Breaking the Cycle

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Breaking the Cycle

by TheOceanIsMyInkwell

Summary

When Shane was freshly sixteen, Yuna came home to find him freaking out by himself at the kitchen island.

He was perched on one of the bar stools with his entire torso slumped across the counter and his arms extended in front of him, hands balled into fists on the granite. His head was buried between his shoulders and he didn't sound like he was breathing.

Yuna didn't say anything for a solid thirty seconds. Alarms blaring in her head, she silently tossed her purse to the side and beelined for her son with her hands out to comfort him.

Or: Five times Yuna suspected Shane was gay, and the one time she finally found the right words to say.

Notes

i love Yuna Hollander with all my heart and i may have written this in a fugue state

dedicated to the two thiam writer peeps who first screamed with/at me about this fandom. i hope you know that when you asked for something devastating you were unleashing a beast within me <3

See the end of the work for more notes

You remember too much, my mother said to me recently.

Why hold onto all that? And I said, Where can I put it down?

—Anne Carson, The Glass Essay

i.

Shane was twelve years old, baby-cheeked and a little sleepy-eyed, when he first asked Yuna to buy him a poster of shirtless Sylvester Stallone from *Rambo: First Blood II*. Amused, the first thing that occurred to Yuna to ask him was if he also wanted a poster of his other TV hero, Xena the Warrior Princess.

"It's not—I'm not looking at the poster 'cause of *that*," Shane mumbled defensively.

Yuna was still chuckling when he said that. "What do you mean?"

Shane shook his head. "Nothing."

"Mm-hm. I'd think you would want all your heroes up on your wall. Don't you think Xena is just as cool as Rambo?"

Shane's cheeks flamed and then his thumbs were hooking in the over-stretched pockets of his shorts, one of those telltale ticks of his that this conversation actually meant something to him. "Yeah, yeah, of course she is. I was just—"

Something in Shane's tone made Yuna sober a little. She set down her pen on the table and looked up from her accordioned envelope of receipts to give her son her full attention. "Just what?"

Shane met her gaze for little more than a second before his eyes swerved away, nonsensically, in the direction of the kitchen. "It's okay. Never mind. It was a silly thing. I'm—I just got a little obsessed but it'll pass."

Yuna remembered exactly when Shane began to be obsessed with Rambo. She'd watched the original trilogy with her husband before, of course, long before they'd had Shane, but David had introduced the movies to their son a year or so prior to today. Contrary to Shane's insistence, it hadn't slipped her notice that, in that time frame, his so-called obsession with the macho hero had not waned.

"I'd say you've been invested in it for a little while," Yuna said mildly. She wasn't exactly smiling, because she knew her son and knew that looking at him with too much of a teasing laugh sometimes meant pressing on a bruise she couldn't see.

"Well—yeah. About him, 'cause, like, he fights with principles and stuff. It's not because I'm obsessed with guns or whatever."

“I know,” Yuna said, just as blandly. Shane Hollander, fascinated with firearms? Probably when pigs fly. “Shane, I’m not saying no. I was just surprised, that’s all. You almost never ask for things.” Sometimes she still recalled, half with a laugh and half with a wince, how at age eight Shane hadn’t worked up the gumption to ask his parents for a second pair of new runners because he had swiftly outgrown the first one but ‘didn’t want to be caught complaining.’

“Yeah, and it’s okay if it’s, like, too expensive. I didn’t mean for you to pay for it all. I still have my allowance,” Shane went on trying to convince her anyway.

Yuna bit back a fond smile. She didn’t remember a time when she had ever asked her own mom for anything. Sure, she’d had a bit of an allowance, just like she and David afforded Shane now, but the mere thought of approaching her mother about any of her whims had filled her with the stone-cold fear of G-d when she was growing up.

She could say many things. When she and David had discussed this, devising plans to have kids and devoting just as much time to mutually beneficial discussions on how exactly they wished to raise those kids culturally, something like this had come up: breaking the barriers of communication. Today, Shane was standing next to her and he was only fidgeting a little, despite her and David’s sneaking suspicions that their kid harbored a little more than normal levels of anxiety, and he was asking her for something. Not something he needed—something he wanted.

She almost wanted to congratulate him. But she didn’t know how to put that into words without embarrassing him straight back into his room. More to the point, she didn’t have the grasp on the right words to express it, anyway. Probably she had never inherited the right vocabulary.

So instead, she reached out across the table between her and Shane to tap the surface with her fingers and said, “Well, then, if that’s all that was worrying you. Sounds like you and I have a deal.”

Shane nodded. “Good.”

Yuna nodded back. “Good.”

“Deal?”

“Deal.” This time, Yuna couldn’t stop the helpless upward tug of her mouth at the corner.

Shane saw it. He squared his shoulders and thrust his thumbs deeper into his pockets and blinked at her, just a little too rapidly, the way she was coming to know he did when he was purposefully being a little brave about something.

“I don’t want you to think I want the poster because of…that,” he repeated himself from earlier, a little nonsensically.

Yuna blinked. “What do you mean, ‘that’?”

“Xena doesn’t wear much except armor, in all the pictures. She doesn’t, ’cause that’s how they write her, but I don’t watch Xena because she’s got her stomach out or anything. And it’s —it’s the same with Rambo.” The rest of Shane’s words tumbled out in a terrible rush. “I don’t want him up on my wall because of that.”

Yuna stared at him. Then blinked again. “Okay.”

Shane had apparently exhausted his twenty-second battery of direct eye contact for the evening. He was intensely interested in the wood grain of the floor, now, with only an occasional flick of his eyes in her direction. “...Okay?”

“I believe you,” Yuna said simply. “You’ve never lied to me, baby.”

Her son’s face did something complicated, then, twisting at the floor in distaste. Yuna tutted at herself, wondering what on earth about her behavior had ever convinced him that she thought he wanted Xena or Rambo or any of those ridiculously underdressed TV heroes on his walls for less than innocent purposes.

“No,” Shane mumbled. “I guess that’s true.”

She couldn’t take how nervous this conversation was making her kid. Patting the corner of the table again, she beckoned this time for him to join her. “Hot cocoa before you go back to your homework?”

ii.

Yuna had longsufferingly borne many years of her mother talking about matches and marriages.

Hana Ishikawa had a checklist for her daughter which she’d made clear from the beginning: one, be an obedient child; two, excel at school; three, complete any extracurriculars that would get her into college tuition-free; four, secure a stable career fresh out of college; five, meet a respectable Japanese man with a steady income so that Yuna Ishikawa could enjoy the Canadian Dream that had only come halfway to fruition for her immigrant parents. This last point, Hana took pains to clarify at length to Yuna time and time again: being that it was so difficult to find Japanese men in Canada, any type of Asian man was fine, so long as he was no more than second-generation. Third-generation men started mucking up the cultural bloodline with their insufferable Western ways. And marriage could be for love, yes, Hana was not opposed to that; but she herself had married purely for love, and ended up with a loser she had to push from behind every day, she said.

The thing was, step five of Hana’s plan for her daughter was a bit of a misnomer. In truth, step five-point-five actually began somewhere between steps two and three, insofar as meeting eligible bachelors was concerned. In Hana’s ideal vision of Yuna’s future, she got married to a childhood or high school friend, someone who demonstrated profound promise and who could only prove that over time by completing college successfully—at a distance—

at the same time that Yuna did. In the meantime, they would build a solid foundation of friendship and mutual trust.

Yuna figured she should be grateful for how much extra thought Hana poured into this plan. After all, Hana's own mom back in Osaka had pushed for something far less accommodating, and as a result driven Hana to desperate measures, fleeing the country entirely to be with the man she thought she was head over heels for at the time.

Yuna's mother was offering her balance this time. A plan that blended human desires with financial practicality.

Still, that didn't mean she hated the ostensible set-up of dinners and parties with church friends throughout her high school years any less.

To Hana's credit, the plan might have worked; there was a Korean guy, sort of handsome, extremely reserved in a way that was almost funny during the first couple of get-togethers, who might have gone and made both Yuna and Hana happy. If only the snarky, self-deprecating, soft-spoken, and *devastatingly white* hockey player David Hollander had never entered the picture.

So when Yuna's church friend Rebecca started planning their usual Easter get-together and conversations shifted to how her daughter Taylor was just the same age as Shane, and Yuna caught herself giggling in maternal mischief, it wasn't until days later and several hours into the party that Yuna realized what she had done with horror.

Shane—fourteen now, still baby-faced but suddenly shooting up out of his dress khakis and mint green button-up—was passively watching a game of ring toss between Taylor, her older brother Charlie, and a gaggle of their youth group friends in the back yard. Shane and Taylor were not complete strangers; Yuna remembered Shane telling her once that the two of them had been partnered by the youth pastor to practice the Bible reading drills, because they were two of the best readers in the whole church, bar none, even adults.

Taylor was an intelligent, spiritual girl, then. And, from the looks of her extroverted interactions with her friends and the way she gamely grabbed Shane's bicep to drag him into the fun, she was also a vivacious spirit.

Yuna tilted her head around her glass of white wine as she observed them. Shane was flushing and ducking his head as someone pressed the plastic game ring into his hand. Taylor was saying something, and then Charlie was whooping, and Shane was blushing even harder.

Yes, Yuna could see Shane and Taylor getting along, years down the road. She could see them being successful together.

"They are so adorable together, aren't they?" Rebecca stage-whispered as she breezed by with a conspiratorial pat on Yuna's shoulder.

Yuna almost laughed. But then memories of all those gatherings with the unsubtle pressure to mingle with the boys from her grade slammed into her, and her gut twisted.

“They certainly are gunning for it,” she found her mouth saying. “Look at them go. Never knew ring toss could look that competitive.”

From the periphery of her vision, Rebecca frowned.

Yuna took another sip and continued observing her son. She tried to look at him: truly look at him, not the brush of Taylor’s fingers over his wrist or the way she grinned at him with all her teeth when he scored higher than her brother.

Shane was leaning away from her, hands in his pockets. He was leaning closer to Charlie, a tall guy far broader than him, given the two- or three-year age gap. He had a blond mop of curls and a roguish way about him and he barely spared Shane a glance, even as Shane trailed a few paces behind him when the group traipsed off for a short pop break.

“Eh,” Rebecca said, like a shrug, “the competition is always what keeps things interesting between two people, isn’t it?”

iii.

When Shane was freshly sixteen, Yuna came home to find him freaking out by himself at the kitchen island.

He was perched on one of the bar stools with his entire torso slumped across the counter and his arms extended in front of him, hands balled into fists on the granite. His head was buried between his shoulders and he didn’t sound like he was breathing.

Yuna didn’t say anything for a solid thirty seconds. Alarms blaring in her head, she silently tossed her purse to the side and beelined for her son with her hands out to comfort him.

The first thing she did was to place the flat of her hand between his shoulder blades and rub. He twitched beneath her touch. The second thing she did was to use her other hand to coax his fingers apart, one by one, because she knew that, on the rare occasions it escalated to something like this, he would dig his nails into his palms until they bled without him knowing.

The third thing she did was to stop herself from kissing the top of his head and instead ask, “Can you look at me, Shane?”

Darling or *sweetheart* probably would have been appropriate. She’d never quite worked out how to add those to her vocabulary, either.

What mattered right now was that he raise his head so his lungs would no longer feel so constricted and could begin to function properly.

Shane didn’t often disobey her—or at all—but this time he did. He shook his head.

Yuna mentally raced through the possibilities. He wasn’t hurt from practice; he didn’t have one scheduled until tomorrow afternoon, and besides, he was wearing the lavender Hawkeye

hoodie that he'd donned earlier for school. On the off chance he had gone to the rink on his own and then encountered something there that spooked him, Yuna highly doubted he would have had the time or presence of mind to change back out of his gear and into his day clothes before fully losing it.

"School?" she guessed quietly. She maybe couldn't imagine bending closer to kiss the crown of his head now—not when she had already missed the window of opportunity at the beginning when it would have been more acceptable—but at least she could do this: rub soothing circles into his spine and draw the truth out of him where it clung to his ribs.

Shane hesitated, then nodded once, hair rasping across the counter.

"Bad grade?"

He shook his head.

"Bad conversation with a teacher?"

He shook his head again, more vehemently.

"Fight with TJ?" She named his best friend in his grade at the time, though even she doubted herself; TJ was the sweetest, most non-confrontational kid out there, not counting Shane.

A third time he negated the guess, though this time the headshake was less convicted. She was getting warmer.

"Fight with other kids?" The words tasted like ash even as Yuna uttered them. Shane didn't fight with others. Even in hockey, his coach had to hype him up to get physical with the other team to truly make him aggressive enough for the sport. If Shane was involved in a fight, the fight had come to him.

This time, Shane didn't move his head. He paused and shuddered delicately under his mother's touch, and then he hauled himself into a slump to partially face her.

Yuna let her inner desire take over where instinct had frozen her up in past encounters with Shane's anxiety. She didn't hesitate to touch him more, to tip his chin up with a knuckle as she continued kneading the knotted muscle in his shoulder with her other hand.

She expected the tears, and yet it still blindsided her anyway to see the crystalline wetness clinging to his lashes. Shane didn't cry unless he was having a bad episode, and he hadn't had a bad episode since that game against the six-foot-one center from Toronto last year.

"Look at me," said Yuna.

Immediately, looking like it pained him, Shane did.

"Who was it?"

Shane shook his head mutely at her.

“No one? Who fought you?” As Shane went on shaking his head, Yuna’s frustration gently rose. “You say you got in a fight but no one fought you?”

Shane cringed away from her. She didn’t let him get far. This time, she pressed a hand to the side of his head and pulled his face back toward her.

“Shane. Shane. Look at me. Tell me the truth. You always tell me the truth, right? You never lie to me.”

Shane finally looked at her again, raw. “Nobody fought with me.” His words scraped out of his throat.

“Then, what?” She gave him another, closer once-over. There were no bruises or scratches; none of his clothing seemed pulled out of place. “What is it, Shane? What? What?”

“Nothing.”

“This is not nothing, Shane.”

“I had a bad day.”

“You haven’t had a bad day since—” She stopped herself at his flinch. The six-foot-one kid had barreled into him like a tank, that game day, laying her son out on the ice for the worst nineteen seconds of her life.

“I got in my head. ’M just stressed, is all.”

Yuna furrowed her brow. “You’ve got three more weeks till start of season.”

“I know. I’m stressing, it happens sometimes, but I’ll be okay in a couple minutes.”

You look the furthest thing from okay, she thought, but didn’t voice it.

“This doesn’t happen to you, not this early before the season.” Even as she said it, she wondered how much she’d missed—if this had been happening here at home, right under her nose, Shane quietly freaking out behind closed doors because of the mounting pressure of the sport.

A sport that she had directly funneled a love and relentless drive for into his brain.

She felt sick to her stomach as she remembered her mother sending her off to piano lessons, spending sixty dollars an hour for Yuna to toil fruitlessly through *Liebestraüm*, haranguing her on the drive back because Ms. Gao had told Hana she was concerned they would need extra sessions before the regional qualifiers.

All this happening in a daze as Yuna hunched in the back seat, wishing she could be playing soccer or hockey or volleyball instead, wishing she could have one free summer to herself, wishing she could regulate her breathing when her mother got like this.

Wishing, above all else, that her mother would look at her for once and ask the question: *Do you still want to keep doing this, Yuna-chan?* without expecting an untruthful answer.

She could do this, Yuna realized in that moment. She could ask the question that her own mother had never bothered to pose to her.

She breathed in deeply and took Shane in a firm grip by the shoulders. “Shane, look at me.”

A few seconds later, he did.

“Do you still want to keep doing this?”

His reply was instant. “Yes.”

“No. No, don’t do that. Answer me properly. Think about it first. Do you still want to keep playing hockey?”

Something in his gaze turned mutinous, almost beautiful. “Yes. *Yes*. There’s nothing I want more in the world, Mom. I can’t believe you’re asking me that.”

And Yuna knew her son never lied to her. Never when he looked at her that way. So she nodded once and she believed him.

“Then you’ve got to come to me when this happens. Text me, call me, come find me. I can’t read your mind, but I’ll do everything I can to help you if it gets this bad.”

Shane was staring at her now with something between awe, shame, and guilt.

“Shane. Promise me.”

“Yeah. Yeah. O-okay.”

“If you can do that for me, I’ll never bother you with that question again.”

Shane nodded.

“Do we have a deal?”

“Yeah. Deal.”

A gust of relief blew through Yuna, strong enough to sway her on her feet. She wanted to invite her son to share another quiet moment with her, drink something, chat over a snack—something they didn’t get a chance to indulge in every day. But as quickly as they had been approaching a connection, Shane stood and detached himself from her.

He hovered for a second, mouth opening and closing like he wanted to say something. *Thank you,* maybe. Or, more characteristically, *sorry*.

He didn’t do either of those things.

“Gotta shower,” he muttered. “Was a long day at school.”

“Wanna tell me about it when you come back out?”

“I’d rather not,” he said, sounding like an open wound again. “TJ had this cool idea for our presentation, though.”

She was not a bruise-presser. She didn’t probe him. She simply said, “Okay. Tell me about that, then. When you come out.”

He nodded, and then slid off the stool with a wince. Yuna’s sharp eyes darted to his feet and then back up.

“Are you hurt?”

“Tripped a little on that short stairwell going to bio today.” Shane tested his weight on the offending limb and stood up straighter. “Just pulled something near my hip, I think. Nothing major. A hot shower will help.”

Yuna nodded and left it at that. Her son knew his body best.

After another second, Shane gestured nonsensically and limped off in the direction of the bathroom, already stripping out of his pretty lavender hoodie like it would burn him if he spent another second in it.

Years later, Yuna would realize that Shane never wore that hoodie again.

iv.

“Honey,” David rolled over in bed one morning after Thanksgiving in 2016 to tell Yuna, “I think our son has a girlfriend.”

“What.” Yuna was an early riser but a heavy sleeper, and she did not like getting up before her alarm. Her mouth tasted like curry from last night’s dinner which she hadn’t been able to completely brush out. “Huh? Wha’ is it, David?”

Her husband was already sitting up, propped against the abundance of pillows on his side of the bed to accommodate his bad back. He scrolled through something on his phone, glasses perched on the end of his nose.

“Our son. Shane. I think he has a girlfriend. It’s not just one photo; dozens of outlets seem to have picked up a whole bunch of pap pics of him and Rose Landry.”

G-d, it was too early in the day for this. Yuna blinked rapidly and allowed herself a single groan as she pushed herself upright and fumbled for her reading glasses on the night table. Once up, she grabbed the proffered phone and flicked through the damning evidence on the screen.

Sure enough, it was Shane, dressed in a plain white shirt and close-fitting jeans but, bizarrely enough, sporting a chic saddle-brown leather jacket. At his side, clasping his hand—his

hand! in full view!—was the poised, statuesque figure of none other than the rising B-movie star Rose Landry.

Rose was flashing a pageant-worthy smile, all teeth and grace and a little bit of girlish giddiness. Her flaxen hair was curled. Shane was smiling at something off to the side, eyes half-shut in shyness. There was little to no distance between the two of them as they swung their hands between their bodies.

There was little to no doubt left, either, that this outing had been romantic.

"G-d. When was this?" Yuna scrolled back up in frantic search of the date. It had just been posted hours ago, when she and David were both asleep. "He didn't tell us? How long has this been going on?"

David reached over to gently wrestle the phone out of her grip, at the same time that he laid a soft hand on her forearm. "Probably not long, hon, if this is the first time they've been seen together."

"*Is* it?" Yuna worried her lip.

"Yuna, this is Rose Landry we're talking about. The paps would be all over her, ever since her Mystique casting got announced. There would have been photos everywhere of Shane with her if this was anything but fresh."

"Rose Landry," Yuna repeated. She was reduced to idiotic little monosyllabic responses.

"Honey," David said again, stroking her arm to soothe her.

Yuna shoved her glasses up to the top of her head and pressed her fingertips against her eyelids. She breathed for a few seconds into her cupped palms, then lowered them to look at her husband. "He didn't tell me about this."

David chuckled in that particular way he did when he was confused about something his wife said and, more importantly, confused as to why he was confused in the first place. "Yeah? He's twenty-five now. He'll tell us about it on his own time. Well, probably sooner, now that the pics are out and it would be awkward if he didn't mention it to us at this point, but you get what I mean."

Yuna shook her head weakly. "He didn't tell me about this. He always tells me about everything."

Perhaps that wasn't so true. Still, in everything that mattered, Yuna was fairly confident that Shane had confided everything to her.

Well. Almost everything.

Yuna sat with her shock for a moment longer, and then finally understood why it was so inconceivable to her that Shane had a *girlfriend*.

When she looked back up at David, she saw an inkling of the same consternation in his eyes.

“How—how did this happen? I thought he was…”

“Yeah,” David agreed. “Kind of—I mean, me too.”

“That party at the Janzens’...”

“Yeah. I saw that, too.”

“Do you think…?” Even now, though, Yuna couldn’t bring herself to say it.

David’s hand fluttered up to her shoulder and squeezed it tenderly. “Do I think what?”

“You think this is…” Yuna’s mind scrambled to pull puzzle pieces together. Shane had never brought home a girl; never had he even expressed an interest in one. There was the passing infatuation with Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but somehow, that had never struck either Yuna or David as anything more than innocent and admiring.

The one time his dad had ever joked about it—the lack of girls, despite being second draft pick for NHL and having garnered a thirsty following online in the year following his breakout—Shane had shaken his head in muted horror.

I’ve got no time for that, Dad.

Why not?

I see my teammates and all the stupid drama they get up to with…like…the people they date, Dad. I’m just starting out. I don’t need that extra pressure on my plate.

Fair enough. We’re not pressuring you, you know.

And Yuna, inanely enough, had thought of the most inept thing to say to comfort her son: *We’re just trying to make sure you know you can have a little fun, too, now. You’ve worked for it. You’ve upheld your image so much, we fully trust you to make great decisions. Knowing you, whatever partner you choose would only help you.*

And Shane had shut down the conversation after that.

Yuna had to stop her own spiraling before it got out of hand. She took a deep breath and tried, as best she could, to put a name to the whirlwind in her mind. “Do you think he likes… both?”

David pursed his lips in thought. Because that was the thing, wasn’t it? There never was a doubt between the two of them, even if they’d never discussed it before today, that something about Shane would always seem to like guys.

“Maybe,” David said. “Maybe. He looks…happy.”

Yuna looked down at the phone screen again. She tapped it once so the photo wouldn’t fade into darkness. There was the bashful smile on her son’s face, the flutter of his lashes to look coyly away from Rose.

Yes. Yes. Maybe, Shane did like both.

Maybe Shane could have an easy time of this dating thing, after all.

But as days and weeks passed, and Shane didn't open his mouth to so much as initiate a conversation with his parents about whatever it was he was doing with Rose Landry, doubts began to shroud Yuna again.

He came to their weekly lunches, sporting more fashion-forward pieces than he'd ever donned before, and a few times he even arrived smelling like faint cologne. Yuna and David exchanged subtle glances whenever it happened. David would smile, easy like breathing, as though telling his wife telepathically, *See? He's got this. He's dressing up to impress a girl. There's definitely something real going on there.*

And then Shane would return Yuna's call about the Calvin Klein ad contract renewal, and their conversation would drift to indirect probes about Rose, and Shane would clear his throat and say, "Yeah…yeah, we hung out a bit last night."

Yuna would hum and say lightly, "Oh? Did you have fun?"

And Shane would make a strangled little noise in the back of his throat on the other end of the line and say, "Yeah, for sure. She's—she's fun. And funny. She's funny, she's real easy to hang out with."

And then he'd lapse into silence, probably chewing on the end of his hoodie string, and Yuna would have to fill the quiet with her own assumptions about his answer.

Less than a month later, when any meager mention of Rose had all but dissipated from their conversations with Shane, David asked him good-naturedly if things were getting more serious.

"Uh, no," Shane said after a beat. He stirred his asparagus tortuously around his plate. "We're not—she's filming in Europe right now. And…it didn't work out, we ended things mutually. Earlier in the month." His latter words poured out in a rush before he shoveled food into his mouth.

Yuna simply said, "That's too bad. I know she made you laugh."

"Yeah. Yeah. That she did." Shane bobbed his head and wouldn't look at his mother. "We're still friends." This time, something quirked up at the corner of his mouth, something like a genuine smile that stirred a shock of delight in Yuna.

He seemed—*happy*.

"Good," Yuna said, more fervently. "That's great, Shane."

Under the table, David squeezed her knee. Yuna laid a hand over his knuckles and squeezed them back.

v.

Scott Hunter was kissing a man.

Scott Hunter and the Admirals had won the Stanley Cup, and Scott Hunter, all sweaty six-foot-something of him, was kissing his boyfriend on the ice.

Yuna's mouth was slack. She was sure that, if she had the wherewithal to glance to the side at her husband, David would be sporting a similar slack-jawed look.

Yuna knew of the obstacles that lay in the way of people like…people who were maybe like her son. She knew how stupid, and asinine, and horribly old-fashioned and downright hurtful all these old-boy conventions in the hockey leagues could be. It was one thing to have the first breakout pro hockey Canadian athlete of Asian descent be Shane; and besides, she was all too aware, in the pit of her clenched gut, that half of the credit was due to David's surname.

But this? To fling all caution and future to the wind and grab a man's face between two hands before the world and kiss him like it didn't matter?

Suddenly, it felt as though Yuna's entire axis had tilted.

The parental comments—the constant reminders—the *practice makes perfect, and you must be more than perfect to achieve what's given them*—the *we can never be seen as anything less than the best of the best if you want to achieve their dream*—hell, even the things that *Yuna* had told Shane, from *I love you no matter what, but your image will always be key to the career path you're carving for yourself—*

It didn't matter.

It didn't *have* to matter.

Shane…

Shane was shaking on the couch next to her, looking just as gobsmacked as either of his parents. Yuna steeled herself to reach out to him and grasp his wrist, but she was half-frozen still with shock. Her son was faster. His phone screen lit up, and a name flashed across the screen: ***Lily***.

Shane bolted off the couch, sounding like the breath had been knocked out of him, and accepted the call faster than lightning. "Yes?"

Yuna was halfway to her feet. Shane had moved away from the living room for privacy, but the way he was turned toward the light, she could still catch the full range of shock to nerves to doubt to pure, unadulterated elation on his face.

"Really?" Shane breathed.

In that moment, Yuna knew.

She looked back at David. *Should I go after him? What should I tell him?*

David pressed his lips into a line and looked at her with understanding in his eyes. Something warred in his expression, too. These were every bit unchartered waters for them as they were for their son.

Almost imperceptibly, he motioned with his head for Yuna to sit back down. *He'll come to us on his own time.*

Aloud, he murmured, "Any day now," and Yuna, achingly, believed him.

& i.

Yuna had only but to lay eyes once on Ilya Rozanov with her son, the way their bodies orbited each other and their eyes found one another across an expanse of silence, and she knew she had been right all along since Shane was twelve years old.

Fourteen years ago. She had been silent, and unsafe to him, and inadequate, for *fourteen whole years*.

It was all too much for her, all of a sudden. She had to get out of here—clear her mind, before her mouth decided to shape words without the conscious permission of her brain—and figure out just what the hell she had been doing these past fourteen years to have missed so many opportunities to let Shane know he could have told her absolutely anything in the world.

That was how she found herself standing a few paces from the front steps of their house, unbidden tears rushing hot down her cheeks as the July mountain air nipped at her bare arms.

She thought about her mother, and the broken little sound Hana had made when Yuna stood up to her and said, *I love you, but I also love David.*

She thought about the spark leaving her mother's eyes as Yuna had gone on: *I don't want to choose. But you're making me choose, and you know that if I were to choose what you wanted for me it would break me.*

She thought about the way her mother opened her mouth with her face twisted with betrayal and began raining down accusations, tearful, raging, and cutting off Yuna before she got the chance to finish: *But if there were a way to keep both you and David in my life, you know I would do it in a heartbeat, because you loved me first.*

And what had she said to Shane, today? Had she even once told him, *you could have come to me and I would have opened my arms and accepted you? You could have run to me and we would have saved you a whole world and a decade's worth of hurt?*

She hadn't. But then again, that wouldn't nearly be the right thing to say, either. Because why was the onus on Shane to open his mouth, when Yuna herself had never taught him the vocabulary to bridge the gap of difficult things like this?

Even now, Yuna jolted and glanced back over her shoulder at the sound of Shane shutting the front door, coming closer to her with her slub-knit wrap held gently over his arm, and she felt a fresh wave of shame that it was him again, stretching himself across the divide to reach her.

She had failed him.

“Hi,” he said, going first.

“Hi,” she said, still failing to take the lead, going with the motions of accepting the sweater as he wrapped it around her shoulders.

They stood and stared at the whistling forest in front of them in silence. For one awful, dragging moment, Yuna didn’t dare look at her son. Her own mouth was opening and closing ceaselessly in unformed words of useless comfort.

She had to tell him that she loved him. There, at least, was a start.

But then they turned to each other at the same time, and Shane beat her to it, because then he opened his mouth and he uttered the worst words she could have ever heard in his life.

“Mom, I want you to know…that I did really try.”

His voice cracked on the last word and he visibly swallowed. Even now, even now, he was being the brave one out of the two of them. Yuna wanted to stop him, but he didn’t deserve that.

“I tried really hard, but, uh… I just can’t help it.”

Yuna froze.

“And I’m sorry.”

Stone-cold horror stabbed her in the gut.

No. *No.* This was not how Yuna would allow her son to speak of himself, or anything else he had endured, ever again.

To hell with picking apart the proper words to say. To hell with trying to balance the hero-making mother with the softer one who didn’t know how to comfort her son.

She had to be just Yuna, just another Japanese kid lost and afraid and alone for so long, and speak the things that she never heard her mother say but always longed to hear.

“Oh, no,” she said, her heart cracking, “you have nothing—*nothing*—to apologize for.”

He wouldn’t face her. He fidgeted, glancing anywhere but her, as his chin wobbled and his jaw worked because he was trying so obviously not to cry.

Yuna thought he deserved a cry, at least just this once.

“Look at me. Look at me,” she commanded, and then when he still floundered, she begged, “Look at me.”

Finally, he did. The stillness became his undoing: a stream of moisture burst out of his right eye and poured down his cheek.

She could start here, with the three things she’d always wished Hana would have told her.

I’m sorry.

“I’m sorry that I made you feel like you couldn’t tell me.”

Shane bowed his head and burst out weeping.

You are not a shame to this family.

“Hey. I am so, *so* proud of you.” Her nose stung, but she had to keep it together. When Shane stared at her like the breath had caught in his chest, she whispered, “Okay?”

As he nodded woodenly, she moved with every instinct in her to wrap him up in a warm and unyielding embrace.

I was the one who wronged you.

“Please forgive me.”

Shane hooked his chin over her shoulder and clung to her. Something about the fragility of the moment made her believe that he’d heard every generation of unspoken truth behind her words. Because the next thing he said, shuddering out a breath, was a small and helpless but hopeful, “I forgive you, Mom.”

Yuna gasped soundlessly. Fourteen-year-old absolution never felt so unexpected or undeserved.

Later, as she watched Shane fold over the tabletop and bury his head in the wood in a panic, she saw the rough-edged, callous-fingered man beside him lay a hand on Shane’s back and bring him back from the edge. She watched Ilya press an olive oil-stained kiss of gentleness to his mouth, and Yuna couldn’t believe she had denied her son this for the last ten years.

But as David squeezed her knee again under the table, she thought, fiercely: *From now on I can walk with him and fight for this with him till the end.*

End Notes

outsider pov's my beloved. women and queers breaking the curse of societal pressures my cherished

As a second-gen Asian-American with a former tiger mom with whom I've found a way to grow into genuine peace and happiness over the years through compromise, the added scene between Yuna and Shane in the show absolutely broke my heart and put it back together in one go. I've shamelessly ranted about this on tumblr but I must have rewatched that specific scene upwards of a dozen times. It comes as close as anything realistic can ever be to the coming out experience I never had but always dreamed of.

I hope you enjoyed or found something worthy in this, and I would so very much love to hear your thoughts! Thank you my lovelies <3 -kaleb

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