

birds of a feather

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Summary

Ilya finally meets Shane's parents. There is no way this could go wrong.

Notes

► content warnings

I highly recommend reading [meet me in the dark](#) first

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

There's a soft murmur throughout the restaurant as patrons converse softly over grilled steaks and fine wine. Low candlelight sets the mood, flickering orange and yellow against tasteful wooden decor.

Four people sit silently at a table together. Ilya to Shane's left, his dad to his right, his mom straight across. Nobody makes eye contact.

Yuna's knuckles are white from how hard she's gripping her serrated knife. She stares at her filet mignon, red juice flowing freely from the beef on her plate. Beside Shane, Ilya is completely motionless, as if he thinks that sudden movements will startle her, like a wild animal. Ilya's food is going cold, the butter on top of his mashed potatoes congealing into a solid fatty lump.

Shane abruptly regrets choosing this restaurant. He thought a public space would be safest: neutral ground, food to keep tempers soothed, and—most importantly—there would be plenty of witnesses. Just in case.

His mom speaks first. "When you said you had a boyfriend, Shane, I was just happy you found someone. But a *Russian*?" Yuna stabs another section of her steak. "The *Moscow Bratva*? We're *enemies*, Shane."

"None of you are even involved anymore..." Shane says weakly.

"Don't dodge the issue." Yuna points at Ilya with her knife. "He was still *Bratva* when you met him, right? I sure as shit was still working for the Sumiyoshi-kai."

Shane winces. They lapse back into an awkward silence, punctuated only by noisy crunching as his dad devours a stalk of broccoli.

"So, Ilya," David says, after he swallows his food, "how did you and Shane meet?"

"I was looking for Yuna, actually," Ilya says, at the same time that Shane says, "that's not important."

They stop, and look at each other with wide eyes. His mom signals the waiter for another glass of wine. She's had two already.

Ilya coughs, before plowing ahead. "I was enamored with Shane from the start. But him, less so."

"I thought you were so annoying," he says, smiling. This is familiar territory, at least. "Stalking me at the coffee shop, ambushing me at the fundraiser—"

“Christ,” his mom interrupts. “I left you alone with him that night. This is my fault. I bet he threatened you the moment I left, didn’t he? That’s how you got involved with him in the first place. Blackmail.”

“Yes,” Shane admits, because he’s not a liar. “But it turned out fine—“

His mom puts her head in her hands.

“I thought you were into it,” Ilya mutters. He stares resolutely down at his clasped hands. “Every time your eyes would get all wide and you would lick your lips and—“

“O-*kay*, ” Shane interrupts. “Like I was saying, it wasn’t a big deal in the end, we worked it out. And now we love each other.”

“Very descriptive, Hollander,” Ilya says. Three heads swivel to look at him, instinctively responding to the name. Ilya smiles awkwardly. “...I am very glad to finally meet you both?”

Yuna’s glass of wine arrives. The waiter has barely left when she’s already chugged half. It’s an expensive wine, definitely meant for sipping, and Shane wonders if it would’ve been more cost effective to buy her the whole bottle from the start.

“Shane, honey, we could’ve *helped* you—“

“I had it under control!” Shane protests. “Look, and it all turned out fine, right? We’re here now and all of us are normal and not crime lords anymore.”

“You nearly died,” his dad says. “That was very scary for us, Shane.”

Shane deflates. “I’m sorry. I know.” He pokes half-heartedly at his salmon fillet. “It wasn’t your fault. Or Ilya’s.”

They eat in silence for a while longer. Ilya continues to not touch his food. Eventually, his mom makes a discontented noise as something else seems to occur to her. “I bet you’re all over the fact that you’re screwing your family’s rival’s kid.”

“*Mom!*” Shane grips his fork, mortified. He whips his head around to look at Ilya. “It’s not like that.”

Ilya is still staring at his hands. “It was a little bit like that in the beginning.”

“*Ilya!*”

“They are your parents, I will not lie to them,” Ilya says. “Besides, it was only like that the first time. But then I got to know you, and then I fell for who you really were.” He looks up, and for the first time that night his lips twitch into a smile. “A good man with a good heart. That is who I love.”

Shane’s mind blanks with that one.

“That’s... sweet,” his dad says.

Yuna doesn't say anything for a long moment. Then, she pushes her chair back; it skids against the dark wood flooring in a grating sound.

"Be right back," she says, throwing her cloth napkin down on her plate. "I need some air."

Shane slumps in defeat as she goes. "I'm sorry. I thought this would go better." He moves to stand, but Ilya beats him to it. He leans down to brush a quick kiss against Shane's cheek.

"Stay. I will go."

"She'll kill you."

"Ah, I suppose it is a risk I will have to take." Ilya winks, but Shane can see the tension in Ilya's posture. But before he can protest, Ilya is gone as well.

It leaves Shane with his dad. David has finished his steak and broccoli, now moving on to his loaded baked potato. Shane watches him despondently.

"How do you deal with it all, Dad?" He says.

David pauses mid-bite. "With what all?"

"Everything!" Shane throws his hands in the air. "Mom being a Nishiguchi. Being a normal person with all this shit going on around us. Hell, you literally chose to have a kid while knowing Mom was who she was!" He leans forward. "Even with both Mom and Ilya being done with it all—it's not like we'll ever be safe. Not really."

"You just get used to it," his dad laughs. "If you truly love Ilya, that's what's important. Why worry about the rest?"

Shane buries his head in his hands. "Not funny."

"I'm serious, Shane." David sets a hand on his shoulder. "Hey, chin up, champ." Shane raises his head to glare at his dad. "There we go. You know, when your mom and I first got together, something very similar happened to us."

"In what way?"

"I was kidnapped," David says, and Shane's jaw drops. "I was never really in danger the way you were, though. It was orchestrated by her father to see if I would be good enough for his daughter." He laughs fondly. "Boy, I had never seen Yuna so angry until that very moment. The way she ripped into Mr. Nishiguchi was such a treat. And that's when I knew I loved her."

Shane stares at his dad. He's never heard this story before. His parents always told him that they met in uni—although he supposes that's likely true. Just severely edited down for him.

This is also the most he's heard his dad say in one conversation, he thinks. So he keeps his mouth shut and listens.

David continues. “I know I let Yuna take the lead most of the time, including the way we raised you. I’m happy to follow, y’know? But we were always on the same page that you were the most important thing to us. Knowing that made everything else manageable.”

“Even with all the gang stuff and tax evasion?”

His dad takes a sip of his wine. “Even then. That’s how our love works. I wake up every day and choose to trust Yuna, and she chooses to trust me, and we know that whatever happens we’ll have each other. The rest is just details.”

“You make it sound so simple.”

“That’s because it is,” David says. “It’s not easy. Some days are harder than others. I think most love is like that, though. Even for people whose significant others aren’t part of a centuries-old mafia syndicate.”

That draws a laugh out of Shane. “You really don’t think there’s *anything* different about our relationships from everyone else’s?”

“I didn’t say that!” David protests. “Your mom taught me how to shoot a gun on our second date. She had a private shooting range in the yard of her townhouse.”

“And that *didn’t* tip you off about who she was?”

David shrugs. “Like I said, I trusted her.”

Their waiter returns to clear their plates, and his dad perks up at the mention of a dessert menu. Shane is content to lean his cheek against his palm, tracing the geometric pattern of his water glass, chasing beads of condensation rolling down the grooves, lost in thought.

Ilya finds Yuna standing on the restaurant balcony, gaze far off into the distance. She cuts her eyes at him when he walks up to lean against the railing, but doesn’t tell him to fuck off. He takes that as the invitation it is, popping a cigarette out of the paper box in his breast pocket, and wordlessly offers one to Yuna. She takes it.

He’s weirdly nervous. Has been all night. An irate future mother-in-law is certainly not the most dangerous thing he’s ever faced.

...Is what Svetlana had said. Considering that the mother-in-law in question is Yuna Hollander, Ilya’s not so sure.

Yuna breaks the silence.

“So,” she says. “Since last term, huh?”

“The term before that, actually.”

“God.” She scrubs her empty hand down her face. “I can’t believe Moscow has been under my nose this entire time.”

“We are not any longer, if that makes you feel better.”

“Not really,” she snorts. “I knew Shane was acting fishy, all those months ago. But I thought he’d trust me enough to tell me if it was serious.”

“It is not always easy to tell a loved one about bad news,” Ilya ventures. “I am sure he thought he was protecting you.”

Yuna eyes him balefully. “Don’t give me that. I know you were looking for *me*. You should’ve come to settle it between us, and left Shane out of it.”

“Was honest mistake, at first,” Ilya says. “By the time I realized, Shane was already determined not to let us meet. I could not change his mind.”

“That sounds like him,” she concedes. “Still. Maybe it’s too much to expect you Russians to have the decency to leave an innocent person out of our business.”

He bristles at that. “Perhaps you should have protected Shane better, then. So that strange men would not think to approach him.”

Yuna laughs bitterly. “You’re lecturing me? After you let him almost die?”

Ilya has nothing good to say to that. He grips his cigarette and looks out into the dark cityscape. Takes a deep breath, letting the nicotine soothe his frayed nerves. He’s doing this for Shane, he reminds himself.

A beat. Yuna exhales a plume of smoke. “You know what the worst part of this is?” She turns to face Ilya. “After all this, I should hate you.” Taps her cigarette. “But I just can’t bring myself to.”

The words surprise him. “I would expect you to hate me. Why not?”

She grimaces. “How could a parent hate the thing that makes their child happy? Or the person, in this case.”

Try asking my father, Ilya doesn’t say. He’s aware this isn’t the moment to be dragging his own issues into the conversation. Besides, they would need to hold a seance to speak to his father, and he’s not sure Yuna would enjoy that.

Yuna continues. “If I really think about it, I’m more angry with myself for letting that happen to Shane. But it’s easier to blame you.” She pauses. “Don’t say that to Shane.”

Ilya solemnly mimes locking his lips and throwing away the key. “Safe with me. Pinky promise.”

Her lips twitch up in a half-smile. “You’re an asshole, you know that?”

“Shane tells me so often. I see now where he gets it.”

“He gets more from David than me, I think,” Yuna says quietly. “It’s why I knew I had to leave the family, after everything that happened. That’s not easy to do, you know.” She takes another long drag of her cigarette. “My father needs a successor, and by rights it should have gone to me. So now it’s a free-for-all.”

“I have heard about this,” Ilya offers. “It does not seem too violent, at least. I am sure your father will choose someone strong.”

“Small consolation,” Yuna huffs. “Besides, even if I don’t do business for them anymore, my father will insist that we’re looked after for the rest of our lives. Being Nishiguchi’s, and all.”

She stubs out her spent cigarette. Ilya hands her another, lighting a second one of his own.

It takes several more breaths before Yuna continues. “I can’t stand being indebted to him like that. When I can’t pay him back the way I should. At the same time, I can’t turn it down. I know what it is to be a parent, after all. You just want your kid to be safe and happy.”

“I understand,” Ilya says, solemnly. “I did not leave the Bratva easily either. I am—was—my brother’s inheritor, as his daughter is too young.” He ashes his cigarette, watching the red-hot glow flare for a moment. “I had responsibilities. To my father’s legacy, and to my men. But Shane helped me to realize it was all so unimportant.”

Yuna looks at him with appraising eyes. “You too, huh?”

“Perhaps we are more alike than we think,” Ilya chuckles. “We both love Shane, after all.”

“...so that’s it,” she says. “You love him.”

“I do.”

“And he loves you.”

“I cannot tell you why, but he does. All I can do is to try and be worthy of him.”

She lets out a long breath. “Promise me you won’t put my son in more danger.”

“I promise I will try,” Ilya says. “I cut my ties cleanly. Paid off many people, killed many more who would not accept it. The men I still have know to look out for him.”

“Okay,” Yuna says, pushing away from the balcony railing.

Before he can register what’s happening, there’s a steak knife pointed at his throat. Yuna holds the other end, glaring at him steadily. Ilya has to push down the instinct to reach for his own weapon, heart fluttering. She would win anyway, seeing as her knife is much closer to his jugular than his hand is to his gun.

“Take care of him, Rozanov. I still have more than enough resources to make you disappear off the face of this earth. Regardless of if you’re some Bratva prince.”

Ilya nods. “Of course.”

Yuna lowers the steak knife, twirling it absentmindedly in her fingers. “But also, you can come to me about anything, too.”

“Yes, if there are any threats to Shane, you will be the first to know.”

For the first time that evening, Yuna cracks a genuine smile. “I appreciate that. But what I mean is, if *you* are in danger, Ilya—or even just want to talk—I’m here for you.”

Ilya frowns. “I am not sure I understand.”

“You’re part of the family, now,” she says. “Not the Nishiguchi, you know what I mean. I want to protect you.”

“...protect me? The son of your father’s enemy?”

Now Yuna rolls her eyes. She looks so much like Shane in that moment.

“You’re not the enemy, anymore. You’re Shane’s boyfriend. Just as much as I want Shane to be happy, I want you to be, too.”

Ilya blinks hard, choking slightly. His eyes water, though whether from the coughing or the cigarette smoke curling through the air, he’s not sure.

“I put Shane in danger once already. Almost killed him. I am not sure why you should care about me after that.”

Yuna shakes her head. “It’s my job as a mom, Ilya. To want you to live a good life.” She reaches a hand out to pat his shoulder, which Ilya accepts stiffly. “It makes me upset that Shane was hurt, in the past. But you didn’t ask to be born into the family that you were. If anything, I should know how that feels.”

She tucks the steak knife into the waistband of her professionally-tailored trousers. “Like I said, you’re part of *our* family now. The Hollanders.”

Ilya’s chest hurts. The last time someone spoke to him like this was... when he was twelve years old. The day before his mother died. He’d forgotten what it was like to have a mother at all. To be loved the way only a mother could love a son.

“You are very generous, Mrs. Hollander. I do not know what to say.”

“Easy. You say to Shane that I’m always right. You tell him to call me more often.” She breathes deeply from her cigarette. “And you never, *ever*, say anything about your sex life again.”

“You were the one who brought it up first,” Ilya laughs, voice wobbling. Yuna ignores it politely.

“Deal?” She says instead.

“Deal.”

He holds his hand out to shake. Yuna grabs it, and reels him into a hug. Pulls his head down to rest on her shoulder. Ilya makes a shocked noise, arms coming up automatically to hold her back. She smells of tobacco smoke and perfume. He closes his eyes.

Ilya hears the door to the balcony creak. When he blinks his eyes open, Shane stands there, watching them warily.

“Well, I’m glad to see you two getting along,” Shane says. “Dad ordered dessert. Came to see if you want any.”

Yuna lets go of Ilya, turning to face her son. “Did he get the tiramisu? I could go for some of that.”

“Uh-huh—“ Shane cuts himself off when he sees the cigarette in Yuna’s hand. “What the fuck, Mom, are you *smoking?*”

He sounds so genuinely offended that Ilya can’t help but burst into laughter. After a second, Yuna follows suit.

“That’s so bad for you!” Shane complains. “Ilya, you’re being a bad influence on my mom. Get away from her.”

He reaches out and grabs Ilya’s hand, towing him away. Ilya presses a delighted kiss to Shane’s cheek, ignoring his protests about how he smells.

The weight of Yuna’s gaze rests on the back of his neck. When he looks, she’s smiling fondly at them, fading glow of her cigarette trailing into ash in the night.

Later that night:

Yuna bolts upright in bed.

“I sold Rozanov the shibari piece.”

David looks at her sleepily. “What?”

“The fucking bondage art piece! From the auction last week!”

“Oh, I remember now.”

They’re both quiet as realization sinks in.

David is the first to react, laying back down. “I don’t wanna know.”

Yuna reaches under the bed, pulling out her favorite wakizashi blade. “I’m gonna go kill him.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea, honey.”

(a reference to [red ropes of fate](#))

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