

Where you are wanted

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Where you are wanted

by [GingerBaggins](#)

Summary

This was different. This wasn't hockey, or a competition, or a well-honed skill. This was her chance to welcome Ilya to their family.

The five times Yuna Hollander opened her heart to Ilya, and the one time Ilya found a home within it.

Notes

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

Yuna was in the car before the video finished playing, ignoring David's pleas to remain calm. She simply could not.

She paused only to press dial on Shane's number before setting the phone in her lap and turning the ignition, pulling out of their driveway and heading straight for Montreal. The team flight got in last night; he would be home.

If she were in a more rational frame of mind, Yuna would concede that she probably shouldn't be driving right now. Not while she was spitting fire and gripping the wheel so tight that the leather creaked under her hands, and not for so long. There was no other option, though, because Shane would be alone and stewing and worrying and *how dare that reporter?*

Fine, it hadn't been Montreal's best game, and fine, it hadn't been Shane's best night, but what right did that give anyone to go for such a low blow? What passes did the media give themselves to be so intrusive? To assign such blame? Yuna gritted her teeth and tried to focus on the traffic lights.

"A lot of missed opportunities tonight," the reporter, though Yuna had a few other names to call him, had asked after shoving a microphone in a still-sweating Shane's face. *"How much has the recent rumour mill impacted you?"*

And Shane had been so unaware. *"What rumour mill?"* he'd asked, brows furrowed.

"There has been a lot of speculation regarding your personal life this past week, namely your, uh, romantic preferences. Could that be the cause of tonight's distraction?"

Most of the time, Yuna was overjoyed that Shane preferred to remain as offline as possible. His social media was a long list of promotional campaigns and the odd, captionless photograph of a lake. He rarely had to confront the nonsense that kicked up every few months when Twitter got bored, but this time it had been shoved under his nose mere minutes after a brutal defeat.

Yuna had seen it all, of course. She was well aware of every spiteful headline and speculative article. *The Truth About Shane Hollanders' Quiet Love Life*, one such magazine read. *SPILLED: Inside Sources Confirm Shane Hollander's Secret Sexual Scandal*, another blasted. *Is The NHL's Poster Boy...For The Boys?* The headline's printed.

"Bastards," Yuna muttered, flicking on her indicator.

Shane's phone went to voicemail, and she supposed that was probably a good thing; if he'd answered, that would mean his phone was on his person, and god only knows what he might be reading.

It didn't matter if the articles were true or not, if the inside sources existed or not, if any of it was baseless or not—it was nobody's business but Shane's. If he wanted to come out, he

would do it when he was good and ready, not because some asshole with a badge pushed a microphone under his nose and demanded it.

It had been a few months since Yuna had learned the truth, though to say she was surprised would be a categorical lie. Her suspicions had been building for a long, long time before the fateful day David had stumbled through the door, white as a sheet, mumbling something about ‘*Shane kissing...I think...Christ, Yuna, I think he was kissing Ilya Rozanov.*’

There had indeed been some shocking news delivered that day, but Shane’s sexuality was not it.

Shane had been so nervous, so shocked, even in the face of the unwavering love his parents had for him. Yuna dreaded to think how severe his current spiral had to be, following such an intrusive, unwelcome interview.

To his credit, he’d remained calm in his immediate response. “*I’m happy to discuss the game,*” he’d answered, gulping once, “*and only the game.*”

It was more assertive than Yuna could remember seeing him be in post-game interviews before, and it made her feel...proud. But she knew Shane, she knew his tells, she knew that he would have started to freak out the second he knew nobody was watching. And that’s why she was heading for Montreal.

She should have looked at the post-game interviews sooner. He’d been alone all night with this, no doubt working himself into a panic. Yuna fully expected to walk in and find him obsessing over food preparation or pushing himself beyond his limit in the gym. Worse yet, he might just be...sitting there. Staring into space. Not breathing.

It took less than two hours to pull into his driveway.

Shane had long ago given her a key to the house and an open invitation; letting herself in was nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it was almost as natural as stepping through her own front door. What *was* out of the ordinary was the sound she was met with. At first, she thought it was the wretched, ruinous sound of Shane sobbing. Then she paused, listened again, and those sobs turned into...laughter? *Oh god*, this was a spiral she hadn’t encountered before.

Regardless, it stopped the second she closed the door behind her.

“It’s me!” she called, unsure of how to proceed.

“Mom?” Shane’s unsteady voice came, followed by a bit of scrambling. “What are you doing here?”

“I...can I come in?”

“Uh, yeah, sure.”

Yuna hurried towards the lounge, heart in her throat, only to find that Shane was not lying on the floor laughing to himself, nor staring at the ceiling and losing his mind, nor surrounding himself with printed out versions of every insidious article she’d spent the week avoiding.

Instead, he was half perched on the sofa, playstation controller on his lap, tucked into the side of—

“Oh.” Yuna stopped short. “Hi, Roz—Ilya.”

The Russian smiled back, the mild tension in his eyes masked well. “Hi.”

“You’re...here.”

It came off a lot ruder than she’d intended it to; it was only that...Rozanov wasn’t *supposed* to be here. Ottawa had a game in Vancouver tomorrow, which meant they had practice this morning and a flight this evening; he should be at home. Yet, here he was.

“I am,” Rozanov said carefully.

Shane set the controller aside and stood. “Mom? Are you okay?”

“Me?” Yuna was having difficulty catching up, which was unlike her. “Yes, of course. I was worried about *you*.”

“What? Why—*oh*, the interview?” Shane pressed a palm over his eyes and blew out a sharp laugh. “Jesus, there are two of you now.”

Yuna looked to Rozanov, who merely shrugged, and that's when it all clicked. Yuna had watched that interview and immediately driven two hours to Shane’s house, and so had Ilya Rozanov. Despite his morning practice, despite the flight she was certain he still had to catch, he’d come all the way here...and why wouldn’t he? He loved Shane, and Shane needed him.

In hindsight, Yuna felt rather silly for not considering this possibility.

“Sorry,” she said, bewildered. “I called, but you—I should have waited to hear back from you first.”

“No, it’s okay. But you really didn’t have to come all this way,” Shane said, gesturing to the couch. “Wanna sit?”

She wasn’t sure if she should, after interrupting what was clearly a stolen moment between the pair, but Rozanov was already clearing the coffee table and rearranging the cushions, like he’d done it a thousand times before. The domesticity of it was as bizarre as it was wonderful.

Yuna hadn’t yet been able to spend much time with Rozanov—so little, in fact, that she still struggled to refer to him as anything other than *Rozanov*, even with Shane’s frequent use of his first name. She was well within the process of rebuilding her image of the man from a cutthroat, loud-mouthed brute with lightning-fast hockey legs into...her son’s partner. A man beloved. A man who held her son’s hands when he panicked and would drive for four hours on a busy day just to check on him.

Family.

“So, you’re...okay?” she asked tentatively, to which Shane shrugged, looking genuinely unperturbed.

“It wasn’t great, but I’m okay now,” he said, and she believed it. He was okay now, because Rozanov was here. “You should stay. The guestroom is already made up if you want to drive home tomorrow.”

Yuna glanced again at Rozanov, who smiled tightly.

“I will be leaving soon,” Rozanov—*Ilya*, she scorned herself, said, offering her a glass of water. “Team flight to catch.”

“Vancouver?” she asked, as if she didn’t know.

Rozanov nodded, looking more than a little awkward, and Yuna realised with devastating clarity that she was the cause of his discomfort. He’d come all this way to be with Shane, and she’d barged in unannounced and stared at him like he’d grown another head.

“You should beat them easily, most of their players are injured,” Yuna said, and wondered what on earth had cursed her tongue; Rozanov knew this already.

He tempered a crooked smile. “Hope so.”

Before she could think it through, she was saying, “Shame you have to leave so soon. The next time you both have a few days off, let us cook for you?”

Rozanov blinked at her, unable to hide his shock, eyes flickering to Shane for what looked a lot like reassurance. Shane smiled at him so warmly that Yuna felt the need to turn her head, maybe pick up her discarded bag and bolt out of there, leaving them with a tide of apologies and a moment of coveted privacy.

But then Rozanov turned back to her, cleared his throat, and said, “Yes, okay. Is nice of you to offer.”

“Great,” she said, and it *was* great, it *would* be great.

Ilya left not ten minutes later, which she felt more than a little guilty about. Shane walked him to the door, and Yuna did her very best to busy herself with chopping vegetables to afford them a private goodbye. It lasted a while, her stomach twisting with every passing second. When would they have another moment together, she wondered? How much of their year was spent like this, like ships in the night?

Shane stepped back into the room while she was dicing a carrot, a sad smile on his flushed face. Yuna elected to ignore the beard burn on his chin.

“I’m sorry I intruded,” she exhaled, setting down the knife. “I saw the interview and didn’t even think—”

“Mom, it’s really fine. Ilya couldn’t stay, anyway.”

She nodded and got back to the task at hand, swapping jobs with Shane until they had a perfectly good soup simmering away on the stove. It was impossible not to notice how often Shane checked his phone, even just a quick pass of his hand over his pocket, as though he was waiting for something.

Two and a half hours later, while they were watching Buffalo play Detroit, it finally buzzed. Shane snatched it up in a heartbeat, a bright smile breaking out across his face. Yuna didn't need to ask who it was, but still, she couldn't help it.

"Did Ilya get back okay?"

Shane startled, clutching his phone to his chest like she'd caught him in the act of stealing cookies from a jar. It broke her heart to see how instinctively he hid this lovely thing between them.

"Yeah," he said, clearing his throat. "He was nearly late for the flight."

"He's going to be tired."

"I said the same. It was unreasonable of him to drive up and back in a day, but he..."

"Loves you?" Yuna finished.

And, well, there was nothing for it. Yuna thought she'd witnessed every single one of her son's smiles: the shy ones, the proud ones, the nervous ones, the false ones, the toothy ones, the silly ones...but never, in all the years, had she seen the one that settled on his face now. It was utterly, undeniably besotted.

"Yeah," he said softly, "he does."

Yuna stopped to cross off seeded bagels from the shopping list, which was almost complete. It was imperative that she get absolutely everything she needed; she had a good impression to make.

It was a rare mid-season circumstance that allowed Shane and Ilya to have two whole days off at the same time. Somehow, she'd convinced them to spend one of their evenings at her dinner table. Shane would stay with Ilya, of course, but before that, they would eat like a real family, for the very first time.

Yuna and David both agreed that it was better to play it safe with the food and go for something they knew would be a hit...and fit in with Shane's '*performance diet*.' This meant salmon, vegetables, and a few sides that she knew Shane would not touch. She also knew Shane would not look twice at any dessert, but it wasn't just Shane anymore, was it? Ilya might want something sweet, and Yuna refused to have nothing on hand if he did.

She marched to the frozen aisle and went digging through the ice cream drawers. Shane had already informed her that there was very little Ilya would not eat, but that didn't mean she knew what he *wanted* to eat—was he a mint choc chip guy? Plain vanilla? Chocolate fudge? A Google search for 'Ilya Rozanov Hockey Ice Cream' yielded very few results, so Yuna had to rely on a good old bit of guesswork.

In the end, she figured that cookies and cream was enough of a crowd pleaser. If it wasn't, she would just...go and get something else.

There was nothing else to tick off her list, and yet Yuna felt a sense of dissatisfaction. Salmon and ice cream weren't much of an impression, were they? Ilya could get that any time, from anyone. He'd probably already had it several times this week, certainly if Shane had done any of their cooking. This was her opportunity to finally know the man her son was planning to spend the rest of his life with; *good enough* wasn't going to cut it.

Yuna kicked the cart and steered it onwards, eyes latching onto the overhead aisle names; she'd never spent much time in the one she now sought, but she was absolutely certain it existed, and that she might find—*ah*, yes, there. The World Food aisle came into view, sparsely populated by boxes and bags with bold labels in languages Yuna couldn't even name.

Russian, though, was particularly distinctive.

The selection was limited, to say the least, but it wasn't *nothing*. Yuna had no idea what was good, or what Ilya would like, or if any of these snacks were even authentically Russian, but she supposed it was the thought that counted. A sweep of her arm scooped up pastries, bread rings, what looked like marshmallows, and giant walnuts. All of it fell into the cart, piling with her panic. Was this absurd? Possibly. Was she going to buy it all anyway? Of course.

Shane and Ilya arrived in the early evening, all wide smiles and shoulder brushes, latching onto each other in that subtle way they always managed. David met them with open arms, Yuna met them with the clammiest hands she'd ever had. Not even in Shane's NHL debut had she felt this nervous—naturally, Shane was *always* meant for the league. There had been nothing to worry about. This was different. This wasn't hockey, or a competition, or a well-honed skill. This was her chance to welcome Ilya to their family.

"Great game yesterday," she said to Ilya, who did not look at all surprised to learn she'd watched it. Shane had clearly prepped him well.

"Would be better if we won," Ilya replied with a good-natured shrug.

And, well, she wasn't going to argue with that.

"Hope you're both hungry, we've made enough to feed the street," David said, ushering everyone through the house.

Shane flinched. Yuna noticed. So did Ilya.

“Sounds great, thanks dad,” Shane said, but the words may as well have been forced through his teeth.

Yuna, clammy palms forgotten, looked to Ilya. He was already looking at her, something unspoken in his eyes, something fearful, something close to a plea.

“Ilya, will you help me dish up?” she asked. “Shane can set the table.”

“Course,” Ilya said, giving Shane a parting kiss to the temple before following her hurried footsteps into the kitchen. They didn’t even get over the threshold before he spoke again, “You see it too, yes?”

Yuna turned to face him, leaning back against the kitchen counter. “Is it becoming a problem?”

“I think, maybe.” Ilya crossed his arms over his chest, hands clutching his sides in what appeared to be self-soothing. “He’s getting more restrictive every time we see each other. Was not sure, but if you notice, too...” Ilya ran a palm over his face and inhaled slowly. “I will speak with him.”

“Do you think he’ll listen?” Yuna knew her son well enough to know the answer, but perhaps this man, who pulled moon-eyes from the boy who’d spent his lifetime avoiding eye contact, would have more success.

“Probably not the first time,” Ilya admitted, frowning. “But is important. I’ll keep an eye on it.”

Yuna didn’t *love* taking a back seat here, but Shane was not a child anymore. If anyone *could* bring this up, it was going to be Ilya. So, she blew out a slow breath and nodded.

“You’ll let me know how it goes?”

Ilya smiled. “I don’t have your number.”

“Oh.” That seemed quite silly, in hindsight. What if, god forbid, Shane got hurt in a game? How would she have let Ilya know? It should have been the first thing they’d done. “Well, don’t leave without it.”

“Okay,” he said, then his eyes drifted over her shoulder, widening when they landed on the row of unknown snacks that littered the countertop. “Is that oreshki?”

“I’m not going to pretend I know what any of it is, but I thought you might—” she winced at how desperate her own voice sounded, “enjoy them.”

Ilya was already reaching for the bag, looking younger than she could ever remember seeing him. “I’ve not had these in years. You have zefir, too?”

“Yeah,” she said, guessing.

“This is very...thoughtful of you.” He didn’t look like he trusted that word, so she gave him a brief smile. “You did not have to.”

“Yes I did. I want you to feel comfortable here,” she said plainly.

Ilya looked taken aback, even more than he had been by the snacks themselves. He swallowed hard, blinked harder, and said, “I already do.”

Yuna felt her entire body relax. There was lingering worry for Shane, which could not be helped, but she knew in her bones that he was in good hands. Hands that were currently clutching a bag of shell-like marshmallows as if they were jewels.

“There’s also ice cream,” she added.

Ilya’s eyebrows shot up. “What flavour?”

“Cookies and cream.”

“Ah.” He slammed a hand over his heart and tipped his head back. “I am never leaving.”

With that, Yuna silently declared the evening a success long before a single plate had been served.

“He’s not answering his phone.”

“Could he be sleeping?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. He was really out of it when I spoke to him earlier.”

“Did he take his temperature?”

“I don’t think so. He wasn’t making much sense.”

Yuna sighed, pushing away from her desktop and the unending open spreadsheets that filled it. “How far away are you?”

“God knows. Traffic is crazy. I’m about two hours out even with clear roads.”

Yuna was already moving towards the door. “Does he have any medicine there?”

“He said so, but—”

“But he’s feverish, got it. I’ll take some.”

Shane's sigh was shaky, and Yuna knew it had nothing to do with their call's connection. "Thanks, mom."

"How do I get in? Is there a key?" she asked, slipping into her shoes.

"Yeah, there's a code. 1208. I'll text it to you."

"No, you won't," Yuna barked. "You're driving. You shouldn't even be calling me right now."

"Mom—"

"I'm going now. Drive safe, I'll keep you updated."

Shane's voice was small, absolutely riddled with worry when he finally said, "Thank you."

The drive to Ilya's was not one Yuna was overly familiar with, only having done it three or four times over the years. Her GPS guided her through back roads to avoid the traffic, getting there in an impressive forty minutes. She left her car in his driveway, haphazardly taking up more space than necessary, and ran to punch the code into the keypad.

It wasn't until she was in his house that she realised what a terrible idea this might be. Ilya was, by Shane's account, out of his mind with a fever. He may not take too kindly to someone bursting into his house unannounced and uninvited. All the lights were on, but it was eerily quiet.

"Ilya?" she called.

Nothing.

With a steadying breath, Yuna kicked off her shoes and began her ill-advised hunt for a large, sickly Russian. She checked the lounge, the kitchen, the office and the downstairs bathroom, all to no avail. She took the stairs two at a time, calling his name as she went.

"Ilya, are you okay?"

Nothing.

She went straight for the master bedroom, only to be met with a confronting sight. Ilya did not share her son's need for everything to be neatly in its place at all times, but he was no slob; this room looked as though a bomb had gone off. Panic shot down her spine, cold and laced with dread.

"Ilya?" she tried again.

Finally, a croaked return, "Shane?"

Yuna bent forward with relief. "Not quite. It's Yuna. Are you in the bathroom?"

"Uh...I...huh?"

Yuna decided the prospect of finding him in a state of undress was less daunting than the prospect of not finding him at all, so she hopscotched over the strewn clothes and pushed her way into the en suite. Ilya was there, folded in on himself and shivering by the toilet, sweat pouring off his forehead. He groaned and turned into the tile when she entered, his shoulders giving one great big shudder.

“No...” he groaned. “No, no, I’m fine. He should not have called you.”

“You’re not a great liar, Ilya.”

It wasn’t true. Ilya and Shane were seasoned liars at this point. Today, however, was a different story altogether. Ilya waved her away with a limp arm and tried to get to his feet, only to slip back to the ground.

“Oh, Ilya, come on...” Yuna rushed forward and wrapped her arms around him, heaving with all her might. She was in shape, but Ilya Rozanov was *not* a light man. “You’ve got to help me.”

He mumbled something in Russian that Yuna chose to believe meant ‘*Thank you very much, Yuna, I will take myself to bed now*’. Unfortunately, his assistance remained limited. It took fifteen minutes to get him to the bed, and a further five to get him on it. He proceeded to kick the duvet off when she tried to tuck him under it...twice.

“Too hot,” he croaked.

“I’ll open the window.”

“Too cold.”

“I’ll get a hot water bottle.”

“Too—”

“Ilya, shut up.” She pressed the duvet down over him and touched a palm to his forehead; it was scorching. “God, you’re on fire.”

“Thank you.”

“Do you have a thermometer?”

Ilya twisted sideways and squeezed his eyes closed, shaking violently. Honestly, Yuna was considering calling an ambulance at this point. If his temperature was extreme, she’d do it.

“You stay here, I’ll be back in a minute,” she said, patting the damp curls atop his head.

Ilya said something that might have been ‘pain’ or might have been ‘Shane’. Yuna knew him well enough at this point to make an educated guess as to which.

“He’s on the way,” she assured him. “He might even be speeding. Let’s hope not.”

“He’d never,” Ilya whispered.

Yuna wouldn’t be so sure. With one more pat to his head, she shuffled out of the room and began sifting through the en suite, finding the cupboards almost entirely empty. Next was the kitchen, then the downstairs bathroom, until eventually she had to call for help.

“How is he doing?” Shane said in lieu of *hello*.

“Not great,” she admitted, scanning the open drawers. “Do you know where he keeps the thermometer?”

“Shit. See the chest of drawers in the hallway? The one by the office?”

Yuna ran to it. “Which drawer?”

“Bottom left. Is he really bad? Should we call an—”

“I’ll check his temperature first, then we’ll see.” The thermometer was in the back of the drawer in a small plastic container. “This is a strange place to keep it.”

“I told him this.” Shane hissed under his breath. “Another fucking red light. I really need to be there.”

“Don’t you dare speed.”

“I...I won’t.”

They were both awful liars today, it seemed. “I’ll let you know how it goes.”

Yuna tucked the thermometer in one pocket, grabbed a fresh bottle of water and Tylenol, and ran for the master bedroom. Ilya was somewhat awake when she entered, half-in and half-out of the duvet, muttering incoherently.

“Shane?” he asked, eyes closed.

“Not yet.”

Yuna kicked the clothes away from under her feet as she marched to the bed and set her haul down. Before Ilya could protest, she shoved the thermometer in his mouth and watched with bated breath as the red line rose. It wasn’t great, but it also wasn’t... life-threatening.

“Hmf,” said Ilya.

“I know,” Yuna cooed. “Sit up for a moment and take some meds, please.”

Ilya shook his head, but he was also pushing himself to his elbows. Yuna slotted the Tylenol into his mouth and brought the water bottle to his lips, tipping it slowly while he sipped. When finished, Ilya flopped back against the pillow with a little whimper. It was so childlike, so vulnerable, that Yuna felt her eyes burn.

“Feel like dog,” he murmured.

Yuna looked around the room, which was in a state that only a feverish man with too long limbs could accomplish, and decided that it would do well to clean it before Ilya regained awareness. She threw socks into the wash basket and folded clean Ottawa Centaurs t-shirts while Ilya lay foetal and let the Tylenol take, pausing every minute to check that he was still okay.

It occurred to her, with sharp devastation, that Ilya was likely not used to being taken care of in times of illness. She did not know the exact details of his familial history, and Shane would never say a word without Ilya’s explicit permission, but she knew enough. His mother had died when he was only twelve...had he been alone for every fever since then? For every bug and every injury? He had Shane now, of course, which meant he would never suffer alone again, but he also had *Yuna*.

The floor was clean, the windows were open, the bedsheets would need to be changed at some point, but it was more important that Ilya stay in them right now. She checked the clock; Shane should be here soon enough, but until then, it was up to her.

“Ilya?” she asked quietly, dragging one of the armchairs over to the bed and sitting beside him. “Will you have a bit more water?”

“No,” Ilya grunted, but didn’t fight when she brought the bottle to his lips again.

It would take significantly more than a few sporadic sips of water to rehydrate him, but that was a job for later when he was lucid again. For now, he needed rest, and she was going to ensure he got it. She brushed her fingers through his curls, the same way she used to for Shane when he was too sick to go to school. He would snuggle up on the sofa and rest his head in her lap, and she would stroke his hair until slumber overtook him.

Ilya mumbled something in Russian, something quiet and frightful and desperate that made her want to find more blankets to wrap him in. Instead, she remained where she was, brushing his hair back from his clammy head, over and over again until the rhythm lulled him to sleep.

She called Shane, who was now less than twenty minutes away, to update him, then took Ilya’s temperature again. When she saw it lower, she almost cheered. Ilya managed two more sips of water and muttered several more words that she didn’t understand, falling into a deep, soundless sleep in the moments between.

The downstairs door burst open twenty-five minutes later. When Shane finally stumbled into the room, he looked almost as rough as Ilya.

“Is he—is he okay?” he panted, eyes locked onto the sleeping man.

“Nice and steady, he just needs rest...and probably more medicine in a few hours.”

Shane was nodding, seemingly unable to stop, as he tripped over himself to reach the bed. Perhaps it was the mother in her that noted how he’d not bothered to take off his shoes at the

front door—something that was as second nature to Shane as breathing. It ceased mattering the second Shane lowered himself to kneel by Ilya's head and reached out the gentlest of hands.

It took less than one second of his touch for Ilya to recognise it.

“*Shane*,” he croaked.

“Sorry I'm late,” Shane replied, sniffing back tears as he bent forward to kiss Ilya's forehead.

Yuna might have warned him about the risks of catching whatever Ilya had, might have told him that Ilya was due more water in five minutes, might have given him the full run-down of Ilya's slowly decreasing temperature, but she couldn't, because there was a rather large lump in her throat.

Shane didn't care about catching whatever Ilya had enough to keep a distance for the very same reason Yuna had no reservations about sitting at his bedside and stroking his hair.

They loved him.

Yuna wasn't sure if Ilya had been raised with impeccable manners or if he just loved lording his helpfulness over Shane, but she would never complain about having help with the dishes.

“Is my third Yahtzee win in a row,” Ilya hummed, smirking as he dried the plate with a towel.

“It's unbecoming to gloat,” Yuna said.

Ilya snorted. “You stood on a chair and screamed the last time you won.”

Yuna had no defence for that, so she changed the subject. “I was going to go to the farmers' market on Sunday, if you wanted to join.”

“Obviously.”

“Shane is welcome to join, but...”

They laughed; Shane enjoyed cooking, enjoyed food preparation, was doing remarkably well with his recovery diet, but would never enjoy the bustle of the farmers' market, and they both knew it. Yuna handed over another plate, and Ilya got to drying it.

“Has he ever enjoyed crowds?” Ilya asked.

“Hmm, he enjoys a full arena,” Yuna mused. “But off-ice? No, never. You know that picture in the hallway, the one of him at hockey camp?”

Ilya smiled. “You mean where he is standing separately from the rest of the group?”

“That’s it. He was seven there, and I don’t think we could have bribed him with anything to stand closer.”

“Is one of my favourites, he looks so mad.” Ilya was fully beaming at the plate as he set it down. “Not as good as the goalie pad.”

Yuna felt a rush of fond nostalgia at the mention of it. Little Shane, aged 5, sleeping atop a goalie’s shinpad after a long game. She couldn’t even remember who the pad had belonged to now, but whoever they were, they hadn’t woken him.

“He was a cute kid,” she said, mostly to herself, but also because she knew Ilya would reply with—

“Not such a bad adult, either.”

Yuna bit back a smile and began working the grime off a pan, just enough to safely run it through the dishwasher. The house, these walls, were the pillars of Shane’s childhood; he’d grown up here, learned hockey on the surrounding lakes, gone to school nearby, scraped his knees on the driveway out front. Between basement and beams, a lifetime of firsts: first steps, first tooth, first words, first trophy, first tears. All of it made up the very foundations of this home, and now Ilya could share in it all.

The pan slipped from her hands.

“Yuna?” Ilya asked, but she could hardly hear him.

Share.

Ilya could share it all.

But could he? He was a part of this family; there was no denying, the ring on his finger cemented it even if words had not. But was that enough? Where was his history? Where held his first steps, first tooth, first tears? He was here now, safe and warm and welcome in these walls, but he was still missing from the foundations.

“Do you have any of yours, or are they all back in Russia?” she asked quietly.

Ilya, understandably, looked at her with concern. “My what?”

“Pictures.”

“Oh.” He turned away sharply. Years ago, before she’d known him, she would have assumed he was angry with her—not anymore. “I, uh, yes, I think I have some.”

Yuna pulled her hands from the soapy water and dried them quickly, wanting to ensure her full attention was on Ilya for this. “They should be on the wall of a home somewhere.”

“Shane said the same,” he mumbled.

Yuna knew, on a surface level, that what she was about to say was odd. That he might not appreciate it, that he might find it too forward, too much, too peculiar. But he and Shane were married now, and Ilya *was* a part of this family. It suddenly felt extremely important that he *knew* it, as she did.

“If you are comfortable,” she began tentatively, “I’d like it to be here.”

Ilya turned towards her slowly, confusion and tender hope in the edges of his eyes. “You want to hang them here?”

“I do, yes. Would you like that?”

For a moment, Ilya didn’t move, didn’t blink, hardly even breathed. Then, so subtly she might have missed it, had she not been watching so intently, he inclined his head. One quick, simple nod.

Pleased, Yuna returned to the sink and resumed her attack on the pan. Ilya said nothing more about it, but when the dishes were done and their hands were dry, he wrapped one arm around her shoulders and squeezed tightly.

A week later, under the late afternoon sun, Yuna directed David as he hammered fresh nails into the walls. On them hung three pictures: Ilya, aged 5, knee deep in the snow. Ilya, aged 9, holding a hockey stick and smiling toothlessly. Ilya, aged 7, sitting on his mother's lap.

Yuna felt the house settle deeper into the ground, like fresh roots had sprouted, and smiled at the framed faces of her beautiful, unexpected family.

It wasn’t that Yuna had any doubts. When it came to Hockey, Yuna Hollander *never* had any doubts. It was just the fact that it was the playoffs, game seven of the series, and a win for Ottawa would send them straight to the final. If they made it to the final...

Well, Shane would be furious if she were to even think it, and she could hardly blame him for holding onto superstitions at a time like this.

There were three minutes on the clock, and Ottawa were up by one, which meant that nobody was even considering relaxing. Anything could happen. Three minutes may as well have been a whole period—a whole year, even. Yuna had bitten her nails to the quick, leaving the scattered remains on the floor of their family seating. David wasn’t faring much better; his hair was in a state of complete disarray from all the tugging.

Shane dove over the boards, brushing Ilya’s shoulder as they swapped out, a brief word from Captain to Alternate that could have been anything from ‘*I love you*’ to ‘*don’t you dare shoot from your backhand*’. Yuna supposed it was likely to be both, in that exact order.

Shane scooped up the puck and took off on a breakaway, sending Yuna to her feet, her hands to her throat, and her heart to the sky. He fired long for the net, hitting the post by the finest of margins, but it was enough for Luca to score on the rebound. The roar of the crowd was so earsplitting that Yuna could hardly hear herself scream.

Without thought, she turned on her heel to celebrate with the crowd, arms above her head. Someone passed her a beer, and she drank it, hating and loving every gulp. David was shouting too, maybe even dancing, if his frantic flailing could be referred to as such. Towels were being whipped like helicopters throughout the stands, the goal music was echoed by the crowd, and up on the jumbotron for all to witness—though distinctly without her knowledge—Yuna Hollander was caught jumping like a kangaroo.

On the arena screens, and the screens of those watching across the world, her jersey could be seen in all its glory; two names, two numbers, one woman cheering for them both.

“Shane, this is a nightmare.”

On the other end of the line, Shane sighed deeply. “It’s just okra.”

“*Just* okra?” he echoed incredulously. “Wait till Yuna comes over and say it again.”

“I wouldn’t dare.”

“Hmm, exactly.” Ilya scanned the aisle again, as though the okra would magically appear. “I’ve already been to three stores.”

“Jesus, Ilya. She’s not going to mind.”

Ilya shook his head. “Is important.”

There was a weighted silence, and Ilya knew he’d been caught. These days, it was nearly impossible to hide anything from Shane, even over a phone call—he hated it almost as much as he loved it.

“She loves you,” Shane said softly. “You *can’t* get it wrong, even if you served her a slice of buttered toast.”

Deep down, in the very core of him, he knew Shane was right. Still, he wanted to try. “What else do we need?”

Shane, who was currently on media duty with Harris and therefore managed to avoid the last-minute Mother’s Day prep, pondered this for an aggravatingly long time. “We’ve already got flowers arriving, I can’t think of anything else.”

Ilya looked around the store, eyes darting to every display until finally landing on something that made his blood run cold. “Did you get her a card?”

“Yeah.”

“Should *I* get her a card?”

A pause, then, “I assumed you would sign mine.”

It was a fair assumption, after all, it’s what they’d been doing for years. Shane bought a card, Ilya would sign it, and Shane would hand it over. It was nice, but a little impersonal, which Ilya didn’t *want* it to be.

“Would it be weird if I got her one?” he asked, turning towards a stack of bread rolls to seek privacy; nobody tended to bother him here, but he still didn’t want anyone overhearing the tremor in his voice.

Shane chuckled warmly, the sound flowing through the speaker and into Ilya’s veins. “Not weird at all. I think she’d like that.”

“Okay.”

“I’ll be home soon, and we’ll get started on the cooking.”

Ilya smirked. “Straight away? After I heroically went out to buy the vegetables you forgot? Do I not deserve a *thank you* first?”

“Find the okra and we’ll see,” Shane said, but his voice had already taken on that breathless quality that told Ilya, under no uncertain terms, that he was indeed in for a thorough *thank you*. “Gotta go. I love you.”

“Say it in Russian.”

“Ya tebya lyublyu.”

“And you, sweetheart.”

As the call ended, Ilya squared his shoulders, lifted his chin, and set off to inspect the selection of cards.

Yuna and David were punctual as always, bearing gifts as always, and engulfed them in firm hugs...as always. Ilya was so bent out of shape about his card selection that he almost dropped the bottle of wine David handed over. Shane was quick to catch it, and Ilya had never loved him more than in that moment.

It was a thought he had several times a day, but that diminished nothing.

“Yuna, I, uh,” Ilya wasn’t usually one to stumble over his words so severely. He cleared his throat. “Here, this is for you.”

The card cut through the space between them, and Yuna—delightful, dark-eyed Yuna—took it with a small smile. Her nails made quick work of the envelope, and Ilya realised it was a bit presumptuous to hand her a card before Shane did. But Shane was watching with glassy, soft eyes and a doting smile, so he didn't linger in the guilt for long.

Like her son, Yuna was often betrayed by her eyes. They had that same depth, that same warmth, and that same tendency to glaze over when she was trying not to cry. Ilya felt like he was holding his breath the entire time she read the card. It wasn't anything particularly moving; Ilya was no writer. But it was a simple, honest thanks for a person who had come to mean so very much to him.

"Thank you, Ilya," Yuna said, reaching out to squeeze his arm before swiping furiously at her cheeks. "I actually got something for you, too."

That surprised him. Yuna was a generous guest, always bringing something to the rare dinners they hosted, but they'd *already* handed over a bottle of wine. So, Ilya's heart constricted to the point of pain when Yuna pulled a bottle of vodka from her purse. Not just vodka, but good vodka.

"Is not *my* day," he said, taking the bottle anyway, already salivating at the thought of it.

"No, and I know that Russian Mother's Day isn't until November," Yuna began. Ilya felt his knees buckle. It was nothing short of a miracle that he stayed upright, "but I thought we could raise a glass to Irina later, if you wanted."

If he wanted.

What a ridiculous, beautiful understatement.

Ilya could do nothing but hug her, both arms wrapped around her shoulders, not even stopping to wipe away the tears that clouded his vision. From the corner of his eye, he could see Shane blinking rapidly, could hear David clearing his throat, and it was all just so much, so perfect. He held on to that feeling for as long as he could.

Later, when they'd enjoyed an okra-less dinner without complaint and bickered over four games of Yahtzee, Ilya finally poured the vodka. He didn't even mind that Yuna mixed hers with cranberry juice—Shane knew better than to try it, and that's all that mattered.

As they each raised a glass, he traced the cross around his neck and felt, for the first time in a long time, wholly at peace. He hoped, wherever his mother was now, that she knew he was loved, that he was well, that he was happy. He hoped, above all else, that she felt it too.

End Notes

The sexual tension between me and pulling all-nighters to write Hollanov fics is...intense.

Thank you to my good time pal for fixing all the mistakes 3, 4 and 5am me made:

[Jaybee](#)

Thanks to my other good time pal for cheering on my slow and steady descent:

[chaosandcodices](#)

Love you, and stuff.

If at any point you thought 'ew, why is that spelt that way?' it's probably because I am British and we love to make words annoying for no good reason. I know it's awful.

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