

Safekeeping

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by [unlikelychild](#)

Summary

Yuna Hollander stares at the diamond engagement ring in slight horror as her husband laughs silently next to her on the couch. Her five year old son stares back at her with his doe eyes on her other side.

*“I'm sorry, sweetie,” she asks as calmly as possible, “did you say a **boy** gave this to you?”*

Or, a near lifetime from Yuna's eyes.

Notes

Have you seen that video where a father is telling the story of how a boy from his daughter's class gave her his mother's engagement ring for valentine's day?

This is inspired from that. But obviously it kinda got away from me. Didn't expect to write as much.

Heated Rivalry has taken over my ability to function as a normal person. So come suffer with me.

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

Yuna Hollander stares at the diamond engagement ring in slight horror as her husband laughs silently next to her on the couch. Her five year old son stares back at her with his doe eyes on her other side.

“I’m sorry, sweetie,” she asks as calmly as possible, “did you say a *boy* gave this to you?”

Shane nods. He’s probably confused about the whole ordeal. Well, that makes two of them.

The ring is comically large for Shane, given that it was sized for a fully grown woman. The diamond is a decent size. The ring looks well used. There’s an inscription inside. Something in a foreign language. Yuna squints to get a better look.

Is that... Russian?

David, finally getting his laughter under control, asks their son, “Shane, can you tell us what happened exactly?”

Shane being five years old, isn’t a great narrator. What both parents piece together from his half finished and uncoordinated sentences is that there’s a new boy in Shane’s class. He doesn’t speak English very well. Some boys were being mean to him. So Shane decided to eat lunch with him. That’s how they became friends. Today the boy in question gave him this ring because apparently you give the people you like gifts today.

Today is valentine’s day.

Yuna wants to laugh but she decides against it. But dear God, this is too precious.

“You’ve gotta admit, Yuna, the boy is pulling all the stops,” David jokes.

Yuna huffs in reply but smiles too. This whole situation is really cute, she has to admit.

One phone call to the teacher in charge reveals the name of the boy: Ilya Rozanov. He came from Russia with his family six months ago. As Shane had said, Ilya is having trouble adjusting but he and Shane have been sitting with each other during playtime recently.

Yuna is proud of her kid for accommodating someone who must be feeling a little lost. Shane is so mature even as a five year old.

She explains the situation to the teacher and gets the phone number of the mother of the child from her.

As she’s dialing the number, a thought struck her. What if Mrs. Rozanova isn’t so keen on finding out what her son did? What if she’s angry at him? Yuna knows enough about the world to know that in some parts of it, people aren’t as... understanding.

Before she can think of a proper way to deal with this, the call is received from the other side.

“Hello?” A female voice in a thick Russian accent says.

“Hi, hello. I'm Yuna Hollander. My son Shane and your son Ilya go to the same pre-school.”

A few seconds pass. Yuna wonders if the call is dropped. But no, it's still running.

“Da. Shane. Ilya talk about him. I am Ilya's mother. Irina. Everything okay?”

Yuna braces herself. “Well you see...”

Turns out the anxiety was for nothing. The moment Irina understands the situation, she starts to laugh. She has a nice laugh too. A full body laugh.

“*Oy, synochek moy, chto zhe ty nadelal?*” Irian says from the other side. Yuna doesn't know what it means.

They talk about the handover of the ring during the next day at drop-off.

The first time Yuna sees little Ilya, she thinks, oh that is one adorable kid.

Sure Shane is still the most adorable child in all of existence, according to her. But Ilya with his big blue eyes and stack of curly hair is a strong contender.

The resemblance he has with his mom is pretty evident. She also has curly hair. She's wearing a yellow cardigan with daisies on it. Instead of Ilya's blue eyes, she has hazel ones.

For some reason Irina Rozanova reminds Yuna of a sunflower.

“I am sorry. I did not even notice my ring was gone,” Irina says.

Yuna wonders why she wasn't wearing it. But it's none of her business.

“It's no trouble. My husband found it pretty funny actually,” she offers with a smile.

They watch as their kids waddle together inside the school clad in winter clothes.

“I am very happy they are friends. The change has been hard on Ilya.”

Yuna looks at Irina to see her smile fade a little. She wants to ask questions, but holds herself back. None of her business.

“Shane is happy to have a friend like him, too,” she offers instead. It's true. Shane is always talking about his friend from school: what they did the whole day, something Ilya did or said, the lunch they shared, so on and so forth.

“Are you settling in okay?” Yuna asks on a whim.

Irina thinks for a moment and says, “Yes, we are. It has been nice. Seeing Ilya make friends gives me hope too.”

Yuna doesn't know why she does what she does next, but over the years whenever she visits this moment, she will never regret it.

“Would Ilya like a playdate with Shane on Saturday?”

When Irina smiles again, Yuna is yet again reminded of a sunflower.

One playdate becomes two. That becomes a weekly arrangement. Yuna realizes she has made a friend too, much like her son.

Playdates turn into hockey practice when both boys decide they want to play ice hockey now.

Weeks bleed into months, years, and then suddenly it's been a decade of Hollanders and Rozanovs. Christmases, birthdays, and graduation ceremonies are shared in between.

Yuna learns more about her friend and their lives back in Russia. A loveless marriage with a loveless man. A battle with depression. An unsuccessful attempt and a wake up call that moved her and her only son across the ocean.

Yuna thanks whatever entity there is for this friendship. Irina Rozanova is a gift.

She observes her son too. How he changes with time. Not just that he grows, he becomes a different person. She observes his behavior: telltale signs of things she does too. She observes his anxiety. Interestingly, she observes his attitude towards Ilya shifting.

She finds him sulking the day after Ilya introduces his first girlfriend to them. She sees him wipe his eyes when he thinks no one is looking. She wants to talk to him about it but doesn't understand how to approach.

She watches as Shane refuses to go to his grade 9 semi-formal and Ilya is angry with him. She sighs when they fight over it and Shane slams his bedroom door shut. She waits as he stewes there the whole night.

Around 9 PM, Ilya comes over asking if he could talk to Shane. He wears a tux and he looks nice, Yuna observes.

She lets him in and Ilya goes to Shane's room. It's around 30 minutes later when he climbs down the stairs. Yuna notices the red cheeks and slightly skewed bow tie. She hides her smile behind her coffee cup and pretends to be oblivious.

Shane goes back to being his old self after that. Even happier, Yuna notices. She waits for them to tell her and ignores the not so subtle glances and touches they start to share.

Shane comes out to David and her when he's in grade 11. There's a lot of tears, hugs, “I love you” and “I'm proud of you” shared between them.

Unsurprisingly, both Shane and Ilya pursue a career in hockey. They get drafted when they're eighteen. Yuna holds Irina as she cries tears of happiness for her son.

Ilya plays for Ottawa and Shane for Montreal. They're fiercely competitive on ice and absolutely in love off it. They hide it, of course. Yuna doesn't like that they have to, but understands why.

It's their second season, when Irina calls her to grab coffee. She shows Yuna her wedding ring. The one Ilya had given Shane all those years ago. But it's different. It looks more like a man's ring now. It's sized to fit one too.

“Do you think he will like it?” Irina asks. Yuna wonders whose son she's talking about.

“Yes,” she answers anyway because both of them will.

Irina smiles, a little sadly, Yuna notes. And then she tells Yuna she has stage 4 Lymphoma.

A lot of things change after that. She watches it all unfold, unable to do much.

Ilya loses himself. He still plays the best hockey he can, which is pretty good. But the smile in his eyes disappears. He becomes a shell of a man. Shane stands by him through it all, the unmoving force.

Yuna is so proud of her son.

It is another season before Irina leaves them all behind. Two weeks before she does, she gives Yuna the ring and the chain with the orthodox crucifix. Yuna has never seen her without that chain. Something lurches in her stomach.

“Give him the chain after I'm gone and the ring when he's ready,” she says with tears brimming her eyes. Then she whispers as earnestly as she can, “Please take care of my baby.”

“I promise,” Yuna whispers back before tears blur her vision.

Yuna picks the headstone and the writing on it: *Here lies Irina Rozanova. The most loving mother, kindest friend, and tallest sunflower.*

She gives Ilya the chain during the funeral and watches him as he clasps it around his neck. She never sees him without it again.

It's so hard. It stays that way for so long. David holds her night after night as she quietly sobs in his arms. She lost her friend. Her best friend. She doesn't know how to get rid of the stone sitting on her chest refusing to let her breathe.

Ilya is much worse than her. He lost his only family. She has no words to comfort him.

A month after Irina is gone, Yuna finds him curled up on her couch with a blanket wrapped around him when she gets up to drink a glass of water in the middle of the night. Shane is at an away game against Dallas.

She wakes Ilya up. He blinks a few times before saying a little guiltily, “I missed her and didn't know what else to do.”

Yuna holds him as he sobs in her arms. She has two kids to look after now, she realizes. Somehow it doesn't scare her at all.

Like everything, time helps to get accustomed to the ache of not having Irina around. Yuna busies herself in work to avoid thinking about her best friend.

She shows up to almost all the home games the boys play. She works to arrange sponsorships and ad campaigns for them. When Ilya and Shane decide to open a foundation in Irina's name on the anniversary of her death to honor her, Yuna works for that too.

And then Shane and Ilya get outed by a nosey journalist.

It is an absolute shitshow from top to bottom. Yes, Scott Hunter from the New York Admirals has come out a couple of years back as gay by kissing his boyfriend in front of the entire world after his team had won the cup. But that didn't change much for the MLH as a whole. Homophobia runs deep in the league and if your queerness isn't profitable to them, they will throw you under the bus.

Shane and Ilya take it all in stride, though. They deal with it their way. Yuna stands by them. She feels a little useless but she realizes there's not much she can do other than show her support for them.

Shane gets shunned by the team he has played with for over a decade. He becomes increasingly anxious about his future in Montreal Metros.

It all comes to head when he has a panic attack over spaghetti during a Sunday dinner.

Yuna almost gets up to comfort him like she had to do during Shane's teenage years, but gets stopped by David and watches as Ilya kneels down in front of him.

He gently holds his hands and makes him do breathing exercises with him. He makes him find objects with the same color in the room. He makes him count and count backwards. He does it all in a soothing tone until Shane calms down. Then he kisses him softly.

Yuna knows at that moment that they're ready. She feels a little bittersweet about it; the fact that her son might not need her as much anymore, but mostly she feels happy.

Shane decides to join the Ottawa Centaurs with Ilya from next season. Yuna knows it's for the best.

During Shane's next away game, she invites Ilya for dinner. When David is preparing chicken parmesan, Yuna hands Ilya the ring. He recognizes it instantly.

“She told me to keep it safe until you were ready.”

She watches as Ilya blinks back tears.

The proposal happens two days after that. In a shocking turn of events, it's Shane who beats Ilya to the punch. Apparently he's been planning it for a while.

Yuna is ecstatic either way.

The wedding takes place next summer.

In the humdrum of everything, Yuna manages to sneak into Ilya's room for a moment. He's stood in front of the mirror trying to fix his bow tie. When he sees her he smiles nervously.

Yuna thinks back the night of freshman prom. She smiles back.

“Come here,” she says and starts to fix the crooked bow tie.

“I didn't have any friends growing up,” she says. “People found me... too much to be around.”

Ilya scoffs like it's stupid. Yuna smiles at him. “I don't think I really knew what friendship meant until I met your mom. She was—*is* my best friend. And losing her is something I won't ever recover from.”

Ilya is looking at her with sadness. “But today, I get to have another son become a part of my little family. And I'm so glad it's you, Ilya.”

She takes a breath and continues, “I know I'm not a replacement for her. I don't want to be. Couldn't dream of it. But I hope you'll give us a chance.”

Ilya holds her hands fixing his bow tie and then he pulls her into a hug.

She sniffles. Tries not to ruin his suit jacket with her tears. She probably fails.

“Thank you,” Ilya whispers.

Yuna repeats what Irina told her all those years ago in the hospital, “Please take care of my baby.”

Call it fate or maybe a sign but Ilya replies back exactly what Yuna had told his mom.

“I promise.”

“Oy, synochek moy, chto zhe ty nadelal?”

“Oh, my dear boy, what have you done?”

End Notes

I genuinely hope you like it.

Comments and kudos fuel my inspiration. So if you want to see more of my writings, please engage.

PS: here's a [beautiful fanart](#) of young Ilya and his mom. Like and reblog to encourage the artist.

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