

By Halves

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/77620816) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/77620816>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid , Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationships:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander/Yuna Hollander , Yuna Hollander & Ilya Rozanov , Shane Hollander & Yuna Hollander , David Hollander & Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander & Shane Hollander
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov , David Hollander , Yuna Hollander
Additional Tags:	POV Outsider , POV Yuna Hollander , Ilya Rozanov Loves Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander Loves Ilya Rozanov , High Shane Hollander , Shane Hollander is High on Pain Medication , Good Parent Yuna Hollander , Coming Out , Relationship Reveal , no beta we die like ilya's dad , Am I doing this right? , I have no idea! , author is english and knows nothing about hockey , author does not speak Russian , Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence , Episode: s01e05 I'll Believe in Anything (Heated Rivalry)
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-13 Words: 16,080 Chapters: 1/1

By Halves

by [tmp93](#)

Summary

She'd never say anything, of course, because she could be wrong. In fact, most days Yuna was certain she was wrong. Shane had only ever dated girls, and had never shown any outright signs of liking... anything else. But that didn't stop her from wondering, occasionally, whether her son was entirely straight.

But the last hour or so had certainly put paid to that suspicion. Because Shane was receiving a frankly alarming number of texts from someone named 'Lily'.

Or: Yuna and David meet Ilya Rozanov at the hospital after Shane's injury.

Notes

This is literally my first time ever posting anything on this website, so hello! Please be kind, I'm very nervous! I would normally just happily lurk, but these two stupid hockey players won't get out of my head, so here we are!

Yuna POV, because I adore her. A mix of show and book canon. The teams are still the Bears and the Voyageurs, because they always will be in my head.

Russian translations are in the endnotes -- major thanks to everyone who helped with the translations!!

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

- Translation into Español available: [A medias](#) by [xorasiana](#)

Yuna Hollander could remember, with perfect clarity, the first time Shane was injured on the ice. One minute he had been flying, the next he had been body checked by a player who looked so much older and larger and stronger than his nine-year-old frame. He went down hard, the back of his helmet smacking the boards with a sickening crack. The rink had seemed to shrink around her, the shouts of the other children fading into nothingness as she watched her son, who suddenly seemed so small and so very young, crumple onto the ice. The trainers had helped him up, dazed and blinking, and though Shane insisted he was okay, that nothing hurt, that he was *fine, Mom, seriously, I'm fine*, she had known in that moment that she would spend the rest of her life waiting for this very thing to happen again. That she would have to get used to seeing her son covered in bruises, cuts, and scrapes, tending to broken bones, and – *God*, she prayed, *please please no* – a broken head.

Shane had walked off that first concussion fairly easily. It was mild, and he had been back on the ice two weeks later. But that moment would be forever seared into Yuna's brain. Because, despite her deep love of the sport, despite her joy at getting to share it with her son, and her pride at his considerable skill, it was so very different when it was *your* child being hurt, over and over and over again, when you could do absolutely nothing to stop it.

So now, as Yuna watched Shane go down, midway through the second period of the Boston game, all she could see was her nine-year-old boy, so small and so vulnerable, laying crumpled on the ice.

It was a close-run game. It always seemed to be, when the Voyageurs were playing the Bears. Shane, in particular, seemed to take it as a personal challenge to beat them, as well as a professional one – or, perhaps, to beat Rozanov. She'd seen them talking before the game, facing each other on the edge of the centerline. Shane had approached him, which was a little odd. But then, Yuna had remembered that this was Rozanov's first match back after the last Voyageurs game in Boston – hadn't Shane said something about a family member dying? Shane's expression had looked serious under his helmet. Perhaps he was offering condolences. He was a sweet boy, her Shane.

That kindness didn't last past the faceoff. Shane and Rozanov played as viciously as ever, ramming each other into the boards, battling for the puck with their usual ferocity. Rozanov had managed to get Shane backed into the boards, and they were wrestling fiercely over the puck. Shane, of course, was much better with the stick than Rozanov, and managed to manoeuvre his way out under him, but he only managed to hold him off for a moment before Rozanov was back on him, stealing the puck from behind with a smug grin. Yuna had to admit, he was *fast*.

But Shane, who Yuna knew would never let Rozanov crow for long, forced him back into the boards, swiping the puck from under Rozanov's skates. And Shane was off, and Rozanov, despite his speed, couldn't seem to close the gap, and this was it, Shane was about to–

It took Yuna a second to process what had happened. She hadn't even seen Marlow coming. One second, Shane was flying across the ice, and the next, he was thrown into the boards. It was like watching a marionette whose strings had been severed. His shoulder slammed hard

into the boards, his body folding like a ragdoll, and Yuna could hear the sickening thud of his head as it hit the ice.

He didn't get back up again.

She was gripping David's hand so tightly her own fingers were growing numb. The ref had blown the whistle, and it was clear by the looks on everyone's faces that this was precisely as bad as she feared. The medics were on the ice in seconds. Hayden Pike looked like he might be sick. Marlow looked shellshocked. And Rozanov... Rozanov was yelling something. He'd been right behind Shane when he went down, and for some reason, he seemed to be trying to get past the medics. They waved him back, but he lingered, gesturing fast, his movements tense and insistent. Eventually, he had to be physically pushed back towards the bench by one of the refs.

Shane still hadn't moved. But he had opened his eyes. He was murmuring something, Yuna could see it on the screens above, but he was definitely talking as the medics strapped him to the spinal board and *oh god, the spinal board, please, please, please.*

The camera cut once again to Rozanov's face. He looked frantic. Terrified, even, in a way that made her stomach turn. If even Rozanov looked panicked...

Hayden was yelling something again, and throwing his fist at Marlow, and Marlow was yelling back, while some of the other Bears jumped in to try and pull Hayden off him. Everyone except Rozanov, who was still hovering by the bench, looking white.

But then the medics were lifting Shane off of the ice, and David was tugging on her hand, and all Yuna could see was her tiny boy, crumpled on the ice, and all she could think was *please.*

* * *

If Shane had looked small on the ice, he looked even smaller in the hospital bed. His arm was in a sling to keep his collarbone steady – only a fracture, thank god – and Yuna could see the steady rise and fall of his chest beneath the blankets. She could just make out the beginnings of bruising spreading across nose and under his eyes in dark, inky shadows.

Mild-to-moderate concussion. Displaced clavicle fracture. He had to stay in for observation overnight, but tomorrow they'd be able to take him home. He'd be out for the playoffs, but he would still be able to play, and that, in itself, was a miracle. It could have been so much worse.

He was sleeping now. Every so often his eyelids would twitch, his long dark lashes fluttering against his cheeks. Yuna couldn't close her eyes. Every time she did, she saw the hit. So she sat, while the monitors beeped steadily, methodically tracking the beating of his heart.

David had gone to get them both a coffee. It was nearly 11 p.m., but there was no way either of them would be able to leave yet, let alone get any sleep. Luckily, Shane was in a private room, so the staff were being pretty flexible about visiting hours – she suspected the nurse

was a Voyageurs fan – and she didn't want to leave until Shane had woken up. She doubted that would be any time soon. He was on some pretty heavy pain relief.

She'd spent her time so far fielding messages from family and friends. Shane's phone, too, had been pinging constantly, but Yuna didn't know his password, so she couldn't respond to any of the texts on his behalf, and even once he woke, Shane wouldn't be allowed any screen time for a few days at the very least. Some familiar names kept flashing up on the screen, though. Hayden, J.J., Comeau, even Rose Landry.

Yuna had liked Rose. She'd only met her the once, at one of Shane's home games, but she had seemed like such a nice girl. Beautiful, too, and clearly into hockey. It was a shame that it hadn't worked out between the two of them. Although, Yuna had had her suspicions as to why. Not that Shane had *told* her anything.

Shane rarely dated. She hadn't heard of him dating *anyone* since the Rose thing. The few times she asked, Shane joked he was married to his job, but he got this weird, closed-off look on his face, like he was deliberately trying to keep something from her. It got worse the more she needed, so she gave up eventually. But that didn't mean she hadn't wondered.

She'd never *say* anything, of course, because she could be wrong. In fact, most days Yuna was certain she *was* wrong. Shane had only ever dated girls, and had never shown any outright *signs* of liking... anything else. But that didn't stop her from wondering, occasionally, whether her son was entirely straight.

She and David had had the conversation multiple times, over the years. They weren't *sure*, of course, but they had both had similar... inklings. They'd both agreed not to say anything about them, simply wait and hope that, if their suspicions were true, Shane would come to them in his own time. But the years had gone on, and Shane never said anything, and Yuna had begun to wonder if she'd misread the signs. The Rose thing, too, had almost entirely put paid to that suspicion.

And if that hadn't, the last hour or so *certainly* had. Because Shane was receiving a frankly alarming number of texts from someone named 'Lily'.

She couldn't *read* them, of course, but she could see the little snippets of texts as they flashed into his notifications.

Lily: are you ok

Lily: please tell me you are ok

Lily: are you at hospital

Lily: shane please if you can answer please answer i am–

Lily: they are saying it is concussion but they won't tell–

Lily: i guess you are not allowed phone so when you see this–

Lily: will visit as soon as i can

Who was Lily?

Yuna found that the question bothered her more than it probably should have. Shane had always been private – not secretive, exactly, but selective. He told them about games, about training, about travel schedules and injuries and contracts. He talked about his teammates, and their wives and their children and their lives. He talked hockey as if it were a third language, one he spoke fluently (as he should – he'd grown up speaking it at the kitchen table, just as he had English and French). But when it came to anything beyond that – friendships, relationships, his life when he wasn't on the ice – there was a noticeable silence.

And this Lily, whoever she was, was a person Shane had actively decided not to tell them about.

The messages hadn't started coming in right away. The first one had appeared around 9.30p.m., right when the game ended. Maybe Lily hadn't been at the arena. Maybe she'd been watching it on television. Or maybe someone else had told her what happened.

It struck Yuna then – with a dull, unexpected ache – that there was someone out there who was frightened for her son – certainly who cared for him, judging by the texts – and she had absolutely no idea who she was.

She knew, logically, that Shane had chosen not to tell her certain things. She knew that if Shane were to go to a bar, and take home a girl, or two, or three – *or*; she thought wryly, *to take home a boy* – it wasn't something he would ever share with other people.

She knew, too, that she had never been the sort of mother who needed to know everything. Shane was private, and she had always respected that. She was a good mom, she thought. She'd made it her personal mission to make sure Shane had every advantage as a child. When Shane had shown talent on the ice, she had recognised it instantly and she had organised their lives around it without hesitation. Early mornings. Long drives. Extra ice time. Nutrition plans. Tutors for the weeks he missed school. Yuna had been vigilant about his body, his grades, his discipline. She had watched for injuries and bad habits and burnout with the same sharp-eyed attention her own mother had once turned on her.

Hockey had not merely been Shane's passion; it was the axis around which their family rotated.

And maybe that was where things had slipped. They had been so focused on Shane as a future NHL star, the first Asian-Canadian to play for the Voyageurs, on Shane's endorsements and awards, that they hadn't taken the time to think about much else around that. She had always operated on a simple assumption – if something mattered, Shane would say so.

But Yuna was starting to think that perhaps Shane was keeping more to himself than she had thought. She tried, and failed, to pinpoint a moment when Shane's life had become something that ran parallel to theirs, rather than intersecting with it. Had they done something to make him not trust them? To believe that he *couldn't* tell them things?

Or was there something about this girl that meant he *had* to keep it a secret? Was she famous, like Rose, and wanted to keep it quiet? Was she married? Why didn't they know who she

was?

Shane's hand gave a little twitch under her fingers. He looked so young when he slept.

Shane's phone screen flashed again. Another text from Lily. Whoever Lily was, she cared enough to keep trying. Yuna tried to be grateful that her son had someone else who cared for him that way, the way he *should* be cared for.

But instead, she could feel only a slow and empty sadness, that she had become the kind of parent who knew nothing about her own child's life.

* * *

They had to go home eventually. A nurse had come round to wake Shane for a concussion check, and they'd used the opportunity to say their goodnights. He was still pretty out of it, but the nurse assured them it was likely the side effects of the pain medication. David had driven them back to Shane's apartment, and they'd crashed in the guest room.

She'd asked David about Lily on the ride back – if he'd ever heard of her, because she was trying desperately to contact Shane – but he hadn't heard of her either. David, naturally, seemed a lot less bothered by this than she did.

"If he wants to tell us something, he will," he'd said, "but I highly doubt it's anything to worry about. It's probably just a friend or something. I'm sure everyone who knows him was pretty damn worried. I know I was."

Shane's apartment was spotless, as usual. It looked as if he barely lived in it. Yuna supposed it was true, to an extent – he spent almost half of every season on the road, and he preferred to spend his summers in Ontario – but the apartment had always felt more like a showhome than a *home*.

There was nothing more to be done that night. They turned off the lights and stumbled towards the guest room, the exhaustion of the day dragging her down under the waves of sleep. Still, she slept badly, her mind constantly snagging on half-formed thoughts she couldn't quite bring into focus.

She dreamed of the hit.

Morning light found her early. She lay awake for a while, listening to the hum of the city beyond the windows, before giving up on sleep entirely.

Yuna had just poured herself a second cup of coffee when she heard David stir in the bedroom. A few minutes later, his phone rang.

He answered it groggily at first, then more alert, his voice dropping into the careful, neutral tone he used when he was listening for details. When he came out, he looked tired but relieved.

"That was the hospital," he said. "They're happy with how he's doing. If everything stays as it is, they'll discharge him later this afternoon. Early evening, most likely."

The knot in her chest loosened slightly, though it didn't disappear.

"They said he's been asleep most of the night," David went on. "Woke up appropriately for checks. No new symptoms."

"Good," Yuna said. She set her mug down. "We should head back, then. Bring him clothes."

"Are we bringing him back here, or taking him home?"

"Here for tonight, and then home," she said, tightly. "He'll be more comfortable at home." The "*where I can keep an eye on him*" went unsaid, but she knew David had heard it anyway. "I'll pack him a bag."

Shane's bedroom was, much like the rest of the apartment, almost completely devoid of anything that felt like his. He seemed to prefer to keep all his personal items – family photos, knickknacks, his jerseys and trophies – at the cottage. Even his bedroom felt distant. Tidy, sure, like Shane was tidy, but there was nothing here that really felt like *him*.

She grabbed a duffle from the closet (*Reebok*, she noted, *good to see he's been using some of his sponsored gear*), and began rifling through the drawers to find something suitable for him to travel home in.

She grabbed the first t-shirt she could see, a black one folded carefully on the top of the pile. It looked large – far too large for Shane, actually, which was odd – but perhaps it would be more comfortable with his shoulder as it was. It smelt faintly of cigarettes, which was stranger still – perhaps Shane had worn it to a bar? She threw it in with some sweatpants, socks, underwear, and grabbed his toothbrush from the en-suite.

She was just coming out of the bathroom when she spied his glasses, sitting on top of the book on his bedside table. He wouldn't be allowed any screen time, but his glasses might help if he was getting headaches. And maybe she should bring the book, too? To keep him distracted, while he was holed up in Ottawa?

But as she made to throw the well-worn book into the duffle, the title made her do a double take. *This Is My Country: Dispatches from Modern Russia*.

Since when was Shane interested in Russia?

In all her life, Yuna had never known Shane to read a book that didn't have at least something to do with hockey. Although, to be fair, Shane had *been* to Russia a couple of years back, for the Olympics in Sochi, so perhaps he'd gotten interested in it then?

She flicked to the bookmarked page – a bookmark shaped like a hockey stick, that she'd got him as a joke several Christmases back – and scanned the page, wondering what on earth could be so interesting to Shane for him to have clearly read it multiple times.

The chapter title caught her eye. *Living Quietly: Queer Life and Daily Risk in Contemporary Russia*.

Yuna felt another of those little jolts in her stomach. It felt like another piece of a puzzle, the ones that David loved to do on a Sunday morning. A corner piece, perhaps, of a puzzle she had yet to finish. Useful, yes, but meaningless on its own. She felt like she was close, so close, to seeing where it fit, but she was having to put it all together without the benefit of the big picture on the box to guide her.

She skimmed a paragraph despite herself. It wasn't pretty. The language was clinical, but the implication wasn't. Laws that framed queerness as a social threat, something that could be investigated, charged and punished. Police stops that weren't logged. Phones checked without warrants. Fines that escalated into detentions. The chapter noted, almost casually, that once a name was entered into the database it rarely left it, and that harassment went unreported because reporting it only made things worse.

There was a personal account from a young man who had learnt from a young age to divide his life – who he was at home, and who he could be elsewhere. About his fear of being reported not by strangers, but by colleagues, or friends, or family. The wrong person knowing – especially someone in uniform – could be catastrophic.

In the worst cases, in places like Chechnya, some were tortured, some were killed, and some simply disappeared, never to be seen again.

Yuna placed the book carefully in the duffle. Had this been something Shane had worried about, in Russia? Had he feared for his safety? Or the safety of someone he knew?

Was he gay? The thought snagged, then snagged again, over and over. But he had dated girls, right? What about Rose Landry? Who was Lily? Did he like both? Is it about someone else?

And, the thing her exhausted brain kept coming back to – *why has he never told me any of this?*

* * *

Shane was already awake when they arrived at the hospital. He was half-propped up on the pillows, blankets tucked around him. His usually neat hair was mussed at the back. Every so often, his eyelids flickered, as though he were trying to keep himself awake, but not quite managing.

“Hey, sweetheart.” She took a seat in the chair beside him, reaching for his hand, and squeezing gently. “How are you feeling?”

Shane shifted to look at her, and murmured something incomprehensible. He seemed to be having trouble focusing. His lips parted again.

“Could... could they see?”

“See what, honey?”

Shane's gaze flickered briefly to the monitors above, before landing back on her.

“Did... did everyone see?”

“Oh, Shane,” Yuna sighed. “Sweetheart, there’s nothing to be embarrassed about. These things happen on the ice all the time, you know that. And I know you’ve never taken a hit that bad before, but there is no shame in it at all, OK? It’s Marlow who should be ashamed. It was a dirty hit.”

It wasn’t. But it made her feel better to say it.

Shane’s hand twitched in hers. He blinked slowly, then sank back into the pillows, eyelids drooping again. A lock of his dark hair fell onto his brow. Yuna couldn’t help but reach out to brush it back into place.

“He’s still pretty out of it,” David said, quietly. “I think it’s going to be a minute before he’s fully with us. They must have given him the good stuff.”

They had only been sitting with Shane for around fifteen minutes when a nurse appeared at the door.

“Apologies, Mr. and Mrs. Hollander, but I’ve got ah, *Ilya Rozanov* at the desk? He’s asking if he can see Mr. Hollander.”

Yuna blinked. Of all the things she had expected to hear from the nurse, that was not one of them.

Out of all the players in the NHL, Yuna had a particular dislike reserved for Ilya Rozanov. The man seemed to have a way of getting under everyone’s skin. He was arrogant, and aggressive, and he spent more time in the penalty box than out of it. That was before she even factored in his reputation off the ice. It was guys like Rozanov that gave hockey players a bad name – drinking, and partying, and sleeping with any woman that so much as breathed in his direction.

On top of that, Yuna had always felt a certain level of resentment towards Rozanov. From the beginning, his career had been inextricably tied with Shane’s. It never seemed to matter what Shane achieved. It was always, *always* compared to Rozanov. The league and the fans certainly loved the rivalry, but Yuna had come to find it a source of extreme frustration. They were the league’s two greatest players, and nothing Shane did could ever be taken on its own merit – he was either taking something from Rozanov, or Rozanov had done it first.

Then again, Yuna understood that it was common for a team’s captain to visit after a player on the opposing team was taken out. It was a pretty common show of respect. Although that wasn’t one she would have expected someone like Rozanov to follow through on.

She glanced over at David, who looked equally as bemused. He shrugged, as if to say *your call*. She supposed it couldn’t hurt. Professional courtesy, and all that.

“Uh, sure. Send him in.”

Not a minute later, Ilya Rozanov walked through the door.

Yuna may be in her fifties (and very happily married), but she was big enough to admit that Ilya Rozanov cut a handsome figure. With his golden curls, tanned skin, and blue eyes, it was easy to understand why he was the playboy of the NHL. If only he had a better personality.

But something about Rozanov looked off today. He was wearing a sharp leather jacket over what was clearly a well-worn Bears hoodie, and there was a tension in his shoulders that Yuna didn't think she'd ever seen before. Not that they'd ever really met. There was one time, when Shane was doing that CCM commercial with Rozanov all those years ago, where they'd sort of met in an elevator. But that was the only time they'd ever spoken in person, and it was only for a second.

But here he was, standing in the doorway, looking exceptionally awkward. His eyes were fixed on Shane.

Did he feel guilty that it was his teammate's hit that had put Shane here? Selfishly, Yuna hoped he did.

"Um. Hello," he said, his thick Russian accent warping the vowels into something blunt and monotone. "You are... Hollander's parents?"

"Yeah, David Hollander," David said, standing, and reaching out a hand for Rozanov to shake. *Thank God for David and his consistent Canadian politeness.* "And this is my wife, Yuna."

Rozanov nodded at her, before turning back to Shane.

"He is OK?" he asked, quietly.

"He's, ah, still pretty out of it. But yeah, he got lucky. Concussion, and a broken collarbone, but no permanent damage."

All at once the tension seemed to flow out of Rozanov's body, like a balloon deflating and collapsing in on itself.

"*Slava bogu,*" Rozanov murmured. Yuna had no idea what it meant. He still hadn't taken his eyes off of Shane.

Come to think of it, Rozanov's eyes looked almost... red. Like he had been crying, perhaps. He didn't look well at all.

"Do you... want to sit down?" she asked, cautiously.

"I, ah," Rozanov blinked, as if suddenly remembering that there were other people in the room. His shoulders tensed once again, and he seemed to be trying to regain some of his usual, disaffected persona. "I do not wish to, ah... *navyazyvat'sya.*" He gestured with his hand, as if physically trying to grab at a word. "I do not know in English. But, you will tell him... that I came?"

She nodded, and was about to thank Rozanov for coming (*and thank God that whatever this was would be over*) when Shane stirred again.

“Ilya.”

His voice was small and hoarse, but it punctuated the silence of the hospital room like a bullet.

Shane was awake again, and his hazy eyes were locked on Rozanov.

Yuna felt her brows furrow. *They were on a first name basis?*

Hockey players almost always used surnames with each other, especially across rival teams. Even in their own locker room, Shane was more likely to hear ‘Hollzy’ than his own name. Yuna couldn’t think of a single time she’d ever heard Shane refer to Rozanov by anything other than his surname. First names were for close teammates, or friends, or...

Rozanov hadn’t moved, although, Yuna noted, the lines of his face had tensed in a way that almost looked guilty. He shifted slightly, his hands balled into fists in the pocket of his hoodie, his sharp blue eyes fixed on Shane.

“Ilya,” Shane said again, and this time Yuna thought she could see tears forming along Rozanov’s lashes. He took one last look at David and Yuna, before his entire being seemed to crumble, and he almost ran to Shane’s bedside.

“Ya zdes’, lyubov’ moya. Ya zdes’. Ya nikuda ne uydu.”

And then Rozanov was clutching at Shane’s hand, and Shane was clutching it back, and Rozanov was definitely crying now.

“They could see us...” Shane said, *“I’m sorry... they could see us.”*

“Nyet, dorogoy. They do not see, is OK. Safe.”

It was as if someone had flicked a switch in her brain. The book. The book on Russia. About what it was like to live in a place you could never be yourself. The oversized shirt, smelling faintly of cigarette smoke. The way Rozanov had acted on the ice, shellshocked and ghost-white, having to be physically pushed back towards the bench, as he had tried to get closer to the medics, closer to *Shane*. The strange, stilted way those text messages had sounded, like someone was texting in a panic, or, she thought wildly, in a language that wasn’t their first.

“Stay,” Shane was saying, leaning into Rozanov’s palm, which had found its way to Shane’s cheek, a thumb brushing gently across the freckles on his cheekbone. *“Please, stay.”*

“Da, lyubov’ moya. I will stay. I am not going anywhere.”

Shane’s eyelids fluttered once, twice, and then he sagged against the pillows, drifting back into sleep again. His hand remained lightly clasped in Rozanov’s.

Yuna only let the silence linger for a moment.

“You’re Lily, aren’t you?”

Rozanov's head shot up in surprise.

"You know about Lily?"

"I know someone named Lily was trying to contact Shane yesterday. Was it you?"

Rozanov only shrugged.

"Why?"

"*Potomu chto ya lyublyu ego*," Rozanov muttered, before shrugging again.

"Are you..." Yuna began, glancing over at David, who looked just as bemused as she did.

"What is he to you?"

"It is... *blyat, eto slozhno*. Is not for me to tell. He..." Rozanov looked down at Shane again, and Yuna was startled to note just how soft his gaze had become. "He should tell you himself. When he is awake enough to... *kak eto skazat'*?" He seemed to be struggling to find the right words. "Ah, choose himself."

"Oh," David said, lightly. "To consent?"

"*Da*, yes. Is his truth to tell."

"But, you're Lily?" Yuna asked again.

Rozanov heaved a sigh, but after a minute, he nodded.

"So it was you, last night? On the phone?" David asked, much more gently than Yuna had. *God, her husband was so nice*. It was definitely where Shane got it from.

Rozanov sighed heavily. He seemed to have given up trying to avoid the questions.

"I was worried."

"Yeah, us too," David said, with a small smile. "But he'll be OK."

"He will be out for playoffs," Rozanov said, grimly. "He will hate that."

Yuna's head was buzzing. Exactly how well did Ilya Rozanov know Shane? There was clearly something more than friendship going on here, she would have to be completely blind not to see that, but *how*? When had this even started?

"So..." David said, slowly. "Do you want to stick around until he wakes? You're, ah, more than welcome to."

Rozanov nodded.

"*Da*. Please. If it is OK? I am supposed to fly back to Boston in..." He checked his watch. "*Blyat'*. Two hours. But... I will stay. Until he is awake."

“Oh, you shouldn’t miss your flight,” David said, kindly.

“I can get another. There is no game tomorrow.” He cleared his throat awkwardly, before getting up from his chair. “I am going to go and, ah, get coffee. Would you like...?”

“Oh, no, bud, thank you,” David replied, just as awkwardly. Rozanov nodded jerkily, before leaving the room.

“*Bud?*” Yuna asked, her brow arched.

“I don’t know, give me a break! I wasn’t exactly expecting... *that...* this morning.”

Yuna sat back in her chair, her hands folded tightly in her lap.

“I can’t... I can’t believe this,” she murmured. “*Ilya Rozanov? And Shane?*”

David rubbed the back of his neck. He always did that when he was anxious. Shane did it too.

“I mean, it makes sense, in a way. I mean, Shane’s always been private.” He paused, glancing down at Shane, still asleep in the hospital bed. “And, you know, we did always wonder if he was... *well.*”

Yuna chewed on her lower lip.

“Yeah, but there’s private, and then there’s... whatever this is. I mean, I just... How long has this been going on? And why did he never say anything?”

David shrugged, cautiously.

“Maybe he didn’t want to? Maybe he’s still figuring it all out himself. Or maybe he just wasn’t ready?”

“But we’re his *parents*. And he didn’t think he could... *God*, I just... How many other things have we missed?”

David leaned across, placing his warm hand on hers.

“Yuna. We have done everything we could for him. He knows we love him. But this... I don’t know. I think it’s probably more about him than it is about us.”

Yuna nodded, but it did little to settle the knot that seemed to have taken up permanent residence in her stomach.

“It’s just... *Rozanov?*”

“Yeah, I know.”

“*Rozanov!*”

“*I know.*”

“Shane *hates* Rozanov!”

“Well, clearly not,” David snorted. “I think...” he trailed off. He seemed to be choosing his words carefully. “I think everyone expects him to hate Rozanov. So no-one really noticed anything different. But, honestly? I don’t actually remember Shane saying anything bad about the guy. Not since, I don’t know, his rookie year, maybe?”

Come to think of it, David had a point. She herself would constantly criticise Rozanov whenever they watched him play. And Shane would nod, or hum, or comment on his playstyle, but now that she was really thinking about it, she couldn’t remember Shane ever really saying a bad word about the man in years.

David let her be, after that. He was good like that. He always seemed to know exactly what she needed – if he needed to give her a gentle push, or if she needed time to mull things over. And right now, her head felt full of everything and nothing all at once. A tangled mess of threads she was struggling to follow.

Rozanov came back after a few minutes. He was carrying a large coffee, and smelt suspiciously of cigarette smoke. Yuna decided it was best not to comment on it.

He hovered awkwardly in the doorway for a moment, before dragging a chair from the edge of the room to the opposite side of Shane’s bed. He cleared his throat, but made no effort to talk.

God, this was awkward.

“Well, this is, ah, a little awkward,” David said, with a little chuckle. *Jesus, David*, Yuna thought, cringing internally. Surprisingly, though, Rozanov returned his small smile, even if it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

“I know you will have questions,” he said, quietly. “I can try and answer some.”

Well, now they were getting somewhere. Yuna started with the one that had been bugging her all night.

“Why are you Lily? In his phone, I mean,” she said.

“It sounds like Ilya,” he said. “Only in his phone. So people do not... ask questions. If they see.” He gave another flicker of a smile. “He is Jane. For me, in my phone. He is Jane.” He chuckled, again. “*On – moya “devushka iz Monrealya.”*”

“Does anyone else... know?” David asked, gently.

“No.” Rozanov didn’t elaborate. His shoulders were tense again. Yuna’s mind inexplicably went back to Shane’s book on Russia. Exactly how bad would things be for Rozanov if people knew about... whatever this was? Hockey wasn’t exactly known for being a progressive sport, but to be a gay *Russian* hockey player...

“How long have you been...?” David asked, pulling Yuna from her thoughts. Rozanov frowned. “I mean to say, how long has this been going on? How long have you been...?”

“You wish to know if we are lovers?” Rozanov asked. Yuna raised a brow in shock, and Rozanov let out a nervous laugh. “Is it not correct word?”

“I mean, I don’t know?” David said, shaking his head bemusedly.

“I think... I think I will let him decide what to tell you,” he replied, diplomatically. “But, probably, we have been... *friends*... for longer than you think.”

“You care about him.” It wasn’t a question. Yuna could tell, by the look in his eyes, by the way his entire body seemed to be angled toward Shane, as if he was being pulled forwards by some magnetic force.

“Yes,” he replied, simply.

“OK,” Yuna said. Really, that was all she needed to know for now.

* * *

It was another couple of hours before Shane woke properly. He drifted several times, and the nurse kept coming in to check on him, but she reassured them it was normal for him to be so out of it with the painkillers they had put him on.

The next time he woke, he was smiling.

“Ohhhh,” he slurred, grinning dopily at the Russian by his bedside. “You stayed.”

“I stayed.”

“Good,” he said, softly. “I don’t like it when you leave. Makes me sad.”

Yuna’s chest tightened a little at that. Rozanov’s mouth twitched, something heartachingly soft breaking through his usual, careful restraint.

“I am not going anywhere, *moya luybov*,” he said, quietly, before glancing furtively at Yuna and David.

“Heyyyy,” Shane said suddenly, his gaze drifting over to where Rozanov was looking at them. “You guys have met him!”

Yuna straightened a little in her chair.

“We have,” David said, smiling a little. “He came to check on you.”

“Did I scare him?” he asked, seemingly forgetting Rozanov was in the room.

“*Da*, Hollander, you did.” Rozanov said, his voice gentle.

“Heyyyy!” Shane slurred, as if he had only just noticed Rozanov was there. He frowned, at Rozanov’s pale face, seemingly registering the Russian’s look of – *of what? Pain? Panic?*

“Heeeeeeyyyyyy!” he slurred, in what Yuna supposed was meant to be a reassuring way. He reached out, clumsy and insistent, and made grabby hands at Rozanov, who relented immediately, and clasped Shane’s hand in his.

“Yesssss. *Bet-ter...*” Shane mumbled. Rozanov was brushing his thumb in slow, steady strokes across Shane’s knuckles, seemingly unconsciously. It was an unbearably intimate gesture.

Yuna glanced at David. He was watching, too, his expression carefully neutral, but his eyebrows were slightly raised.

Shane smiled dopily at Rozanov, before giggling to himself.

“Are you gonna get in bed with meeee?” he asked, in what he clearly seemed to think was a flirtatious manner. Rozanov looked mortified.

“Ah, I think you need to be resting.” he said, looking worriedly at Yuna and David.

“You have that face,” Shane said, seriously, frowning at Rozanov.

“What face?”

“The *face*. When you’re worried you do the frowny face.” Shane scrunched his face into an exaggerated, pouty frown. Yuna couldn’t help her huff of laughter. “You’re worried.”

“I am not anymore,” Rozanov said, turning his attention back to Shane.

“Is it because I didn’t text you last night?” Shane looked so genuinely brokenhearted that Yuna wondered for a moment if he might cry.

“No, no, no, is OK,” Rozanov replied hurriedly, brushing his thumb over Shane’s cheekbone in another reassuring gesture, before catching himself, and clearing his throat again.

“I was reaaallyyy looking forward to it. I’m, like, super maaaaaad at Marlow for fucking it up...”

“He feels really bad. He did not mean to hurt you,” Rozanov said, seriously.

“Uuughhh,” Shane said, throwing his head back exaggeratedly against the pillows. “I can’t believe fucking *Marlow* cockblo—”

“Ah, Shane,” Rozanov interrupted quickly, glancing pointedly at Yuna and David. “You are very... medicated. And your parents are here.”

“Ohhh. They’re not scary,” Shane said, groggily, still slurring his words. “They’ll love you.” He turned his head, fixing Yuna and David with a comically solemn stare. “Do you love him?”

“Oh, ah—” Yuna began, utterly unprepared to answer that question.

“I only meet them this morning, Hollander,” Rozanov said, flustered. “I do not think—”

“Heyyyy you’re bluuuuushing!”

“No, I do not blush,” Rozanov said, scowling. “I tell you this. Russians do not blush.”

“Hmmm,” Shane hummed, nonsensically, and then attempted to poke at Rozanov’s cheek. Yuna felt as if she had entered an alternate dimension. Shane closed his eyes again, and rested his head back on the pillows. “I had a plan, too.”

“A plan?” Rozanov echoes, gently.

“Hmmm. I was gonna ask you something... I had like, a whole ass plan.” He snorted. “*Ass plan*. I bet youuuu had an ass pla—”

“OK, Hollander, please do not say this in front of your parents.”

“Ooooh. Oooops,” Shane snorted. He tugged at Rozanov’s hand, pulling him closer to whisper exaggeratedly in his ear. “They don’t know. I haven’t *told* them.”

Yuna’s heart lurched painfully in her chest. The words seemed to land all at once. Regardless of everything, Shane had clearly been trying to keep this secret close to his chest. And for whatever reason, whatever he thought he needed to protect, whatever line he’d been trying to hold between his parents and his private life, it had slipped – not because he wanted it to, but because his filter had completely gone. She felt a sudden, fierce urge to shield him from his own honesty, to somehow put the words back where they belonged and let him say them properly, when he was awake, and coherent, and *ready*.

“I, ah, think they might know something now, Hollander,” Rozanov said, and while his voice was gentle, Yuna could sense the tension underneath.

“Do they hate me?” Shane asked, in a tiny voice, his face crumpling.

“Oh, no, sweetheart, no!” Yuna said immediately, leaning forward to grab Shane’s free hand. David, too, placed a hand on Shane’s calf.

“We could never, ever hate you, son,” David said, softly.

“Oooh. OK, that’s good.” Shane murmured, relief washing over his features, before closing his eyes again. “Don’t want anyone to hate me...”

It was only seconds before he’d drifted off again, completely dead to the world, leaving Yuna and David alone with Ilya Rozanov once more.

* * *

The next few hours seemed to blur together, in a way that made time feel strangely elastic, stretching out further and further, before pinging back, fast.

Shane slept, deeply and utterly, his breathing slow and even beneath the blankets. The nurse came and went, checking his pupils, his vitals, and murmuring reassurances in the patient tone of someone who had done this a thousand times before. Each time, Shane stirred only faintly, a frown furrowing his boyish face before he sank back under again.

Rozanov stayed.

He didn't talk much. When he did speak, it was in that careful, clipped way that Yuna now understood to be a consequence of needing to choose every word deliberately, and translate it twice over before it reached his mouth.

He answered questions politely, if minimally. *Yes*, his team had flown home. *No*, he hadn't rearranged his flight yet. *Yes*, he had somewhere to stay. *No*, no-one else knew he was here. He never once volunteered any information about anything. Not about Shane, or about himself.

At one point, she'd tried to break the silence by offering her condolences about his father. He'd just nodded, sharply, and said "*Thank you*," and gone back to staring at Shane.

Yuna found herself watching him when she thought he wouldn't notice.

He sat close to the bed, his long legs folded awkwardly into the small, plastic chair, one hand still resting near Shane's, as if he were afraid that if he moved away, Shane might vanish. Every so often, his fingers twitched, as if he wanted to reach out and take Shane's hand once again, but something seemed to stop him each time.

After a while, David tried, once again, to make conversation.

"So," he said, clearing his throat. "You're the captain for the Bears, right?"

Rozanov nodded, despite the absolutely, ridiculously obvious nature of the observation.

"That's a lot of responsibility. I know Shane, ah, always carries that pretty heavily."

"Is OK," Rozanov said, shrugging slightly. "They are good team."

Rozanov let the silence stretch a moment more, before clearing his throat awkwardly.

"Hollander is... great player. I like... I like playing him very much."

"Yeah, you're pretty well matched." David said, smiling.

"He... how do you say? *Vdokhonovlyayet menya*. Ah... makes me want to be better player."

"Yeah, I think that's the same. You know, for Shane."

Yuna noticed David shift slightly in his chair, but he was looking kindly at Rozanov. She was, once again, overwhelmed with gratitude towards her husband. He was so much better with people than she was.

“The media, they, ah,” he said, “they really like to make it seem like you two are at each other’s throats. But I guess it’s not really like that?”

Rozanov’s blue eyes flicked to David for a moment, before settling once again on Shane, still sleeping soundly. He smiled faintly. If Yuna didn’t know better, she’d say it was almost shy. Bashful.

“*Nyet*,” he said. “It is... media. They exaggerate. They like to make story, make tension. But, I like playing with him. Against him, too, but... Last month, at All-Stars. We were on same line. It was... good.”

Yuna felt a small, surprised smile tug at her lips.

“Really?” she asked, softly. “You enjoyed being on the same line as him? I thought you’d be annoyed, you know, since they moved you to the wing.”

“Oh, no. I... was happy to move. We played well together, I think. Quick passes. Good... *kak by eto skazat’?* *Sovmestímost*. Ah... *oh*.” He chuckled slightly. “Compatibility.”

“Yeah, you could see that, I think,” David said. “On the ice. At that game.”

Rozanov shrugged again, but he had a small smile on his face. Yuna suddenly remembered, unbidden, watching on television as Shane had scored the winning goal in Tampa off an assist from Rozanov. Rozanov had skated over to him, and smacked a kiss onto his helmet, right where his cheek would be.

How could they possibly have missed this?

Eventually, the silence settled in properly, and some of the discomfort faded. At some point, Rozanov’s rigid posture began to soften. His shoulders slumped, and his head dipped forwards slightly, before jerking back up, as if he’d caught himself. He rubbed a hand over his face, dragging it down over his eyes.

“You should sleep,” Yuna said, quietly. “You look exhausted.”

“I am fine,” he replied automatically.

Ten minutes later, his chin had dropped to his chest again. This time, it stayed there.

Yuna watched him for a long moment. He looked younger like this, too. Stripped of all his sharp edges, and vulnerable in a way she doubted many people ever got to see. Except, perhaps, she thought, Shane. And she wondered, not for the first time that day, who the real Ilya Rozanov actually was.

* * *

Shane didn’t wake again until early afternoon. He stirred, blinking slowly, and let out a deep groan of discomfort. The morphine must have worn off.

“Hey, sweetheart,” she said, gently, shifting closer to the bed. She made sure to keep her voice low. David had gone to grab everyone another coffee, and to search for some sandwiches from the cafeteria, while Rozanov was still sound asleep in the tiny, plastic chair.

“Hey, Mom,” Shane said. His voice was still groggy, but he seemed much more alert than he had been earlier that morning.

“How are you feeling?” she said. She couldn’t help but reach out to brush his fringe from his eyes, smoothing it back across his forehead.

“Like I got hit by a truck,” he said, with a pained smile. “What happened?”

“You took a hit from Marlow in the second period. It was a pretty nasty fall.”

“Oh,” he said, frowning. “I don’t remember...”

“That’s OK,” she said, quickly. “The doctor said you might not, it’s OK.”

“How bad is it?”

“Broken collarbone,” she said, never one to beat around the bush. “And a moderate concussion. You’ll be out for the playoffs. I’m sorry.”

Shane nodded, looking disappointed, but he gathered himself with a sigh.

Just then, Rozanov shifted slightly in his chair, and Shane’s eyes darted to the sleeping Russian. His expression shifted, first to a mild panic, before closing off into something almost detached.

“He’s been here all day,” Yuna said, a little pointedly.

“Has he?”

“Hm. He was here when you woke up earlier. But I don’t know how much of that you, ah, remember.”

“Did I... did I say anything? Stupid, I mean.”

“Ah,” she hesitated, a little awkwardly. “Define *stupid*.”

“What... what did I say?” His eyes kept flicking nervously towards Rozanov once again. His fingers fidgeted with the edge of the blanket.

“Nothing... *bad*. You seemed very upset that you couldn’t text him last night.”

“Oh. Right.”

Yuna felt her heart break a little. Shane looked terrified, totally and utterly petrified, in a way she’d never seen before. She reached out, taking his hand in hers, and squeezing it gently. Shane’s lashes were wet.

“Shh, it’s OK,” she said, as gently as she could. “It’s OK, baby. You can tell me anything, OK? There’s nothing you could tell me that would make me hate you, I promise.”

He took a shaky breath, and squeezed her hand tightly.

“I—” He took another breath. “I’m gay, Mom.” His voice was barely above a whisper. “I was going to tell you, soon, but…”

Yuna felt a surge of emotion, of protectiveness, and love, and pride, all rolled into one. She gave his hand another reassuring squeeze.

“Oh, sweetheart,” she said, leaning forward to cup his cheek. “Thank you for telling me that.”

“Mom, I uh…” He’s swallowing back his tears. “I need you to know that I… I really did try. I tried really hard, but I… I just can’t help it…”

It took her a second to figure out what he was trying to say. Suddenly, she understood with perfect clarity *why* he hadn’t told her. Because he was Shane Hollander. Number 2 draft pick of 2009. First Asian-Canadian to play for the Voyageurs. Ambassador for Rolex, and Reebok, and a dozen others, because he was “exactly the sort of young man they wanted representing their brands.” Because, somewhere along the line, he’d stopped seeing himself as a person, and had instead only been able to see himself as a brand. As a role model. As a hockey player.

“I’m sorry…” he cried, tears clinging to his lashes.

“Oh, no, *sweetheart*,” she said, feeling her own eyes flooding. “You have nothing, *nothing*, to apologise for.” She put a hand under his chin, forcing him to look at her. “Look at me.” He tried to fight her, but he gave in eventually, no match for a mother’s stubbornness. “I am so sorry, sweetheart. I am so sorry I made you feel like you couldn’t tell me.”

“I’m sorry,” he said. Yuna wiped away a tear that had escaped down his cheek, “for not telling you, before…”

“Oh, Shane, no, please don’t be. That’s OK. It’s OK. I’m so proud of you. OK?” She took a deep breath. “It’s me that should be sorry. For making you feel like I was your manager, before I was your Mom. I’m so sorry, Shane. Please, please forgive me?”

“I forgive you, Mom,” he said, shakily, reaching up to hug her with his good arm. She clung to him for a long moment, before letting him go to wipe at her own eyes. Shane let out a small, shaky laugh, sagging back into the pillows in relief with a long exhale. His eyes flicked towards Rozanov again.

Yuna could only let the silence hover for a moment before she had to ask.

“So, was that what… Rose Landry was about? You were… *trying*?”

Shane took a heavy breath.

“Uh, yeah. I... got scared. I guess I sort of convinced myself that I just hadn’t met the right girl? And, I guess, if Rose Landry isn’t the right girl, then no-one is, you know?”

“And is that why you broke up?”

“Yeah... she, uh. She sort of held my hand, and like, came out for me. She’s... she’s the only one who knows. You know, that I’m... gay. Other than Ilya.” He looked over at Rozanov with a longing sort of fondness. Yuna didn’t think she’d ever seen that expression on his face before.

It hurt, a little, that Shane had already told someone, before he had told them. But, she knew, he had every right to tell whoever he wanted, whenever he wanted, and, she thought, wryly, it made sense that it would be an ex-girlfriend who would be more likely to notice the signs.

“So, ah... you and Rozanov?”

“Uh...” Shane blushed fiercely. “Yeah.”

“I’m not going to lie, that part’s a bit... surprising.”

“That part?” he asked, furrowing his brow a little.

“Well, we did sort of have suspicions that you might... be gay.”

Shane looked genuinely shocked.

“Really? H-how?”

“We just know you, honey.” And really, despite all the secrecy, they did know Shane. And there had always been things that they’d noticed. His seeming lack of interest in girls, his fierce blushes and slight awkwardness around objectively good-looking guys. His hero-worship of – *or, according to David, his obsession with* – that slightly older boy, Benjamin, that one summer at hockey camp. That time he’d pretty obviously checked out a guy in the grocery store, before averting his gaze and blushing as red as the tomatoes he was holding. He really wasn’t all that subtle. “Although, clearly” she said, gesturing to Rozanov, “you can still surprise us every once in a while.”

“I’m sorry,” he said again. “I didn’t want you to find out like that. All at once.” He sighed deeply, before glancing at Rozanov again.

They sat in silence for a moment. Yuna’s head was still reeling, but Shane seemed to have calmed down considerably, and was staring at Rozanov with an expression that could only be described as saccharine. And yet again, Yuna couldn’t wrap her head around the apparent mismatch. How did someone like *Shane* – kind, gentle, steady *Shane* – end up with someone as chaotic and volatile as *Ilya Rozanov*?

“I guess I still don’t understand how this *happened*,” she said, frowning a little “I just mean... well, weren’t there any... *nice boys* in Montreal, Shane?”

“Probably.”

It took Yuna a second to realise that the answer had come, not from Shane, but from the Russian in the corner. Rozanov looked half asleep, and his face was serious, but he glanced at Shane with an expression of what could only be described as adoration.

“I– I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were–”

Rozanov waved a hand, silencing Yuna’s apology, and fixed his attention onto Shane.

“Hey,” Shane said, quietly, reaching his fingers across the blanket carefully. Rozanov reached back. He seemed to have decided it wasn’t worth pretending anymore.

“Hey,” Rozanov said, stroking his thumb across Shane’s knuckles. “How are you feeling?”

“Tired,” Shane sighed. “But, happy, I think. My mom knows, and, well, I guess my dad does, too.”

“*Da*, Hollander,” Rozanov said, rolling his eyes fondly. “I think they would have to be very stupid not to figure it out after what you said to me.”

“Wait, what did I say? Mom, you said it wasn’t that bad!” he said, accusingly.

Rozanov laughed, then, his blue eyes twinkling with mischief.

“You ask me to get into bed with you. Then you complain that Marlow, ah,” he glanced at Yuna a little awkwardly, “*ruined* our night.”

“Shit.”

“Yes,” he said, smirking. “You were very, ah, *kak vy govorite*...?”

“High?” Yuna supplied, with a small smirk of her own.

“*Da*,” Rozanov smiled, “completely high.”

“High as a kite,” Yuna added.

“Great. That’s not embarrassing *at all*.”

“No, *moy pomidor*, it was very cute.”

“Shut up.” He frowned. “Wait, what does that mean?”

“Tomato,” Rozanov chuckled, before leaning closer to Shane to whisper something that sounded an awful lot like “*angry kitten*.” Shane batted him away good-naturedly, while Rozanov laughed again.

Strange, Yuna thought, *this new Ilya Rozanov*. He’s really not what she expected.

Just then, David entered, and Yuna could feel the shift in the atmosphere of the room. Shane was watching his father with cautious eyes, while Rozanov gripped his hand, the smile fading slightly from his lips.

“Hey, kiddo,” David said, smiling gently, and Yuna watched some of the tension bleed out of Shane’s shoulders. “How’re you feeling?”

“I’m... good, Dad,” he replied, but his expression was still careful. Rozanov was holding himself stiffly, again, but almost seemed a little... defiant?

“Ah,” David said, glancing at their conjoined hands. “I see we’ve got to the, ah, elephant in the room.”

Shane nodded jerkily as David took the seat next to Yuna, but Rozanov frowned, and looked at Shane in confusion.

“What is this, elephant in the room?” Rozanov asked Shane, quietly.

“Oh, it’s a saying,” Shane replied, just as softly. “Like, there’s something that’s really obvious to everyone, but no-one is talking about it.”

“Oh,” Rozanov said, scrunching his face in confusion. It was actually sort of adorable. “So the elephant is obvious thing?”

“Yeah,” Shane said, with a tiny smile.

“OK. So, obvious thing is that we are lovers.”

Ok, that was still the worst possible word choice, Yuna thought, as she coughed out a slightly horrified laugh, while David blanched. Shane, meanwhile, looked mortified.

“No, Ilya, don’t use that word, that’s gross.”

“Oh,” Rozanov said, scrunching his face again. Yuna felt another stab of pity for Rozanov, having to constantly communicate in his second language.

“So, ah, you two are together, then? A couple?” David asked, gently.

“Um,” Shane said, looking over at Rozanov. “Sort of?”

“Yes,” Rozanov replied, looking intently at Shane.

“Really?” Shane asked, and Yuna got the distinct impression that their conversation had turned into something intensely private.

“I think maybe, yes,” Rozanov said softly. Shane beamed at him, his entire face taken over by a blissful expression of happiness that almost hurt to look at. She felt David squeeze her hand. “But is complicated,” Rozanov said, staring back at Yuna and David.

“Mom said...” Shane began, tentatively, looking at his dad. “She said you sort of... guessed about me? That I might be... gay?”

“Oh, sure kiddo,” David said, smiling softly. “We didn’t know for sure, obviously, but... we thought it was a possibility.”

“And you’re not, like, disappointed?” Shane asked, quietly.

“How could we ever be disappointed in you, Shane?” David replied, fiercely. “We love you.”

Shane nodded, tears gathering along his lashline, while David reached out to cup the back of his head, just like he did when Shane was little. When Yuna looked away, she caught Rozanov’s eye, and she couldn’t help but notice that he looked a little... wistful, maybe? But the expression disappeared when he noticed her staring, and he cleared his throat a little awkwardly.

“But,” David said, with a wry grin, “what we did *not* suspect was that you were so friendly with, ah, Rozanov here.”

“Ilya,” Rozanov replied, and it was only in that moment Yuna realised that neither she nor David had thought to use his given name. Even in her head, he was always *Rozanov*. A hockey player, before he was a person. And wasn’t that all too familiar?

“Ilya, sorry,” David said, nodding respectfully.

“Yeah, I know,” Shane said. “It’s... a long story. And it doesn’t even really make sense to me.”

“Or me,” Roz– *Ilya* supplied.

“Maybe, just start at the beginning?” She said, gently. “When did this happen?”

She really was curious to know. As much as she understood that she shouldn’t push, her brain was still having a hard time wrapping around how this could have come to be.

“I mean, we’ve been... *something* for a while...” Shane began, cautiously.

“Wait, was it Tampa? At the All-Star game?” David asked. “You two had so much, uh, chemistry...”

“Uh, no, it was before then.” Shane said, a hint of a blush forming on his cheek. Roza– *Ilya*, just held Shane’s hand, seemingly content with allowing him to divulge the information to his parents.

“Well, you sure fooled everyone, bud.” David said, blowing out an incredulous breath.

“So, when?” Yuna asked. She wasn’t entirely sure why she was so desperate to know, but she knew that she wouldn’t settle until she did. Until she had figured out exactly how long Shane had felt he needed to hide from them.

“Since, uh... *rookie season*.” Shane mumbled.

Yuna felt herself freeze in shock. “Wait...” She did the mental math in her head. “Since you were *nineteen*? Your *rookie year*? Oh, *Shane*.” She couldn’t imagine. *Seven years*. He’d been holding that secret inside for *seven whole years*.

“No,” Ilya said, brow furrowed. “Is not true. Since before that.”

“Not helping, Ilya,” Shane muttered.

“The summer before,” Ilya said, insistently.

“When did you even...?” Yuna asked, mentally running through that summer almost a decade ago. *When had they even found the time to...?*

“Uhhh, well...” He blushed furiously again, before seeming to steel himself. “Do you... do you remember that CCM commercial? The one I did with Ilya?”

“And you’ve been... *together*... all that time?”

Shane laughed a little, then.

“Ah, *no*,” he said, pointedly, with an awkward grin, flushing scarlet.

“God, no,” Ilya said, at the same time. “Just...”

“Just... what?” Yuna asked, confused.

“Just...” Ilya shrugged, making a sort of aborted gesture with his hand. “Just...”

The dots connected suddenly in her head, and she again had a sudden, fierce memory of encountering Ilya Rozanov in an elevator, that night, after the shoot, and all of a sudden *she* was blushing almost as red as Shane, and she found she didn’t really need the answer to her question after all.

“Oh!” She cleared her throat a little awkwardly, avoiding both boys’ gazes.

“Just what?” asked David, quietly.

“*Lovers*,” she replied, pointedly, and David grimaced a little.

“OK, can we stop using that word?” Shane asked, frustratedly. “Besides,” he said, quickly, “we are now. Well, sort of. I think. We’d like to be. If it wasn’t basically impossible.”

He looked so strained as he said it that Yuna couldn’t help but reach her hand out to his again.

“Nothing is impossible, Shane,” she said, gently. Shane gave a little huff of laughter, although he didn’t look entirely convinced.

“If anyone could figure it out, it would be you, Mom,” he said, gently.

“Well, I don’t know about anyone else, but I’m starving,” David said, breaking the tension somewhat. “You like ham and swiss, Ilya?”

“Sure,” Ilya said, with a polite smile, as he deftly caught the sandwich David tossed him.

Yuna accepted hers gratefully, but her mind was too busy to focus on eating. She felt as if she were reliving the past decade of their lives, of her son's life, every conversation, every dinner, every photoshoot, every game... and speaking of games, all those times they had played against one another... how did they...?

"You never..." she said, frowning, "*let* him win, did you Shane?"

Ilya laughed, long and loud. Shane looked furious.

"God, Mom. No!"

"He does not need to let me win," Ilya said, still laughing. "I am faster skater. And he has weak backhand."

"A weak...? Shut up, Ilya," Shane said, rolling his eyes. "The team comes first, Mom. Always."

She wasn't entirely sure if she believed him. They clearly cared about each other a lot. How on earth could they keep that off the ice?

Shane seemed to know what she was thinking, and rolled his eyes again.

"Do you let Dad win at Yahtzee?" he asked, deadly serious.

"I would rather die," she said, automatically, and *oh. Right.*

"Yeah, same," Shane said.

"OK," she acquiesced, holding her hands up in mock surrender.

David, who had been watching the exchange with fondness, wiped his hands on a napkin, before leaning forwards, his expression softly serious.

"Ilya, I gotta say, I'm surprised about you," he said. Ilya's face was impassive, but Shane's brow had furrowed slightly. "You've... well. You've got such a reputation as a, you know, a *ladies' man*."

Yuna, to her own surprise, hadn't even considered this before. Seeing the pair together, it was obvious how much Ilya seemed to care for Shane. But David was right, Ilya *did* have a reputation. It was one of the things she'd always... *disliked* about him, before all this – that he seemed hell-bent on sleeping his way through every woman in the continental U.S. And while David's tone was light, she could tell that he was concerned.

"Is... not *untrue*," Ilya said, somewhat awkwardly. Shane looked frustrated. It was fair, Yuna supposed, since they were sort of questioning Ilya's... what? His sexuality? His morals? His ability to keep it in his trousers?

"Ilya," Shane said, carefully. "Likes both."

“Oh,” David said, somewhat surprised. *Bisexual*, Yuna thought. That’s the right word, isn’t it? Or is it *pansexual*? Or...?

And what did that mean for Shane? If Shane was gay, but Ilya... *liked both*? Especially considering he had a reputation for being... *prolific* in that regard? She couldn’t help but exchange a look with David. She knew her concern would be written all over her face.

Ilya frowned, and when he spoke, he seemed to be selecting each word with extreme care and precision. “I have been with lots of women, it is true,” he said, un-selfconsciously. “That was not... fake. But,” he paused, looking over at Shane, his eyes blazing. “I have only felt like this with one person.”

“Yeah?” Shane said, softly.

“*Da.*” Ilya smiled brilliantly, stroking his thumb across Shane’s cheekbone.

“Me too,” he replied, staring deeply into Ilya’s eyes, before leaning in for a gentle kiss. Suddenly, Yuna felt as though she was intruding. She focused on unwrapping her sandwich, trying to give the boys some privacy in the tiny hospital room.

As she fiddled with the wrapper, her mind turned once again to the problem. Yuna, for her part, had never met a problem she couldn’t solve. Eventually. It may take some clever thinking, or some brute force, but where there was a will, there was a way. Since he was a little boy, Yuna had always been determined to help Shane overcome any problem. And when he told them he wanted to play hockey, she had decided to make damn sure that nothing – not money, not time, and definitely not the colour of his skin – was going to hold him back. She’d be damned if she let his sexuality – let who he *loved* – hold him back now.

She picked at her sandwich for a moment, before taking a deep, decisive breath.

“OK, so,” she said, piercing Ilya and Shane with her best “momager” expression. “What’s the plan?”

Both boys stared at her blankly.

“We don’t... really have one?” Shane said, glancing nervously at Ilya. “It’s all... kind of new.”

Kind of new, but you’ve been something since you were nineteen, Yuna thought, rolling her eyes internally. *Boys. Why did they have to be so oblivious?*

“So your plan is to just keep doing this, in secret? Until you retire, or...?” David asked. Even though he didn’t say it, she heard the *forever* anyway. Yuna was struck by a visceral jolt of sadness.

“No,” she said, “oh no, that’s...”

“Yes,” Ilya said, with a piercing look, “it is.”

“We can’t really just... come out and announce it.” Shane was frowning again.

“Well, we need a statement prepared, at the very least, in case anything leaks,” she said, her mind running a mile a minute. “Something classy and simple. And I can quietly reach out to the premium brands. Maybe just Reebok. Oh, and Rolex, and Speedo. They’re good brands, they’ve done Pride collaborations before, I’m sure of it. They’ll be thrilled, I think, once they wrap their minds around this. There’s a world of opportunity here, if they do it right.”

“Mom, can we take three steps back, please?” Shane said, a little frustration edging into his voice. “I’m not gonna come out, or anything, not just yet. We just want...”

“A future,” Ilya finished.

Right. OK. One thing at a time.

“Well, who else knows?” she asked. While she didn’t think Rose Landry was likely to talk, that didn’t mean someone else wouldn’t. Especially if they were planning on keeping this a complete secret. “Any of your teammates, Ilya?”

“No,” Shane said, answering for Ilya, and looking uncomfortable again. “No-one else knows. I mean, Rose knows about *me*, but she doesn’t know about Ilya.”

“Well, Sveta...” Ilya said, and Shane furrowed his brow.

“Svetlana?” he asked Ilya. Shane seemed somewhat put out by the mention of the other woman. Was she one of Rozanov’s... *many women*?

“*Da*. She knows about me, that I am bisexual. She knew about Sasha, back home.”

“Your coach’s son?” Ilya nodded in confirmation, and, *well*. Yuna was sure there was an interesting story there. For a second, she was almost tempted to ask, but then she was thinking about the book again, and about what it would have been like for Ilya in Russia, where he would always have run the risk of getting caught, where he could never be himself, and she was struck again by overwhelming sympathy for the man.

Ilya ran his free hand through his curls, looking bashful. “And she... she knows about *Jane*.” He said. “She knows Jane is... not a girl. She guessed, when I was at home for the funeral. But I do not think she thinks it is you.”

Shane, she noted, seemed almost relieved at this news. Yuna decided it was best not to pry any further.

“OK, so that’s two people,” she said, trying to get them back on track, “but no-one in your hockey circles?”

“No,” Ilya said, shaking his head. “There are no hockey players who are...” He waved his hand again, grasping for the word.

“Out,” Shane said, sighing flatly.

“Well, there’s a first time for everything. And odds are that it can’t only be you two, right?” David said, gently. “There’s, what, over 700 players in the NHL? I mean, even just

statistically speaking...” He tailed off. While David was right, Yuna wasn’t sure that was all that helpful. Statistically speaking, there would likely be around, what? Thirty or so queer players in the league, at the very least. But no-one had yet been brave enough to be the *first*. And the NHL wasn’t exactly known for being the most tolerant of sports – not in management, not in the locker rooms, and not even from the fans. Not all of them, of course, but Yuna had seen plenty of disgusting social media comments... Whoever ended up being the first out player would need to be extraordinarily brave.

“I mean, that’s only part of the problem though, right?” Shane said, snapping Yuna from her thoughts. “I mean, it’s not just that I’m gay, or Ilya’s bi... it’s that we’re *us*.”

Of course. The rivalry. Hollander and Rozanov. Even if the league could accept that Shane was gay, the fact he was dating *Ilya Rozanov* was definitely not going to go down well with the fans. He was essentially sleeping with the enemy. The entire narrative was against them.

What they needed was to *rewrite* it.

“So, why don’t you change the narrative?”

“Narrative?” Ilya said, scrunching his nose.

“Story,” Shane said, quickly.

“Oh.”

“What do you mean, Mom?” Shane asked, staring at her intently.

“Well, we need to find a way to bring down the heat on the rivalry, right? At least as far as the media and the fans are concerned.”

“I mean, our teams don’t help...” That was certainly true. The Voyageurs v. Bears rivalry was almost as old as the sport itself. And Voyageurs fans – *or*, she thought, *their players* – were never going to accept Shane dating a Bear, or vice versa.

“I could change teams.”

Nothing could have shocked her more than Ilya’s quiet suggestion.

“What?” Shane said, softly, his face mirroring her own surprise.

“I am free agent next season. I could take trade. Maybe to Canadian team.”

“Really?”

“You would do that?” Yuna asked, “For Shane?”

“Yes. But also I... I would love not to have Russian passport.”

Yuna couldn’t quite believe how many times she had felt sorry for Ilya Rozanov in the past 24 hours. But still, something was niggling at her.

“So you have no loyalty to Boston?” she asked, a little shrewdly.

“Jesus, Mom!” Shane said, fixing her with an exasperated look.

“What? Loyalty is important!” she said. Which was true, loyalty *was* important! If Rozanov was ready to ditch Boston, who’d given him his start, what else would he be willing to put aside?

“He’s trying to be loyal to me, not *Boston!*” Shane said, indignantly. And, well. He had a point. Shane turned to Ilya, rolling his eyes. “My mom cares a little bit too much about hockey,” he said. Yuna raised a brow at him. Ilya, however, just chuckled.

“Yes, I see where you get it.”

“OK, so, Ilya takes a trade.” She paused, running through possibilities in her head. “Montreal is obviously a no-go—”

“I draw line at Montreal,” Ilya said. “Dreadful team.”

Shane gave a soft *hey!* of indignation.

“Vancouver?” David asked, but while Yuna considered it, Shane and Ilya both shook their heads.

“They are already at their cap,” Ilya said. “Could not afford me.”

“Well... Ottawa is looking for a new center, so they have an opening,” Shane said, carefully. “And they’re *well* under their cap...”

They’re also the worst team in the league, Shane, she thought. Ilya Rozanov, playing for Ottawa? But, to her surprise, Ilya seemed to be seriously considering it.

“Ottawa is still same division as Boston. We would be rivals, still.”

“Yeah, but... it’s close by. Only two hours. And, I mean, Boston and Montreal... that’s intense, right? But *Ottawa* and Montreal...”

“It’s definitely not as bad,” Yuna said, still somewhat shocked that Ilya would even consider a trade. “That could work. I mean, lots of players have friends on other teams. And for all anyone knows... I mean, you’re rivals, but that doesn’t mean you have to *hate* each other.”

“So, we... we become friends. Off the ice,” Shane said, getting into his stride. Yuna couldn’t help but wonder if he’d been thinking about this for a while. “I mean, it’s not like we’re rookies anymore. People can’t expect us to genuinely hate each other forever, right? We aren’t fucking wrestlers.”

“So we are just *best friends* all of a sudden?” Ilya said, somewhat incredulously. And he did have a point. It was a lot, to go from nothing to close friendship, and not expect anyone to question it.

“You need a cover,” she said. “Something that means you *have* to spend time together, to give you space to *publicly* become friends.”

“Maybe... what if we start a charity? Together. Something that benefits both cities, that means something to us... We make up some story, like I approached you...”

“Or I approached you,” Ilya said, indignantly.

“Whatever. The point is, we tell the press, the fans, that... that working on the charity means so much to us that we’ve developed, like... a mutual respect for each other, and that we...”

“And that we are lovers,” Ilya said, with a smirk. “Any questions?”

“Stop using that word,” Shane said, exasperated. “But... look, we still play hard against each other on the ice, obviously—”

“Obviously,” Ilya parroted, smirking still, and how could Yuna have ever thought they would go easy on each other?

“But, we’re only two hours away from each other. All year. And if people saw us together, it wouldn’t be so weird, you know? And you could apply for citizenship, and...” Shane took a deep breath, as if almost steeling himself. “And maybe, when we retire, we could... be together. Like for real.”

“You are really thinking that far ahead, Hollander?” Ilya said, amazement swirling in his blue eyes.

“I do about this. I do about... about you,” Shane said, looking intently at Ilya.

Yet again, Yuna felt like they were intruding on something private. She nudged David with her elbow, gesturing to the door.

“We’re, ah, gonna grab some coffees, boys,” David said, softly, as if he was trying not to break the moment between the two. But the pair seemed so wrapped up in each other that they barely nodded their acknowledgment, before they were staring at each other again.

They were silent as they walked out into the hall. As the door swung closed behind them, Yuna caught a glimpse of Ilya leaning forward to cup Shane’s cheek, unbearably tender, before leaning in to kiss him, all the while whispering something in Russian. Yuna’s heart gave a pang, caught between joy and a piercing, aching sadness.

“Well,” David said, huffing out a breath.

“Since *rookie year*,” Yuna said.

“Summer before,” David corrected, with a smile. “Are you OK?” he asked, placing a warm hand on her shoulder.

“I don’t know,” she admitted.

It was a lot to take in. In the span of a few hours, Shane had been injured, hospitalised, drugged up, come out to his parents, and revealed he was in a decade-long relationship with his long-time professional rival. And, in that same span of hours, Ilya Rozanov had gone from being *Rozanov*, certified menace and playboy extraordinaire, someone who nebulously existed in her brain as ‘Shane’s biggest rival’, to *Ilya*, the person. *Ilya*, who was a little awkward, and stoic, but seemed like he actually had a good sense of humour. *Ilya*, who struggled sometimes to find words in English. *Ilya*, who *liked both*. *Ilya*, who would be willing to transfer to Ottawa. *Ilya*, who was in love with her son.

“It’s just such a long time,” she said, “for him to carry that all alone.”

To her shame, she felt tears welling up yet again. She felt horribly selfish. Of course, a large part of her sadness was reserved for Shane alone – how lonely he must have felt, how isolated, how he had never been able to fully be himself. But there was a part of her, small, selfish, and unfairly loud, that was devastated that he hadn’t felt he could tell *her*. And he had told her as much. He had *tried*, he said, and Yuna was only now realising how much of himself he had buried because he was so scared of disappointing *them*.

“But he’s not alone now,” David said, wrapping his arms around her. “He’s got us now, right?” She nodded weakly into his chest. “And,” David continued with a smirk in his voice, “he apparently has Ilya Rozanov.”

“Well,” she said, pulling back to wipe her eyes, “you know Shane. He never does anything by halves.”

* * *

Shane was discharged by dinnertime. His arm was carefully balanced in a sling, and he was still in quite a bit of pain – the headaches had started in earnest, and Yuna had insisted he keep his sunglasses on to protect his eyes from the bright hospital lights – but he was otherwise OK. Ilya had hovered, seemingly unsure what to do with himself, but both David and Yuna had insisted he come with them back to Shane’s apartment for the night, and David had promised to drive him to the airport so he could catch his rearranged flight the following morning before they drove Shane to Ottawa.

Strangely, it became clear pretty quickly that Ilya had never actually been to Shane’s apartment before – he seemed incredibly interested in the few personal items Shane had dotted around. Yuna didn’t ask – she couldn’t imagine how difficult it must have been to conduct a relationship entirely in secrecy. In her mind’s eye, she could see the hotel rooms, empty and impersonal, in cities that weren’t theirs, a decade of hiding behind closed doors. It made her eyes prick with a familiar burn for about the tenth time that day, and so she busied herself with settling Shane on the couch, and making sure he had everything he needed in easy reach, while David began combing the kitchen to find something to rustle up for dinner.

“I’m fine, Mom, seriously,” Shane said, fondly, as she fluffed the pillows at his back.

“Yes, well, you took quite a hit to the head,” she said, bluntly. “I’m putting your phone in the kitchen – I’ll leave it on loud, but there’s absolutely no screen time at all for the next 48 hours, OK?”

“OK, yes, I know,” he said. She could see him making eyes at Ilya across the room, communicating wordlessly. Just like she could with David. Ilya was smiling.

“Alright, just making sure,” she said, placatingly. “I’ll go grab a few extra pillows for your bed. You’re going to need to keep your arm steady while you sleep.”

She left Shane and Ilya to the quiet of the living room, and set about grabbing everything Shane would need to at least have a mildly comfortable night. By the time she returned, Ilya had migrated to the sofa, and Shane was leaning into his side. They were talking quietly; Shane’s eyes were closed, his head resting against Ilya’s shoulder, while Ilya ran his fingers gently through Shane’s hair.

Yuna knew she shouldn’t eavesdrop, but she lingered at the door nonetheless.

“You are very lucky, you know,” Ilya was saying, softly. “To have parents who love you this way.”

“I know,” Shane said. “I think they like you.” He smiled up at Ilya from where he was nestled into his shoulder, and the look was so tender and proud that Yuna thought her heart might burst.

Ilya was silent for a long moment.

“I do not know what it is like,” he said. “To have a family like this. Even before... to my father I was disappointment. My brother hates me, no matter how much money I send him, because I am successful and he is not, and because I like men, which he does not understand. And my mother...” He trailed off.

“It’s OK,” Shane said, softly.

“I miss her,” Ilya said, his voice sounding oddly thick. “She was the only family I really had.”

Shane reached up to cup his cheek with his good hand, pulling Ilya’s face to his until their foreheads touched.

“You get to share mine now, OK?” he said.

“OK,” Ilya replied, before giving Shane the tenderest of kisses.

In that quiet moment, Yuna Hollander understood three simple things. Firstly, that her son – for better or worse – was in love with Ilya Rozanov. Deeply, truly, completely in love. Second, that this love, as impossible as it seemed, was thoroughly reciprocated. And third, she understood that in the span of 24 hours, Ilya Rozanov – who had apparently never known the love or support of his own – had become a part of her family.

Well, she thought, *Ilya Rozanov better be ready for us*. Because, much like her son, Yuna Hollander never did anything by halves.

Dinner that night was a quiet affair – David had made some simple penne, which Shane managed to eat easily enough with one hand. Conversation was light and sporadic, mostly due to how exhausted everyone seemed to be. Eventually, Shane’s energy began to wane completely, and before Yuna could even open her mouth, Ilya was there, coddling him, and cajoling him to bed with a promise that he’d make sure the dishes got done.

Ilya kept to his word, helping David with the washing up while Yuna helped Shane get settled. The only mildly awkward moment came when Ilya grabbed his duffle, and instinctively made towards Shane’s room, before seemingly realising Shane’s parents were watching, and freezing in an abortive, stilted sort of way, before clearing his throat uncomfortably.

“I, ah–” he said, looking more than a little embarrassed. “Is there a blanket? I can sleep on couch.”

“Don’t be silly,” David said, smiling at Ilya in the same, fond way he often smiled at Shane. “Go be with Shane. He’ll want you there, I think. I don’t think he’d forgive us if we made his boyfriend sleep on the couch.”

Yuna didn’t miss the way Ilya’s eyes lit up at the word ‘boyfriend’. It struck her that that may have been the first time anyone had ever called him that. *Shane’s boyfriend*. She rolled the phrase around a few times in her head. She thought it sounded pretty good.

Ilya had to leave relatively early the following morning. He’d managed to get himself on the first flight back to Boston, and from there he was going to have to go straight on to Pittsburg. Yuna, to her surprise, was actually quite sorry to see him go – not least because both he and Shane looked thoroughly miserable at the thought of being apart.

But she wasn’t letting Ilya Rozanov get away that easily. *Oh, no*. She’d already gotten his number, and added him to a new family group chat (‘*Hollanders +I*’ – David thought he was especially clever with his use of the roman numeral), and made him promise to come to stay with them in Ottawa as soon as his season was done. From what she gathered, Ilya and Shane had decided they were going to spend the summer at Shane’s cottage – they’d made some tentative plans to head up there after playoffs were over.

Shane and Ilya had tried not to make an obvious fuss over their goodbyes – it was something they were, she supposed, well used to doing by now – but they held each other much longer than was strictly necessary, and when they finally pulled apart, both boys’ eyes were looking suspiciously wet.

For her own part, Yuna hadn’t been able to resist pulling Ilya into a hug herself. The hug was somewhat stiff and awkward at first, but after a moment, Ilya relented, and he hugged her back with equal strength. With a jolt, she realised this was the first hug he had likely received from a mother in a very long time. It was mad, how fast it had happened, but she felt a surge of violent protectiveness for this boy, who seemed so lonely, and who loved her son so very much.

And besides, despite his quiet, stoic presence, the house seemed so much quieter with him gone.

“Ilya is hurt,” Yuna said, frowning.

Shane turned to glance at her from where he was lying on the couch.

“How did you know?” Shane said, with an incredulous scoff.

“He’s protecting his ribs. You can tell by how he’s angled there, look!” She pointed at the slow motion replay on the screen. “See! Right there! He opens up and turns away from the hit! He could have leveled Hunter clean, but he didn’t! Ilya would never miss an easy hit like that.”

Shane chuckled, then, and Yuna gave him a gentle glare. In the span of only a few, short weeks, Yuna Hollander had become one of Ilya Rozanov’s biggest fans. She’d very quickly found that the protectiveness she felt over him off the ice had extended to watching him play. It was as if someone had flipped a switch – by giving herself permission to like Ilya Rozanov, she suddenly had a whole new appreciation for his skills on the ice. And by God, was he a skilled player. He wasn’t as technically good as Shane – he definitely played with considerably more force – and he was still a magnet for trouble, but there was something exhilarating about watching him, all the same.

“Yeah,” Shane said, his eyes glued to the game, where Ilya was currently getting into it with the ref, and looking like he was thoroughly enjoying himself. “His ribs are pretty bruised from that hit he took last week. He says he’s fine to play, but...” Shane trailed off, watching as Ilya happily headed off to the penalty box.

“Why didn’t he say something? We spoke to him yesterday!”

“He didn’t want you to freak out about it,” Shane replied.

Ilya had become somewhat of a permanent fixture in their day to day lives, despite his lack of physical presence. He and Shane talked daily: they texted, spent hours on the phone, and, whenever Ilya had the privacy, facetimes. They’d taken to calling Ilya at mealtimes, propping Shane’s phone up against the salt shaker so Ilya didn’t have to eat alone.

It had taken less than a week for him to come out of his shell. Once he had realised that Yuna and David actually liked him – at least, as much as they could be expected to, given they didn’t yet know him very well – he slowly but surely became much more gregarious, happily chirping Shane, and cracking jokes – often at the expense of other players; Hayden Pike and Scott Hunter were his favourite targets – and shed much of his stoicism in favour of a softer, more gentle personality. He was still brash, and more than a little cocky, but Yuna quickly saw it for the act it was – bold, braggadocious bravado designed to mask lingering insecurities, both linguistic and emotional.

And he was, quite simply, incredible for Shane. Yuna didn’t think she’d ever seen Shane look so happy. They laughed constantly, teasing each other with their endless competitiveness, trading loving barbs and fond chirps, all the while exchanging looks of pure longing and

love. It would be somewhat sickening, if it were anyone other than her own son, behaving so spectacularly sappily.

Once, about two weeks after Shane came home from the hospital, talk had turned to the statement Yuna had been drafting about their relationship, in case anything were to leak. Shane had gone increasingly quiet, before he'd begun to have some kind of panic attack. He'd had them before, when he was much younger, but as far as Yuna knew, it hadn't happened in years. He had slumped his head down onto the dinner table, while his breathing turned increasingly shallow and frantic. Ilya, however, was able to bring him back around with just a few careful words, talking Shane through his breathing, and reassuring him in a gentle, lulling mix of both English and Russian, until Shane had calmed completely. He'd been hundreds of miles away, but his voice was all Shane had needed.

It was good, she thought, that Shane was in such a safe pair of hands.

The Bears lost to the Admirals – pretty predictable, Yuna thought, considering Rozanov was playing at about sixty percent capacity. He really did carry that team, in the same way that Shane often carried the Voyageurs. Not that she was biased, of course.

“Well, that’s that,” she said, looking over at Shane, who was already texting furiously – no doubt commiserating with Ilya. “I think New York is going to win the cup,”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Hunter’s determined. You can see it. They’ve gone nine seasons without it, he’ll make sure they get this one.”

She was rarely wrong about these things.

“Well, it’s a shame,” David said, emerging from the kitchen. “It would have been nice to see Ilya lift the cup.”

Yuna couldn’t help but notice Shane’s radiant smile at David’s words. She watched, happily, as he grinned down at his phone, no doubt passing on the message. She never wanted that smile to ever go away.

* * *

In the end, Yuna was proven right. The night of the final found the four of them lounging on the couch, glasses of wine, beer and ginger ale in hand, as Scott Hunter barrelled his way towards his first Stanley Cup.

Ilya had arrived not long after Boston was out. He’d been disappointed – not just because of his ribs, but because he had lost to *Hunter*, who Ilya affectionately liked to refer to as a fossil – but the disappointment seemed to pale in comparison to his joy at being back with Shane. They’d spent much of their time simply relaxing. Yuna had initially worried that it would be hard to keep someone like Ilya Rozanov entertained for a sustained period of time. He was used to a much wilder lifestyle, full of partying and drinking. But Ilya, much to everyone’s surprise, was completely content to sit around and do puzzles with David, curl up and watch

nature documentaries with Shane, or sit out on the deck with Yuna and chat about everything and nothing at all.

"I can't believe New York is finally gonna win the cup," Shane said, from where he was curled up next to Ilya, who groaned loudly in response.

"I hate Scott Hunter," he said, mopily.

"No, you don't," Shane laughed.

"I do!" he replied, indignantly.

"No, you don't," Yuna chimed in. "You're just mad he knocked you guys out."

"Yes, because he is *old*, Yuna. He should not be able to do this! Was only because fucking Kent got me with dirty hit. If I was fit, Hunter would stand no chance."

"Sure, sure," Shane said, patting his arm placatingly.

One minute to go.

"Do you think Hunter will drink tea out of the cup?" Ilya said, smirking.

"Caffeine?" Shane said, chuckling. "Never. He's not that hard core."

"Milk then," Ilya said with a wicked grin.

"Warm milk," Yuna chuckled.

"*Da*, and then he must go straight to bed. He is too old for all this excitement."

The whistle sounded, and the ice was full of excited men in red jerseys. Ilya gave a heavy sigh.

"Ugh, next year," he said, wistfully.

"In your dreams," said Shane, with a wicked grin.

They watched as a beaming – and somewhat shellshocked – Scott Hunter was handed the Stanley Cup, lifting it into the air above his head to the rapturous delight of the crowd.

"I'm happy for him," Shane said, softly.

"Of course you are," Ilya replied, rolling his eyes.

"He's a good player," Yuna added. "He's deserved this for a while now. It was definitely their year."

"Ack!" Ilya said, waving his hand dramatically. "You Hollanders, you are far too nice. Hockey is not sport for nice people."

“Well, you’re definitely proof of that,” Shane said, grinning.

“Hey!”

The players on the ice had brought out their families – kissing their wives, hugging their children. It was going to be one hell of a party in New York, that was for sure. Yuna watched as Hunter hovered on the fringes of the group, getting a few slaps on the back from his teammates, but still, he seemed to be out there all alone. Yuna remembered hearing something about Hunter being orphaned when he was young, and she felt a pang of sorrow that Scott Hunter’s mom wasn’t there to celebrate with him.

Shane seemed to be thinking the same. “It’s kind of sad,” he said, “that his parents aren’t here to see this.”

“Oh, I’m sure he’ll find a way to celebrate,” David said, lightening the mood with a deft chuckle.

“What is he doing?” Ilya asked, suddenly.

Hunter had made his way over to the boards, and seemed to be gesturing to someone in the crowd. The camera followed him, pushing in as tight as it could on his face. He looked... nervous?

“I... don’t know?” Shane said, looking equally as puzzled.

A man was making his way down through the crowd. The commentators seemed to think he was a fan of some kind, but Yuna wasn’t so sure. Why on earth would Scott Hunter be pulling a single, random fan down onto the ice after a Stanley Cup win? But, no, there he was, grabbing this man by the hand, and leading him out onto the ice, gripping him by the shoulders as they talked intensely for a brief moment.

And then, Scott Hunter, captain of the New York Admirals, winner of the Stanley Cup, was kissing another man on live television.

“Oh,” said Yuna, softly. “Wow.”

It was unfathomable, the bravery that single kiss had taken. The implications were enormous. The captain of the current Stanley Cup winners had just come out on national television. In the days, weeks, and years to come, the world would be talking about this moment, this kiss, as the one that changed the game.

But right now, she could only think of how it would affect the two boys at her side.

Shane was gripping so tightly to Ilya’s hand his knuckles had turned white. Their eyes were wide and glassy.

“Do you think that’s his boyfriend?” Shane said, in a soft, fragile voice. “Holy shit, Ilya, can you believe it?”

“I’m moving to Ottawa,” Ilya replied.

“Yeah?” Shane said, turning to face him.

“Yes.”

And Yuna watched as Ilya Rozanov leant in to kiss her son fiercely, before he turned his steel-blue eyes on her.

“Yuna,” he said, “I think we will need a plan.”

End Notes

Russian Translations:

(Note: Google translate was used. Apologies. Major, major thanks to everyone who helped with the translations! If anyone knows of anymore errors please, please let me know! Russian is very different from the Latinate languages I'm used to!)

Slava bogu – Thank God

navyazyvat'sya – Impose

Ya zdes', lyubov' moya. Ya zdes'. Ya nikuda ne uydu – I'm here, my love. I'm not going anywhere.

Nyet, dorogoy – No, sweetheart

Da, lyubov' moya – Yes, my love

Potomu chto ya lyublyu ego – Because I'm in love with him

blyat, eto slozhno – Fuck, this is complicated

kak eto skazat – How do I say it

On – moya "devushka iz Monrealya – He is my "Montreal Girl"

Vdokhonovlyayet menya – Inspires me

kak by eto skazat'? *Sovmestímost* – How do you say it? Compatible.

kak vy govorite...? – How do you say...?

Thank you to anyone who read this! It's so nice to be part of a fandom again -- I haven't been in these trenches since my 2012 tumblr days, so it's weirdly nice to be a part of this kind of community again! This fandom feels really special. I sort of just started dabbling in something and then it became this massive beast of a story -- really not sure what they put into those books/that show but it feels like a collective psychosis. I've got a few more ideas for stories that I might post... we'll see!

Update: Um, holy shit??!! I cannot say thank you enough to everyone who has commented, left kudos, or bookmarked this little story. I've read all of your lovely comments, even if I haven't had the time to send replies! It's the first time I've ever been brave enough to post my writing anywhere, and I cannot actually believe how many people have read it, or how kind everyone has been. Thank you, thank you, thank you! 

There are no plans currently to write a follow up to this fic, as I think it stands on its own, but for all the people in the comments asking to know what the plan would be, (if you'll allow a

smidge of shameless self promo) please check out my new ongoing fic [Changing the Narrative](#) which follows Shane and Ilya as they make a more active plan for coming out to the world! It updates every Friday! 

Works inspired by this one

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!