

Whatever Words You Have

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Whatever Words You Have

by [bella31](#)

Summary

Yuna wants to want this. David already calls him 'son'. Ilya is clearly trying, so over a hockey game and a bottle of Merlot, she tries too.

Notes

I tried to be a casual Heated Rivalry fan, and failed. I love these characters. They're messy and perfect. I want to swaddle them in fuzzy blankets.

PS I haven't read The Long Game yet, so I have no idea how Yuna and Ilya progress in canon. This is my take after season 1 (and book 2) ends.

Yuna winced at the sound from behind her front door. Their house was solid, the door sturdy, but there was never any need to knock that hard. In general, things around the Hollander house had always been quiet. Unless a hockey game was on.

David had invited Ilya to watch the New York Admirals play the Montreal Metros. Ottawa had a break tonight, so Ilya was free. And close. It made sense.

But Ilya had never been to their house without Shane, and the thought unsettled her. For ten years, she'd watched Ilya Rosanov publicly hate her son through trash talk, the on-ice aggression and sneering interviews. Her reaction had been fierce and protective, as a mother's response should be.

And all those years, Shane had hated him too. Or so she thought. She'd even enabled it. A public rivalry meant publicity, brand deals, and career opportunities. And now Shane was asking them to accept Ilya into their lives as his *boyfriend*, both the bare minimum, and a daunting hurdle.

David was quick to notice her discomfort. "You'll learn to like him. I already do."

"Well. I'll get the door."

Yuna hurried down the hallway and opened it to a tall, broad Rosanov staring her down.

"Hello." Ilya held up a bottle of Russian Standard. Vodka, of course. Yuna took it. She didn't have the heart to tell him she didn't like vodka. Even the premium Russian stuff tasted like rubbing alcohol.

"Thank you." She stepped out of the way to let him through, but he didn't move. Instead, he handed her a second bottle. Dark red with a crisp white label. Nagano Merlot, her favorite.

"How did you know?"

Ilya winked and passed Yuna on his way into their home, his shoulders as broad as the hallway.

Yuna examined the wine bottle as she followed Ilya into the kitchen. The Ilya who had uprooted his life for Shane didn't resemble the one she thought she knew. She'd seen the tabloids, his arm around a different woman every week. So cavalier about affection. Shane loved fiercely but selectively. And this was the man he'd chosen.

From the kitchen, David grinned at Ilya. "Hey son," he said, reaching for a handshake. Ilya pulled him into a hug instead, clapping his back.

Son. Part of her heart hardened hearing it. They had one son.

David nodded toward the bottle in Yuna's hand. "Shane must have told you Yuna loved that wine."

“He did not,” replied Ilya.

They moved to the sofa. Ilya claimed the middle seat, and David and Yuna filtered in on either side. The couch’s arm pressed into her ribs.

David turned on the TV and Ilya opened the bottle of vodka. He poured David a generous helping. Then one for himself. He put it back on the table and Yuna didn’t even need to ask before her wine glass was full of Nagano.

“Thank you for the wine, Ilya.”

“Was nothing.”

As the pre-game commentary droned on, the living room fell silent. Maybe it was time to test the waters.

“So,” she said. “When did you know for sure about Shane?”

“Know what for sure?” Ilya asked.

Yuna tensed, the way she always did when he answered a question with a question. “When did you know it was love?”

“Ah. Love.” He smiled. “Not *lovers*.”

“Well, yes but—“

“You’re not asking when we started fucking.”

“Jesus, Rosanov,” said David. “We know it was the summer before your rookie year.”

“Not fucking yet, no.”

Yuna’s knuckles were white around her wine glass. *All those women, all those mornings.* “Kind of crass, Ilya?” she asked, sharper than she’d meant.

“What is crass?” asked Ilya.

“I don’t know. Direct. Insensitive.”

“Yuna,” David said softly.

“Sorry,” Ilya said. His voice quieted. He opened his mouth to talk but then shut it. He didn’t have the words.

“We just want to know when it got serious,” said David.

Ilya’s body stilled. He nodded, deep in thought, as though the answer wasn’t simple. “After all-stars. Right when my dad died. I wanted to be serious before that.”

“And Shane didn’t?”

Ilya shrugged. “Maybe he did. I don’t know. I didn’t have right words to ask.” Then he looked at Yuna with an expression she’d never seen on his face before. Pleading. “That is common problem for me. I did not learn English in school.”

“You learned it in the locker room,” said David.

Ilya nodded.

Yuna’s heart sank. He wasn’t crass. The words he had were. Suddenly, certain things about Ilya looked different. There was more under the surface that language couldn’t reach.

“You can tell us anything,” said David. “With whatever words you have.”

Ilya was quiet for a moment before his tentative smile returned. “At all-stars weekend, Shane told me he and Rose were not compatible.”

David glanced at him sideways. “And?”

“I didn’t know what that meant. So I said nothing.”

There it was, an olive branch. One Shane probably planned and rehearsed, deflected by a language barrier. No wonder it had taken nine years.

The puck dropped and the living room fell silent. It was almost comfortable. Ilya glanced at David, then Yuna, before pulling off his Ottawa crewneck with theatrical flair, revealing a New York Admirals t-shirt underneath.

“Are you serious?” said David, shoving his arm. “You’re rooting for the Admirals?”

“Of fucking course,” said Ilya. “Montreal sucks this year.”

Yuna tensed at his vulgarity. Hoping he didn’t see, she let out a quiet laugh. “The audacity.”

“What is *audacity*?”

Yuna pointed at his shirt. “*That*.”

A huge grin spread across his face, bright and boyish, He winked.

“You knew that, didn’t you?”

That smile. That wink. It had to be part of his allure. Her son was only human.

Shane won the faceoff. David and Yuna cheered. Ilya groaned.

Yuna rested a hand on Ilya’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze. It was light and deliberate. An acknowledgement. He was trying.

Ilya responded in kind. He covered her hand with his own and squeezed back. Confident and immediate. Even though she had initiated it, she tensed before she relaxed. Their hands slipped apart. Yuna let the moment sit between them.

Shane scored. Yuna and David whooped, but Ilya booed.

“Fucking Shane Hollander,” said Ilya. “I hate that guy.”

“That is goal number what, thirty six?” asked David. “What are you at, Ilya?”

“Fuck off.”

“Thirty two,” said Yuna.

“You’ve kept count of mine too?”

“Of course, I have to make sure my favorite player wins.”

“He will,” Ilya said. “He has to catch up, but he will. Don’t worry.” As if encouraged by their prior contact, he reached an arm around her shoulders and pulled her against him. It was firm, almost possessive, and Yuna felt herself slip away from the hard barrier of the sofa’s arm.

She froze. She wanted to want this.

At Yuna’s resistance, Ilya let his arm drop to his side, heavy and leaded. He withdrew the contact in the same way he’d given it. Instinctively. His face hardened. His smile retreated behind a familiar shield.

She looked at him. He didn’t look back. Had she said too much without saying anything at all?

If it were Shane, she would pull him into her. Make sure he never felt a trace of rejection.

But it wasn’t Shane.

She wasn’t there yet.

And maybe, in time, she would be.

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