The Debrief

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The Debrief

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Summary

The Hollanders visit David's family for his mother's 100th birthday. It goes about as well as you'd expect.

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And now was time for a sacred Hollander family (well, really Shane and Yuna) tradition: the debrief.

"So, how was that for your first Hollander family function?" Yuna asked Ilya.

He shrugged. "I can see why you do not visit often."

Notes

Well, I'm a doctor now!

I've been working on this for so many months, I just need to post it and be done. I don't *love* it, but it's fine, and I need to not work on it anymore.

I saw a tumblr post months ago about Shane and Yuna debriefing family events afterwards and I can't find it anymore, but it inspired this. I hope that's okay!

See the end of the work for more notes

12:42AM

“Well, that was exhausting.”

The Hollanders poured through the front door of Yuna and David’s house past midnight, David and Shane mumbling their agreement at Ilya’s statement. David, who had driven the four all the way to Toronto and back in the span of a day, went straight up to bed without even stopping in the kitchen for a glass of water. Yuna noted to herself that she’d need to bring up an extra glass for him when she went to bed. She didn’t want David waking up parched in the middle of the night and disturbing the whole house by rustling around in the kitchen.

Yuna was tired too, but at least she and the boys had gotten some sleep in the car. And now was time for a sacred Hollander family (well, really Shane and Yuna) tradition: the debrief.

Yuna slumped onto the big couch in the living room, and as expected, Shane and Ilya followed a few minutes later, Shane with a ginger ale in hand, Ilya with two glasses with clear liquid in his hands. He handed one to Yuna—water—and kept one for himself—presumably vodka. Her son’s husband sat on the loveseat to the left of the couch, and Shane sat on the cushion beside him, his head leaned back onto Ilya’s shoulder with Ilya’s arm around his waist.

“So, how was that for your first Hollander family function?” Yuna asked Ilya.

He shrugged. “I can see why you do not visit often.”

It was true, they didn’t see David’s extended family often. They didn’t live very far, just a little over four hours to a suburb outside of Toronto, but after David and Yuna married, they found themselves seeing David’s family as little as possible.

There were a multitude of reasons why. David had never really gotten along with his family. He was the youngest of five children, and his older sisters and brother tended to be more outgoing than David was, even when they were children. As the youngest, David’s mother was always what the kids online nowadays call “a weird boy mom.” She never liked Yuna for that reason. Before their wedding, she had cornered Yuna and told her that as David’s mother, she would “always be the most special woman in his life.” David stood up for Yuna, of course, and hence began the rift between David and Yuna and the rest of the Hollanders.

They went to a few family birthdays and Christmases when Shane was a child, but he was far in age from most of his cousins, and so it wasn’t much of a loss when Shane got busy with hockey, and they stopped visiting David’s family.

When the invitation for Nana’s 100th birthday party came in the mail, Shane hadn’t seen his extended family since a short-lived Christmas dinner in 2016. Still, it was David’s mother’s 100th birthday.

So they went. All four of them.

“It was very loud in there,” Ilya said, taking a sip of his vodka.

“I’m pretty sure my cousin Elijah had, like, ten more kids since last time,” said Shane.

“Yes, well, your grandmother was quiet.”

Yuna let out a quiet laugh. “She wasn’t always that way. She used to have a *lot* of things to say…mostly about me, but being a hundred years old does that to you.”

Ilya shrugged, “Probably for the best then.”

~

3:28PM

When they pulled up to the McMansion on the quiet suburban street, there were already cars filling the driveway and overflowing into the surrounding street. Yuna led the family to the front door, David following just behind her and Shane and Ilya a few steps behind, carrying the dessert they brought.

Yuna knocked, and a woman quickly answered the door with a big smile and hair too blonde to be natural. “David, Yuna, come on in!” She made polite greeting sounds as she shuffled them all into the house and gestured for them to take their shoes off. “Shane, wow, it’s been so long. And you might be Ilya! It’s nice to meet you.”

The woman reached out and took the casserole dish from Ilya’s hand. “I’m Shane’s Aunt Alice: David’s sister. Can I get you guys anything to drink?”

After the pleasantries were settled, it was time for the main event. Aunt Alice led David, Yuna, Shane, and Ilya to the dining room to greet Shane’s one-hundred-year-old Nana. Ilya had never seen a person who was a hundred before, and on first glance, he kind of wish he never had.

Nana was perched in a chair at the head of the table, presents surrounding her, party hat on her head, and an oxygen tube in her nose. David approached his mother straightaway and crouched next to her chair.

“Mom,” he said. “Happy birthday, Mom. It’s David.” David's voice was slow and loud as he spoke.

“Oh, David. Finally bothered to visit your dear old mother did you?”

Yuna scoffed next to Ilya but didn’t say anything.

David ignored her comment and kept talking. “We’re all here to see you, Mom. My wife, Yuna, is here. You remember her. She made that pudding casserole you like.”

Nana did not look up at Yuna. She just kept looking forward as if David had said nothing at all. She reminded Ilya a bit of his father at the end: sick and scared, but still as cruel as ever. He wanted to leave this room quickly.

David continued, “And my son, Shane’s here. You remember Shane. He plays for Ottawa now.”

Shane knelt down next to David just to the side of Nana’s chair. “Hi, Nana,” he said. “Happy birthday. It’s good to see you.”

“Shane,” Nana said, like she just remembered something. “Did you find a nice girl yet?”

There were thirty seconds of silence as all the Hollanders presumably debated sharing news with a woman that was born in 1923.

Shane cleared his throat. “No, Nana, not a nice girl. But I brought my husband…Ilya.” He looked back with a wide-eyed expression and a flapping hand motion intended to summon Ilya forward.

“Yes,” Ilya said, “it is lovely to meet you, Mrs. Hollander. Happy birthday. You are a very youthful one hundred.”

Nana slowly raised her gaze to Ilya as he stood in front of her, and she just…stared…and stared…and stared.

“Okay,” Aunt Alice said from where she stood behind Yuna and Ilya. “Things are very overwhelming for Nana at this age. Let’s just give her some time to enjoy the party,” she said as she shuffled them away with an arm around Ilya’s shoulders.

As Ilya walked away, he turned to Yuna beside him. “I think I broke Nana.”

“It’s okay,” Yuna said. “She didn’t like me either.”

~

12:49AM

“Ilya, what do you mean?” Shane said. He craned his neck back to look at Ilya’s face, even though it meant the back of his head dug into Ilya’s delt. “The older ladies loved you.”

“Did they?” Yuna said.

“Aunt Alice certainly did.”

~

4:39PM

Shane was attempting to escape a conversation with Uncle Bill that he was sure was going to end in the man asking him to borrow money when he realized he hadn’t seen Ilya in a while.

“…so after that crazy bitch took all my money, I had to move back in with Nana. Can you believe it? I guess it’s not a bad gig. Sometimes I gotta get her a water or something in the middle of the night, but Beth and Alice handle most of the real medical-y stuff. Not that your

dad is any help. You know even without the rent payments, it's still pretty expensive living around here. I could use some—" Bill jostled Shane's arm with the hand holding a bottle of beer—certainly not his first and likely not his last.

Shane didn't even bother with a fake smile as he said, "Yeah, sorry, I've gotta go. I think I hear my mom calling my name in the kitchen."

Uncle Bill didn't seem to notice the lie as Shane made his way over to the kitchen. He was planning on getting a drink and finding Ilya when he realized that the kitchen was already occupied with the exact person he was looking for.

Except Ilya wasn't alone. Standing next to him was Aunt Alice, standing *very* close.

Alice was David's second-oldest sister, third-oldest sibling overall. She lived just down the street from Nana and was her primary caretaker. Shane remembered her as being one of the few of David's relatives to actually show interest in his hockey career…particularly in his MLH teammates.

So Aunt Alice was a bit of a cougar.

Ilya and Alice stood facing the counter as Ilya told a story that Aunt Alice thought was hilarious, if her dramatic laugh and the way she put her hand on his bicep were any indication.

Shane knew his husband was attractive—he knew that better than anyone—but he had stopped feeling jealous when people flirted with Ilya a long time ago. It happened all the time when they went out with the team. Some woman or man would approach Ilya in the bar and do just what Aunt Alice was doing now: standing too close, touching his arm, leaning in when he talked. Shane wasn't jealous, because as soon as Ilya saw Shane from across the room, his face lit up in a way that no one else would ever get to see. Then, it was like the person desperately trying to woo him didn't exist, and the only two people in the room were him and Shane.

This time, when Ilya's gaze turned to Shane, they were the only two people in the world again—but not according to Aunt Alice.

"*Moya lyubov,*" Ilya said. "I was just looking for you."

Aunt Alice was still standing right next to Ilya, still had her hand on his arm. Shane could've sworn she was squeezing it.

"Oh Shane," she said, "I was just chatting with your hubby here. He's quite the charmer!"

"Yes he is," Shane said. He leaned against the counter across from Alice and Ilya.

"He was just telling me a hilarious story about a prank your teammates played on you when you joined Ottawa," Alice continued. "Just hilarious! Your husband tells one hell of a story. He's so handsome, too, but you know that. You're a lucky guy."

Okay, so Alice had a few glasses of wine in her. Shane contemplated putting a stop to it, but Ilya didn't seem annoyed. If anything, he seemed entertained by the way he raised his eyebrows at Shane after Alice's comment on his handsomeness.

"Yes, Shane knows this. But I'm the lucky one between us, getting to be married to your nephew."

Aunt Alice laughed. It was not the laugh of a person who was sober. "Well, aren't you charming?" She lightly slapped her hand against Ilya's chest and then just…left her hand there on his pec. "What did my nephew ever do to deserve you?"

Shane cleared his throat, but neither Ilya or Aunt Alice moved. Ilya didn't because his eyes had already been on Shane from the second he entered the room, and Aunt Alice was…too busy looking into Ilya's eyes to notice Shane putting a stop to it.

"Aunt Alice, if you'll excuse me. I need to borrow my husband for a second," Shane said, not in his normal voice, but his captain's voice.

That snapped Alice out of it. "Oh, yes, of course," she said, hand still on Ilya's pec. "It was so nice to meet you, Ilya. I hope we'll be seeing you around more."

Ilya tried his best to keep his face neutral, but Shane knew every wrinkle and every inch of Ilya's face like the back of his hand. The crease at the corner of his mouth gave it away—the fucker was nearly laughing.

"Yes, ma'am, nice to meet you as well. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must speak with my husband."

Ilya pulled away from Alice and walked towards Shane. The pair only barely made it through the door into the hallway before they broke out laughing.

~

12:53AM

Yuna nodded and pulled the blanket from the back of the couch over her lap. "I probably should have warned you about that. Alice is a cougar. I brought my younger brother to exactly one Hollander Thanksgiving, and she sat so close to him on the couch that she was nearly in his lap. And that's when she was still married to her husband!"

"Speaking of Uncle Jim," Shane said. "Is he still an uncle if they're divorced? Whatever, but you'll never guess what he said to me."

~

5:06PM

Shane was under strict instructions to get Nana's birthday card from Dad's coat pocket and get straight back to the living room where Ilya and David were having a conversation about resealing the deck at the cottage.

What Shane didn't plan for was that someone else would be in the coat closet at the same time.

"Ah, shit! You scared me, kiddo." Alice's ex-husband—Uncle (?) Jim was standing in the dim hallway by the front door, rummaging through the coats stuffed into the overflowing closet.

Shane didn't remember much about Uncle Jim. He did remember that Uncle Jim was one of the few relatives that was as interested in hockey as Shane and his parents were. Even when Shane was a kid playing at the lower levels, Uncle Jim showed up to a handful of games and always made a point to talk to Shane about how his season was going.

He and Aunt Alice had divorced when Shane was twelve. He still went to the occasional family event after the divorce, but Shane didn't think he'd seen Jim since he was drafted.

"Sorry," Shane said. "I just need to grab something from my dad's jacket."

"Ah," Jim said, and gestured towards the chaos of coats like it was a particularly infuriating puzzle. "I've been trying to get a cigarette out of my coat for ten minutes now. It's a disaster in there. Hey, I've been meaning to say, congratulations on the cups—the one last year, I mean, and I guess the three with Montreal too. Hell of a player you turned out to be, kid."

"Yeah, I guess I did," Shane said, a real smile on his face for the first time tonight caused by someone other than his parents or Ilya.

"I actually started betting on your games a while back," Jim said. "Lost big a few years ago on a bet about you signing with Ottawa. Never thought it'd happen. I thought you'd retire in Montreal."

"Me too," said Shane.

"So you know the betting apps, the DraftKings and the FanDuel and all that, they give you free money sometimes. That's how they hook ya. But I'm good at it—well, I'm gonna be good at it. Once I start getting the insider information from my nephew, eh Shaney."

No one had called Shane 'Shaney' since he was twelve, and he'd hated it for at least five years before then.

"Amazing thing you've got going on in Ottawa. Never thought I'd see that team in the playoffs, let alone with a cup, but you and Rozanov have really turned that team around."

"It really was the whole team—"

"And Rozanov!" Jim said. "Wow, never thought I'd see him at a Hollander family dinner, but hey, not that I'm complaining!"

Shane felt his back tense and the hairs stand up on the back of his neck. Even now, nearly three years after they were outed, Shane still went into fight or flight when he wasn't sure how someone would react to them.

To his credit, Uncle Jim quickly noticed Shane's discomfort. "Oh, bud, you've got nothing to worry about." Jim stepped closer to Shane and put his hand on his shoulder. Shane supposed this was meant to be a comforting gesture, but he had always been a fan of personal space.

"I'm cool with the whole gay thing," Jim said, flashing Shane a wide, toothy grin. "It's making me a ton of money! Ever since you two signed with Ottawa, I've been making a killing betting on your games. I put 3K on you guys winning the cup again this year! What do you think, Shaney?"

Shaney thought he would very much like to get out of this uncomfortable, yet weirdly heartwarming conversation.

"We're gonna try! Oh, I think I see my dad's jacket right there. I'm just gonna grab it really quick." Shane reached past Uncle Jim and grabbed whichever coat looked closest to his dad's and didn't bother even trying to check. "I'm gonna head back, but it was nice talking to you. Bye."

Shane turned around and was out of there before he even saw Uncle Jim's reaction. Maybe he would offer Jim some tickets to one of the Centaurs' playoff games this season. He'd think about it.

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12:59AM

Ilya was laughing so hard, it shook the ginger ale in Shane's hand from the arm pressed against Ilya's side.

"It's not *that* funny," Shane said.

"It is a little funny," said Ilya.

"It is," Yuna agreed.

"Mom!"

"What do I always tell you? Money makes the world go 'round. Rainbow capitalism works sometimes."

"Well, Jessie certainly agreed with you," Shane said.

"Ugh," said Yuna, "don't even talk to me about that."

"What about Jessie?" Ilya asked. "The cousin with the curly hair and the weird sweater?"

"Alice and Jim's daughter," Yuna clarified.

"She's an influencer," Shane said.

"A what?" said Ilya.

“An influencer,” Shane said. “You know what they are. Harris tells you all the time, and you pretend not to listen. If you don’t remember, then maybe you had too much to drink.”

Shane reached for Ilya’s vodka glass, but Ilya pulled it out of his reach “No,” Ilya whined. He put the glass on the nearby end table. “The internet people,” he said, giving up on being difficult. “She is one of the internet people?”

“She has a TikTok,” Shane said. “Didn’t I tell you about this when it happened? Maybe I didn’t. It was so hectic those first few months after everything came out.”

“I don’t think I even told you until a few months after, Shane,” said Yuna.

Ilya huffed. “Will someone please tell me what cousin Jessie did so I know if I should have been mean to her tonight?”

Yuna looked to Shane. He looked back at her and shrugged, then said, “She made a bunch of videos right after we were outed, just like, talking about me growing up and how I’ve always been secretive, and they always suspected I could be gay or whatever else she said.”

“Oh yes,” Ilya said, “I should have been much meaner to her.”

“You probably could have,” Shane said. “Mom, didn’t you have to text Aunt Alice to get her to stop?”

Yuna nodded. “She did stop, eventually, but not until after I had some very stern words with her mother on the phone. Mother to mother.” She sighed. “She was resistant at first. She claimed that this was just how Jessie made money and that I was being—quote—judgy.” Yuna rolled her eyes and took a sip of her water. “Some people.”

“Well, yes, I am judgy,” said Ilya. “Speaking of ‘judgy,’ I sat next to your Aunt Beth at dinner—”

~

5:39PM

By the time Aunt Alice shouted that dinner was ready, the whole Hollander family stood from their seats throughout the house and migrated to the dining room. Ilya made a quick detour to the bathroom before joining his husband and in-laws at the dinner table. By the time he got there, David and Yuna were sitting at the far end of the table talking to a couple that looked about David’s age, and there were no extra seats near them. The only available pair of seats open was at the opposite end of the table, next to a woman in her seventies with brown hair with grey at the roots and across from a group of teenagers.

Ilya offered to get Shane a drink from the kitchen before he sat down, but Shane insisted that *he* be the one to get Ilya a drink, so Ilya sat down next to the older woman and saved the seat next to him for his husband.

The woman next to Ilya looked up at him out of the corner of her eye as he sat down. She didn’t say anything to him at first, just pushed her peas around her plate. Still, Ilya did what

he did best and set off to charm the woman.

“Hello,” he said, “I don’t think we’ve met. I’m Ilya.”

The woman looked up from her plate and cast Ilya a small smile that didn’t reach her eyes. “Nice to meet you, I’m Beth. And how did you know my mother? Are you one of the boys that she has to help with the landscaping?” She spoke with a tone of pretentiousness that Ilya hadn’t heard since his early days of living in North America, when his accent was thick and his English imperfect and Americans heard that and assumed he was stupid.

This was Shane’s family. Ilya refused to make a bad impression. He could be the bigger person.

“No, actually, I am Shane’s husband—David and Yuna’s son.”

The woman nodded like she had known that all along but was hoping to avoid acknowledging it. “Oh, yes, you’re Shane’s…partner.”

Ah, Ilya understood now. If he was a sensible man, this conversation would be over, this woman could go back to her small world and small mind, and Ilya would pretend he’d never met her. But Ilya was an instigator at heart. He might as well push some buttons until his husband came back.

“His husband, actually,” Ilya said. “We got married two years ago. It was a small ceremony, apologies you were not invited.”

“Hm,” Beth said, then her eyes stilled on something just beneath his neck. “Are you a Christian?”

It wasn’t a question people asked often, but still, he wore his mother’s cross every day, and sometimes people got curious.

“My mother was Orthodox. I am…not so much.”

“Do you go to church?” she asked.

Ilya shook his head. “Not in a long time, no.”

Beth gave another pretentious hum. “Maybe you should go this Sunday. My church welcomes *anyone*—” Ilya highly doubted that. “It might be…eye-opening for you.”

Ilya hadn’t gone to a liturgy since his mother’s funeral. He didn’t follow her religion anymore, but Ilya was pretty sure he believed in a God. But surely if there was a God, He would be too busy dealing with war or world hunger or whatever other vast problem than worrying about Ilya falling in love with a man.

Plus if there was a God, didn’t that mean that God made Ilya bisexual in the first place? So Aunt Beth’s self-righteous judging really made no sense. Still, Ilya was sure none of those arguments would convince Shane’s rude Aunt Beth.

Luckily, Shane came back from the kitchen just in time.

“Oh, there you are,” Shane said as he put a glass of what looked like white wine in front of Ilya’s plate. As he stood behind Ilya and leaned to put the glass down, he turned his head and quickly kissed Ilya on the cheek.

Shane took the seat next to Ilya, and Beth had apparently decided this situation was too gay for her taste and went back to pushing her peas around with a sneer.

And how could Ilya care what anyone else thought of him when he had Shane, happy and peaceful and in love by his side?

~

1:13AM

“Ilya, why didn’t you tell me?” Shane said. He turned around in their shared seat as much as he could to look at Ilya, but Ilya just tucked him back into his side.

Yuna was so incensed that she was sitting up on the couch. “Oh, I’m going to kill her,” Yuna said. “She can’t talk to my son like that. Who does she think she is?”

“Yuna, is okay. I grew up in Russia and play professional hockey. I have heard a lot worse.”

Yuna was shaking her head, and her cheeks were flushed in anger. “Beth was always so judgmental. When David and I were having trouble getting pregnant with Shane, she always made sure to mention how easy it was for her to have her million kids. She actually said that some people were ‘just meant to be mothers’ and ‘not all women are.’ Good to know she hasn’t grown a bit over the years.”

“Mom, what the fuck, that’s horrible,” Shane said. “I don’t remember her being mean to me when I was a kid. I think she mostly just ignored me.”

“For the best, probably,” said Ilya.

Yuna laid back down with a thump. “I’m sorry, boys. I really hoped tonight would go okay for you.”

“It’s fine, Mom,” Shane said. “We actually did have one really good conversation with some of my cousins.”

~

6:51PM

“Hey, we were wondering if you guys wanted to come with us on…a walk.”

Shane and Ilya were standing by the fireplace in the living room, finishing off their glasses of wine, when two people in their twenties approached them. Shane knew they were his cousins —his Aunt Kathy and Uncle Rob’s twins, Dina and Grace—but Shane hadn’t seen them since

they were teenagers. Kathy and Rob moved to the United States when Shane was a baby and only came back for the occasional holidays when Shane was young. Now they were grown up, with freckles and curly dark hair, one long down to the waist and one cut short.

“A walk?” Ilya said.

“Yeah, a walk,” said the one with shorter hair—Dina. “Like a…a cousin walk, if you know what I mean?”

Shane did not know, but he was dying to get out of this house. “Yeah, sure.”

Shane’s cousins led him and Ilya outside, and they immediately started walking down the sidewalk to the quieter part of the neighborhood. Shane had never been good with small talk, but he figured he should try with his own cousins.

“So, did you guys drive up this morning, or did you fly here?”

“Well, our parents live in Indiana,” said the one with longer hair—Grace, “but I live in Manhattan and Dina lives in Pittsburgh. It’s where we went for college, and Dina just stayed, and I got a job in New York. But we met at my parents’ a few days ago and flew out of Indianapolis yesterday.”

“Oh, I’ve been in both Pittsburgh and New York,” Shane said. “They’re both nice cities. New York has some great architecture, and Pittsburgh’s hockey team is pretty good this year.”

“Yeah, I heard you guys are hockey players,” Dina said. “Are you guys any good?”

“Any good?” Ilya scoffed. He played being more shocked than he actually was, but still, it was rare to meet someone in Canada who hadn’t at least heard of Hollander and Rozanov. “What second-rate places are you living in that you have not heard of Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov?”

“So is that a yes or…”

Grace and Dina slowed to a stop on the sidewalk, and Shane suddenly noticed that they were in a part of the neighborhood without surrounding houses, just trees. Grace reached into the pocket of her coat and pulled out a small, metal container and a lighter. She clicked open the lighter and revealed two joints rolled in tan paper.

“Oh, yes,” said Ilya, “finally the party is starting.”

Grace laughed at that. “What did you think we brought you out here to do? Kill you and bury your body in the woods?”

“Well, now that you say that, this location is suspicious,” said Ilya.

Dina shrugged. “It’s the only place out of view of Nana’s nosy-ass neighbors.”

“Her neighbor two houses down once saw us and sent a letter to the HOA calling us ‘pot-smoking degenerates.’ Degenerates! Insane,” said Grace. “Anyway, you want one?”

Dina had already taken one joint out of the container and was lighting it between their lips.

Shane looked to Ilya. They had gotten high a few times before. Occasionally, someone brought a joint or a brownie to a Centaurs event, and Ilya usually indulged while Shane stayed sober to drive him home. They'd gotten high together off edibles a few times at the cottage, but they usually just spent those days lazing in the sun and slow fucking on the couch.

Ilya smiled at Shane and took the joint from Grace. Dina handed him the lighter, and Ilya brought the joint to his mouth before lighting it.

The four of them stood there for a few minutes as Grace and Dina passed the joint back and forth between them. Ilya took a few hits of his, put it out on the bottom of his shoe, and tucked the rest in his pocket for later.

Grace nodded to Shane with the joint in her mouth. "You don't smoke?" she said.

Before Shane could speak, Ilya said, "He would not risk his perfect lungs."

Shane rolled his eyes. "I've done edibles a couple times, but no, I don't smoke."

"Oh, I have gummies here," Dina said as they reached into their pocket and pulled out a bright green bag with gummy bears surrounded by marijuana leaves on it. "That's the great thing about Canada, you can buy this shit anywhere here."

Shane took the bag from Dina and turned to show it to Ilya. Ilya just looked at him and shrugged. "What can it hurt?" he said. "Don't tell me you want to deal with the rest of this evening sober."

That was a good point. "How many do I take?" Shane asked his cousins.

"If you've done edibles before but not recently, just take one. You can always take another one later if you need more. It'll take longer to kick in than smoking, though," Grace said.

Shane followed Grace's instructions and ate one gummy before handing the bag back to Dina.

What followed was several minutes of Ilya and the twins making small talk about everything from the weather in Canada to strains of weed to a fight between Shane's Uncle Tim and Uncle Bill last Christmas. Weed had always made Ilya extra chatty—not that he needed help to be charming and social. Shane's own high hadn't yet kicked in, and it didn't help that he wasn't exactly sure what to say to his younger cousins that he hadn't seen in years. He just didn't know much about them.

Shane tuned back in to the conversation by the time the group continued their walk around the neighborhood. Grace and Dina were telling Ilya about how their parents moved to America for their dad's job when they were babies.

"We used to come back to visit a lot more when we were younger, but then life got busy with school and clubs and sports and shit, and we stopped making the drive that often. My dad's

family lives less than an hour outside of Indianapolis, so we see them a lot," said Dina.

"Nana holds a mean grudge, though. Every time we see her, she says some passive-aggressive bullshit about how she was 'abandoned' by her youngest daughter and that they're 'keeping her grandchildren away from her.'" Grace said with exaggerated air quotes. She turned around and walked backwards as she talked to Ilya, Shane, and Dina walking a few steps behind her. "Well, she always says 'granddaughters.' She still refuses to get the memo about that."

"Oh yeah, I'm nonbinary," Dina said, "and a lesbian. I guess you probably missed that bit of family drama when I came out a few years ago."

Ilya shrugged. "I could tell. Shane could not. His gaydar is terrible."

"Oh, fuck you," Shane said. It was true, though.

"I guess it could have been worse," Dina said, gesturing to the two of them. They didn't need to clarify. "Sorry about that, by the way. That was really fucked up."

"Yeah," Shane said, "it was."

"Not to be weird or anything," Dina said, "I know it was fucking terrible for you guys, but it was kind of…comforting, when I found out, I guess. Knowing I wasn't the only one in the family. Like I wasn't alone."

Shane was used to being the "only one" wherever he went: the only gay player on the Metros, the only married players in the league, the only Asian player on his juniors team, then the only Asian captain in the league, the only non-white cousin in his family. It was a particular brand of loneliness that Shane had been well-acquainted with since he was a child. But as he got older, Shane found himself becoming less and less alone. He was finding there was a particular comfort in learning that another person was queer: an invisible weight lifted off his shoulders. It didn't erase all the other things that weighed at him, but it lightened the load a bit.

"Yeah," Shane said, "I guess it is nice."

"What she's trying to say," Grace said, "is that if you know any single PWHL players, give them Dina's number."

"Grace—" Dina flushed and rolled their eyes, but their sister just cackled.

"I am dying to know, though," Grace continued, "how did this whole thing start?" She gestured between Shane and Ilya as she spoke. "Cause, I mean, we were all clueless. When the news hit the cousins groupchat—well, the groupchat of cool cousins—everyone was shocked. Our awkward, shy, jock cousin in the biggest sex scandal in NHL history? Crazy."

Shane said, "Sex scandal?" at the same time Ilya said, "Cool cousins groupchat?"

Ilya continued, his hand on his chest in exaggerated surprise, "There is a groupchat of the cool Hollander cousins, and I am not in it?"

Grace threw her hands in the air, “I don’t have your phone number! We don’t even have Shane’s number. Plus, how was I supposed to know if you guys were cool or not!”

Ilya was feigning offense, but all Shane could do was laugh and laugh and laugh. The edible had definitely kicked in.

Ilya and Shane exchanged phone numbers with Grace and Dina and, much to Ilya’s delight, got added to the “Cool Hollanders” groupchat. By the time that was done, Shane looked forward and realized they had made their way back to Nana’s house. Before they went in, Grace grabbed Shane’s arm and Dina grabbed Ilya’s. The twins pulled them into a circle on the sidewalk.

“Okay,” said Grace, “we all still have a couple hours left in this hell hole. I’m gonna tell you how to survive. Aunt Beth and Uncle Timothy are homophobic assholes—”

“I learned that, already,” said Ilya. Shane figured he’d get the story later.

“Stay away from them at all costs, or they’ll spew some insane shit about the fiery pits of hell or whatever. Some of their kids are cool, like Jill and Mary. Jill’s youngest daughter is super into hockey, and she kind of worships you both. Uncle Bill and Uncle Jim are weird but fine, Aunt Alice, too, but Jessie is a weirdo. Our parents are cool, so if you need to have a normal conversation, just go find them. And if one of the four of us sees each other in a conversation we don’t want to be in, we’ll pull each other out. Deal?”

“Deal,” said Ilya and Shane. They went back in the house to brave the rest of the night.

The rest of the night went better than before, though Shane couldn’t tell if it was because he spent most of it with his friendlier cousins or because he was a little bit high. Shane and Ilya sat next to Dina and Grace while the family sang to Nana and talked with them about their college years while they all ate cake. After cake, Shane and Ilya ended up talking to Shane’s cousin, Mary. She was close in age to both of them, but with a toddler and an infant hanging off her at all times.

She was telling a story about her husband leaving his car keys at an ice cream shop when the toddler—a little boy in a blue-striped shirt—tugged on the bottom of her dress.

“Mama, Mama,” he said, “I’m thirsty.”

“I’ll get you some water in a second, sweetie, just give Mama a minute,” Mary said, resettling the baby on her hip as she kicked her legs and fussed.

“I’m thirsty now,” the boy said. He sounded like he was about to cry. Shane really hoped he wasn’t going to cry; it was already loud enough in this room.

“Oh, well,” Mary sighed, “okay.” She looked to Shane and Ilya. “Could one of you…” She held out the infant to the two of them, its little legs kicking in the air between them.

Both Shane and Ilya had plenty of experience holding teammates’ babies. Maybe it was the weed or maybe it was the fact that Shane didn’t know this baby nor her mother very well, but

he felt unsure as he took the baby from her mother's hands and tucked her in his arms.

"Thank you," Mary said, "you could just take her to her bouncer in the office, I'll meet you there—oh, yes, honey, we're going—be right back." With that, Mary scurried off holding her older child's hand, leaving Shane and Ilya with a baby who looked at them with a confused look on her little face.

"Office?" Ilya said.

"Office?" Shane replied, equally as unsure.

It took them longer than it would sober for the two of them to find what Mary referred to as the office: a windowless room upstairs with a computer, a couch, and a grey baby bouncing chair in the corner. To the baby's credit, she didn't cry at all as Shane carried her through seemingly every room in this house looking for the office. She didn't even cry when Shane and Ilya put her in the chair and fumbled through buckling her in with eventual success.

"You looked good holding a baby," said Ilya. He stepped close behind Shane and tucked his chin over Shane's shoulder and whispered, "You should let me get you pregnant."

"That's exactly the sort of thing you can't say in this house." Shane and Ilya both jumped at a voice from behind them. They turned around to find Yuna Hollander standing in the doorway of the room. "Hearing something like that would put Nana in an early grave."

"Can you really call it early if she's a hundred years old?" Ilya said. "And I'm sure you would be devastated, yes?"

Yuna raised her eyebrows at the boys, then she seemed to notice something. She walked towards the two of them, grabbed each of them by the chin, and tilted their faces down to look at her. She looked at Shane's eyes first, then Ilya's.

"Are you both high?"

Shane said, "What, Mom? No, of course not!" at the same time Ilya said, "Yes, we are high."

Yuna released them and hung her face in her hands. "My sons are morons."

Yuna undoubtedly had more to say, but luckily, they were interrupted by Mary and the toddler.

"Oh, thank you guys so much! Two little ones really can be a handful sometimes." she said. "Oh, hi Aunt Yuna. It's good to see you! How are you?"

Yuna smiled at Mary. "Enjoy it while they're young. They just get dumber as they get older."

~

1:56AM

“Well I’m glad you two at least had one good conversation tonight,” Yuna said. It was getting late, and she noticed her eyelids getting heavier as Shane and Ilya’s story drew to a close.

“Yeah,” Shane said. “It was really nice.” He yawned as he said his last word and followed it by blinking a few times quickly. “What about you, Mom? Have any interesting conversations?”

“Well,” Yuna said, “Elizabeth told me that she’d pray for my family. Jim ranted to me for a while about how Alice brings her new boyfriend, Marcus, everywhere. Elizabeth’s daughter, Jill, complained about raising teenage daughters for a while. Though I did have a really nice conversation with your dad’s sister, Kathy.”

~

8:01PM

“Some things never change.”

“For better and for worse.”

“Mostly for worse.”

Yuna was in the middle of an unbearable conversation with David’s sister, Alice, when Kathy came up behind her, put her hand on Yuna’s arm, and apologized for the intrusion, but if she could just get Yuna’s help with something super quickly…

It wasn’t a secret that Yuna didn’t exactly get along great with David’s family. David’s mother made her distaste of Yuna clear from the beginning, and for the most part, the rest of the siblings followed suit. They said that Yuna was too intense for them, too 'uppity.' They could never quite understand why David chose the educated, stubborn, dedicated Yuna over all the quiet, boring white women that David had dated before her.

Kathy was the exception. She was only a year older than David, and she and Yuna clicked as soon as David introduced the two of them at a lunch on the campus where David and Yuna met. They recognized each other’s tenacity and motivation and bonded over teasing David, who was more shy and reserved then than he was now. Kathy was one of the few of David’s relatives who visited David and Yuna when they had Shane. She brought over casseroles and cleaned the house while the new parents napped, and Yuna made sure to return the favor when Kathy had the twins five years later. They drifted apart when Kathy and her husband, Rob, moved to the United States when the twins were young, but she was always Yuna’s saving grace at Hollander family functions. Well, both Kathy and what she usually brought with her…

“Oh, perfect,” Yuna said as Kathy handed her the lit joint. “I was starting to get worried that you’d grown out of this.”

“With this crowd?” Kathy said. “Never.”

The two of them stood at the back of Nana's house, leaning against the white-painted siding as they passed the joint between them.

"What was my sister bothering you about this time?" Kathy asked.

Yuna scoffed. "Which one?"

"Alice," Kathy said. "The conversation I just saved you from."

Yuna rolled her eyes, but it wasn't much of an exaggeration. "Oh, you know. Complaining about her ex-husband. Complaining about her new boyfriend. Gushing about my son-in-law. About what you would expect."

"That woman never gives up," Kathy said.

"She does not."

"Though I guess it gives me an excuse to ask about…that: Shane, your son-in-law, how your life has been these past couple years."

Kathy was also the only Hollander to check in on Yuna and David when the whole Fanmail scandal went down a few years prior. She made it clear that she didn't want to bother them or Shane, but that if they needed anything, she was there for them. It was a sweet gesture, even if there was nothing that could really be done to ease the sudden invasion of privacy that had rocked Shane's life.

Yuna hadn't really talked with anyone but David about it since it happened. Maybe it was the weed tonight that loosened her tongue, or maybe she just missed talking with her sister-in-law.

"Terrifying, shocking, the culmination of my worst nightmare," Yuna said. "But also, life has been better than ever since. Shane is happier, so David and I are happier. It's just a shame what it took to get there."

Kathy shook her head and looked at Yuna with a softness in her eyes. "I couldn't imagine what I would do if it were my kid. Dina's coming out was chaotic enough with some of this crowd's reactions, but if it had been the whole world…" She took a deep breath, and Yuna knew she understood in a way that only another parent could.

"You try to protect them from everything," Yuna said, "to set them up for success. I focused so much on making Shane the best he could be—as a person, at hockey—that I missed that I was also signing him up for a decade of hiding who he was."

"It must have been shocking for everyone when the video came out," Kathy said. "For you especially."

"No," Yuna said, "well—yes, but not for the reason you'd think. David and I had found out a couple years before, so the video itself wasn't that shocking, but seeing your child's personal life smeared across TSN and CBC like it's some celebrity scandal, like he'd done something wrong. I hated it so much."

“I’m sorry,” Kathy said. “I can’t even imagine. So you’d met Shane’s husband before that, right? Before it all came out?”

“Oh, of course,” Yuna said. She figured she’d keep the exact details to herself. “We’d known him for years.”

“That’s good,” Kathy said. She took a last hit off the joint, then put it out. “I haven’t gotten a chance to talk to him tonight, but he seems nice. We don’t get much hockey coverage in Indianapolis, but I’ve heard he’s good. What’s he like?”

“Ilya—” Yuna said, the words came easy, “we love him like a son. It was a shock at first, of course, but we could see it right away. He’s so considerate and caring and funny and thoughtful. He comes over to spend hours doing puzzles with David and help me cook even when Shane isn’t in town. And he loves Shane the way that every mother hopes their child is loved someday.”

Kathy smiled. “Well, it’s a shame I haven’t gotten to meet him yet.”

The two made small talk for another couple minutes about their children and the weather and the Centaurs’ plans for another cup run this year, but soon it was time to go inside before someone noticed they were missing.

Luckily, within the hour, people were saying their goodbyes, and David, Yuna, Shane, and Ilya all piled in the car to head home for the night. As soon as they were out of the neighborhood, David was the first to break the silence.

“Well how was everyone’s night? Did anyone have fun?” Yuna knew that David struggled with his family as much as any of them, but she couldn’t begrudge him starting conversation on a long drive home.

There was silence long enough for it to be awkward, then Shane said, “It was an interesting night.”

Shane and Yuna made eye contact in the rearview mirror. They would be discussing this night when they got home, as they usually did after Hollander family functions.

“It seems like the boys had fun,” Yuna said, “getting high with your cousins. Isn’t that right?”

Shane rolled his eyes. Ilya spoke, “Can you blame us?”

Yuna couldn’t, but she didn’t want to admit that to them.

Suddenly, Ilya leaned forward in his seat. He was sitting in the backseat behind Yuna, but he craned his body between David and Yuna’s seats and looked at Yuna’s face.

“Ilya, buddy, can you buckle your seatbelt? I know you’re in the back, but it’d make me feel safer if you were buckled,” David said.

Ilya ignored it. “Yuna,” he said, careful and delighted in a tone she had heard him use a thousand times with Shane. “Are you high?”

Shane laughed like it was the funniest joke he'd ever heard. Ilya sat back in his seat and buckled his seatbelt. Yuna remained silent. The longer she went without denying it, the quicker Shane's laughter subsided. Yuna looked in the rearview mirror, and saw a shocked look pass across Shane's face. "Mom?" he said. She could see in the mirror that her eyes were as red as theirs.

Yeah, they would be debriefing this later.

End Notes

Kudos and comments are all so loved and appreciated!!

Thnx all for reading!! <3

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