

second home

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second home

by [aurora_chiroptera](#)

Summary

When Shane is 11, he and Ilya have their first sleepover, as best friends do. Shenanigans ensue and secrets are shared.

Everyone needs someone who sees them.

[Can be read as a stand alone.]

Notes

As noted, this can be read as a stand alone. All you really need to know is that Irina and Ilya fled to Canada in late 2000 and in doing so, met the Hollanders. Also I have decided Irina is queer.

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

January 2001 - Ottawa

Ilya was laying across Shane's bed so that his head hung over the side, upside down. It made his hair look longer, the curls stretching out.

"What are you thinking about?" Shane asked, from where he was sitting cross legged on the floor.

Ilya blinked at him, opened his mouth a few times, then said a string of words in Russia that sounded a lot like swear words. Shane couldn't know for sure, so he didn't say anything about it.

"Boring," Ilya settled on.

Shane set down the instructions to a Lego set he'd gotten for Christmas to give Ilya his full attention. "You think Legos are boring?" Shane had been saving the set so they could play with it together.

"No. English boring," Ilya said, face scrunching up. "Hate it. Sound stupid."

If Shane knew any thing about his friend, it was that Ilya hated to be bad at something as much as Shane did. It was why Ilya was so great to play hockey with, because they could do drills together until everything was perfect. It wasn't fair that Ilya felt like this; there wasn't much he could have done to already know English before coming to Canada.

Shane chewed on his lip, thinking it over. Maybe this could be like the hockey drills. "I'll learn Russian," Shane declared. "Then we can both be bad at something together."

Ilya was quiet, probably trying to translate that. Then he smiled, sliding off the bed and onto the floor. "You learn Russian?"

"And you learn English," Shane confirmed.

"Yes, yes, boring," Ilya said, pushing himself up to sit against the bed. After a moment he leaned forward, giving Shane a hug. Before Shane could hug him back, Ilya pulled away and poked the unopened bag of Legos. "What?"

Shane held up the instructions. "Hockey Legos."

Ilya took the instructions and flipped through them. They were mostly pictures so it shouldn't matter-

Ilya tossed away the instructions. "Boring."

Shane frowned. "Is that your favorite word?"

"No. Shane," Ilya said, opening the Legos and dumping them out.

“Do you have a favorite word?” Shane leaned forward to catch Legos that bounced across the carpet and pushed them back to the pile. He watched in quiet horror as Ilya started to put pieces together without the instructions.

“Yes. Shane,” Ilya said, grinning at him, like Ilya thought he was so clever. He attached a plastic hockey net to something that was clearly supposed to be the bench.

“Okay,” Shane said, taking a deep breath. He could play with Legos how Ilya wanted to. He started digging through the pile to find the people parts so they could at least have a tiny hockey team. Even if the team would be playing in a funhouse.

“Shane,” Ilya’s tone was scolding. “Listen. You are favorite.”

“Oh!” Shane focused on attaching legs to a torso as he thought that over. “I don’t think that’s how it works.”

Ilya shrugged, holding up the tiny Stanley Cup he’d dug out of the pile. “More fun.”

Shane found he was smiling back. Out of curiosity, he put a tiny puck on the torso where the head should go. It looked silly, but sometimes Shane did feel like he had a hockey puck for a brain. “More fun,” he agreed, and took the Cup from Ilya to give to the puck headed person.

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April 2002 - Ottawa

“I’ve never had a sleep over before,” Shane said and Ilya could see his cheeks go red under his freckles.

Shane's freckles were fascinating and Ilya sometimes wanted to trace them with his fingers. He didn't think Shane would like that though, and settled for wrapping his arm around Shane's shoulders. “I have not been invited before,” Ilya told him, and shrugged.

Shane leaned away so he could look at Ilya’s face before he leaned back against his side. “We should promise to always do first things together.”

Ilya wasn't sure that was possible, but he liked the idea. “Is important for feedback.”

Shane laughed. “Feedback is a good word.”

Ilya made a sound of disgust. “I only know because Coach uses all the time.”

Shane laughed again, which was Ilya’s favorite sound. He knew now from school and hockey that Shane didn't laugh much, so it always felt like a win when any of Ilya's antics amused him. Ilya had grown to like Canada a lot and it helped to have Shane at his side.

Ilya let Shane go, so he could run and fling himself on to Shane’s bed. It was carefully made, but had a stack of soft blankets on it, probably for Ilya if he needed them. It was so cozy and nice, Ilya wondered if he could get away with sharing the bed with Shane instead of a sleeping bag on the floor. He started to make himself a nest in the blankets.

Shane got up on the bed after him, leaning against the headboard so that he was sitting across from Ilya. “Is your mom really going on a date?”

Ilya groaned with embarrassment, wanting to cover his face with one of the blankets. “Is worse than that.”

“Why worse? I think it’s nice,” Shane said. “Irina is very nice.”

Ilya settled himself against the bottom of the bed, wrapped up in at least two blankets. It wasn’t cold anymore, really, but the blankets were so soft. He needed the support for what he was going to tell Shane. “I know who her date is.”

“Okay, who is it?”

“Assistant Coach Kara,” Ilya said, almost in a whisper.

Shane, gratifyingly gasped, eyes going wide as he leaned forward. “No. Way.”

Ilya nodded. “Yes, is going to be so weird.”

Shane still looked shocked, though he hummed thoughtfully. “At least you know Coach Kara is nice.”

Ilya hadn’t thought about it that way. Coach Kara had been an assistant on the school team for two years now. Ilya thought she was very cool, with her short hair, arm tattoos, and always wearing interesting boy’s clothes. She was also very nice, a good coach who had helped him a lot with getting even more consistent in his passes. She’d spent extra time with both him and Shane so that they could go through extra drills the rest of the team didn’t want to do.

“It’s still weird though,” Shane said, filling the silence. “Like, do you say anything at practice? Does she? Do you pretend not to know?”

“I don’t know,” Ilya said, because he hadn’t thought about any of that either. Sometimes Shane’s quick thoughts were nothing to stress over, other times, they were worries Ilya really did need to think over.

“I think... I think it’s... neat your mom is going on a date with another girl,” Shane said, his voice quieter than usual.

Ilya found himself smiling. “Yes, is very cool.”

Shane leaned back again, picking at a loose string on his comforter. “Do you think you like girls or boys?”

Ilya shrugged. He hadn’t thought about it too much, because there were a lot of other pressing things to think about. “Why choose?”

Shane looked up and blinked. “I... I don’t know.” He frowned for a moment, turning back to focus on the string instead of Ilya. “We’re too young for that though.” Those words sounded

to Ilya like Shane was repeating what someone had told him. “And hockey is more important.”

That last part was all Shane and Ilya nodded, because he couldn’t disagree. “I am going to be better at hockey than you.”

“In your dreams,” Shane rolled his eyes and gently kicked Ilya’s leg with his own. Making claims like this was a game they played, and it helped them be the best players.

“Boys!” Yuna’s voice, calling from the stairs, interrupted before Ilya could grab a pillow for a revenge attack on Shane. “Popcorn is ready if you want to come watch the game!”

“Coming!” Shane called back, putting his own pillow back before he could whack Ilya with it and hurrying off the bed.

“No running on the stairs!” Yuna reminded as they raced out of Shane’s room.

They did as she said (Shane always listened to his mom and Ilya wasn’t going to ignore Yuna either), until they hit the hard wood at the bottom of the stairs. Then they started a sock skating race towards the living room. They tumbled into the couch out of breath.

“I think Shane won that one,” David observed, holding a popcorn bowl up so it wouldn’t get knocked over.

“Yes!” Shane cheered, settling into the center of the couch beside his dad and Ilya settled on the final spot next to the arm. Yuna claimed the armchair - it seemed to be the adult favored seat. Ilya wondered if they ever raced for it or just took turns.

“You’ll have to get him next time Ilya,” Yuna said, looking over her shoulder at him.

“No he won’t,” Shane said, pulling down a blanket from the back of the couch and settling it over both his and Ilya’s laps.

Ilya loved it at Hollanders. He’d never stayed the night before, but there had been many evenings since moving to Canada spent at the Hollanders when Mama had to work late. The house felt like a little bubble of kindness, food, love, and hockey. Yuna and David were always so nice to both Ilya and Mama. And Shane was probably Ilya’s favorite person in the world, besides Mama. He’d begun to make some other friends now that his English was better, but none of them were like Shane.

“Here,” Shane brought him back to the now, the game about to play, by offering Ilya the popcorn bowl.

Ilya took it and grabbed a big handful, smiling around his full cheeks, which got Shane to laugh more.

“Don’t choke,” Yuna said in her gentle scolding tone, probably at both of them. “Oh they’re starting!”

If there was anyone who liked hockey more than Shane, it was Yuna. Ilya had to admit that was pretty awesome. It did mean that watching hockey with her was different from anyone else. Every play Montreal or New York made tonight would be examined and critiqued by her. Ilya found it almost as entertaining as the game itself, so he ate more popcorn and made himself cozy.

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On some game nights, Shane got permission to stay up past his bedtime. He loved getting to spend time with his parents like that. He felt very grown up when he was able to point something out that Mom missed. Sometimes once the game was done, they'd talk and Shane would get to stay up even longer.

Tonight though, as soon as the game was done, Shane got up. "Ilya and I will get ready for bed!"

Ilya slid off the couch to follow. "Yes. Is late."

"Okay," Mom chuckled. "I'll come up in a bit to say goodnight."

Brushing teeth and changing into pajamas took a lot longer with Ilya, because Ilya always wanted to goof off, which then made Shane laugh. He finally made it a competition to see who could get ready first, and that ended with Ilya throwing himself into his sleeping bag because he didn't want to lose to Shane twice in a night.

Mom came in not long after, wishing them goodnight, insisting (embarrassingly) on taking a picture of them so she could document their first sleepover and show Irina. As soon as she closed the door and left, Shane stuck his head over the side of the bed.

Ilya was lying there, looking up at him.

"We can share my bed," Shane whispered.

Ilya grinned.

"I wouldn't want to sleep on the floor, so why should you?" Shane said, scooting over so there was plenty of room on the bed.

Ilya didn't have to be told twice. He climbed up and rested on his side so he was facing Shane. With the light of Shane's bedside lamp behind him, his hair seemed to glow almost as bright as his smile.

"Is this when we tell scary stories?" Ilya whispered. He switched to Russian, speaking slowly for Shane. "Or tell secrets."

Shane had practiced really hard to try to keep his Russian at a similar level to Ilya's English. It was difficult when it wasn't used much in his day to day life or at school. Ilya and Irina would talk to him in it, though, and Mom and Dad had helped him find CDs to practice more. He and Ilya had already figured out it was a good way to talk during games, especially if one of them saw an opening while the other had the puck.

Shane hadn't realized it could be used like a secret code at his home. "What secrets?" he whispered back, sticking to Russian.

Ilya reached behind him to turn off the light. Maybe secrets were easier to tell in the dark. "Any secrets. That only we can know. I'll start: I am a better hockey player than you."

Shane sputtered, then laughed. He didn't hit Ilya with a pillow only because he currently had his head on it. "Keep telling yourself that."

With the darkness, Shane could only hear Ilya shift, eyes not yet adjusted to the dark. "Whatever you need to believe."

"It's the truth."

Ilya hummed, a sound that didn't agree or disagree. "Okay, real secret now. I don't miss my papa, even though people seem to think I should."

Irina and Ilya didn't talk much about their life in Russia. Sometimes teachers or other adults would ask Ilya where his dad was and he would tell them he didn't have one. Shane knew this was unlikely, especially having overheard some conversations between Irina and Mom. But he'd never asked Ilya, because he didn't want Ilya to be sad.

"He wasn't nice to you, was he?" Shane asked. It was hard for him to imagine. His dad had only ever loved him and Mom, just like they loved him.

"No. He didn't like me or Mama," Ilya said, voice a little rough. "Sometimes I miss home, but I don't miss him."

Shane knew he wasn't supposed to hold hands with another boy, but he reached out to Ilya anyway. It had to be different with Ilya. Especially when Ilya sounded so sad. In the dark he found Ilya's hand resting on the bed near his face. Ilya didn't pull away when Shane took it.

"I have a brother," Ilya whispered next after a long moment of quiet filled with only their breathing.

Shane couldn't stop the gasp at that. It was something he would have never guessed, never even thought to consider, because there was no evidence of it to be found. This must be a very big secret that Irina hadn't even told Mom or Dad. But where - "Is he still in Russia with your papa?"

"Yes." Ilya's hand tightened for a moment.

"Your mama didn't bring him too?"

"No."

"Do you know why?"

Shane could hear Ilya shifting a bit, but his hand was still twining with Shane's. "She's never said."

“I’m sorry.” Shane used to think about what it would be like to have a sibling. He always imagined it would be like having a guaranteed friend, which would have been nice. “Do you miss him?”

“Sometimes. He wasn’t always very nice to me,” Ilya said. “He was older and sometimes Mama told him that meant he should look out for me. I think he mostly found me annoying. It doesn’t seem fair.”

“What doesn’t?”

“That he was left and I wasn’t,” Ilya said. “Mama feels bad, though she won’t say it.”

“When you’re older, you could see him again,” Shane said. It felt important to help Ilya see a plan, even if he couldn’t do anything right now.

Ilya squeezed his hand again, before letting go, retreating. “Maybe you could come with me.”

“Yeah,” Shane said, and he had a feeling he would, if Ilya asked. It made him feel happy that Ilya thought they would still be friends in the future. Sometimes, even with him staying over, Shane wondered if Ilya would get bored of him.

“It’s your turn,” Ilya said after a long silence.

“I don’t think I have any,” Shane said, as something uncomfortable felt as though it were squirming in his chest.

It didn’t seem like Ilya believed him. Shane didn’t really believe himself. “It’s not fair if you don’t,” Ilya said. It was permission as much as anything.

Ilya had shared a scary secret, maybe Shane could too. “I am afraid I won’t be able to play in the NHL.”

In the slight light now coming through the window, Shane saw Ilya sit up. “What? Why? You’re really good. Better than me sometimes.”

Shane felt his face heat. That was a big compliment, at odds with all of Ilya’s teasing. “Have you ever seen a player who looks like me or my mom?”

Ilya was quiet for a long moment, lying back down. “Not many. Many who look like your dad.”

“People don’t seem to care about that.” Shane knew he mumbled that. He didn’t know the Russian words to directly explain his experience. It hadn’t come up for Ilya or Irina, so they’d never taught him. “Sometimes kids on other teams make fun of me.”

“I will fight them!” Ilya said, his tone getting a bit loud.

Shane didn’t want him to be quieter though. “You won’t always be there to protect me.”

“I’ll teach you how to fight them.”

Shane knew that probably wouldn't help, but also didn't think there would be anything else that Ilya could do. His friend was trying to make him feel better, and for the moment, that was enough. "Okay, but I don't like getting penalties."

"You'll have to be sneaky," Ilya said as if it could be that simple. And maybe it was for him. "We have to both be in the NHL, because we must play together. We have to promise."

Shane couldn't disagree with that. Even though it had not yet been a full two years, it was hard to imagine playing hockey without Ilya there. It felt like they were too old for it, but Shane asked anyway. "Pinky promise?"

"Yes, that's the most important promise."

It took them a few times to catch each other's pinkies in the dark, which set them both off laughing. Their knuckles pressed together and they both whispered the promise.

As they let go, Shane wondered if it would be okay to share another secret. Before he could stop his mouth, he'd said, slipping back into English but lowering his voice further. "I don't think I'm good at making friends."

Ilya also switched languages. "This is not you. Is everybody else's problem. We are best friends, because we are both the best."

"But you've made friends at school," Shane tried not to sound hurt or bitter. He liked when Ilya smiled and laughed, and he did that around his other friends. Shane was pretty sure he did it more around him though.

"Yes, some. You will also," Ilya assured. What Shane could see of his face seemed thoughtful. "I can share."

Shane liked that idea. Then he could still be with Ilya. That would make things easier. "I'd like that."

"It shall be done," Ilya went back to Russian, maybe to sound more dramatic.

Quiet fell back over them and Shane realized that he felt better now that he had told someone his secret fears. They hadn't felt good inside him. But now Ilya knew too. Just as Shane knew about his secret brother. Shane could only hope that Ilya also felt better. Listening to him breathing on the other side of the bed was soothing.

With Ilya there, Shane never had to fear being alone.

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Irina softly knocked on the door to the Hollander's house, not wanting to wake the boys if they were still sleeping. She and Yuna had planned to have brunch all together when Irina came to pick Ilya up, and even though it was getting close to 10, she hoped that the boys might still be asleep. Sleepovers were for staying up late and sleeping in, and Irina would not have that taken away from Ilya or Shane.

Yuna answered the door with a smile. "Good morning, come on in."

"I brought pastries for everyone, and coffee for us," Irina held up the paper bag she had in one hand and the drink tray in the other. She'd memorized Yuna and David's order first to thank them for their kindness and then because they were friends.

"You're a life saver." Yuna took the drink tray and Irina followed her into the kitchen after kicking off her shoes. David was checking on something in the oven - baked maple bacon from the smell of it. "Irina brought treats!"

David grinned as he accepted his cup. "You didn't have to."

"You took care of my Ilya, is nothing," Irina waved the comment away, finally hands free to get her own drink.

"I don't know how much we did, you know how those two are when they're together." David chuckled as he took out a waffle maker.

"They look out for each other," Irina agreed and went to find a plate she could put the pastries on. "Is sweet. No trouble?"

"None," Yuna confirmed, leaning on the kitchen table. "Besides some giggling at midnight."

Irina grinned. As it should be. "Oh well," she said to the Hollanders. "Happens."

"I tried to document some of their first sleepover," Yuna said. Yuna loved to take pictures of her family. Irina had known this since she first visited and saw all the pictures, mostly of Shane, around the house. A lot of the newer ones now also had Ilya in them, given how attached they were. "Let me get my camera."

Plate located and filled in the meantime, Irina went over to Yuna when she came back in. Yuna had a digital camera which must have been expensive, but she was able to pull up some of the pictures to show Irina right away, so it was money well spent in Irina's opinion. There was a picture of the boys playing outside and then one of them with David on the couch, watching a hockey game with rapt attention. Then a picture of them all ready for bed - Ilya on the floor in a sleeping bag and Shane in his bed. The final one though was the sweetest, Yuna must have snuck in to take it that morning. Ilya had ended up sharing Shane's bed and in it they slept facing each other, like they had fallen asleep while talking. They looked so young, but also so happy. Irina couldn't help but coo at it.

This was everything she had left Russia for.

"Now before they wake up," Yuna put the camera carefully away in its case. "How was your date?"

And goodness, hadn't Irina been lucky to find so much more in Canada? She was glad she lived to see it. "Was wonderful," Irina sighed more than said, knowing she had a goofy smile on her face. "I am glad Ilya was not home."

Yuna raised her brows but David held out the most awkward fist bump, which Irina indulged with a laugh.

“We had dinner, then she took me skating, which you’d think I would be sick of, but no,” Irina said. “Then we went to her place and was... just so nice.”

“We don’t need to give her the shovel talk?” David asked. He’d had to explain that one to her when she first told them about her date.

“No, she is too kind,” Irina assured, though her throat suddenly felt tight.

“Kind is what you deserve,” Yuna said, then held out her arms.

Irina accepted the hug gratefully. She had been scared to come out to the Hollanders. They had been the one constant in her life in Canada for so long, and in Ilya’s. But the reason that finally got her to leave Russia had been protecting a potential future Ilya - he was still so young. And connecting him so closely with people who might not love all of him was intolerable. Better to take the pain now, for herself, than later.

Luckily, despite some awkwardness, Yuna and David continued to show their kindness. Maybe it made sense that they both could adapt their world view with relative ease, but it was also a relief. Irina got the sense they were still working through it, but she could tell when it was worth sticking out the awkwardness.

Yuna pulled away, rubbing Irina’s arms. “I’m happy for you. You know that Ilya is always welcome, if you need some other date nights in the future...”

“I will take you up on that.” Irina stepped back so she could look from one Hollander to the other. “And if you need date nights, Shane can stay with me.”

“We can take turns,” Yuna sounded pleased by the idea.

“It has been a while since we had a night to ourselves,” David mused as he poured a second batch of waffles.

Irina wasn’t surprised about that. Shane was clearly the center of their world. “It would be good, yes?”

Yuna and David smiled at each other with such steady love that Irina wished she had the camera to capture this moment for them. Yuna said, “Yes, that’d be good.”

“Mama!” Ilya barreled into the kitchen, wrapping his arms around her waist. He was getting a bit tall for it.

Irina ran her fingers through his sleep messed hair. “Good morning. Sleep well?”

Ilya nodded. “We smelled bacon.”

David peaked in the oven. “It’s almost ready. Shane, Ilya, can you set the table?”

Shane appeared in the kitchen. “Yes!”

“Anything to get bacon soon,” Ilya agreed, letting Irina go and going to get the napkin holder.

Yuna and Irina made eye contact and laughed.

End Notes

Who was up sharing deep secrets and serious topics with their besties when y'all were ages 11-15? That shit could really get intense.

Also loving writing happy Irina, she deserves it!

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