trance and looked over his shoulder to Yuna who was now scooping the dish into two separate bowls. She loved Russian dishes and would occasionally even experiment with David on how to make something authentic and bringing it to Ilya to taste test.

It warmed his heart how considerate they have been since the moment they met him. He never had that, not even with his family. In Russia he was always frozen. Observing. Trying not to make the wrong call. Measuring ten times before proceeding with caution. It was exhausting to always be on alert.

He felt like his every word was being recorded or could be taken against him.

With Yuna and David everything was easy. And yes, Yuna was a momager and her brain worked faster than anything he ever saw in his life yet it was never out of malice but sheer empathy and care she had for her family, Ilya included.

Ilya never had to ask for something because she knew exactly what he needed and right now he needed his mother, or 'a' mother. In any shape or form. He exhaled and diverted his focus on the package again.

Whatever Svetlana sent him was heavy.

"Um, no. No sour cream. I have fever. I don't want to throw up. Did as a child, not good for me," Ilya says fiddling with the package in his hands trying to break it open without scalpel or scissors.

"Okay. Here you go. And the scissors for the package. Don't hurt your fingers, Jesus child," Yuna slaps Ilya's hands where he tried to break open the package with his fingernails.

Ilya cut open the last piece of the tape and everything from the package collapsed on the floor. But right before it collapsed he saw the pale blue and yellow pattern he could recognize anywhere in the world.

And the World stops spinning. His breath catches in his throat and his hands start shaking.

"Oh."

Yuna immediately drops bowls on the table and starts collecting the contents from the package. Picking up item after item before she realizes that Ilya was frozen.

He knew what these were, he's seen them ages ago.

He never thought he would see them again.

They were hidden in his family home and nobody but him knew about his hiding spot.

Well, nobody but him and Svetlana.

The last time he went back home for his father's funeral he completely forgot to take them to the USA and there wasn't even a day when he wasn't beating himself up for forgetting such an important thing to do.

Yuna glances from Ilya's pale face to the items in her hand, one photo peeking over the rest of them.

"Oh, wow. Are these... Ilya, is that you?" She says with a shy smile on her face turning over an old baby photo of Ilya being twirled in the air by his mother.

Ilya just stares at the picture like he can't believe it's right there in front of him. Yuna flips through the items, still smiling but when she doesn't get an answer lifts her eyes and sees the defeated look on Ilya's face.

She immediately puts everything on the table and pulls Ilya into a bone crushing hug.

"Oh honey, it's okay. I'm here. Shhh." Yuna rocks him back and forth muffling his sobs on her chest.

It was the fever's fault, he repeated over and over again in his head. If it weren't for his high fever he probably wouldn't break this easily. He also missed Shane and the fact that his team

was all alone fighting the best team in hockey and he couldn't take it anymore. So he just let himself break down.

The idea that Svetlana did this for him even though he never mentioned that he didn't got his stuff back was soul crushing.

Ilya never really had people who took care of him. Well, not other people than the entire Hollander family and Svetlana and not really until recently. But he still felt like he was being a burden to them and needed to earn their love back.

And for Svetlana to do this without questions asked made his heart burst into hundreds of little pieces.

Yuna was holding him like a child, brushing curls on top of his head. Every once in a while dropping a kiss on top of them.

"You didn't expect this, haven't you?" Yuna asks carefully eyeing the bundle of items on the table. There was a stuffed toy of some kind, a piece of clothing or a blanket, two photo albums and a stash of photos.

Ilya shakes his head and sighs defeated.

"No. Friend sent it to me but she didn't say what it was. A friend from Russia," he adds at the end.

"Oh."

Yuna didn't know what to say. She knew Ilya more than a year at this point but stories about his time in Russia were always a tough subject and every time either she or David tried to ask him about it he would close off and change the subject.

And Ilya knew that it wasn't meant to drive them off but rather to protect his image as something fragile and unstable. Even though neither Yuna nor David ever saw him as such. He always wore his heart on the sleeve and loved loudly.

So the fact that he was hiding that part of him not to disrupt this newfound relationship was tearing her apart because she wanted to know everything about him.

She saw how his posture changed around authority, how he let his guard down when he was surrounded by friends and family. How he smiled with his whole face when he finished an exceptionally complicated puzzle with David or when he ribbed Shane about the differences in ginger ale manufacturers.

"I thought I'd never see them again. They were in my father's house," Ilya untangles himself from Yuna's hug and wipes at his eyes, gaze still locked on the bundle.

Suddenly terrified.

"She knew where they were?" Yuna asks gently, rubbing small comforting circles on Ilya's back. Letting him set the pace of the conversation.

"Yes. We know each other since childhood."

"That's nice of her."

"Yes. She's really nice. But I didn't know. Ugh sorry for crying," Ilya plants palms of his hands into his eyes trying to stove off the tears from coming but he was overwhelmed and borderline shaking. Whether that be from the fever or the emotional bomb dropped in the middle of the absolutely boring day in Ottawa.

Yuna takes off the excess blankets from his shoulders and he deflates a little, trying to get some deep breaths in.

"Hey, you have nothing to be sorry about. You hear that? Nothing. Would you like to go through it after you eat? Together?" Yuna offers. Ilya's eyes are wide open as he nods in silence.

"Yes. I would like that."

"Okay then, first food then memories," Yuna claps her hands like its all settled, gives him the bowl of Shchi and a spoon.

Ilya stares at the bowl for a beat before closing his eyes and inhaling the signature smell of his favourite comfort meal.

The smell of home.

"Deal. What is the score?" He attacks his bowl when Yuna groans.

"Oh no."

"Oh yes," Ilya grins through a mouthfull of food.

"How did that even happen?" The Centaurs were leading again.

"I teach them. They listen. But Shane has time, he can maybe get another goal or two," Ilya teases but Yuna levels him with her gaze.

"Ugh you two are too good for this sport, it's infuriating. Also, don't talk with your mouth full."

"That's why you love us," Ilya shrugs his shoulders and continues eating with gusto. Yuna just smiles and leans into the couch with her own bowl of Shchi.

Copious amounts of sour cream included.

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Voyagers were leading 5:4 which was amazing considering the fact that The Centaurs were without their Captain and that Montreal was really playing their best game this season. Ilya was so proud of his team, even though they were losing, that he was already planning what to do to surprise them with when he's all better and back on the ice.

They deserved it.

When he just joined the team they seemed uncoordinated, but they just needed a good leader. Ilya knew that in a season or two they could do amazing things in the league.

But then his eyes fell again on the little bundle left untouched on the table in front of him and reality screeched in. Hockey completely forgotten. A white noise coming from the tv screen.

Ilya was glad that Yuna was here with him. A steady presence, an anchor in his troubled mind. Her warm hand on top of his knee pulling him from his thoughts back to earth.

Shane had the same influence on him. Grounding. The feeling of safety and not the urge of running away from but running towards somewhere. Running towards home.

There was a reason why he hid this in the first place while he was living in Moscow. Even though he loved every single piece of history it represented it agitated him so much that he wanted to punch through walls with his bare fists how furious he was of a life his mother could've led if she hadn't met his dad and had Ilya and his brother.

Some nights when he was bored out of his mind, couldn't sleep and Shane wasn't answering his calls he would daydream how great of a life without pain and depression his mother could've led if it wasn't for him. The imagination was way better than cruel reality all of them suffered through.

In his mind she was a photographer, travelling the world and bringing home a book from each country in a foreign language making a special collection.

In his mind she laughed, fiercely and freely like when a child smiles jumping up and down in puddles of water after a warm summer rain.

In his mind she never had to worry about choosing her words carefully but expressing her wisdom so that the entire world could hear her loud and clear.

In his mind she led a life worth living for. Without fear. Judgement. Without looking over her shoulder and protecting her children from an abusive husband.

In Ilya's mind Irina got everything she ever wanted, and more.

In Ilya's mind he absorbed all the anger, frustration and his mother's desperation from the life they led. Even in the afterlife he wanted her to have something to look forward to, so he pulled all earthly emotions and burdens on his back. Protecting her every step of the way, in both of the land of the living and the dead, having her back.

The anger he felt towards his father, brother and ultimately himself was eating him alive. He blamed himself for not doing more when it mattered and convinced himself that it still could matter if he believed it hard enough.

But it was hard.

In his mind he never did anything to stop it from happening. He knew his mother was sad and depressed. That she was slowly fading away under every punch from his father, after every

brush of makeup applied to her skin to mask the bruises, after every turtleneck bought to hide the hand marks on her throat.

It made Ilya violently ill.

And he helped, he was aware of it. He wasn't frozen in time. More often than not he took his father's punches, harsh words and obscenities. He took everything stoically, but in Ilya's mind he was so mad for not doing something more.

Anything.

For not being the person his mother could confide in and ask for help.

Because he would do it. If he could turn back the time he would do anything in his power to stop her from going over the edge.

And it killed him. The thought that he wasn't enough to stop his father from abusing her and that he wasn't brave enough to confront her and take her to the doctor for much needed help.

He felt like an accomplice.

When Irina died Ilya focused all of his energy on hockey and the possibility of getting out of Russia. Out of the grip from his father and brother and out from everything that could make him remember the past.

For a while he used his body and sought touch to distract himself from the situation he was in. Living through a haze most of his teen years, searching for something he didn't even know what it was.

The minute he saw those freckles all those years ago in a god forsaken town in Canada he knew that his life has been changed.

For better or worse he couldn't quite tell at the time. But it changed.

And yes, it might took them almost a decade to land where they were right now but Ilya wouldn't change a thing.

Ok, he was lying. He would change a thing or two.

He would change the fact that they still needed to hide their love because the world was such a cruel place to live in. But he wouldn't change the fact that Shane was his whole life and that Yuna and David became his safe space. His family. Even though they weren't bonded by blood they were family in every way that mattered.

And for his broken soul that was more than enough. Running from his past to his future felt like the final stretch of running a marathon where your legs work automatically but your mind was floating somewhere above the ground. You know that the moment you cross the finish line someone will catch you and instead of falling down you will float away.

Ilya composes himself and reaches for the bundle pulling it in his lap. His fingers trace slowly over the contents, feeling every change in texture. His fingertips remembering like it was yesterday the last time he went through it. Yuna stayed close, slightly leaning on his shoulder in quiet support.

His fingers grazed the small baby blanket he was once cuddled up in and taken out of the hospital. The blanket his great grandma bought him and which he always kept by his side when he was just a child. The baby blanket was pastel yellow with small baby blue ducks woven row after row over it. He swallows a lump in his throat and wipes out a tear then reaches for the baby album.

It was a scrapbook rather than the actual album. One of those 'baby's first steps/words/milestones' type of albums. The one where parents could add photos and anecdotes from your childhood. It had greyish-blue silk plush covers and a baby blue ribbon in the middle of the front page.

He brought it to his nose and inhaled the familiar smell of stale paper and glue from the binder. When he opened it the paper pages were heavy just like he remembered them, banana yellow with generic baby prints of flowers, stick figures and ducklings; questions with enough space to add comments and photos.

First page was decorated with the picture from the day they took him home from the hospital. Under the photo a lock of golden hair was scotch taped carefully, still well preserved along with now darkened medical tape containing his mother's name, his date and time of birth used to identify him in the maternity ward. Long before security tags existed they would slap medical tape over tightly bundled up babies and number them with their mother's name on them.

Ilya lets out a wet laugh, his voice hoarse from the flu and crying.

"This was the day they took you out from the hospital?" - Yuna asks taking in the picture and how dazed Ilya was looking at it, absentmindedly caressing the patch of hair taped almost thirty years ago by his mother.

"Yes. My mother had some... Um, how do you say it. Complications with birth? She was very young when she had me. She was so pale."

Ilya goes over the photo soaking it all in. Irina was strongly holding him on her chest while sitting at the end of the bed in civilian clothes in the maternity ward, showing him to the camera, face pale, under eyes dark but eyes still shining with love that the baby was finally in her arms.

Ilya gives the album to Yuna and she smooths over the rough edges of the glued photo. The edges are almost entirely destroyed because Ilya had the custom to look at it obsessively when he was younger. Then Yuna gasps.

"Wait, the blanket," she looks at Ilya who nods then hands her the soft blanket, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Yes. The same," he says then huffs out a laugh. Yuna looks at him surprised. "Sorry. Just realized something just now."

"What?"

"Loons," Ilya says and laughs again.

"Loons?" Yuna repeats confused.

"When I went to the cottage last year Shane made fun of me because I never heard the loon call. I was so scared. I called it a stupid canadian wolf bird," Yuna lets out a little laugh, Ilya continues - "I just realized that these ducks on my baby blanket, they look like..."

"Loons," Yuna finishes with smile tugging on her lips.

"Yes. Loons. Shane will make fun of me," Ilya groans but not maliciously.

He takes the blanket out of Yuna's hands and brings it to his face, trying to see if it still smells like home, like his mom. But the smell was gone and his heart lurches.

Yuna then realizes that there were other things from the package which fell to the floor and as she scoops them up Ilya almost starts hyperventilating. Dropping the blanket from his face he reaches over for the things Yuna was holding - his favourite stuffed toy, knitted baby shoes, jumper and a tiny little hat. Yuna places it on top of his knees and takes his trembling hands in hers.

"We could go over this some other time, hm? Maybe when Shane gets home?" She asks gently but Ilya is already shaking his head.

"No, I... I want to do this with you. If that is okay?"

"Always."

Yuna takes the albums and carefully places them in Ilya's hands.

"Tell me the stories then. All of them."

Ilya glances over at the tv where they just showed Shane scoring another goal for the Voyagers and doing their little signature 'I love you' sign which they occasionally did when they knew the other one was watching the game from home. Ilya smiles, tears dropping from his eyes and glances back to the albums, clutching baby blanket and clothes to his chest.

"Okay."

Ilya whispers and Yuna kisses his temple.

—

"Ah, this is a fun one. I mean, it will be probably for Shane I don't know if you..."

Ilya starts showing Yuna one of the classics, still flipping through the scrapbook which had most of his baby photos from when he was barely a few months old. This photo in particular was the famous one of him as a baby in a pink plastic bath tub looking all unfocused at the camera.

Ilya tries covering the photo with his hand like he's checking with Yuna if she is okay with looking at him naked but she levels him with her eyes like he's a creature from another planet. He never knew what the customs were regarding these sorts of things and he didn't want to be rude to her.

"My god Ilya, as if I haven't seen enough baby boys naked in my lifetime. Shane used to run naked all around our old apartment refusing to wear clothes because, and I quote - 'everything was scratching him'.

"I mean, I don't have to look at it if you're uncomfortable of course," Yuna says when Ilya blushes but then gets his hand out of the way and with a cheeky smile says:

"Is funny tho. Shane is going to blush when I tell him you saw me naked. But I won't tell him the context."

Yuna swats him on the shoulder.

"I want to say you wouldn't dare but I kinda want to be there when you tell him that. I need to see his face," Yuna laughs and Ilya fist bumps her.

"Great minds think alike. We will plan it together."

They continue going through different pages. Every now and then there was a photo of baby Ilya on the bed or in his crib with his mother's neat handwriting around the edges explaining something funny that has happened or any milestones he achieved.

Both Yuna and Ilya laughed at the fact that his two favourite stuffed toys were ones of a duck and a bear. The loon and the bear looming over his entire destiny apparently.

But then, half way through the book entries stopped. The last photo of Ilya (around six months old) and Irina all bundled up outside in harsh winter day, snow all around them - their rosy cheeks the only things visible in the photo.

Ilya gives the baby book to Yuna who flips through the rest of the pages but there is nothing. No new entries about first teeth or when he said his first words. There is a red smudge from something looking eerily similar to blood stain on the last few pages and Yuna shakily inhales while quickly closes the book.

She didn't need to do that. Ilya memorized each and every detail from that book. But he was grateful that she wanted to spare him from being hurt again.

He never asked his mother what the stain was, but it was there well before she took her own life.

When Yuna looked over at Ilya he was now holding the knitted pieces of clothing in his hands - the jumper, hat and baby shoes - now all yellowish, but once probably pristine white.

"This was the only thing she saved from when I was a baby. Never knew why. I think she made it," Ilya says in a hushed tone examining the fabric, trying to stuff his fingers in small shoes and suddenly laughs playing with them like his fingers were tiny little feet.

"I keep thinking about..." He starts but then stops himself and shakes his head.

"Hey no, don't do that. What do you keep thinking about?" Yuna places a hand over his shaking knee.

"Having babies. With Shane. If... If that is something we could do once we're not hiding anymore. Even though we don't..." He doesn't know how to finish the sentence.

And he hates that he doesn't know. Because on some level he does know.

He wants kids, two probably and several dogs and to play on the same team with Shane for a while before he retires a year or two before Shane so he can enjoy cheering him up from the audience with the rest of the WAG and their little family.

But right now everything that he thinks he knows is out of his reach and unattainable.

"... Don't know how long you are going to hide?" Yuna finishes and Ilya nods defeated.

"Is silly. We are happy now. Young. We will have babies eventually, is just... Sometimes..." He chokes up mid sentence.

"Hey, hey no. Ilya, honey. It's completely normal to think about it. And I know for a fact that Shane would love to have babies with you."

"He would?" Ilya asks his eyes all wide and terrified like she might answer differently and Yuna's heart shatters a bit.

"Of course. Why wouldn't he? You two are going to be the best dads ever. Those children will probably be the best hockey players in the world, and with Shane's up tightness and your cheekiness they will probably be the most socialized and well adjusted children in Canada."

Ilya laughs a little but then his brows furrow.

"I keep wondering if my mom's depression and dad's dementia are genetic," he hears Yuna gasp. "And what if I go insane? Shane would be all alone. I couldn't do that to him. And to our children."

At that Yuna takes both of his hands in hers and makes him look at her.

"I need you to listen to me very carefully right now. Yes, that might happen but it might not. Life is full of surprises. You might get dementia, or cancer or nothing at all. You could get hit by a car or a blimp could storm through the roof of your house and kill you instantly."

"Wow, that's... Dark," Ilya puts on a little smile and Yuna squeezes his hands.

"The point is that you can't control those things. If they happen they will happen but neither of you will be all alone. Your mother was alone. The circumstances of your life in Russia were ... Awful Ilya, and it wasn't your fault that it happened the way it happened.

"We don't know what will happen in 10, 20, 30 years or hell even tomorrow. Life is uncertain and chaotic but you will have us. Shane and David and me, and your children and grandchildren. You will live a happy life with your husband and family.

"And when you're 80 years old you'll continue to curse the loons at the cottage while Shane cleans those windows three times a day.

"Are we clear? I don't want to hear you saying those things about you or your future, because your future is my future. Our future. You have a family who loves you and who will always be there for you. So, every time you feel like you need a hand, a word or two no matter time of the day or night you know you can call us, okay?

"You. Are. Not. Alone. Ilya."

"Okay," Ilya mumbles and kisses the knuckles of her hands. Yuna brushes his wet face with the edges of her cardigan and claps her hands like they just made the deal with the devil and they're continuing onto the next clause of the contract.

"Okay. What do we have next?"

—

Ilya picks up the other album, cyan blue with a drawing of a boy and a girl standing in snowfall. This photo album was different than the first one. The photos inside of it were filled with other people and a bit older Ilya. While the baby book contained his first steps this one had Ilya in various ages and was not in chronological order.

He flips through the first pages with a sentimental smile on his face. Yuna rarely saw this smile of his. He usually kept it for the summers and cottage where he spent hours looking at their pictures Shane decorated the walls with. The only place that felt like theirs since they couldn't leave any evidence in their houses in Ottawa and Montreal.

Yuna hated it as much as Ilya did. As much as Shane did, even though he might've never mentioned it she knew it bothered him. Being in love and in relationship with someone for almost a whole decade while hiding yourself, your entire shared history and future was like a slap to the face.

She saw how hard it was on both of them. How Ilya got smaller over time when they were in public during the Irina Foundation meetings when they were surrounded by cameras. How each flinch of Shane's body physically pained Ilya and how inseparable they went the minute cameras shut down.

Ilya sinks deeper into the couch and Yuna pulls him in a hug from the back, laying her chin on his shoulder so she can look through the photos while holding him.

—

"Ah, I love this photo. Is my grandma's mom. What do you call it?" Ilya flips his brain trying to find the word.

"Great grandma?"

"Da. Yes. Her name was Cveta, like bloom. When flowers bloom," he opens then closes his fist mimicking blooming of the flowers. Yuna hopes that Ilya can't feel the backflips her stomach is doing trying not to burst into tears.

"That's very lovely. You have the same eyes," she says instead.

"Yes. And her nose. Well, her nose before I got it smashed in hockey."

In the photo, his great grandma was holding him her cheeks flushed, her hazel eyes looking at the little boy in her arms while he was holding her finger. His grandma and Irina were in a blur in the photo, probably cooking something because the table in front of them had flour, eggs and bowls of different sizes.

"She chased me with a flaming broomstick once," Ilya remembers with a wet laugh. Yuna snaps her head towards him stunned.

"What?"

"Is old wives tale. When a child pees in the bed you need to chase the demons away," Ilya flails his arms in the air like it's a normal thing to do.

"With a flaming broomstick?" Yuna gasps.

"Yes. A small one," Ilya shows the size with his hands all serious.

"I... Okay. And, what, you stopped wetting your bed?"

"Yes. The demons got chased away," Ilya shrugs his shoulders. Yuna sighs.

"I try to understand you but then you say stuff like that and I wonder."

Ilya laughs then rests his head on top of hers still resting on his shoulder.

—

"Oh my god I hate this picture," Ilya groans suddenly flipping over a page. Yuna looks over his shoulder and twists her face.

"Is that... Is that supposed to be a Santa?" She squints to see it better but the only thing she can see is Jeffree Dahmer type man in a Santa suit. Screaming and frightened Ilya on his knee with a bag of sweets in his tiny little hands.

"He looks like a serial killer. That is why I hate your Christmas here in the West. Full of scary Santas." Ilya shivers and flips a page revealing more photos from various Christmas celebrations.

"But why does he look like a drug dealer? Our Santa doesn't look like that," Yuna asks but Ilya shrugs his shoulders.

"Because he probably was."

Yuna stops for a beat waiting for a joke to land but realizes that Ilya wasn't laughing anymore. His finger stops at the photos with a Christmas tree with his grandma holding him up towards a skinny multicolored decorated tree.

"That looks lovely."

"Yes. I love these photos. Do you know that we don't celebrate Christmas like you do?" Ilya says suddenly his eyes focused on his mom's happy expression getting tinsel on the tree while his grandma holds him smiling.

"What do you mean?" Yuna turns her head to look at Ilya.

"Russian Orthodox Church follows a different calendar. Our Christmas is on January 7th and Christmas Eve the day before. And is very different.

"There was once a time when we couldn't celebrate it so they made New Year's a holiday. Big celebration. Parties. Alcohol. Fireworks. Friends and Family. What you call Christmas tree we call New Year's tree. We exchange gifts on January 1st.

"Then Christmas Eve and Christmas are quiet, only for close family and full with tradition and specific foods and stuff. It is kind of a quiet ritual," Ilya explains like explaining a history lesson, devoid of emotion.

"What do you mean you couldn't celebrate Christmas?" Yuna asks carefully.

"Soviet Union was... Well... Long story. Not a good time. We Russians have very difficult relationship with religion and politics. So New Year's is like a national holiday, compared to Christmas which was held under the radar."

"You had to hide to celebrate it?" Yuna's stomach does a backflip again.

"I mean. Yes. Kinda. My dad was also police, which didn't help. That's why I don't care what we do for Christmas. I know I drive Shane crazy but it just doesn't matter to me."

Yuna looks at Ilya's side profile and how defeated he looked talking about it like it didn't matter. Of course Yuna wasn't completely delusional. She was of Asian descent herself and she was fully aware that there were different traditions and cultural moments celebrated all around the world but this was different. She couldn't comprehend having a child, Ilya, going through what was supposed to be one of the joyous holidays in the year and being hidden, terrified or just sidelined because it didn't matter.

Ilya's experience from such a young age made her realize how sometimes mundane things she took for granted. For Hollander family celebrating Christmas was gathering around the fireplace in fuzzy socks, drinking cocoa, exchanging gifts and watching cartoons with baby

Shane then going to a nearby lake where he and David would skate for a few hours until they were all blushed from the cold air.

It had nothing to do with religious holiday as such, it was family time on steroids. Nothing more nothing less.

Her heart ached every time Ilya explained something from his past like it didn't matter. Because it did and it was such a big thing about him that she wanted to protect him from. Or to change for the future. To get him out of this shell of fear of doing something wrong.

Yuna might not be his mother but her let be damned if she doesn't try to give Ilya everything he deserves and more. She always wanted another child and yes, it might be a little unconventional the way she got him but he's here and the one thing Yuna Hollander doesn't do is give up on someone.

Yuna felt like she owed that to Irina. To continue to guide her son who deserves everything in this world after the life he led.

—

"Oh no, why were you crying in this one?" Yuna asks pointing to a photo of Ilya, around 1 year old screaming and crying on the floor of some kind of a cottage surrounded by grass and trees. Ilya lets out a loud laugh.

"Oh, I love this one. I had ticks in my head," Yuna looks stunned at him.

Again, this boy found really strange things hilarious.

"Is fine. Mom got them out. Tall grass, I wanted to play in it. Didn't listen to her and well," he laughs again caressing the photo with his thumb then flips another page and surprises a sob.

"This was my first birthday. My mom used to make these bear cakes for first birthdays for all her friends," he looks longingly at the photo of Irina looming over Ilya's small body - teddy bear cake in front of him, the entire thing almost half his size.

"She made it herself?" Yuna asks her eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Yes. It had jelly candies, the sugary kind. I don't know the translation. Um... Crushed biscuit, coca cola like juice, margarine, chocolate, orange juice. It was so tasty. It sounds like is not but really is."

Ilya leans again on Yuna's head and flips through the pages. Stopping every now and again to point at some of them and laugh.

—

"She called me a dandelion in this photo," Ilya was probably 13 months old at best in the photo, sitting in a stroller with a yellow pacifier in his mouth. His beady eyes focused on the lens of the camera with golden hair wild like a lion's mane.

He smiles then wipes a tear with his thumb then flips a page and gasps.

"Oh. I forgot about this one."

He was barely three or four years old. In the photo Ilya was holding hands with another boy. Irina was standing behind them with concern on her face. Both boys were clutching each other hands and caught mid giggle in the photo.

To a stranger it was a happy photo, the kids were laughing and just being children. What's wrong with that, right?

But the look on Irina's face made Yuna's stomach churn and she knew that something more sinister was going on. She decided to ignore the feeling but still asked:

"Was that your brother?"

Ilya starts violently shaking his head.

"Ah, no. My mother's best friend's son. Peter I think was the name..." Ilya then stops mid sentence, lifts his head eyes focusing somewhere in the distance then looks at Yuna who narrows her eyes in confusion. "Huh, I just realized something."

"What?"

"That was the first time I remember my dad hitting me," Ilya drops that information out of nowhere and Yuna feels like someone took the floor beneath her feet.

"What? Why?" She barely says.

"Because I was holding another boy's hand," Ilya says it like a matter of fact shrugging his shoulders and going to flip the page over again but he stops and gets back to it.

Yuna lets a little: "Oh."

"Just after this photo was taken. My mom was so sad about it. She couldn't see her friend anymore," Ilya traces his mother's body on the photo with his index finger. Yuna wants to reach inside of the photo, yank both of the boys and Irina out and protect them at all costs.

"What do you mean?" She finally says.

"My dad didn't allow it."

Ilya laughs and Yuna looks at him confused.

"I just realized it was because he thought I was gay. I didn't know that at the time it was what it was. I just thought he was angry at me. He was always angry. And when he was angry he would hit me."

Ilya laughs again and Yuna concludes that's the way he copes with trauma. She can't imagine what kinds of coping mechanisms he put in place to be able to talk about it so normally after all this time.

"Well. You can't hit away the gay I guess. Or whatever the phrase is," he finishes and flips the page again.

Yuna was both mortified and sad. But then Ilya's groan pulled her out of her spiraling.

"Ugh. The Golden Boy is winning," Ilya points to the tv where the game was in the last 30 seconds and Montreal was obviously going to win.

"Like you're not proud of him," Yuna pokes Ilya in his ribs teasing him.

"I am. But you can't tell him. He'll get it into his head," Ilya lifts a finger like he's threatening Yuna and she smiles pushing his finger away while The Voyagers were celebrating the win.

Ilya returns to the album and groans again.

"I hated kindergarden so much," he admits poking at the photos with children all shapes and sizes, surrounded by the small tables. Probably during a lunchtime.

"Why?"

"The metallic bowls and plates. The sound of the forks," Ilya shivers like he can hear the sounds again. "And the taste. Hated it. Thank god I didn't go for that long. My grandma watched me instead," Ilya shrugs his shoulders again.

"Why didn't you?" Yuna lifts her eyebrow sensing that this might not be so traumatic experience but rather Ilya's standard semi troublemaker one. Ilya grins devilishly:

"Um. I tried to climb the bookshelf to get the toy for a boy and the shelf fell over me."

"What?!" Yuna gasps but laughs.

"It was light. Is why fell over. I was fine," Ilya flails his hand in the air again dismissing it.

"Were you, actually?"

"Well, I got punished and kicked out of day care but yes, I was fine. And the boy got his toy. It was a win win situation. A boy with freckles smiled at me."

Ilya smirked again while Yuna was shaking her head in disbelief.

This boy.

—

The last photos in the album were from some sorts of various celebrations - alcohol, cigarettes, babies sleeping on hard chairs while the music was blaring around them. Yuna couldn't comprehend the noise that was probably going on in the background, yet Ilya laughed fondly.

"Don't tell me this was a happy memory?" She asked stunned again. Ilya nods.

"Sort of. Was funny, a lot of noise, music, food, people. But all my friends were there. And Svetlana was there. It was fun."

"And Svetlana is?" Yuna asks looking at the pictures. Ilya shows a little curly haired girl with wonderful eyes and dazling smile. They were probably six or seven in the photo. They were lying on the couch, Ilya on her lap with his eyes closed while Svetlana was mussing with his curls and talking to a girl perched right next to her on the armrest.

"My best friend. She is Sergei Vetrov's daughter."

Yuna lets out a small 'oh' and Ilya laughs proudly.

If there was something Yuna Hollander appreciated more than anything was hockey legends. So, the fact that his childhood best friend was a daughter of one made her perk up.

"She knows a lot about hockey. We were inseparable until recently," Ilya admits, knowing fully well in which direction this conversation is going to go. Just waiting for another shoe to drop.

"Until recently?" Yuna asks carefully but Ilya still can't look her in the eyes.

"Yes. I... We stopped seeing each other after I moved to Ottawa," he says sheepishly, suddenly thinking whether this was the topic he wanted to talk to with his boyfriend's mom.

"Oh, so you two were... Together?" Yuna finally lets out.

"Sometimes, yes. But like friends with benefits. Both of us didn't want a relationship. She was fine with it. We knew each other our whole lives. It was safe for me."

He choses that moment to look at her, prepared to see a look of disgust on her face but all he found was acceptance and understanding. He felt like someone was slowly releasing the grip it had on his heart and his heartbeat was finally picking up a normal pace.

"Oh, you mean in case gossip magazines got you, you mean? I know it's probably hard being in public eye and having relationships. That's why for the longest time we thought Shane simply didn't want to date. Because he didn't want to deal with that stuff," Yuna explains looking at stunned Ilya who wasn't expecting that at all.

"That yes. But like she knew me before I was me. She's a really good person. She sent me this," Ilya closes the photo album and leaves it on top of all the things they looked over and takes the last bundle of photos.

"What?" Yuna asks.

"When I left Russia after my father's funeral I forgot to take this with me. She was the only one who knew about it. Probably went home recently and got it for me. She just sent me a message this morning that she's sending an early birthday present but she didn't say what it was. Was not expecting this."

"That's very kind of her."

"Yes. She is very kind," Ilya swallows another sob and looks back at the bundle of photos releasing the ribbon it was holding them together.

"Does she know about Shane?" Yuna asks carefully which makes Ilya snap his head towards her and shake his head in panic.

"No. Nobody knows. I mean. Not at least from my side," he tries assuring her that their secret is safe with him but that was not what was Yuna going for because she takes his hands into hers again and looks into his eyes.

"Oh, Ilya. That's... That's not fair. You mean to tell me that Hayden knows, Me and David know and ... well Shane's entire team knows he's gay but doesn't know about you specifically, but... Not one of your friends knows about Shane?"

"He says he's not ready. I respect that," Ilya diverts his eyes and tries to get out of her hold to get back to the photos but she is holding him tightly, not letting go.

"But Ilya, you don't have anyone to talk about it."

"I know. Is fine," Ilya looks at her with a smile that doesn't quite reach his eyes. He gets out of her hold and flips through the rest of the photos. Photos Svetlana added from her own collection.

Yuna studies him for a beat, knowing fully well that it's definitely bothering him. He loved Shane, that wasn't even a question but Shane needed to know that Ilya never had anyone by his side. However Shane might be introverted he had friends and family supporting him all his life. Ilya chose to walk away from fame The Raiders got him, from the possibility of playing for the team on the road for more Stanley cups. He moved to Ottawa to be closer to Shane, without any friends or confidants. Waiting week after week for a night or two with Shane. All while knowing fully well that he can't go back home to Russia.

That wasn't fair, not for Ilya or for Shane. And it pained Yuna so much that she was willing to march right into Commissioner Crowell's office and do something drastic.

"Oh my god. We were teens in these ones," Ilya laughs and Yuna blinks out from her thoughts.

When she looks at the photos she sees now teenager Ilya and Svetlana on the grass by the lake, smiling and eating watermelon, rolling around in the grass -then Ilya jumping from silos by the lake into the water. Ilya in another boy's lap half asleep while the boy's hand was in his curls. Ilya and some other friends sitting in front of the grocery store drinking and smoking cigars and making faces.

Then one or two with Ilya resting in Svetlana's lap while she goes through his hair - one when she was only five years old, like the one from the album and one when they were in their teens.

He doesn't explain the photos, just looks at them with a huge smile on his face and every now and again shaking his head in disbelief like someone other than him lived that life.

Then suddenly his phone rings with face time - Shane. Yuna goes to stand up from the couch to give them some privacy but Ilya shakes his head and takes her hand into his so she just melts on his shoulder again.

"Heeey, heeey..." Shane says with his fondest tone seeing a smile on Ilya's face then on his mom perched next to him.

Shane loved their relationship. Maybe was even borderline jealous of it because he was never social for his mom's standards enough but this felt like a good compromise. Both Shane and Ilya nurtured all the things Yuna adored - the level headed organizational skills and focus Shane had towards hockey and sociability and playfulness of Ilya's warm heart (alongside his incredible talent on ice). They were a package with the label 'don not separate' and he loved that for her.

"Hi, sweetheart. You played good today."

Ilya says fondly, suddenly out of banter he wanted to start the conversation with. He ate his favourite food, Yuna was holding him and his childhood best friend just gave him a bit of his history and identity back. He just wanted to praise Shane for a bit if he couldn't have him in his arms tonight.

Shane senses the shift in his tone because usually they would bicker a minute or two before they refer to fluffier moments after a game between The Centaurs and Voyagers. He glances quickly at Yuna in the camera and sees that her eyes were red from tears.

"Thank you. I tried," Shane blushes a bit and smiles, willing his mom to somehow telepathically communicate with him. - "You look better. How are you feeling?"

"Fever dropped an hour ago. He ate a full meal and even showered," Yuna hops in the conversation seeing how Ilya is still just dazed looking at Shane's picture in picture on his phone.

"Hey, amazing. I'm so glad. Hey hey, what's wrong?" Shane suddenly says when he sees several tears escaping Ilya's eyes.

"Oh, nothing. Just got something today and Yuna helped me get through it," Ilya says in a small voice and Yuna drops a kiss on top of his curls. When she sees that he can't elaborate further she says quickly:

"Your boyfriend got an early birthday present today. From his friend Svetlana and..." Yuna starts all smiley but Shane flips his head towards Ilya and snorts, angry kitten face on.

"Svetlana?" He lifts his eyebrows and Ilya snorts. Yuna looks at them in confusion.

"Ah. Da. Shane is so very jealous of Svetlana."

"Am not. But. Why... Why would she... How does she know where you l... What did she..." Shane was now beat red and stuttering making both Ilya and Yuna laugh loudly.

"Relax моя любовь. She... Do you remember how I talked about my baby stuff from Russia?"

"Oh. Yes, of course," Shane shakes out of his jealousy and looks at Ilya once more and sees everything on his face. "Oh, she sent it to you?"

"Yes. All of it. I have to call her later to see how she did it. I was not expecting this."

"And you... You went through it? Together?" Shane looks at Yuna trying to find an ounce of concern on his mother's face but she just gently nods and smiles.

"He was the cutest baby Shane. You will holler when you see him. Oh, and you won't believe!" Yuna jumps from her seat jostling Ilya and he sighs when she gets out of frame.

"Oh no. No. No. Yuna, no!" Shane can hear them laughing and trying to battle something out of the camera but all Shane can see are wild motions from both of them.

Then Ilya groans, Yuna yells in victory and the camera stops moving. Ilya is red from embarrassment and Yuna has an evil smirk on her face.

"So, son," Yuna starts and Ilya groans again covering his eyes with his hands. Shane smiles. "You know how your boyfriend here is afraid of loons?"

"Um. Yes. But how do you know..."

"Well. The package Svetlana send over had his baby blanket. What do you think his favourite baby blanket had on it?" Yuna winks and lifts the blanket to the camera.

Shane lets out a loud laugh.

"OH MY GOD !!! Are those ducks? They do look like loons, little blue loons," Shane gets closer to the camera so he can see the screen properly and Ilya can see the freckles on his face, melting completely.

"Oh shut up. I hate both of you," Ilya looks at them through the screen but both Yuna and Shane are laughing fondly.

"Nah, you looooveeee us," they both sing song in unison.

"Okay boys you continue and I'm going to clean up in the kitchen."

—

Yuna leaves them to catch up on the couch and picks up the bowls and the empty packaging going to the kitchen to sort it all out. But the moment she leaves the warmth of Ilya's presence the entire conversation and walk down the memory lane they just had made her want to scream at the Universe.

Year and a half ago she hated this boy. Okay, maybe not hated but despised on ice. He was her son's biggest rival. He was brilliant but a troublemaker - or she thought so.

On surface he represented everything Yuna Hollander didn't stand for. But now, upon knowing the boy and seeing how it was all an act she would give up her own life if that meant that she could take all of his suffering and transfer it on to her.

How can a child live through all the horrors of childhood like that - abuse, death, trauma, victim of political regime and still come out of it as the most emphatetic, loveliest boy she ever knew.

She watched Ilya bundled up in blankets on the couch talking animatedly and laughing over something Shane said while she was packing up the dishwasher.

All the ruined Christmases, New Year celebrations, half filled baby books and the lack of photos in general ended when he joined their family. And Yuna was determined that if anyone comes for both of her sons ever again they will have to deal with her first, because she will not go down without a fight.

After finishing in the kitchen she walks over the couch to see if Ilya wanted to go to bed to rest for a bit but finds him fast asleep cuddled with his baby blanket and the blue bear under his chin.

Yuna just drapes the throw blanket over his body and takes the phone out of his hands. His face time with Shane still active. Shane smiles gently, looking up from where he was reading a book with his glasses on and she blows him a kiss and they drop the line.

Maybe Yuna Hollander wasn't able to have two biological children of her own but The Universe had a funny way of delivering and she will not let it down.

End Notes

Btw the memory of my great grandma chasing me with flaming broomstick is probably the only one I have of her because she died when I was very young and I still remember that day like it was yesterday 😊 (it was funny as hell). I also used her name in this fic as Ilya's because it was on theme with Lily/Bloom, get it? Fun fact, my grandma's name is Violet and one of her sister is Lily (these names sound completely different in my own language but are the names of actual flowers - Violet - Ljubica, Lily - Ljiljana, blooming flower - Cveta) so yeah, again on HR theme 😊 and yes, the story with the kindergarden bookshelf is also my own. I was expelled but "thankfully" bombing and the war started soon after that so they didn't care about it when I was applying for primary school (let me be, I use humor to cope with trauma).

Also, please tell me I'm not alone bawling my eyes out on all the 'Cottage' edits where Ilya is finally feeling like he's home and safe when he's with Shane, Yuna and David? Like that shit breaks my heart, I love him so much 😭

Oh, yeah. It's January 6th, Christmas Eve (and it's almost midnight, hence Christmas) so in whichever fictional universe Ilya Rozanov is right now I hope that Yuna, David and Shane are taking care of him and feeding him with obscene amounts of food 🍲

Comments and kudos appreciated ✨ You can find me on twt /@strgzngstorm92 or: stargazingstormtrooper92

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