

Fever Dream

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Fever Dream

by [raviann](#)

Summary

When Shane suspects Ilya has the flu but he's away for a game, he calls upon his mother to make sure Ilya is well taken care of in his absence.

“I’m sorry I thought you were mama,” Ilya quickly said on top of her words, still unwilling to meet her eye. So this was where the majority of the silence stemmed from, then. Shame. She immediately sat back down, plate forgotten. Even with his head angled downwards, she did not miss the red flush on his cheeks and chin.

YUNA

“Hey, sweetheart. Isn’t the game beginning in two hours? What’s up?”

Yuna huffed quietly into the receiver of her phone, amused, as she watched David mercilessly throw snow off of the roof of their car with a shovel. He caught her watching through the kitchen window, sent her a gloved thumbs-up, and continued to sweep it from the windshield as if he had a vendetta against the wintertime.

“*Mom— hi,*” Shane’s voice was tinny and obscured on the other line, as it always was whenever he was so far away, but this time even more-so when combined with the noise of what must have been the locker room. Shane rarely ever called this soon before a game; his priorities often more-so aligned with keeping his teammates in check and completing pre-game interviews, not placating his nervous mother. Something was amiss, and she had a nagging feeling it was serious.

“Is something wrong?” She asked, unable to contain it.

She heard him sigh. That was never a good start. Somewhere near him, a teammate shrieked something incoherent. But she patiently waited him out as he tried to find the words. “It’s— *Lily,*” he finally said, clearly frustrated. Her heart ached. She hated that he needed to be so careful with his words when around anyone he knew personally. She hated that he couldn’t be open and honest and carefree. She hated that all of the men he surrounded himself with got to talk openly about their wives and girlfriends and children, and he was relegated to a code-word like an obsessive middle schooler. But she steeled that anger for another time.

“*She’s sick, I think. Since I’m all the way over here for another twenty-four hours at least, I was hoping you might be able to... check up on her.*”

The ‘her’ was strained. Yuna nodded gratuitously, despite the fact that her son couldn’t see her. “Of course. Of course I will. Do you know specifically what’s wrong?”

“*Flu, I think. H—she won’t tell me. She mentioned not feeling well a few hours ago, and I haven’t heard anything since,*” then, quieter, more nervous: “*she would never ask for help, but I know she needs it. She wouldn’t have mentioned anything if it wasn’t bad.*”

Yuna Hollander did not know her son’s boyfriend quite well just yet. He had only recently fully transitioned to living in Ottawa, and therefore only just becoming a common occurrence in their lives— perhaps even more common than her own son. She had had him over plenty of times with Shane by his side, but only a handful of times by himself: almost always to watch Shane’s games. While so much was obscured in shrouded ambiguity, though, she did know one thing for certain: that Ilya Rozanov seemed to be a very stubborn man. And that Shane himself would never reach out, asking for her help on his behalf, if he didn’t think he needed it.

“I’ll be there in thirty minutes,” she decided. “I’ll send you updates, but focus on the game for now, okay?”

Shane snorted. “*Yeah, yeah. Text me, please.*”

“Of course, honey. I love you.”

“*Love you too.*”

Ilya’s new-construction mansion in Ottawa, purchased with Yuna’s amateur but enthusiastic real-estate guidance, was imposing beneath the newly-fallen snow: large and dark and glassy. David had managed to free Yuna’s car by the time she’d gathered a bag of groceries and medication, and she was not particularly cautious on her speedy drive over.

She did not bother with knocking. There was no doorbell, and the house was sprawling; she doubted Ilya would notice if she walked right in if he was in one of the back bedrooms. She put in the code Shane had given her and noisily kicked off her shoes to announce her presence, but it sparked no reaction from the silent, open-floor living space.

She placed her shopping bags on the counter and continued down the hall, knocking on the large door she remembered leading to the master bedroom when she had last been given a tour by the realtor, months ago.

“Ilya? It’s Yuna,” she called, forcefully. There was no answer. Suddenly nervous, her hand shook, just barely, on the handle. “I’m coming in.”

The room was dark, save for the meager light coming from a lamp on the dresser. It smelled stale and musky, like a teenage boy’s room when left unattended and uncleaned for too long. It was not messy, though—but eerily empty, as though nobody lived there. No clothing, no photos, no decorations besides the essential bedroom furniture. The only sign of life was a curled-up lump on the bed, facing away from the door.

Yuna walked over, crouching down beside the bed near Ilya’s sleeping face. His expression, though slack and peaceful, was marred by the pallor of his skin and the unsettling, uneven pattern of his breathing. She slowly reached up to comb a hand through his hair, and nearly yanked her fingers back when she found it soaking wet, heat radiating from his skull. When she had first become a mother, pregnant with Shane, she was mortified that she would have to do things like this: take care of gross, feverish bodies, change diapers. But when she held him in her arms for the first time, it was as though his body became an extension of hers, and that fear dissipated into only small queasiness during episodes of sickness. Though Ilya was not hers by nature, she felt that same unyielding courage in the face of just how *gross* his damp, sticky skin felt.

She quickly yanked the mound of blankets and quilts atop him down to his hips to cool him down, pressing a hand to his back. His tee-shirt was soaked through with sweat. When she then felt his neck, the temperature there was no better.

“Ilya,” Yuna, though a calm person in most situations, felt the tightening in her voice. Why hadn’t he woken up by now, with all of this prodding? His skin was hotter than she’d ever felt

when dealing with fevers— even when Shane was a baby and had gotten sick beyond her fears. He had needed the hospital. “Ilya, wake up,” she said, firmer.

A faint stir. Ilya’s eyelids fluttered, and the hand smushed near his mouth caught on the pillow as he shifted. “*Mama?*” He asked, and Yuna’s heart plummeted in her chest. He was likely reacting to a soft female voice and the hand she still had carding through his hair. The scent of perfume. The wary, childish vulnerability that came with fever. Yuna did not know much about Ilya’s mother —only his fierce love and the brief backstory of his and Shane’s mental health foundation— but she knew enough that she felt a physical ache rush through her ribs.

“I’m sorry,” she whispered, heartbroken, as he opened his eyes. She knew intimately the abject, crushing disappointment of wanting a mother who was gone. “Just Yuna.”

It took a moment for Ilya to come back to himself. He studied her, then looked past her, as if he could see something she could not. She watched him slowly regain understanding of his surroundings and what was happening, though, because his gaze instantly snapped to hers.

“Yuna?” His expression morphed into confusion. Quickly, he tried to sit up faster than his body allowed. Yuna pushed him back down gently, suspicious that he was going to try and put on a façade just for her.

“It’s okay, it’s okay,” she said softly. “Shane called me. I’m just here to check on you.”

“Shane worries too much,” Ilya replied, voice groggy and stanching with muffled exhaustion. He groaned, shifting to lay on his back. She didn’t miss how the small movement made him breathe harder.

“Usually I’d agree, but perhaps this time he wasn’t worrying *enough*. Ilya, sweetheart, you have a terrible fever. Have you taken anything for it?”

Yuna expected a witty, snappy retort. *Of course. You Hollanders worry so much. I’m not going to die, see?* She expected push-back, or stubbornness, or insistence that this wasn’t as big of a deal as Shane was making it out to be. Instead, Ilya’s eyes glazed over and she watched, mortified, as his lower lip was sucked into his mouth, trembling.

“No. I don’t feel very good,” Ilya said, shakily, and that was enough to break down her carefully-constructed stoicism. She climbed up onto the bed beside him, helping him to sit up enough so that she could gather him in her arms. His head fell onto her shoulder like an infant’s would when being lulled into sleep, and his hands came up to weakly cling at her sweater. His breathing hiccuped— the tell-tale sound of tears being forced in.

“I know you don’t,” she whispered, rocking them back and forth, only slightly. She didn’t want to suddenly make him nauseous. She rubbed a hand down his back and played with the soft curls at the nape of his neck, trying to iron out his sadness. “I know. Fevers are the worst.”

Ilya let out a big, shuddering sigh, like a dog lying down after a long day. His damp hair prickled the sensitive skin of her neck, and she felt his lips move against her shoulder as if he

was trying to say something but couldn't get the words out. So she would do the talking for him.

"You know me," she whispered, still rocking, unwilling to pull away. She patted between his shoulder blades subconsciously. "Game-plan time."

A little huff of amusement, a puff of warm air. There he was.

"Some water, medicine, and perhaps something bland to eat if you can stomach it. A rinse-off, and some new, warm clothes. Then sleep."

Ilya was quiet for a moment. Then, tentatively: "my mama had the same game-plan. When I was little. In same order, too."

The little cracks that had been forming in Yuna's chest since meeting Ilya and slowly piecing together his ambiguous childhood finally split, causing a chasm in her heart. She turned, pressing a kiss to his hair and rocking him slower. "I knew I would have liked her," she said, trying to keep her tone light and teasing. She immediately worried if it was the wrong thing to say—too much, too soon—but her fears were upended by Ilya clinging to her tighter.

"You would've," he confirmed.

Yuna reluctantly let go of Ilya some time after the tears stopped. She propped him up on pillows, fussing with the blanket around his waist. With a weak promise that she would be right back, she went to the kitchen to fetch what she needed.

"Alright," she said upon returning to the bedroom, trying to make her tone chipper. "Temperature first."

Ilya was pliant and peaceful when she stuck the thermometer beneath his tongue. It beeped after a few seconds, reading a stark 39.6 in bold, red lettering.

"Bad?" Ilya, it seemed, could read her expressions well.

"Yes, I won't lie," she whispered, running her thumb gently against the thin, soft skin under his eye. "But before we make any rash decisions regarding doctors, we'll see if medicine has an effect. If it gets any higher we'll go, though."

He downed the fever-reducers with a gatorade. His lack of nausea was a rare, small win: Yuna knew from experience that symptoms with the flu ebbed and flowed, so it could not be ruled out, but at least she managed to get a few saltine crackers and half of a banana in him afterward with minimal coaxing. Ilya was starkly silent: the most worrying of any symptoms. He looked down at his lap as he ate, picking restlessly with a loose seam in the bedding.

When it was clear he was done, she pulled the plate away from him, brushing a few crumbs off of his tee-shirt. "Alright, well how about—"

“I’m sorry I thought you were mama,” Ilya quickly said on top of her words, still unwilling to meet her eye. *So this was where the majority of the silence stemmed from, then.* Shame. She immediately sat back down, plate forgotten. Even with his head angled downwards, she did not miss the red flush on his cheeks and chin.

“Hey,” Yuna reached forward, tipping his chin up with her fingers. He let her, meeting her eyes with a watery, sorrowful expression. Before she said anything, she soothed her thumb over the rougher skin there, the budding stubble, shaking her head. “You know, I’m sure Shane told you, but I had a surgery five months ago. Something simple, but I still had to go under anesthesia.”

Ilya nodded his head, clearly unsure of where this was going.

“When I woke up, David was there. Shane was there. But I was groggy, and confused. And David told me that the first thing I did was ask where my mother was. I’ve been told stories, from a friend who works with people who are dying— she says that it is almost guaranteed that most of her patients ask for their mothers when they are sick, or tired, or nearing the end. It’s instinct,” she said, trying to emphasize that last word.

“It’s written into who we are as human beings. And Ilya, from what you’ve told me, your mother seemed like a particularly good lady. Not just because she has the same game-plan as me for sick days—“ Ilya’s lips tugged up into a grin at this, “— but because she cared for you. Very apparently. Of course you wanted her. She was your safe space. You don’t have to be sorry for being a human.”

That broke the dam that Ilya had been hiding away by sheer willpower all morning. His breath hitched, just as it had the first time he cried, and before Yuna knew it she once again was leaning forward to hold him tight.

“How is he?”

Yuna wanted to tease Shane about his lack of greeting, to congratulate him on his win. But she knew the sheer desperation lining his tone. The unbearable need to know how a loved one is, when you are so far away.

“He’s better,” Yuna said truthfully. After Ilya’s second breakdown, she’d managed not to get him near the shower, as he assured her he simply would not make it that far on his feet, but at least into a new tee-shirt. She wiped down his face with a warm, wet towel, and sat beside him to card her fingers through his hair until he fell asleep. He had stayed like that since, his breathing only slightly uneven, and was so out of it that she even managed to slip the thermometer in his mouth while keeping him asleep. His temperature had begun to drop slightly.

“He doesn’t feel well— he had a very high fever, and was pretty loopy. But he’s due for a second dose of medicine soon and it seems to be working. He’s been asleep for a few hours, since the start of your game. He’ll be annoyed he missed it, but it’s good he slept some of it off. I’m making him something a little more tangible for dinner than crackers.”

She stared down at the lackluster chicken noodle soup she'd conjured up from her frozen supply of celery, carrots, and onion, and the grateful sick-day essentials she kept in the cupboards. Noodles, chicken broth. Something a bit heartier than crackers.

Despite being separated from her son by leagues and miles, Yuna could physically feel the impact of the good news. She pictured his posture slumping, his eyes closing. She heard his little relieved sigh. *"Good, that's good. How is he, uh... emotionally?"*

"Have you seen him sick before?" Yuna gently pried, knowing this question came from some sort of sly, previous understanding of Ilya's state when ill. It was not a usual thing to ask.

"Once," Shane admitted. *"A terrible migraine. A few years ago. It was hard for him, I think. He's so used to being on his own that he kind of breaks down at any little show of affection. I just wanted to make sure he hasn't scared you off."*

Scared you off. Yuna wanted to cry.

"No— no, Shane. I promise he hasn't. Yes, it's been difficult. Not because he's made it difficult. He's easy, and obliging, and grateful. He just wants the affection, *so* bad. And when he gets it, I think it's so overwhelming that it manifests in tears."

The confirmation Ilya had cried in front of his mother seemed to be the breaking point for Shane. *"I wish I were there,"* he whispered, tone wobbly.

"I know," Yuna placated. "But I've got him. He's as safe as he can get. Here, how about this — I have to wake him up for medicine anyways, and you can talk to him for a moment."

Shane audibly brightened at that suggestion; a happy little hum Yuna remembered from his childhood. When Shane confirmed he was safely in the confines of his hotel room, he switched the call to FaceTime and Yuna smiled at his flushed, tired face. He looked as he always did after a game: radiant.

They stayed silent as Yuna went down the hall, letting herself into Ilya's room. Ilya was still sound asleep on his stomach, arms curled beneath his chest and head ducked into the comforter. She was reluctant to wake him, but knew the medicine was more important than twenty minutes of interrupted sleep. She put the phone down just long enough to rub his back.

"Ilya, sweetheart, time to wake up," she said gently. He jolted to life, as he often did upon being woken by anyone other than Shane, but settled back down and groaned dramatically when he saw it was her. From Yuna's phone, Shane let out an amused laugh.

"Come on," she whispered, playing with the hair behind his ear. "You have to take some more medicine. And I have a surprise."

Ilya perked up, cracking open his only visible eye.

"Shane's on the phone," Yuna said in a sing-song tone. The effect was comically immediate: Ilya made quick effort of sitting up, but had to be supported by Yuna when a sudden wave of

dizziness took over his vision. She settled him against the pillows, gently lowering his head down until it was supported. Then, while she began to fiddle with the medicine container, she handed him the phone.

"Ilya," Shane whispered from his end. His voice was a mix of besotted and relieved.

Ilya cleared his throat, grinning slightly. It was the most mirth Yuna had seen in his expression all day, and that counted for something. She mindlessly reached over to rub off a crusty, old line of tears near his cheekbone. "Did I miss game?"

"Afraid so," Shane replied, sheepish. *"But we destroyed Charleston."*

"Who even knew they had hockey team. Too hot there for ice."

Shane huffed. Then, after going quiet for a moment, he asked, *"how are you?"*

"Mmm, better," Ilya sighed. He dutifully accepted the handful of pills Yuna passed his way, downing them in one go with his lukewarm gatorade. "Your mother is taking good care of me."

This confirmation lit something fierce inside of Yuna's soul. She reached out, carding a hand through his hair. Though still damp and undoubtedly oily, there was less of a magnetic heat radiating from the thin skin of his skull.

"Your fever still needs to drop by an entire digit before I'm comfortable letting you out of my sight," Yuna said gently, taking her hand back after a moment. "But maybe we wash your hair tonight, hm? And then some soup?"

Shane made a noise of contentment from the phone. *"Oh, Ilya, the hair-wash is the best."*

Ilya pulled a confused face— a distinctly childish expression. "What?"

"Hollander family tradition," Yuna said excitedly, squeezing his leg. "I always wash Shane's hair for him when he's sick. It puts him right to sleep."

Ilya huffed out a little laugh. "Sounds weird. But I will accept fate. My head is itchy."

Yuna resigned herself to letting the boys talk for a moment after, letting herself out of the room. From where she was monitoring the soup she had boiling on the stove, she could hear barely-there whispers of laughter every few minutes, and she took it as a good sign.

At the kitchen sink, she rolled up a bath towel and curved it in the shape of a horse-shoe, a makeshift pillow, resting it near the basin. Ilya's house had a fancy retractable faucet, which would undoubtedly make it easier to wash his hair. Satisfied with her set-up after tracking down another towel for after, she went back to Ilya's room to fetch him.

Opening his bedroom door, she caught the tale-end of his *I love you, Shane* which never, no matter how many times she heard it, grew old. *Someone loved her baby as much as she did.*

Ilya had a pensive, sad look on his face as he passed back the phone. “He’ll be home soon,” his tone was reassuring— probably mostly for himself. “He found a flight coming to Ottawa in two hours.”

“Oh, good,” Yuna smiled. “Well, how about we make you nice and presentable, hm? Then you can sleep it off until he gets here.”

“Are you sure? I can just take a shower. You don’t need to...wash.”

Yuna shook her head vehemently. “I’m not leaving you alone in a slippery, hard-surface shower with your fever. I couldn’t haul you off of the floor if you fell. This is good enough until Shane comes back to help— and I promise you’ll like it.”

Slowly, they made their way to the kitchen. Yuna wound her arm around Ilya’s the entire time, forcing him to shuffle rather than take ambitious steps. When they made it, Yuna patted the kitchen counter and stood vigil while Ilya made the unsteady hop up. It was almost comical; she hadn’t done this for Shane since he was a teenager, and helping to maneuver Ilya’s bulky body to lie on the countertop with his head near the basin was like trying to fit a lion in sheepskin.

She wound the corded towel around the back of his neck, making sure his skin wasn’t touching any hard, sharp granite. When his hair was situated over the back of the basin, damp curls dangling, she turned on the water.

Yuna tested it on her hand first before putting it to his head, and when she did, the warmth elicited a steady, content sound out of Ilya. His eyes fluttered closed.

Yuna wet his entire head, tilting it gently this-way-and-that, before working some sweet-smelling shampoo into his hair. She indulged longer than necessary in massaging his scalp, watching the way his eyes stayed shut and his chest lowered with a big huff of air, body going limp.

As she was rubbing behind his ears, he leaned into her touch minutely. His body shifted towards the sink, pushing the towel almost off the ledge. She re-adjusted him, shaking her head. “Just like my baby, when he was small,” she whispered fondly, mostly to herself. “He loved this too.”

She missed Shane being her baby. She missed his wayward methods of seeking comfort when he was sick, always different in his communication. Once, bleary-eyed and flushed red, he had gone to the bathroom to retrieve his watermelon-scented shampoo and dropped it on her lap, eyes pleading, until she understood that he wanted her to wash his hair in the sink. He was quite smart for a three year old, but she understood her biases. She always thought he was exceptional.

Now, though, Yuna had this. Ilya— A man who, inside, on days like today where he was overrun by fever, was a little kid who received little to no positive attention aside from his mother, but even that ended when he was twelve. Twelve. When Shane was twelve, he needed a mother more than ever.

She was coddling Ilya, she knew. He was grown. He didn't need her to wash his hair, nor force him to take medication for his fever. She knew he could do these things on his own, much like Shane could, but she didn't want him to be alone. The mere fact he had assumed she was his *mama* when he felt an affectionate touch was enough to convince her to stay, however long he needed. No matter if he were sixty and she ninety, one day. Yuna's heart twisted in her chest, and she made sure to cup Ilya's forehead with her hand so that none of the soap would get in his eyes while she rinsed it out. Just as she had Shane's, once.

Yuna twisted some conditioner into the ends of his curls, watching the little ringlets form again after a few nights of neglected matting. When she finally was done, she scrubbed the excess water from his hair and, laughing at his noise of disapproval, helped him to sit up and slide down from the counter.

"Shane was right," Ilya said, sounding drunk, as she guided him to sit at the dining table. "That was very very nice."

"I'm glad," Yuna said happily, wrapping a blanket around his shoulders from the couch. She saw how he was shivering, and trying to hide it. His fever still was high enough to toy with his internal temperature, but she knew it would hopefully break as he slept again.

"I know you're uncomfortable. I want to quickly get some broth in you before you sleep, okay? That medicine will make you nauseous without it."

Ilya nodded, placid and grateful, and practically inhaled the bowl of soup she set out in front of him. She gave him more of the yellowish broth, admonishing him to drink slower so as not to make himself sick.

It was another team effort to get him down the hall and back into bed. He managed to brush his teeth, and Yuna pretended to be oblivious to the fact that it was because, more likely than not, Ilya would next wake when Shane was home. She guided him into bed, and when he tugged multiple comforters and blankets atop himself, she didn't have the heart to strip some of them away to get his fever down.

Outside, the sun had dipped below the horizon. Her phone buzzed— Shane letting her know that he was boarding his flight, but he would be at least six hours because of his connection.

"Shane's getting on his plane," Yuna whispered as she sat beside Ilya, running her fingers through his shower-soft curls. "If you sleep through the night, he'll be here when you wake up."

Ilya looked content with that, if only for a moment, before his eyes snapped open from their half-drowsy daze and his hand latched onto her wrist. "Are you going to go home?"

"No," Yuna said, and he nodded, relieved. He let go of her, and she resumed her pattern across the crown of his head. "I'm going to stay in the guest room tonight, in case you wake up nauseous, or your fever gets worse. David is coming by in an hour to drop off a pair of pajamas and some essentials. Don't worry about me."

Ilya nodded again. English, probably, was quite difficult when you were feverish, exhausted, and mentally drained. Yuna turned off the lamp beside him, smoothing a hand across his shoulder before getting up. “Sleep well, sweetheart. Don’t hesitate to get me for anything.”

Another nod. But just as Yuna was about to close the door, she heard a faint little call. “I love you, Yuna.”

“I love you too, honey,” and she meant it.

SHANE

It was nearly four in the morning when Shane finally, quietly, let himself into Ilya’s house. He felt disgusting, and itchy, and as though his skin was too far-stretched on his bones: the awful affect of traveling all day and worrying about someone on the other side. Usually, he would high-tail it into the shower where he might let the steam melt away leftover tension, but this time he only toed off his shoes and made a beeline for Ilya’s bedroom.

Ilya was curled up small on Shane’s side of the bed. His mouth was tipped open, lips peeling and chapped, and his curls were a wild splay on the white pillowcase. He was swimming, it seemed, in a pool of sweat. His shirt was soaked, plastered to his skin, and he had kicked off the blankets at some point.

Shane paused. Did this mean his fever had broken? That’s often what wet bedsheets and wet clothes meant with the flu, but Shane had little experience being anything more than a patient. He knelt by Ilya’s bedside, rubbing his palm along Ilya’s forehead. Cool. Wet. His fever had broken.

With the touch, Ilya stirred. He subconsciously leaned into Shane’s hand, taking in a big gulp of air and seemingly recognizing Shane by smell alone— eyes still closed. They snapped open immediately, though, and a little grin lit up Ilya’s pale face.

“Shane,” he whispered, reverent. Sweat be damned, Shane dipped down to leave a lingering kiss on his temple.

“Hey, *solnyshko*,” Shane reserved pet names only for times such as these, and Ilya always preened. “Sorry I couldn’t be here sooner.”

“It’s okay,” Ilya’s accent was thick. He rolled onto his back out of sheer discomfort. “I’m cold.” Then, after a moment of contemplation, “I missed you.”

“I missed you too. Your fever broke, I think,” Shane said, heart swelling. He flicked on the bedside lamp to the lowest setting, but Ilya still winced. “A shower might warm you up, then more medicine, then back to bed.”

“Just like your mother,” Ilya murmured. “Plan.”

“Don’t harp on my plans, Rozanov,” Shane teased, kissing his forehead again because he simply was unable to resist. “Come on. I don’t want you to be cold.”

Shane carefully sat Ilya up, stripping him of his damp, clingy clothing and discarding his own, covered in invisible airport-filth. He supported Ilya into the shower, testing the water to ensure it was warm before propping Ilya up on his chest and allowing him to cling. Ilya hooked his head on Shane's shoulder, nose pressed against the crease of his neck as Shane half-mindfully wrangled some soap onto a washcloth, wiping it down Ilya's accessible back.

"Don't fall asleep," Shane whispered over the pounding noise of the water, only half meaning it. He rocked them gently, slowly, as he washed Ilya's neck and arms.

"Might," Ilya sighed against him.

Shane reached up to cradle the back of his head, holding him there. Ilya's shaking had subsided, and his skin was warm to the touch and flushed a healthier shade of red than the pallor submerging his face when he was asleep. He was joking, and clinging, and sleepy. The soap could wait.

YUNA

Yuna awoke to the sound of the shower running.

She had always been a very light sleeper, and while it sometimes was to her detriment, it most certainly was not when it came to looking after anyone ill. She scrubbed a hand over her face, pinning up her hair, before slipping on her robe to investigate. She was scared, for a moment, that perhaps Ilya was making a last-ditch effort to cool himself down in a moment of feverish panic, or perhaps he had gotten sick on himself.

However, when she was flicking the light on in the hallway, she caught sight of Shane's suitcase.

Yuna smiled to herself.

Ilya's bedsheets were covered in evidence that his fever had finally reached its peak, breaking with the aid of the medicine. She stripped them, shoving them into the hamper alongside the boys' discarded clothes, and replaced them with new ones.

She re-filled Ilya's water glass beside his bed, put his medication on a little napkin beside it, and fetched Shane's favorite water bottle from the kitchen. She grabbed an extra, clean blanket from the couch, folding it at the foot of the bed. The temperature in the room had risen significantly, so she cracked open one of the windows, only a centimeter, so some cool, crisp winter air could freshen the room.

Shane's phone was lying, abandoned, on the dresser. She texted him anyway.

I see that Ilya's fever broke.

Have him take one more round of meds. He might still be chilly after the shower, or too hot, but that's normal.

She sent both, watching Shane's phone ding beside her. Then, she added:

I love you both.

I'm just next door if you need absolutely anything.

Yuna could still take care of both of them, despite their looming size, their strength, their adeptness in handling things on their own. Just because they could didn't mean they had to. Her babies, grown or not. Blood or not. They would remain this way, in her heart, as long as they allowed her to fuss.

It took her a while to fall back asleep. At some point, the sound of the shower phased out. She lay in the dark, remembering the way Shane would curl up between her and David whenever he was sick, demanding to be held.

Then, her phone dinged. It was Shane.

You are the best. We love you.

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