a breastplate made of silver linings

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a breastplate made of silver linings

by Anonymous

Summary

"Be careful," Shane frets, one hand hovering over Ilya's shoulder. "It's icy, and I don't want to be a widower."

"Oh, we'd have to be much higher than this for the fall to kill me," Ilya says, gaze still fixed on the cool black skyline. "At least seven stories."

It's not until much later, as the waitress is clearing the dishes from dinner, that Yuna finds herself wondering why Ilya knows exactly how high a fall needs to be in order to kill him.

Or: Yuna learns about Ilya's past bit by bit over the years.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

They're in a parking garage in downtown Montreal, on their way to catch a reservation for their usual Friday night family dinner, and Ilya is admiring the skyline. "Is a good view," he says, thighs pressed against the concrete balustrade, his eyes on the horizon. "Can't believe they waste it on parking garage."

"Well, you need to park your car somewhere," David says.

Yuna always enjoys watching Ilya enjoy things. She likes watching Shane enjoy things, too, but it's different for him. There's a reluctance to it, his happiness always in the process of being excavated from some buried place. Ilya's joy is loud. He lets it take over his face. When he's happiest, he bounces on his toes like a child.

Now he tips his head back, scouring the night sky for stars. Only satellites in Montreal. "Wish I could see the Big Dipper," he says. "But the lights, these are good, too."

Such a city boy.

"Be careful," Shane frets, one hand hovering over Ilya's shoulder. "It's icy, and I don't want to be a widower."

"Oh, we'd have to be much higher than this for the fall to kill me," Ilya says, gaze still fixed on the cool black skyline, its shimmering blue dots of light like waves on the horizon. "At least seven stories."

"Well, if you fall and maim yourself, we'll be late for dinner," Shane says. "So can we get a move on?"

Ilya sighs. "So impatient, Hollander," he tuts, but he turns back from the edge and grabs Shane's gloved hand, and follows him down the stairs without further fuss.

It's not until the waitress is clearing the dishes from dinner that Yuna finds herself wondering why Ilya knows exactly how high a fall needs to be in order to kill him.

—

They're in a private room at the back of a nice-but-not-exorbitant sushi restaurant in downtown Ottawa. It's the middle of the day on a Thursday and Ilya and Shane are talking about marketing for the newly-created Irina Foundation.

"It's important to help people understand why you're starting this charity," the communications consultant, Sarah, tells them. Across from her, Ilya and Shane are seated side by side, very obviously trying not to act like a couple, and, at least to Yuna's eye, very obviously failing. They're too comfortable anticipating each other's movements: Shane steals the pickled ginger off Ilya's plate without asking, Ilya casually reaches over Shane to grab the soy sauce.

"Well, we want to give back," Shane says, chopsticks hovering over a rainbow roll. "I mean, it sounds crass, but we have more money than we need."

“Yes, but why *this* charity?” Sarah presses. “The hockey element, that’s easy to understand, but why mental health and not, for example, animal welfare?”

Shane looks at Ilya, quirks an eyebrow. Ilya quirks an eyebrow back.

“That’s because of me,” Ilya says, popping a piece of salmon into his mouth. “My mother committed suicide.”

Sarah is good at keeping her expression professional, but Yuna doesn’t miss the subtle change in the atmosphere. “I’m very sorry,” Sarah says gently.

Ilya shrugs, not looking up from his plate. “It was a long time ago,” he says.

“Well,” Sarah says. “I certainly don’t want to press you to share anything you aren’t comfortable with, but it would be good if I could understand exactly what happened, and exactly what you’re comfortable sharing. If we have a, uh, official internal narrative, that will certainly help the marketing team.”

Ilya shrugs, not looking up from his plate. “There is not much to say. She was depressed, probably for many years. And then, one day, when I was twelve years old, I came home and found her. Dead. Pills.”

Yuna’s breath catches in her throat. She hadn’t known that part of Ilya’s story—that he had been the one to find his mother’s body. It’s painfully easy for her to imagine a younger Ilya, with his bouncing curls, running into a house and calling for his mother and hearing nothing but silence. The frown on his face as he moved from room to room, peering around corners, until finally he threw open the last door, and there she was.

“I think we would prefer if the last bit wasn’t made public,” Shane says, eyes on Ilya. Ilya nods his head, jerkily, and Shane turns to look back at Sarah. “We can say she had depression and how she died, but nobody needs to know who found her.”

Sarah nods quickly. “Yes, of course. Yes, that’s plenty of information to share. Of course.”

They change the topic after that, but it takes Ilya a while to look up from his plate. Even longer to meet Yuna’s eyes. When he does finally look at her, there’s a strange expression on his face. Almost like he’s waiting for her to say something to him—but she can’t for the life of her figure out what.

—

They’re in Yuna and David’s living room at the cottage, playing Monopoly with a fire roaring in the background. The boys have two days off for the Christmas holidays and they’re spending them here, stuffing themselves with mashed potatoes and playing board games.

“You know, this is not what I thought my life would look at twenty-eight,” Shane says, as David places a hotel on Park Avenue.

“Ah, yes,” Ilya says. “Your life is better than your wildest imaginations, we know, Hollander.”

Shane thwacks him with a throw pillow. “That’s not what I meant, asshole.”

“No?”

“No,” Shane says. “I thought—“ He cuts himself off.

Ilya nudges Shane with the top of one foot. “Come on,” he says. “Tell us. What did baby Shane think his life would look like now?”

Shane glances up at Ilya, then at his parents. “Well, for one, I thought I would have a wife,” he says.

Ilya hums, taking a sip of his Coke. “Yes, you were stuck in gay closet for very long time,” he says.

Shane rolls his eyes. “Like you were so quick to jump out of it,” he says. It’s funny: Yuna has never known how to pull Shane out of his shell when he gets awkward and shy. But Ilya is so good at it. He teases, and Shane bites back, and Shane is always so much more relaxed, afterwards. So much more himself.

“Anyway,” Shane says. “I guess I just thought I wouldn’t be doing this, by now. That I’d have—kids, or something. And I wouldn’t be hanging out with my parents when everyone else is off at holiday parties.”

“Wow,” Yuna says dryly. “Don’t be too nice to us.”

Shane rolls his eyes. “I didn’t mean—“

“No, we get it, you don’t love us anymore,” David sighs. Shane huffs, and Yuna takes it upon herself to change the subject.

“Ilya,” she says, rolling the dice and moving her token forward two spaces. “When you were a kid, what did you think your life would look like at the ripe old age of twenty-eight?”

Ilya hums thoughtfully, gaze on the board. “When I was a child, I am not sure I thought about getting to be this age,” he says. “I did not make many plans after eighteen.”

It’s an absentminded confession. Unweighted. It makes Yuna’s throat tight.

But Ilya just shrugs and continues, “But I guess I would have thought I’d be playing hockey, like now. Big star in NHL. Probably also with wife. And on better team, with less ugly mascot.”

Shane’s hands slides across the couch and finds its way to Ilya’s thigh. Ilya looks up and smiles at him, teeth flashing out.

“Is better this way, of course,” he says. “Definitely better.”

—

They're lounging on Ilya's expensive couch, in Ilya's expensive living room, in Ilya's expensive house, in Ottawa, watching Shane play on the TV. It's 3-2 to Montreal, but the second period only just ended and the Admirals are doing well this season. Anybody's game.

"So," Yuna says, as the Zamboni glides across the ice. "Do you have any siblings?"

Ilya looks startled by the change in conversation. "Just chatting," Yuna explains. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Ilya's gaze flicks to his right, almost like he expects Shane to be there to step in for him, but of course he isn't. It's just the two of them here, them and David, who's off in the kitchen making criminally unhealthy milkshakes that Yuna knows she shouldn't eat on her macrobiotic diet. She'll probably end up eating one anyway, because David has a way of making her doing silly things.

Yuna considered that it might be too much, to ask these questions when it's the first time the three of them have hung out without Shane. But then if she doesn't ask now, when will she?

"I have a brother," Ilya says, finally. "Alexei. He is four years older than me. Lives in Moscow."

"What does he do?" Yuna asks.

Ilya's face does something complicated. "He is police," he says.

Yuna waits, but no more is forthcoming. "Are you two close?" she asks, and Ilya flinches. Only barely, but noticeable enough, with the way she's watching him.

She opens her mouth to apologize, but before she can, Ilya says, "He is a lot like my father." He doesn't say anything else, but then, Yuna supposes, he doesn't really need to.

I'm sorry feels like a very inadequate thing to say, so Yuna pats the back of his hand where it's sprawled over the couch cushions and doesn't say anything at all.

—

They're in a dressing room for a new Adidas photoshoot, for which Ilya is being styled in branded tracksuit bottoms, branded slides, his cross, and nothing else.

"Lower the waist just a little bit more," a stylist says, and someone else loosens the drawstring on Ilya's pants so they slip down, revealing just a little bit more of his hips. "That's it, that's perfect."

Ilya's eyes meet Yuna's and he raises an eyebrow. "Do you think my husband will approve of this?"

"What your husband doesn't know won't hurt him," Yuna says, and Ilya laughs.

He enjoys these photoshoots a lot more than Shane does. Charms the assistants, makes friends with the photographers, is always gratifyingly complimentary of the final product.

Shane mostly walks around looking constipated, like one wrong move could completely destroy his marketability. It's probably Yuna's fault that he's like that; she tries not to think about it too much.

Someone tells Ilya to turn around so the makeup artist can see him in different lighting, and when he does, Yuna notices something on his arms she's never seen before: a line of tiny silver scars, perfectly round and so neatly arranged it's impossible that they weren't deliberate. They're about the size of a cigarette, Yuna thinks.

"Oh, don't worry about those," someone says, and it takes Yuna a moment to realize that they're talking to her, that they've followed her gaze. "We'll cover up any marks in post."

Yuna nods and thanks her. Ilya meets her eyes in the mirror and smiles.

—

They're outside the home team locker room at the Centaurs' arena, and Yuna is complimenting Ilya on his game while Shane finishes up his shower.

"That shot in the third was particularly inspired," she says. "I have no idea how you saw the opening through that many defenders—"

There's a groan and an, "Oh my god, Mom, don't inflate his ego," as Shane appears at the end of the hallway, a duffel bag slung over his shoulder.

Yuna rolls her eyes, waving a hand through the air. "Oh, I tell him when he has a bad game too, believe me, Shane. Speaking of which—" She gives him a significant look as Ilya laughs in the background. "This wasn't your best night."

Shane clenches his jaw. "Mom."

"What! I'm just saying, you could do well to take some tips from Ilya here with your backhand."

"*Thank you,* Yuna, I have been telling him—"

"Ilya, I swear to God—"

"How did your backhand get so good anyway?" Yuna interrupts. "I've never seen another player with such a powerful force and accuracy combo."

Ilya preens. It's sweet, how much her praise means to him. Shane had told her once that Ilya kept a folder in his phone of screenshots of her text messages: ones where she said she loved him, but also ones where she complimented his game. He must go over them, sometimes, or maybe he's just saving them, a sort of evidence. Evidence of what, though, Yuna hasn't quite figured out.

"I learned backhand young," Ilya says now. "In Russia, when you miss backhand shot, coach hits you with hockey stick. You get very good at backhand shot very quick."

Yuna's heart clenches.

"Great," Shane sighs, entirely unsurprised. He's heard this story before, then. "Now my mother is going to show up at my practices to abuse me."

Ilya grins at him, and when Shane steps towards the parking lot, Ilya follows, reaching out to grab Shane's hand.

"Don't worry, *kotenok*," he says. "I'll protect you."

—

They're in the kitchen of Shane's cottage, chopping vegetables.

"Matchsticks," Yuna says, when Ilya pulls out a carrot. "Do you know how to chop matchsticks?"

"Do I?" Ilya asks scornfully, and then proceeds to try to cut the carrot in the most inefficient way possible.

"Stop," Yuna says. "Gosh, give it here, let me show you."

She demonstrates the technique, then passes the knife back to Ilya. His movements are slow and careful, but much more effective. "Good," she praises, turning back to the celery.

"How did you learn to do this?" Ilya asks. "Did you take cooking class, or something?"

It's an innocent question, but a lump rises in Yuna's throat. "Ah, no," she says. "No, my mother taught me."

Ilya's movements pause for just a second before they start up again. "I see," he says.

"She was a great cook," Yuna says. "She made lots of Japanese dishes from her childhood. She used to pack them in my lunch, until I told her to stop making them for me. I wanted PB&Js."

She knows her voice sounds thick, but she appreciates the fact that Ilya doesn't acknowledge it, just keeps chopping away at the carrots. "I cannot blame you," he says. "PB&J, this is good North American food."

Yuna laughs a bit. "I guess. Did you do much cooking with your mom?"

Again that hesitation with the knife; again, it picks up again after a moment. "Ah, no," Ilya says. "My mother, she was not much of a cook in the first place, and in my family, a boy learning to cook—it could not be done."

Yuna nods, sliding the celery into the pan where the onion is already sizzling. "I can understand that," she says.

“But my mother—she was really very talented woman,” Ilya says. “Cooking, eh, no. But she was very artistic. She could draw so well. She used to draw little sketches of me doing things. Like when I was child, I always wanted a dog. So she would draw me playing with this big fluffy dog and tell me it was dog I would get some day. Things like that.”

“That sounds nice.”

“Yes.” Ilya nods. “She was good woman. Really. I miss her often.”

“Do you think she would have supported you?” Yuna asks. “You and Shane, I mean.”

Ilya surprises her by snorting. “No,” he says. “Definitely not. She would have called me many names and insisted I marry a woman. But.” He shrugs. “Just because people are not perfect does not stop us from missing them, no?”

Yuna considers him for a long moment. He often looks so boyish, with those golden curls and his gleeful, teasing smiles. But in this moment, wearing just the slightest smile, his brow creased with sincerity, he seems much older than thirty.

“Yes,” Yuna agrees. “I think you’re right.”

“Anyway,” Ilya says, turning back to the cutting board. “I like to have a—what is the English phrase—in Russia, we call it a ray of hope. A good thing, with the bad?”

“A silver lining?”

Ilya nods. “Yes, this. Silver lining. So, silver lining to my mother being dead, at least I can pretend she would not mind me being gay, yes?”

A startled laugh tears out of Yuna’s throat. Ilya grins at her as she claps her hand over her mouth, as if to take it back. “I’m—sorry, that’s not funny.”

“Is a little funny,” Ilya says, sliding the chopped carrots into the pan. “No, go on, laugh. Better than crying.”

“There’s nothing wrong with crying,” Yuna says, even though, short of Shane and Ilya’s wedding, she herself hasn’t cried in years.

“No, of course not,” Ilya agrees. “But it is so tiring, to cry all the time. More fun to laugh.” He waves a hand through the air, his eyes meeting hers. Blue eyes, blue eyes. Yuna never expected to have a son with blue eyes.

“I have beautiful life,” Ilya says. “I have beautiful husband. I have beautiful job. I have beautiful friends. I have beautiful mother-in-law who teaches me to chop matchstick carrots. And life is very funny.”

Oh, this big soft bear of a man. Yuna wants to travel back in time and pluck him up and protect him from everything bad in the world. She wants to kiss his small head and rub salve on his cigarette burns and punch his coach in the face when he tries to raise a hand to him.

“Much more fun to laugh,” Ilya says. “Don’t you think?”

End Notes

I know that ilya says canonically that his mother would love shane but I also think there's something interesting with this notion that he is romanticizing his mother because of her death and that in reality she might struggle more with ilya's sexuality than he initially thinks, or even that he thinks she would struggle with his sexuality but he still thinks she would like shane as a person. I think over time, as he ages, he would maybe be willing and able to let go of this idealized view of her a bit and come more to terms with things like this. so I tried to represent that here.

also before I get annoyed comments ilya is using gay as an umbrella term here!

I have read and been inspired by many fics in this fandom; if anything here veers too close to something written elsewhere, please let me know so I can credit/correct. thank you!

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