

The Love of a Mother

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The Love of a Mother

by [MabtheWinterQueen](#)

Summary

Ilya's mother does not haunt him like she should. She comes to him in other ways.

Notes

I have read Heated Rivalry and seen the show. I have not read The Long Game or any other Game Changers books because the wait is at least a month on all of them. If this directly contradicts later book canons or something, oops. It probably won't in major ways, but oops anyways.

Boy, I really didn't expect this story to smack me in the face with the convergence of three important things in my life: being queer in a very homophobic environment, the sport I know the most about but forgot I really love, and the horrific trauma of your parental figure's sudden death when you were a child where you were the one who found their body. Ilya Rozanov, world's most relatable man.

It's been a while since my last fic or update and in my defense, I started work as a substitute teacher right before Sneeze In Your Mouth season and I've been sick more this year than I have been since I was a kid.

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

Ilya's mother does not haunt him like she should.

There are no gasping nightmares at his age. Truthfully, he rarely recalls his dreams at all, if he even has them. That is always how grief haunts you, though, in movies. A gasping nightmare, perhaps a sobbing panic, all to be soothed away in someone else's arms. Irina Rozanova does not come to her son in his dreams.

There isn't a pall hanging over his every waking moment, either. Well, kind of. It's hard to describe the fog of depression, looming at the edges of every feeling, but that fog is not Irina either. The pain of losing her is not all he thinks about. It can actually be days without a conscious thought about the end.

Irina haunts her son in other ways.

All of his memories with her are clouded. There is an unease to them, now. A creeping dread at the corners of every bright moment. He can share a memory of happiness with Shane and feel light, but thinking about them alone only brings him closer to thinking about her death. Her “accident” that he spent so long believing he should have seen coming. She would've been an amazing actress.

Irina truly haunts Ilya when he is around Yuna Hollander. He is not quite... *jealous* of her relationship with Shane, and he doesn't think he would have preferred her to his own mother. That's not the right feeling. Yuna is just so *different* from Irina that it brings her into sharp contrast, but even more, it highlights how they are the *same*.

Yuna is... *driven*. Focused. She shows Shane her love through ambition. Through social acceptance rituals, brand deals, hockey analysis. Anything to make him a better fit, give him an easier life.

Irina loved Ilya with words, and when speech failed her, with song. Irina held Ilya long after he had grown too large, too old to pick up. She was always sunny for him, always confident for him, always what he needed when he needed her.

When Yuna needles Shane about Rolex, he feels Irina's hands on his shoulders, holding him. When he sees Yuna interact with strangers, he sees her mask, and his mother's hands are on her own mouth.

Yuna Hollander's mask had frightened Ilya when he first realized it was there. It is different, with strangers and with family, as all masks are, but noticeable when you know what to look for. A mask of normalcy, a mask of “just like you”, of “look no further”. So like Irina's own that it had constricted his throat.

It is not the same mask. Alike, but not. Ilya has come to realize that. Yuna's mask is like Shane's more than Irina's. Studied, careful. Hiding not a deep depression but a social awkwardness and difference that is ill-understood, especially for a woman, an immigrant at that. Different, and yet there is hiding nonetheless.

Yuna has become someone Ilya deeply appreciates. It had taken him a moment to notice, but she mothers him like she mothers Shane now. She's ruthless in her opinions about his own image, his own management. She calls him after every game to comment on his form, his flaws, how to be better. She introduces him to important people – sometimes people he already knows. Every time, he feels his mother's warmth.

...

Shane had never really given much thought to his upbringing before Ilya.

He loves his parents, obviously, of course. They're his parents, and they love him. They're not really the kind of family who says it all the time, but he knows, and they know. It's good.

Shane is a lot like both of his parents. Yuna's love of hockey has been transplanted into his body like it was incubated with him in the womb. His twin. He watches games with them and they all fall into familiarity without words. He has his father's face, not in appearance but in affect. Yuna is much better than both of them at wording things correctly and having the correct expressions. This is just normal in their family.

Shane has never had the opportunity to meet Irina Rozanova, and he thinks that at this point, it's a pretty low probability that he ever will. Still, from what Ilya has told him, he thinks Ilya is a lot like her.

Ilya would probably disagree. Ilya's opinion has been noted and ignored.

Words are important to Ilya. He gets frustrated when English words fail him, and even moreso when Russian words do as well. Spoken love means more than shown love alone for Ilya, but he'll never ask for it. He needs the words to be impromptu, meant. Earnest. When all else fails, Ilya will sing his feelings to Shane. Always alone, usually when he thinks Shane is asleep.

He wishes he could fall asleep to it, but Ilya has a very bad habit of going distractingly flat.

Ilya's face is so expressive. It's like Yuna's, but more genuine. Shane can't always recognize what emotion it is but there always is one on his face. Always open, warm. When Ilya talks about his mother, Shane can only see Ilya's warm face in his mind.

Ilya is tactile in a motherly way, too. He likes to hold Shane, and be held. It's very rare for him to turn it down, even when they've argued, even when he's clearly in a bad mood. More than holding him, Ilya is constantly touching. Touching their arms together, grabbing his shoulders, pressings their thighs snug. Ilya loves touch in a way that Shane imagines Irina instilled in him. He can see her in his mind's eye, with Ilya's face, holding her young son, teaching him that there is love within her touch. Shaping him into who he is now.

Shane has never met Irina Rozanova. He never will. Through loving Ilya, he thinks he has grown to love her, too.

...

Yuna had spent years planning how she would interact with Shane's wife.

Passively, in the background, she considered the ways in which she would need to be different for a daughter-in-law than she could be with her son. Obviously, it would need some tweaking once she actually *met* the girl, but it's good to be prepared.

Her plans changed as Shane grew up, seemingly entirely uninterested in girls. Well, that's all right. A husband would be fine. She'd just have fewer new things to consider.

Of course, she was wrong.

In fairness, she couldn't have been expected to plan for Shane to marry a fellow player. Especially not *Rozanov*. She had expected a nice boy, maybe from Montreal, maybe from Ottawa, perhaps maybe even American. She never could've guessed Ilya Rozanov.

Ilya is... quite different from Shane. He's quite different from his own curated image – Yuna hates his manager. She doesn't know his manager but she hates them. They make terrible decisions and market him in a horrible way. Anyways. Ilya is quite different from his persona. He's quieter – though it would be hard not to be. Politer, too, in the same way. There is something wounded about him. Something that tells Yuna that he needs her guidance.

Well. Yuna has successfully raised one hockey player. She knows what to do with this one.

End Notes

Ilya's grief really resonates with me. I thought I'd try a little projection.

On a lighter note, Happy Top Surgery Eve to me! And the fun fact of the fic: opals are not minerals because they do not have a crystalline structure due to how aqueous they are. The H₂O in their chemical structure unbalances it and causes them to not have any consistent crystalline structure, and that's one of the things you must have to count as a mineral.

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