you made a rebel of a careful woman's careful son (he is the best thing that's ever been mine)

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by cuterus24

Summary

It was awkward. What do you say to the boy your son loves when he’s awake in the middle of the night with a haunted look in his eye? Ilya looked nervous in a way that was difficult to place. She wondered if she should get Shane—the boy looked like he needed someone. He looked young, like he needed a mother. Yuna was a mother, and a damn good one if Shane was any indication.

~

How Ilya Rozanov goes from Yuna's son's archrival to her son's boyfriend to her favorite son.

OR

How Yuna Hollander goes from Mrs. Hollander to Yuna to Mom.

Notes

Inspiration struck from zoning out at work, and I just had to write this instead of working on my thesis (oops). I did the whole thing in 24 hours, and I need to be done with it because I have to watch a liver transplant tomorrow so sorry if it sucks!

See the end of the work for more notes

July 2017

Yuna Hollander had made the drive to her son's cottage dozens of times before, but this was the first time she felt nervous. They had texted Shane a few minutes before and hopped in the car as soon as they got the okay from him to come over. David was driving, focused on the road with two hands on the wheel like he always did, which gave Yuna plenty of time to stare through the windshield and think.

It was only a few hours ago that Shane had left their house…with Ilya Rozanov. Yuna was still reeling from that.

She'd suspected for a long time that Shane might be gay. He was an attractive young man in a league known for players getting married and having kids young. Aside from Shane's brief relationship with Rose Landry—following which he insisted that they were absolutely better off friends—Shane hadn't introduced them to a girlfriend since high school. Looking back, it was no wonder that Shane was so awkward with his date in their prom pictures, his hands crossed behind his back instead of posing with an arm around her. Yuna and David just assumed back then that he was trying to be polite in front of his and the girls' parents. But then they watched Ilya Rozanov place a soft kiss on Shane's lips at their dinner table and put his hand to the small of Shane's back as they walked to the car.

Yuna had never suspected Ilya Rozanov. Especially not since rookie year, or the summer before! After the two had left, Yuna and David stood in the kitchen together putting dishes in the dishwasher, and Yuna contemplated all the things she had said about Ilya Rozanov over the years.

She remembered ranting to Shane about Rozanov's proclamation that he would score fifty goals in his rookie year. She remembered loudly proclaiming, "Fuck him," in response. It had already started, all the way back then. What had Shane thought when she said that? Was he sad? Angry? Guilty? Amused? She tried to remember the face he made, but nothing stood out as out of the ordinary. When had her son gotten so good at hiding from her?

The drive to Shane's cottage is short, and before Yuna knows it, they're pulling into the driveway. When Shane had shown her the blueprints for the cottage before construction had begun, Yuna raised concern at the fact that the external walls were almost entirely glass. While Shane was new to the MLH, he was still a minor celebrity who had security to think of. Shane had brushed it off at the time, said that the cottage was so secluded that nobody would be able to find it to spy on him if they wanted to. The house's glass walls mean that as soon as they parked, Yuna could see her son and Ilya Rozanov standing in the entryway of the house. Shane looked to be moving a pair of shoes from beside the door to the coat closet, Rozanov standing a few feet away from him with his arms at his sides.

Shane opened the door as soon as he saw them. David walked in first, greeting Shane as he walked past him. As she walked through the door, she reached out an arm to hug him, and with the other arm, he took the baking dish from her hand. She had made a baked chicken dish that she knew he liked and fit within his diet. David had been carrying a glass bowl with the salad they brought, but when she looked over, she saw that the bowl was now carried by

Ilya Rozanov. Rozanov greeted her with a nod and quickly turned to lead the group further into the house.

The house that Yuna walked through was familiar, but not. She was surprised to see that the table was already set for dinner. The furniture was all the same and so was the structure of the house. But there was a sweatshirt laid over the back of the couch that Yuna didn't recognize, and Shane was never the type to leave clothes lying about, especially unfolded. There was an open can of Coke on the coffee table, something that Shane never drank and had declared was too sweet even as a child. There was Ilya Rozanov in her son's kitchen, holding the salad that she made and moving about the kitchen as if he knew where everything was by heart.

Both of the boys were in different clothes than the ones they had worn to the Hollanders' house. Rozanov seemed to be dressed more formally, in black shorts and a light blue button-up shirt with the top few buttons undone to expose the gold necklace just below his collarbone. Shane, on the other hand, was more dressed down in a red t-shirt and dark jeans, and his hair slightly more rumpled than before.

"Dinner will be ready in a second," Shane said. "Why don't you guys sit down, and we'll get you something to drink?"

Yuna and David sat down next to each other at the dining room table, and a few moments later, Shane came over with a beer in each hand. The first he placed in front of David, the second next to the plate across from Yuna. Shane went back in the kitchen and came back out with the chicken and salad that they had brought, both now uncovered and the salad tossed in dressing.

He sat down across from David, and a few moments later, Rozanov approached the table. In one hand, he held a glass baking dish, and when he set it down, Yuna saw that it was a cheesy potato dish that Shane would never make for himself. In the other hand, he held a bottle of white wine with a wine glass tucked between his fingers. He set the wine glass in front of Yuna and poured it almost to the top.

"We stopped at the store in town that you suggested," Shane said, "they had the beer you wanted, Dad, but they didn't have your usual wine, Mom. But Ilya said this one was good, so I hope you like it."

Yuna reached for the glass and took a sip. It was good, very different from what she would usually drink, but she'd have to take a picture of the label before she went home. She looked up to say as such to Rozanov, but he wasn't looking at her.

Rozanov pulled a can of ginger ale from where it was tucked between his elbow and his ribs and cracked it open. He poured it in the glass by Shane's plate before sitting down across from Yuna. Shane hadn't looked up the whole time, as if Ilya Rozanov pouring him his favorite ginger ale was just another part of his day. Maybe it was.

The dinner was quiet as everyone put food on their plate and began to eat, if not awkward. Yuna had carried the bulk of the conversation back at the house, but Yuna Hollander had always been good at logistics, not small talk. She knew how to get answers from people, how

to make plans. She didn't know how to talk with the boy her son was apparently in love with, whom she had all but hated on his behalf up until three hours ago.

Shane started talking to David about his plans for the upcoming season. They were talking about a possible change in the first line and the potential of a newly drafted rookie, but all Yuna could think about was how wrong it felt to be talking about playing strategy in front of the competition. To Rozanov's credit, he wasn't secretly taking notes or texting his coach under the table; he was simply looking over at Shane as he ate his way through a heaping serving of potatoes.

Eventually, there was a lull in the conversation, and Yuna turned to the man across from her and said, "So, Ilya, is this your first summer at Shane's cabin?"

Everyone at the table had turned to look at Rozanov as he finished chewing the food in his mouth, then said, "Yes, it is my first time here. Is nice."

"Ah," Yuna said. She reached for her glass of wine. and caught Shane staring at her from across the table. He had a worried look in his eye that was familiar to her. "How long have you been in town?"

Ilya took the questions in stride. "About a week now. Though I hadn't really seen the town until today. We've mostly just been swimming and grilling and playing video games and such."

Across the table, Shane had gone still. He was looking at Ilya out of the corner of his eye, and Yuna could bet that he was nervously bouncing his leg under the table. Her suspicion was confirmed a few moments later when Rozanov reached over and put his hand on her son's leg. Yuna saw the way that Shane instantly relaxed under Rozanov's hand. The muscles in his shoulders relaxed, and Shane looked back to the table to reach for his ginger ale.

It was just like it had been at the house when Shane had broken down at the table, and Rozanov had pulled him out of his spiral. Somehow, her son's lifetime of anxiety and perfectionism unwound under Ilya Rozanov's hand. It was something she was still trying to wrap her head around.

"Well, has Shane gotten you out on the jet skis yet? Those things are a blast to get on the lake," David shifted the conversation towards things to do in town and at the cottage. No one mentioned the obvious: that Shane Hollander and Ilya Rozanov couldn't be seen together in a small town in Quebec without people asking questions.

After everyone finished eating, Shane and Rozanov cleared off the table. Yuna was finishing off her second glass of wine when Rozanov walked back towards the table with a plate of cookies in his hand.

Shane followed closely behind him, and when Yuna looked up at him, he was rolling his eyes as Ilya placed the plate in the middle of the table.

"You made these?" Yuna asked. She'd never known her son to bake, especially cookies.

“Ilya did,” Shane said, in mild exasperation.

Rozanov shrugged. “Is nice to have sweets for guests. I made him stop at the shop in town for dough. Shane has nothing fun in this house, just organic lettuce and ginger ale.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Not all of us plan on dying of lung cancer in the next ten years. Some people are actually trying to be healthy.”

Rozanov didn’t seem deterred. He grabbed a cookie off the plate and held it in front of Shane’s mouth.

“Come now, eat cookie.”

Shane sighed. “You know I can’t. With my macrobiotic diet—”

“Ugh,” Rozanov said as he rolled his eyes, “it is summer. Relax. Eat cookie. Is good.”

Shane looked at the cookie in front of his face, then looked at Rozanov, who seemed characteristically smug. “If I take a bite of the cookie, will you leave me alone?”

Rozanov nodded. “Yes,” he said, “for one hour. Now cookie.”

Shane relented and took a bite of the cookie. Ilya smiled as he popped the rest of the cookie into his mouth, and Yuna couldn’t help but stare at him.

Rozanov—no, Ilya—Ilya Rozanov: the boy who was nothing like she expected. The boy who loved her son enough to give up a cup-winning career in Boston just to be closer to him. The boy who unwound her tightly wound son with a few words and a touch of a hand. The boy who pulled Shane out of the rigidity of his rules and routines and helped him to find joy.

December 2017

“We both have games on the 23rd, so we’ll drive up on Christmas Eve.”

“Oh, Ilya’s coming too?”

“Yeah, is that okay?”

Even amidst his busy schedule, Shane always took the time to spend Christmas at Yuna and David’s house. Yuna didn’t even need to ask Shane if he was coming, just when, but she didn’t expect that this year he would bring Ilya Rozanov. Yuna supposed it made sense. She knew Ilya didn’t have any family on this side of the world, and it was what normal twenty-somethings did: bring their boyfriend to Christmas.

Because Ilya Rozanov was her son’s boyfriend. She was still getting used to that.

David and Yuna had visited the boys at the cottage two nights before they flew out to Montreal and Boston. They had a nice dinner and sat out by the fire afterwards, making polite

conversation. She knew that the two saw each other when their teams played one another. Sometimes if she called Shane around a game against Boston or during a long weekend, she could hear Ilya talking in the background. She would end those phone calls with a “Tell Ilya I said hi,” but she hadn’t directly talked to him since the summer.

“Yes,” Yuna said, “of course that’s okay. We would be happy to have him.”

Yuna is used to having her son home for the holidays, but her son’s boyfriend…that requires a whole new level of preparation.

Her son followed a strict diet recommended by his team nutritionist to maximize endurance and strength, but Yuna knew from the handful of meals she’s had with the boy that Ilya Rozanov did not do the same. Ilya ate sweets and liked Coke and Russian vodka, but she wasn't quite sure what else. She asked Shane to text her a list of snacks and drinks that Ilya liked, and she bought everything on the list, even if it meant going to multiple stores.

The Hollanders always open presents together under the tree on Christmas morning. She had never thought about what presents Ilya Rozanov might like, but she could never leave the poor boy without presents to open on Christmas morning. She didn't know what size he wore, but she guessed he was a size up from Shane as she bought him a hoodie that matched one she got for Shane. She bought him socks, because in her experience, twenty-something boys always need more socks. David bought him a nice bottle of Russian vodka. What else do you get for the twenty-six-year-old millionaire who has everything?

The bed situation posed the biggest problem. Shane usually stayed in his childhood bedroom when he was at their house, which unfortunately had a twin bed. There was a guest bedroom in the attic with a double bed, but the room’s insulation wasn't suited for Canadian winter, and it’s far too cold even with space heaters. Luckily, they had an air mattress left over from the few sleepover parties Shane had as a kid. That would have to do.

Shane and Ilya arrived early in the afternoon. Shane’s last game had been against Buffalo, and Ilya’s was at home in Boston. They had flown into Montreal separately that morning and met up at Shane’s house before Shane drove them to Ottawa.

Yuna watched from the window as a friendly scuffle broke out when the boys opened the back hatch of Shane’s SUV. They were both laughing as they gently shoved each other, and the fight resolved with Ilya carrying both of their suitcases towards the door.

David and Yuna welcomed them in the entryway. David took the bags from Ilya, and Shane quickly took Ilya on a tour of the house. She gave the boys time to unpack, then everyone settled in the living room to watch a Christmas movie before dinner.

Yuna watched Shane and Ilya from her spot at the end of the couch. The Hollanders had a large sectional in the living room facing the TV on the mantle. Yuna sat on the end that protruded towards the fireplace next to the armchair that David sat in. The boys sat on the other end of the couch, their sides pressed against each other as close as they could be without being in each other’s laps. Even in the low light of the room, Yuna could see Ilya’s hand wrapped around her son’s as Shane played with Ilya’s fingers. They both had a soft smile on their face that spoke of comfort and familiarity. She imagined she would be much

the same if she were them. She couldn't imagine going months without seeing David, especially when they were young and newly in love.

When the movie was over, they ate dinner followed by slices of cheesecake for dessert that David had made that morning. Shane declined his own piece, but Ilya convinced him to take a few bites of his.

As Yuna was washing her face before bed, she heard a gentle knock on the bedroom door. David opened it to find Shane on the other side.

"Hey," he said, wearing a t-shirt that looked a size too big for him and Christmas sweatpants that she had bought for him in high school, "The air mattress is deflated."

They followed Shane to his room and found Ilya Rozanov kneeling next to a sad-looking air mattress on the ground. A hissing sound revealed the obvious problem. They hadn't used the air mattress in years and probably should have checked for leaks before setting it up.

"I can try to patch it with some duct tape," David said, "but it'll probably just deflate overnight."

"You boys can try the room upstairs. We'll get some extra space heaters from the basement and see if we can get a new air mattress tomorrow."

Ilya stood and placed his hand on Shane's shoulder. He shrugged. "I will sleep on the couch tonight, is no big deal."

"No," Yuna said, "you don't have to do that. That won't be comfortable. Maybe we can run out and get a new air mattress tonight. The Walmart down the street should be open—"

"No, is fine," Ilya said. "I have dealt with worse. You have a very nice couch. I'm sure it will be comfortable enough."

Shane looked disappointed in this turn of events, but he didn't protest. Yuna followed his lead and let it go, getting blankets and an extra pillow from the linen closet to set Ilya up on the couch. She left the boys to themselves in the living room, and a few hours later, she heard Shane's footsteps in the hallway and the sound of his bedroom door clicking closed.

Yuna had never been a good sleeper, but menopause certainly wasn't helping. She'd always been the type to wake up in the middle of the night with her mind racing, but now those thoughts were accompanied by hot flashes. How fun. She had developed a routine over the past few months that consisted of going to the kitchen for an ice-cold glass of water, opening the windows in the living room for some cold air, and sitting on the couch watching old hockey games until her mind went quiet. It worked like a charm most of the time, but tonight that plan was impossible due to the Russian hockey player asleep on the living room couch. Yuna tried to tough it out for a few minutes, then rationalized that she could probably sneak past Ilya to the kitchen for a glass of water at least. She would be quiet. She knew this house like the back of her hand; she wouldn't even need to turn the lights on.

What she wasn't expecting when she entered the living room was the boy sitting up at the end of the couch in the low light of a table lamp. Ilya seemed startled to see her, like he had been caught doing something wrong.

"Oh, sorry," Yuna said. "I didn't mean to wake you up."

Ilya shook his head. "No, is fine," he said. "You didn't wake me. I was up."

"Oh." Yuna stood in the doorway to the living room for a moment. "I was just getting some water from the kitchen. Do you need anything while I'm in there?"

"No, I'm okay. Thank you."

Yuna walked past him to the kitchen and poured herself a glass of water with extra ice. She got Ilya a glass of water anyway and handed it to him as she walked back through the living room.

"Alright, well, good night," she said as she turned to head back to her room.

"You can sit out here if you want. I don't mind."

Yuna turned back to the boy sitting on her couch. "No, I don't want to disturb your sleep. It's fine."

Ilya shrugged. "I was not sleeping anyway."

Yuna studied the boy in front of her. He was leaned forward with his elbows on his knees, bouncing his right leg. He looked how she felt—unsettled and wide awake.

"If you're sure," she said, setting her glass of water on the coffee table. "Do you mind if I crack the window a little bit?"

Ilya gestured like he didn't mind, and Yuna pushed the window open just enough to let in a breeze. She sat on the end of the couch closest to the window and furthest away from Ilya.

It was awkward. What do you say to the boy your son loves when he's awake in the middle of the night with a haunted look in his eye? Ilya looked nervous in a way that was difficult to place. She wondered if she should get Shane—the boy looked like he needed someone. He looked young, like he needed a mother. Yuna was a mother, and a damn good one if Shane was any indication.

She stood up and crossed the room to the cabinet beside the TV, pulling out a stack of scrapbooks that had been collecting dust on those shelves for years. Ilya watched her as she went back to the couch, sitting a few feet away from him. She set the books on the table in front of them and opened the first one to a page towards the end.

"Shane's first hockey game," she said as she pointed to the photo of her son in the scrapbook. He held a hockey stick in both hands in pads that dwarfed him as he cast an incredibly cute, gap-toothed smile to the camera. "He was so excited he couldn't stop talking about it on the

drive there. I got so nervous the first time someone checked him to the ice, but he just stood right up and kept skating."

Ilya leaned forward to get a better look at the photo, and a smile crept its way onto his face. "Obsessed even then," Ilya said. "It's good to know he has always been like this."

Yuna laughed and turned the page. "This was his first-grade field trip to a Centaurs' game. I'd taken him to probably a dozen by then, but this was the first time he got to be in a box. All the other kids were eating chicken tenders and playing with legos in the back, but not Shane. I think he spent the entire game with his face pressed to the glass."

Ilya laughed at that one and reached out to touch a finger to the picture of a much smaller Shane in a Centaurs jersey, looking exasperated at having to look away from the game for his mom's lame photo.

They worked their way through the scrapbook of Shane's elementary years, Yuna pointing out cute pictures and funny stories along the way. She grabbed another scrapbook off the pile.

"Ooh, this one is his baby book. He was an extremely cute baby, but I might be biased."

She opened the scrapbook to the first page, showing a photo of a newborn Shane hooked up to monitors with a tiny oxygen tube in his nose. "He was born a little early and a little small, so he had to stay in the hospital for a few extra days. He got stronger fast, though. The nurses were surprised, but he's always been so determined, even then."

She turned to a photo of Shane a few months older, smiling as David and Yuna held him between them. The photo was taken during the first big snow of the season, when they bundled Shane up in a tiny snowsuit and the thickest hat and gloves they could find for his size and sat him down in the snow. She remembers his nose wrinkling at the cold snowflakes hitting his nose, and those wrinkles turning into laughs as he watched his parents throw snowballs at each other. She remembered that day as if it were yesterday, not a quarter of a century ago.

"He was very cute," Ilya said. "He did not have the freckles yet, though. Makes him even cuter now."

She wondered if Ilya Rozanov had ever seen her son wrinkle his nose in the cold. She wondered if he had ever made Shane laugh as wild and uninhibited as he did when he was a child. Yuna supposed he probably had. They'd spent almost a decade together. It was hard to wrap her head around.

"Do you like kids?" Yuna said. "Do you want them someday, you think?"

Ilya leaned back and looked at her for a moment.

"Sorry," she said, "it's too early to ask that. You're so young."

"No, no, is okay," Ilya said. "I do like kids. I have a niece back in Russia, though I will probably not see her again. Shane and I have talked about it. Probably, yes, someday. When

we can be—" He paused, as if considering his next words carefully. "—together. When people can know."

"You don't think you'll see your niece again," Yuna said. "You won't go back to Russia?"

Maybe Yuna shouldn't be asking that. She knew that Ilya's father had died earlier this year, but Shane hadn't said anything else about Ilya's relationship with his family. She didn't know much about Russia's laws around LGBTQ relationships, but she didn't think it was good.

"Probably not," Ilya said. "Things are…complicated there. Family is complicated. Any time I am in Russia is time I cannot be with Shane. I would rather be with him than be there."

Yuna wasn't an MLH player, but she was the mother of one. She knew it was hard. The schedule was demanding, and the culture intense. She was lucky enough to have lived in the same city as her parents before they passed, but they were both immigrants from Japan. Her parents didn't talk about it much, but she knew they missed their families back home. The few times she had been to Japan to visit them, she remembered thinking that her parents were different there: around the people that raised them and the culture they knew and the language they grew up speaking. She couldn't imagine leaving home alone, especially as young as Ilya did. Even with a complicated relationship with his family, it must have been lonely.

She put a hand on Ilya's arm. He didn't flinch away. If anything, he leaned into it. She wondered how long it had been since Ilya Rozanov had a mother.

They worked their way through the baby book and moved on to the last scrapbook: Shane's teen years. Together they laughed at stories from Shane's awkward adolescent years and admired photos of Shane with trophies and medals as he climbed his way up Canada's junior hockey leagues. The scrapbook ended on a photo from 2008: a seventeen-year-old Shane smiling in front of the banner for the Prospect Cup in Saskatchewan. It was before Team Canada's first match. Shane was so nervous then, but so excited. Canada was projected to win that year, with the most likely competitor in the final being Team Russia. He was so upset when he lost the final, and now here Yuna was all these years later, looking at this photo with the boy who had beat him.

"Well, you remember this one."

"Ah, yes," Ilya said, "the first time I met Shane. The first time I defeated him on ice. Good memories. I thought he was cute back then, too. He told me I shouldn't be smoking a cigarette."

"Hm, that sounds like him."

She had watched the Team Russia practices with Shane during the tournament. She remembered being impressed with their young captain, but he certainly wasn't better than her son. Still, he was the only player that she had ever seen come close to Shane's talent.

She and Shane had been walking into the arena when they spotted a young Ilya Rozanov leaning against the wall. She told her to go inside, that he wanted to introduce himself to the

boy everyone in the hockey world was comparing him to. When Shane found her a few minutes later, she'd asked what Rozanov was like. Shane had shrugged, "Kind of rude."

Apparently, Ilya had thought Shane was cute back then, at their first meeting when they were seventeen. He had said a few months ago that they had started getting together the summer before their rookie year, so about a year and a half after this photo was taken. Was Shane interested in Ilya then, too? Was there a blush on his cheeks when she asked Shane about him that she had mistakenly blamed on the cold?

She supposed it didn't matter. They were here now. And Canada beat Russia at the cup the following year, so it was about even.

Ilya yawned, and Yuna suddenly realized that she was tired, too. She felt calm in a way she hadn't since hearing that Ilya was joining them for Christmas.

She closed the book in front of them, but left it on the table in case Ilya wanted to look at it later. "I think it's time to turn in for the night. Are you sure you're okay out here?"

Ilya nodded. "Yes, I will be fine. Thank you for water and for pictures."

Yuna wished him a good night and went back to her room. As she fell asleep, she wondered if all of Ilya's childhood photos were still in Russia. She wondered if he had a mother who looked at them when she missed him, like she did with Shane. She wondered if there was a way she could get a hold of one. Someone should have that boy's baby pictures in a scrapbook and on the mantle, and it might just have to be her.

The rest of Christmas went off without a hitch. Ilya was ecstatic to see his name on presents under the tree. Shane's gifts to his parents had been labeled as being from Shane and Ilya, and Shane made a point to mention when the gift being opened had been picked out by Ilya. Yuna and David went out for a new air mattress on Christmas, and both of the boys seemed happier to be able to sleep next to each other for the next two nights.

When Yuna was at the store, she walked by the photo printing section. She had an idea she couldn't resist.

Two days later, the boys had packed up their suitcases and were on their way out the door. They both had games the next day, so they'd be spending the night at Shane's new house in Montreal, and Ilya was flying out first thing the next morning.

Shane had insisted on carrying their bags to the car after hugging his parents goodbye, which left Ilya behind as he put on his shoes.

"Wait, before you go," Yuna said as she caught him in the entryway. "I have something for you. Call it a late Christmas present." She handed him two rectangles wrapped in Christmas wrapping paper with a bow on the top.

"Oh, thank you," Ilya said. "Should I open them now or—"

“Open them now,” she said.

Ilya tore at the wrapping paper to reveal the first of two framed photos she’d had printed. It was a photo of Shane as a toddler wearing tiny skates and a helmet too big for his tiny body. Ilya cracked a wide grin when he saw the picture.

“How old is he here?”

“Just barely three,” Yuna said. “The first time we took him skating.”

Yuna had made sure he wore a helmet and every type of padding she could find before she let him out on the ice. None of it had deterred Shane, no matter how many times he fell or got knocked over by the big kids. He just picked himself up with a laugh and kept skating. She knew then that her son would be something special.

He unwrapped the second picture and handed her the wrapping paper. This time, his smile was more subdued as he looked at it.

It was a photo Yuna had taken of Shane and Ilya in front of the tree. She had a tradition of taking a picture of Shane in front of the Christmas tree since he was a baby, and this year, she asked Ilya to be in the picture.

She took plenty of photos of the boys standing in front of the tree, Shane’s arm wrapped around Ilya’s shoulders as they gave their best, professional smiles for the camera. What the boys didn’t know was that Yuna had snapped one last photo after she told them she was done. Shane had let his arm fall around Ilya’s waist and let his face fall against Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya looked like he was whispering something in Shane’s ear, and Shane was laughing in a way she hadn’t seen since he was a child, just so incandescently happy.

“I know you probably can’t just hang them up in your house, but I wanted you to have them. And if you have any pictures of yourself from when you were younger—or even recently—I want you to send them to me. I’ll have Shane give you my number. I’d like to put them up in the house, if that’s okay with you. We’ll be careful if we have any guests over, but I’d like to have them.”

Ilya was still looking down at the pictures. He had tears in his eyes.

“Oh, honey,” Yuna said.

“No, I am okay,” Ilya said. “Just…very happy.”

His eyes were wet, and his smile was soft as he looked to her. She couldn’t help the instinct to wrap him up in her arms. He wrapped his arms around her in an instant and tucked his face in her neck like a child.

“You’re welcome here any time, you know that,” Yuna said. “Even if Shane’s busy or even if he’s out of town. You can come here whenever.”

They both pulled back, and Ilya tucked the photos in his arms like something precious.

“Thank you, Mrs. Hollander.”

“Yuna,” she said, “call me Yuna.”

“Yuna,” Ilya said. “Shane is probably waiting. Thank you for Christmas. Thank you for photos. I love them.”

Yuna smiled. “You’re welcome.”

She held the door for him as he walked to the car and waved at the boys through the windshield as they drove off. Yuna supposed this was what Christmases would be now: two boys in her house instead of one. She was looking forward to next year.

July 2018

It had been many years since Yuna Hollander had been fully, truly drunk. She’d stopped drinking much besides the occasional glass of white wine a few years ago when she learned that anything sturdier than that was a guaranteed headache the next morning. She’d determined that the suffering wasn’t worth it and swore that her days of loose-lipped inebriation were over.

Of course, it was Ilya Rozanov who had turned her into a liar.

Boston had knocked Montreal out of the playoffs in the first round. Yuna had tried not to hold a grudge, but she didn’t text Ilya for a week afterwards in protest, not her usual “good luck” before games or pictures of food she thought he’d like. She started up again when Shane told her to let it go around game three of the next series. She knew Shane was staying at Ilya’s in Boston while Ilya traveled back and forth from Pittsburgh. She resumed her “good luck” and “have a safe flight” texts before games and decided against asking Shane if he was distracting Ilya from the playoffs. She never thought she’d be rooting for Boston, and certainly not Ilya Rozanov, but this past season had changed things.

Nobody but the Hollanders and Ilya knew that it was actually Ilya’s last season with the Raiders, and Yuna knew that he wanted to do well to do right by the city that had loved him all these years.

She almost couldn’t begrudge him for depriving her son of a third cup.

The Raiders got knocked out of the playoffs by Pittsburgh in game seven. While Shane and Ilya wanted to head straight to the cottage after the MLH awards, Shane had to stay in Montreal for some brand partnership deals and had some meetings with the Metros leadership. Ilya had announced his move to the Ottawa Centaurs on July 1st and was met with shock by the whole hockey world. Every sports news site was riddled for days with thinkpieces on whether the increased salary allowed by the Centaur’s cap space was worth betraying the team he’d led to a cup win. Pundits declared it the end of Ilya Rozanov’s career. Many debates were had on international television on what could possibly lead notorious

party boy and fierce competitor Ilya Rozanov to leave Boston for a dud team like Ottawa. If Shane or Ilya heard any of it, they didn't seem to care.

Which was how Ilya ended up staying at the Hollanders' house in Ottawa, touring houses while Shane was stuck in Montreal.

He'd toured three houses today with an agent that Yuna had recommended (the agent, of course, did not know that). Yuna couldn't be seen accompanying Ilya Rozanov on his tours of Ottawa homes, but he showed her and David all the pictures afterwards and asked their opinions. Shane was coming up that night to sleep at Yuna and David's before taking Ilya with him to the cottage the next morning, but he wouldn't be in until late.

Over dinner, she'd had a glass of wine while David and Ilya drank some mixed vodka drink that Ilya made. It made David tired enough to head to bed early, but Yuna insisted on staying up until Shane got in, and, unsurprisingly, so did Ilya.

The night had started off calm. They watched some old Montreal vs. Boston games while Ilya and Yuna gave commentary, critiquing everyone but Shane. Ilya was drinking straight vodka on the rocks, and when he got up to pour himself another one, he asked Yuna if she wanted anything.

"No, I'm okay, thank you," she said, but Ilya didn't take that for an answer.

"Are you sure? I make a very good drink. David seemed to like it. It is old Russian recipe."

"I really shouldn't," Yuna said.

"Maybe you shouldn't, but…" Ilya said, "it is good."

Yuna relented. She'd just have one, she promised herself. And the drink was good.

Yuna did not just have one.

That was how she found herself on the couch of her living room, drunk enough to be dizzy if she stood up too fast, watching a Metros vs. Raiders game from 2015 with Ilya Rozanov. She remembered that game; she was there, a couple of rows up from the ice. She remembered Ilya hitting Shane hard against the boards as they fought for the puck, and Yuna had been so angry that David had to pry her hand from the armrest before she cut off circulation.

She couldn't have known back then that the two had already made plans to see each other later that night. Every time Ilya stole the puck from Shane or scored against him, every time they faced off against one another, every time Yuna cursed Rozanov's name, the two of them had already known each other's home addresses.

It wasn't a question she would ask if she were sober, but it was a question she'd been wondering about for nearly a year now. Shane had been so cagey when she asked at the dinner table last summer, and she didn't want to push so soon after he'd already revealed so much. But she was here with Ilya Rozanov now, and she was tipsy, and her curiosity was winning.

“When did you and Shane first become…uhh…” She thought for a second before saying, “Realized that you liked each other more than just rivals?”

Ilya smiled with a mischievous look in his eye. “Ah, you want to know when it started?”

“Yes,” Yuna said.

“You want details.”

“No,” Yuna exclaimed, “no, dear God, I do not want details. I just want…a timeline, I guess.”

Ilya tilted his head as he took another sip of his vodka. “Seems like a detail to me.”

“You are much better at avoiding questions than Shane is.”

“Seems like Shane is very good at avoiding questions. Kept big secret for you all these years, yes?”

“Yes, he did,” Yuna said. “And he’s good at keeping them now.” She shrugged as she leaned back against the couch. “You can’t blame me for being curious. I mean, I thought I knew Shane so well, then come to find out he’s been hiding something for seven years—and not the thing I thought he was hiding.”

“Ah,” Ilya said, “and now here I am: the big secret.”

“No,” Yuna said, “that’s not what you are. You’re the person my son entrusted his biggest secret to, even when I thought he hated you.”

“He did hate me for a long time, even after.”

“I don’t think that’s true.”

Ilya shrugged and looked down at his glass.

“So you want to know when?”

Yuna nodded. “If you’ll tell me.”

Ilya looked up from his glass and turned towards Yuna. He wasn’t nearly as drunk as she was, but he was getting there.

“I can’t speak for Shane, but I first realized I liked him at Prospect Cup. He was…cute. Funny when he didn’t mean to be. And he was the first player I met that I really wanted to beat, not just win games or make other teams sad, no. He was a challenge. I wanted to be better than him.

“I first thought he liked me at the draft. We talked for a bit afterwards, and he was mad he hadn’t been picked number one, but…when you have a secret like mine, like Shane’s, especially in Russia and in locker room, you get good at…noticing things. Or else you get hurt.

“But we didn’t say anything to each other then, not for another year. If you really want to know, it was the commercial. The one in Toronto.”

Toronto. Summer 2010. She remembered something: Ilya Rozanov in the elevator as she was on her way to the lobby vending machine. She’d tried to introduce herself, but the boy had looked relieved as the door closed. She assumed that the time that he was just shy, but—

Nope. Stopping that line of thinking.

She had another question, one that she had wondered since Ilya Rozanov stood timidly behind her son in the doorway as Shane announced that they were in love.

“Why Shane? Why not some other boy in Boston with less to lose?”

Ilya drew a deep breath and leaned his head from side to side as if bouncing an idea around inside it. “I was young, stupid, alone in a new country speaking a language I didn’t know with the expectations of a million people on top of me. I was careful when I shouldn’t have and reckless when I shouldn’t have. It was reckless—Shane—even though we were careful, but he was the only one who knew what it was like: the pressure, the hockey, the secrets, all of it. By the time I knew it was too reckless, it was too late. I was in love with your son. I might have loved him the whole time, I think, but,” Ilya sighed, “but I do not know. Sorry, is bad answer to your question.”

“No, no, no,” Yuna said. She leaned forward on the couch and put her hand on Ilya’s arm. “You made each other feel less alone. You know that’s all I ever wanted for Shane, for him to be happy, for someone to understand him. And you do. I’m glad you two found each other, even if it was reckless.”

Ilya laughed at that. “Yes, I am lucky to have him.”

“He’s lucky to have you, too,” Yuna said as she let go of Ilya’s arm and reached for her glass. “Though try to cut down on the recklessness, I think you’re going to give Shane a heart attack with that motorcycle.”

“But is fun,” Ilya said. “You could take it for a spin while we are at the cottage. It should not be rotting in a garage all summer.”

“No, no, absolutely not,” Yuna said. When Ilya had arrived at the house a few days ago on a shiny, red Ducati without so much as a helmet, Yuna spent the next day thinking of ways to make that death machine disappear while the boys were at the cottage. “And don’t give David any ideas about that either. I can only have one member of my family risking their life at any given time.”

Ilya froze, and Yuna wondered if she had done something wrong. Then, he said, “Family?”

Yuna’s heart broke. “Yes, of course. Ilya, you’re family.”

The look on Ilya’s face was delicate, and Yuna wondered if he was going to cry, but instead he smiled. “Is a good family,” he said.

Yuna smiled back. “Yes, it is.”

There was the sound of a key in the door and footsteps on the hardwood. Shane probably assumed everyone was asleep, so Yuna called out, “We’re in here.”

Shane walked into the room in a rumpled hoodie with a duffel bag over his shoulder. “You guys didn’t have to wait up for me,” Shane said.

“Yes, we did,” Ilya said as he tilted his face up towards Shane. Shane obliged and placed a chaste kiss on Ilya’s pursed lips. He took Ilya’s hand with the one not holding his bag on his shoulder and looked over to Yuna, namely, the drink in her hand.

“Mom, are you drinking?”

Yuna looked to Ilya, who was trying his best to look innocent. “Your boyfriend got me drunk.”

“Ilya,” Shane said with equal parts annoyance and fondness.

“I am very good at convincing Hollanders to be bad,” Ilya said.

“Ew, don’t say that,” Shane said.

Yuna laughed. “It’s true. You get me drunk, you kick the Metros out of the playoffs, you corrupt my son—”

“Corrupt your son?” Ilya said, his voice nearly a shriek. “Your son did not need much c—”

He was interrupted by Shane putting a hand over his mouth. Shane had dropped his duffel bag and held the other hand against Yuna’s mouth.

“That’s enough from both of you for tonight. It’s bedtime.” He removed his hand from Yuna’s mouth, but not Ilya’s. “Do you need help getting up, Mom?”

Yuna rolled her eyes. “You know I used to be fun before I was a mom. I can handle myself, just get some sleep before your drive tomorrow.”

She stood up from her spot on the couch, took a second to catch her balance. “Goodnight, boys,” she called as she walked towards the hall.

“Goodnight, Mom,” Shane said.

“Goodnight, Mom,” said Ilya.

She had just gotten settled into bed when she heard the boys shuffling down the hall. After Christmas, they had replaced the twin bed in Shane’s room with a queen, so the boys had somewhere to sleep when they visited. She could hear them whispering, but couldn’t hear what they were saying. She heard the click of Shane’s bedroom door, then a laugh loud enough to make it through two closed doors. It was a kind of joy Shane only had when Ilya was around.

As Yuna drifted off to sleep, she was struck with the feeling that Shane was going to be alright. Both of her boys would. She would make sure of it.

End Notes

Kudos and comments are always loved and appreciated!!

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