

Can't Help It

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Can't Help It

by [bomberqueen17](#)

Summary

I know everyone's written the missing scene of Ilya and David at the table when Shane goes out with Yuna's cardigan but I had to, too.

Notes

Can I tell you it's weird to be in a fandom where typing "[Actual Dad Character]'s A+ Parenting" wouldn't be completely sarcastic? It's wild.

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

Chapter 1

David watched his son take Yuna's cardigan and go out the door she'd disappeared through, and sat back a little in his chair. They were fine, Yuna just needed a moment to process that there was an entire aspect of Shane she had not only not been managing, she also hadn't even suspected. David was as surprised as she was, but he was generally a bit more Zen about these things; it was sinking in slowly for him but mostly he was grateful. He was just grateful, firstly that his son had these unexpected depths to him-- he'd really been worried about how driven and isolated Shane was, all these years-- and secondly that he knew, now. He'd accidentally stumbled on the secret, and had run out of there and straight back here resolving never to speak of it to anyone, but Shane had come right over, composed and brave and, for once, not unaccompanied.

He took a sip of his drink, then turned his eyes to the young man sitting across the table. Ilya hadn't been frightened at all, not at any point in this entire thing. He seemed to be a fairly unflappable creature. Who also, apparently, knew exactly how Shane liked to be touched. Shane was not a person who liked to be touched very much, and while David didn't exactly relish the memory of seeing him pressed against a glass door and groped like that, it was undeniable that he'd been enjoying it. Which was just not something David had ever thought was really in the cards for Shane, and he couldn't really square it. It was sort of nice, to be wrong-footed about something that was actually *good* for Shane.

Ilya was regarding David with some wariness just now, though, holding his tumbler of vodka in one hand with the other arm crossed over his chest.

"I'll be honest," David said, "I'm mostly just impressed he managed to keep a secret." He shook his head slightly. "I didn't know he had it in him."

Ilya inclined his head slightly, eyebrows twitching, but did not speak. David considered that a moment, then decided to continue. "He wears his heart on his face," David said. "Shane has never in his life known how to keep from showing every single thought he has right on his face."

Ilya inclined his head again, a little further. "This is true," he said, unsmiling.

"You can see how that would make a loving father worried for him," David said. "This is a hard, cruel world, and hockey can be a cruel sport. And here's this little creature you made and did your best with, and you can't protect him, you have to kind of throw him out there for the world to look at, and there he is with every single thing he thinks just right out on his face." He shook his head a little. "But I was wrong. He *can* hide."

"You're not wrong," Ilya said, shaking his head a little. "He is no good at lying. But he has learned when to shut his mouth, at least. The one thing he has, is discipline."

"Too much," David said. "Too much."

Ilya shook his head slightly, looking away, and a little smile curved his lips, but it was a slightly bitter one.

"I worried about you too," David said bluntly, on impulse. Ilya looked at him, frowning in puzzlement. "I knew you were even younger than Shane, and here you were, in a foreign country, all alone. I knew how much pressure there was on Shane, and I thought, you've got all that pressure too, but you don't have Yuna Hollander there to kick people's asses for you."

Ilya's mouth opened slightly in surprise, abandoning its sardonic little twist. "I *was* alone," he admitted. "But." He smiled bitterly again, but it was sadder. "I had been alone a long time already. It wasn't that much more pressure. And coach was nicer to me here."

"I remember when your father died," David said. "I felt terrible. Shane said he'd sent condolences, so it felt inappropriate for me to send any. Not like you'd even know who I was. But I did worry for you then, too."

Ilya blinked slowly, and nodded a little. "He did," he said, "thank you." He took a drink. "Actually that maybe was when I realized." And he stopped.

"Realized," David prompted gently, when no more was forthcoming.

"How fucking nice Shane is," Ilya said, looking away again. "Mostly people left me alone, team left me alone, and I had said that was what I wanted. Shane didn't pester me but he sent text, he called once. So I called him back, when it was bad and I did not know what to do with myself. And he was so fucking nice to me."

"He has a big heart," David said. "But honestly that seems like a pretty low bar, Ilya."

Ilya gave a low laugh, looking down into his tumbler. "No," he said. "Not to me."

"I admit," David said, "I don't know a lot about Russian culture. Are your folks usually pretty stoic?" Asshole, that was a weird word to use to a second-language speaker. "You know, keep their emotions inside?"

Ilya laughed again. "Noooooot exactly," he said, drawing it out as he considered it. "No, we are drama. We are high drama. High emotions. We laugh and we scream and we cry. And we do not smile too much, too much smile and everyone think you a fool. But lots of shouting. Lots of crying. Lots of strong emotions. Lots of fighting."

"That sounds healthy," David said, slightly uncertainly.

Ilya shook his head, shrugged one shoulder. "Can be," he said. "Can be not. Just like anybody." He shrugged. "We *have* feelings. We have feelings out loud. Doesn't mean we *talk* about feelings." He raised the tumbler. "Part of culture is, you drink to be honest. A man who will not drink with you is hiding."

"My people don't talk about feelings unless they're nice," David said.

"I *notice* this," Ilya said, with an air of revelation. "Only nice things! But bad things happen! Pretending there is no bad things does not make them not happen! Important to complain

about bad things, but when I do, people act like I am doing wrong. This I will say,” he went on, warming to his topic-- the vodka was working, perhaps, just as his people believed-- “One thing Russians do well, we complain when things are bad. Because how can you fix something if you cannot admit it is bad!”

“You’re absolutely right,” David said. “You’ve just got to tell it like it is.”

“*Thank* you,” Ilya said, “you understand.”

“Understand what?” Shane said at the door, and his eyes were wet but he was smiling.

“Importance of complaining,” Ilya said.

Yuna was right behind Shane, and was wiping her eyes, but she looked happy too. Whatever they’d discussed, it seemed resolved. Good.

“Complaining,” Shane said, going a little blank. But he came and sat back down next to Ilya, who gave him a startlingly sweet smile.

That was the truly unexpected thing, to see Rozanov’s face, so long always a cocky sneer or hostile leer, in its real true natural state. The boy was made of sunshine really, David thought. He didn’t wear his heart on his face all the time like Shane did, he had much more control, much more reserve, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t there. And David had to admire a person who could abandon himself to the pleasure of eating so thoroughly. Ilya was a person who had a tremendous and sincere capacity to enjoy things, which was exactly what Shane needed in his life.

Shane smiled back at him, a dazed and watery smile, but he was happy. Yuna came and sat down, and took David’s hand in hers. He squeezed it, and she used her other hand to wipe her eyes again.

Next evening at the cabin, post-dinner

“Ilya,” Yuna said. David pronounced it very correctly, Ilya had noticed, with the high thin I and the sharp *ya*. Shane used a blocky, wide I sound. Ihll-yuh, sometimes even stretching it to three syllables. Ill-ee-uh. Very Canadian. Yuna was right in the middle. Ilya didn’t exactly mind; his name from Shane’s mouth was always a thrill no matter how many syllables it was.

He nodded a greeting to her, and moved over a little where he’d been leaning on the decorative railing. She came and settled herself a short distance away, arm’s reach or so, close enough to talk but not close enough to violate Canadians’ notions of personal space. (Another cultural issue Ilya had needed to adjust to, as he’d belatedly learned that Russians apparently liked to stand unusually close to one another while talking. Fortunately his time among Finns had prepared him. Canadians were somewhere in between the two extremes. He still had to mentally do math sometimes, especially when drunk, to place himself at arm’s

length from someone for an interaction he'd naturally have conducted at shoulder-bump distance. It felt cold, but he was used to it now.)

"I want to talk about your career," she said. "Firstly, have you discussed anything with your agent?"

"No," Ilya said. "The plan is very new. I want to be sure I've thought about it first."

"Are you happy with your agent?" she asked, sliding a sidelong look at him.

He'd thought about it. His agent was Russian, and had represented him since he was a teenager. He tilted his head, noncommittal. "Might be open to discuss," he said, fidgeting with a callus on his palm that was peeling a little from all the time in the water. He wished he had a cigarette for something else to do with his hands, but he wasn't about to light one up. He didn't have any out here anyway. He thought about calling his agent and saying *My career priority now is enabling my secret gay relationship*, and how that might go. Hmmm.

"I'll keep that in mind," she said. "I understand we're not deciding anything right now. But I wanted to feel you out."

He laughed. "I am a brazen hussy who will abandon team that drafted me just to be closer to your son," he said.

She laughed too. "Ilya," she said. "I know how that sounded but-- the thing is, you're an absolute phenomenon and it would be a criminal waste to derail your career. If it weren't for Shane you'd be a generational talent. As it is the MLH is beyond lucky to have two like you at once. I don't want to see you vanish into some backwater."

"I am told Ottawa is capital city of Canada," Ilya said innocently.

"But the Cens are a joke," she said.

"They have potential," Ilya argued.

"Ilya," Yuna said, very quietly.

"I want Canadian passport," Ilya said. He'd considered American, but given their politics-- he'd wanted to scream at what they were letting Putin do to them, but nobody would listen to him and he'd only make himself a target, so he'd kept his mouth shut. And resolved that it was Canada or nothing for him. "So it's Ottawa, or I try for Edmonton or Vancouver, and I play in Western Conference. And I see Shane once, twice a year, then at awards ceremony, then maybe a week in the summer. Always on opposite sides at All-Star game, no way there could be a theme that would put us together. Which I don't care that much about but is one more way we can't see each other. And another contract is three, five, seven years? Only then do I get to think about any other option. Ten years go by and I see Shane eleven, twelve times total. By then I am thirty-five maybe? Maybe too old and broken to play hockey anymore. Maybe I retire. And then I do whatever I want, because my life is over and nothing matters. And that's all I hope for?"

It had been a long monologue. Yuna hadn't expected it, he thought, but she was mulling it over, and her expression was-- sad maybe? "No," she said quietly, "you're right. If it's Canada you want-- but why such a hurry for the passport?"

Ilya considered his words. "If I am outed," he said, "by some chance, and I lose my place on a team, which is very possible outcome, I have no legal standing to remain in North America, and if I am deported back to Russia, as very publicly-outed gay, it is illegal there to be gay, and I am quite sure I will not like what happens to me. I am extremely eager to get passport that is not Russian, as quickly as I possibly can, because then at least no matter what, I will not have to find out what happens to me in Russia."

Yuna exhaled. "I didn't realize the law was quite that... much," she said.

"It is," he said. "I have relatives in police. Some of them hate me. They would see to it, I have no doubt. Make example of me."

Would his brother actually do it?

Yes, he decided, and gladly.

"Those are high stakes," Yuna mused.

"Yes," Ilya said. "It's maybe why it took me ten years to admit to myself that this was perhaps a real thing." He gestured vaguely back at the cottage, where Shane and David were doing something elaborate with a crossword puzzle.

"If that happened, though," Yuna said. "Shane could marry you."

"If I am outed and he is not," Ilya said tightly. "What then?"

"That's extremely unlikely," Yuna said.

"But if it happened," Ilya said. "Would be stupid to throw away his career too. Much smarter to make a different plan to start with. Much smarter for me to get my own papers on my own terms." He tilted his hand. "So. Ottawa. Or I go to rot out west, and then there's nothing to hide, except maybe video call once in a while, hardly incriminating." He shrugged. "Ottawa does not look so bad."

"I suppose not, once you lay it out like that," she said, a little glum.

He couldn't help but give her a half-grin. "I'm sorry there wasn't something we miss so you could fix it," he said, and then immediately repented. "I mean that," he added hastily. "I hoped there was."

She laughed. "Oh! You know, I do love fixing things," she said. "Well, I haven't given up. I might think of something. There's time."

Ilya laughed, relieved she'd understood him. He liked her, and didn't want to offend her, but a large part of how he had always interacted with people he liked was making gentle fun of

them. He didn't know what he'd have done if she'd turned out to be someone who couldn't stand that.

She sighed, and moved a little closer to him on the railing, so she could put her hand on his arm. "Ilya," she said. "You're just such a good player. I don't want to see you dragging an underachieving team like a ball and chain around your ankle. You deserve to win more Cups." She considered that a moment. "Or, well, at least come in second. You know I want Shane to win them all, of course."

"Of course," he said graciously.

She considered, pulling her arms in to cross them across her chest, tapping her chin with one finger as she thought. "The real ideal situation would be if you could both play for the same team," she said. "Then there's no more rivalry, there's no more of that bullshit, and also you would be unbeatable." She glanced up at him, and pointed. "You two do have *amazing* chemistry."

"No team could afford us both," Ilya said, and shrugged.

"Not right now," Yuna said. "But. In the longer term."

"I don't think Montreal would ever, *ever* tolerate me," Ilya said.

"It would be a hard sell," Yuna conceded.

"I know you're Metros fan," he went on, deadpan. "I am surprised even still you can stand to look at me."

She gave him a look, but caught on that he was being funny, and laughed. "Young man," she said, "I admit that has been the most difficult part of this entire situation."

"I am what I am," Ilya said. "I can't help it."

Chapter 2: Pillow Talk

Chapter Summary

You know what, I wasn't done.

"I don't think there's anything new to say," Yuna said, lying flat on her back in the bed. "But I just."

David rolled over and kissed her shoulder. "It's a lot to take in," he said.

"It shouldn't be that complicated," Yuna said with a little huff. "We even thought he might be gay. Or. You know. Asexual."

She'd really been convinced he was asexual. Her reasoning had been impeccable, and David had nodded along but said that only Shane would know and he'd tell them when he felt ready, if he thought they should know, and so on. And Yuna had insisted this must be the truth.

It was her way. She needed to know things, to be sure she wasn't missing something. It was understandable, and while sometimes David felt a little worn-down by her need to know and control everything, mostly after so many years he was used to it and could just go along for the ride.

David let out a long, not unpleasant sigh. "Well," he said. "He's gay."

"I mean," Yuna said. "What did you actually *see*."

"He's telling us the truth," David said mildly, though with a bit of an edge to it. Shane *had* lied to them, for the first time in his life, but it had been a lie of omission, it had not been a fabrication. He had simply not told them something he was afraid of them knowing, which was a lot different than telling them something untrue.

"No I *know* that," Yuna said, frustrated. "I just--"

David sighed. It had been an invasion of privacy, what he'd seen. "They came up from the lake," he said, "with their towels on, they'd been swimming, and they were laughing together and holding hands, and then Shane leaned back against the door and Ilya leaned against him and kissed him."

"Hm," Yuna said.

"And Ilya had his hand on Shane's... butt," David said. "And Shane very clearly was encouraging him, had his arms around him. They were acting like-- it was *normal*," David said. "It was just the kind of thing we might have done at that age. It was just two normal

kids being normal and slightly horny. And Shane was laughing.” *He tipped his head back to give Ilya a better angle.* “It was also really obviously something they’d done before. They were really comfortable with each other. You *saw* that, Yuna, you saw how Shane let Ilya touch him and even leaned into it.”

Yuna considered it. “And you didn’t tell me,” she said. She’d probably hold that against him for a long time, he thought resignedly. He’d come back with his charger in his hand and had said not a word, and Yuna had picked up on his strangely shaken mood but he had kept his mouth shut and fended her off and refused to discuss it, until Shane had pulled up with Ilya right there and it was too late to forewarn her.

“It was an invasion of privacy,” David said, a little sharply. “I shouldn’t have been there. He asked us not to. I shouldn’t have been there, I shouldn’t have seen it.”

“He lied to us,” Yuna said.

Okay, there *had* been a fabrication, the whole silent retreat thing, but only to enable the omission. “I can’t blame him,” David said. “And it’s his right as an adult person to have boundaries, but we never have before, so he had to come up with something.”

“He’s been unhappy this whole time,” Yuna said, horrified. “Oh God. We *have* been smothering him. *I’ve* been smothering him. Oh David. I thought he needed the support. I thought he wanted--” She covered her face with her hands. “David this is my *nightmare*.”

“It’s okay,” David said. “Yuna, it’s okay. We’re not smothering him. He’s just grown in a direction neither of us expected so we weren’t ready. It’s like-- so we just have to move the supports, take some of them off, give him a little more room. It’s okay. Obviously we didn’t stunt his growth. He made the room he needed.”

“I’ve spent his whole life terrified I’d crush him somehow,” Yuna said. “And I fucking *did*.”

“You didn’t crush him,” David said.

Yuna was suddenly in tears. “He told me,” she said, “he *tried really hard*, David he tried really hard, to-- to what? He *tried*-- He didn’t think we’d accept him like this! What *violence* did he do to himself to *try really hard*, David? Oh God!”

“It can’t have been that violent, Yuna,” David said gently.

“But you know how hard he works,” Yuna said, hands over her face. “His *tried really hard* is like other people’s died-of-effort.”

“Yes,” David said, “but, Yuna, he tried and then stopped, obviously. He gave it a shot, and realized it wasn’t working, and he was happy. He was lying to us, sure, but he was happy. He was already happy.”

“How happy, living in hiding and lying?” Yuna demanded. “How really happy can that be? In hiding even from us-- and we’re so much up in his business he had to fabricate an entire story to even make that much space for himself to be happy in.”

David sighed. It wasn't that he particularly wanted to dwell on that memory, of two young men in peak physical condition twining around each other against a glass door in extremely horny fashion, but. "He looked pretty happy, Yuna," he said. "Remember how you used to worry about how he didn't get enough physical touch in his life and it was bad for his brain?"

She was silent a moment, because that was something she'd worried about a lot. They'd always known their boy was different, and she'd read widely on the topic and had found some, in hindsight, pretty fucking awful old literature about how a "cold mother" could stunt a child's emotional growth. And yeah, Yuna had found it hard to have a tiny child that wanted to touch her all the time; she liked physical touch but only in her preferred ways, and little sticky baby hands were not that preferred way. She'd beat herself up pretty badly over not touching Shane enough when he was a baby, blaming herself for his pickiness about sensory inputs as a small child, and still the worry lingered into adulthood. Sports meant touching, a contact sport like hockey meant contact obviously, but she fretted that it wasn't the same. He didn't hold hands with his friends, didn't have girls on his lap.

They both knew now that that wasn't how it worked, the entire theory of "a cold mother" was debunked as bullshit. But the guilt lingered. And Yuna's eager acceptance of her theory that he was asexual had, David knew, been a kind of balm to her, to make up for this earlier belief that she'd hurt herself with for so long.

"I think his physical touch needs are being met," David said. "In really, really normal ways."

"By a man whose sexual exploits are stuff of *legend*," Yuna said.

David considered that a moment. Maybe Ilya was talking bullshit to say his heart had been Shane's the whole time, but he didn't think so. "Well," he said. "By all accounts, Ilya's good at it. So."

"Stop," Yuna said, turning to look at him.

"No really! Other playboy hockey stars always wind up with terrible allegations of assault and other horrible stuff, but never Rozanov. Nobody has ever complained about him. And I think they would, if there'd been anything to complain about." David shrugged. "If he's a slut he's an ethical slut. Good for him."

"David," Yuna said, scandalized.

"Yuna," David said, "they've been fucking for ten years."

"*David*," Yuna said.

"All this time," David said, "we've been worrying about fame isolating him, about him dealing with all that pressure alone, and he's been getting his butt grabbed on the regular." It was hard to conceive of, mentally, but. Again. Those two young bodies against the glass door, so familiar with one another-- Shane never laughed like that with strangers. He never made that face when he was uncomfortable.

"David," Yuna said, dragging her hands down her face.

“Well?” David said. “It’s an invasion of privacy that I saw it, but I saw it, and now we know that.” He sighed. “So he’s been grabbing our son’s butt for a decade. And Shane has been enjoying it. This is really good to know.”

“Why *him*,” Yuna said, which really was the crux of it, David supposed.

“Did you *see* him?” David asked, sitting up on an elbow.

Yuna made an incredulous scoffing noise. “David!”

“I don’t mean that he literally looks like Michelangelo’s David,” David said, “I mean that he’s a nice kid with a sweet smile who Shane actually likes being touched by, but I don’t know, the fact that he looks like Michelangelo’s David probably doesn’t hurt. But I mean, you saw them together, why *wouldn’t* Shane love him?”

“But he’s,” Yuna said.

“The number one draft pick to Shane’s number two,” David said. “The number two to Shane’s Rookie of the Year. Neck and neck with him in the scoring race every season. If there’s any person on this Earth who knows exactly what kind of pressure Shane is under, it’s Ilya, because he’s right there with him.”

“Beating him!” Yuna said, indignant.

“Sometimes,” David said. “Approximately half of the time. Getting beat the other half of the time. You can’t think for a second that’s not part of it. Either one of them would have otherwise spent his life without really being challenged. Even if Rozanov *was* just an asshole, I’m sure Shane would be fascinated by him.” He considered that. “We’re probably lucky he isn’t.”

“We don’t know that he isn’t,” Yuna said darkly.

“Iiiiiiii think we *do*, actually,” David said.

“But he’s hated him for years,” Yuna said.

David hummed, settling back down onto the pillow. “Has he ever said that?”

“Yes,” Yuna said.

“Has he said it *first*,” David said.

“The very first thing he told us was that Rozanov was kind of a jerk,” Yuna said.

David hummed again. “That’s a first impression, yeah,” he said. “But after that, did he just agree when other people said it, or did he originate it?”

“I don’t know,” Yuna admitted finally.

David nodded. There it was. “It’s more of the pressure that was on them,” he said finally. “The pressure to have their understandable, normal rivalry become a hostile one. You can compete with someone and enjoy it! It’s normal! What they have is so *normal*, Yuna. And if they were anyone else but who they are, nobody would ever bat an eye.”

“Well,” Yuna said. “Except for the gay thing.”

“Not even for the gay thing, in so many contexts,” David said. “What if they were, I don’t know.” He struggled to think of an occupation where it wouldn’t be weird, and his first thoughts were *teacher* but he knew there were still controversies over that, and *lawyer* and then he thought he didn’t really know any lawyers personally. “Actors.”

“Actors are hardly regular people,” Yuna said.

“Accountants,” David said, because he couldn’t easily think of any sensational headlines about accountants.

Yuna snorted. “I, okay,” she said, and laughed. “The two most promising young accountants of their generation.”

“Pitted against one another since freshman year of undergrad,” David intoned.

“Oh God,” Yuna said, “that CCM shoot, that I didn’t book him, and I found out Ilya’s people had requested him and I never thought anything of it. Did Ilya do that, do you think?”

“I mean,” David said. “It was a brilliant stroke for that campaign.”

“But was it his idea?” Yuna said. “Because his agent has not been all that aggressive about brand deals. I should know.” She gasped. “Oh my god he needs to fire his agent. I need to help him. He’s leaving *so much money* on the table. He does like, three campaigns a year, aside from the team endorsements. It’s stupid!”

“Maybe he doesn’t like doing advertisements,” David offered.

“Well you said it yourself,” Yuna said, “he looks like Michelangelo’s David. Every minute someone isn’t paying him to photograph him is a waste of all that youth and beauty.”

“If you get him in front of a bunch of cameras with hair and makeup done,” David said, “you’re going to unseat Shane in all those most attractive competitions. You know they always use his advertising shots for those.”

Yuna sighed. “That’s a competition I don’t think Shane would mind losing,” she said.

“Apparently not, not if it’s Rozanov,” David said.

“Stop,” Yuna said. She sighed. “I’m getting that boy some endorsements.”

So we have two sons now, David thought, but decided it was too soon to say it out loud.

It was true, though.

End Notes

I have another longer work coming that is an absolute masterpiece of shitposting but it is a collab work and it needs time, so this is mostly just to tide me over dopamine-wise until that is done. Do stay tuned, I promise it will be worth the wait.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!