

Meet me in the middle

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Meet me in the middle

by [tangledorangeweb](#)

Summary

Yuna Hollander knew how to handle things. When half your life was based around a sport where people flew across ice with knives strapped to their feet and clubs in their hands, wrestling with what effectively became a rubber bullet when slapped hard enough, and when half that sport was about who could hit the hardest and fastest, you knew how to handle things.

“I want you to know that I did really try. I tried really hard, but... I just can't help it. I'm sorry.”

She wasn't quite sure what to do with that one. It was not a hockey puck slammed so hard into the teeth that they broke, but it sure felt like it.

Or

Yuna Hollander processes what her son has told her, and sees it in front of her own eyes.

Notes

This took me maybe an hour. Saw an edit of that scene where Shane apologises to Yuna and it made me word vomit spontaneously. This wrote me more than I wrote it. Enjoy!

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

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Her initial response had been instinctive. When you are a mother, and your son looks like that, looks like his whole heart was breaking just for telling you the truth, looks like he thinks you will yell or be angry for something that was never his fault, you want to sweep it all away. She tried to sweep it away. She did not want him to ever feel like he was wrong for this. *Especially* not for this.

It was not his fault. Yuna thought it as they entered the house again, and then paused on the door step, briefly. *Fault*. That was not the word. Fault implied someone had made a mistake, implied there was a culprit for the situation they were in and blame to be passed. Fault made this seem wrong. The fault was what Shane was apologising for.

And then she thought, hovering over the boiling pasta pot on the stove while her husband stirred the sauce, *what was he apologising for?* Her son and his arch-rival were in the dining room still, because she thought maybe they needed a minute and some lunch was a good excuse as any to take a break. She could only hear them every now and again, whispering, voices barely rising above the sound of bubbling water.

Why was he sorry? What did he think, in all this, was the failure?

“I tried really hard.”

And of course he did, because he always did, because he was her son and anything he did he tried really hard at. Shane Hollander ran until his lungs burst and studied until his brain was full. He planned until it was finished and worked until it became leisure. He hit until ice cracked and played until the cup was in his hand. He pushed until the ceiling was hit and then only felt satisfied if he could learn to push through it, because he was her son and her son had always been that way. But what was that, here?

Was he sorry for loving a man? Was he sorry that he could only love men?

But none of that was his fault. Fault again. That horrible word, coded in defence, where there was no need for it because this was not an attack. None of those things had any reason to be a fault.

“I tried really hard.”

Was that what Rose had been? Was he trying, even then, to prove to everyone that this too was a thing he could overcome? And then when they broke up, he had seemed so sad and confused and scared, and at the time, it had seemed so obvious why. Now she understood better, because Shane had been a little relieved, too, and that was what scared him. Not losing her, but being grateful for it.

The world was not kind to people like Shane. Especially not in sport. Of course he had been scared. Of course he would have tried, because he was a perfectionist, and the world would never let him know peace if he was anything less than. Changing room trash talk and old-fashioned hockey coaches, social media, being an international figure, all these things would have convinced him early that being gay was a fault. That he was wrong for it.

And that, Yuna would spend the rest of her life tearing apart with her bare hands if she had to.

Half an hour later, she laid out their game plan to begin the tearing apart of his fear and rebuilding of his confidence. Shane liked to know what was happening. Getting a handle on the situation was what she was good at. She was glad to finally have her fingers clutched around a plan.

Her son still looked a bit queasy, however, protesting at the pace and thoroughness of her planning. Meanwhile his counterpart at any given moment had nearly half a pound of pasta in his mouth. She supposed being one of the most famously confrontational and powerful hockey players in the league meant you needed a bit of fuel. The gusto was almost admirable, however, like he had never seen a proper home-cooked meal before, and at any moment it might disappear.

“And you have no loyalty to Boston?”

“Jesus, Mom!” Said her son, seeing the suspicion.

“What? They drafted him.” She said, looking at him with raised eyebrows. She didn’t necessarily trust anyone who wasn’t loyal to their team. “You would leave Boston, for Shane?”

“Yes.” Said Ilya, looking up from the pasta properly for the first time. He was nodding before he even spoke, and that seriousness of him, the intensity that she was only familiar with through a TV screen on the ice, it was all there.

“Mom!” Said Shane.

“What! Loyalty is important!”

“He’s trying to be loyal to me, not Boston.” Huffed Shane, a little angrily. The second he said it, he looked almost embarrassed about it.

And then came the pin drop.

“I wanted you to know that I did really try.”

“I wanted you to know.”

This wasn't just about being gay. That was a hard enough thing to talk about. But Shane had to have always known they'd be okay with it. There had never been a moment, from either her or David, that they had ever projected anything but support for anyone that had been outcast or downtrodden because of the way they loved. She could bet, in fact, right now, that Shane would have told them already. If it hadn't been for...

"Shane." Coaxed the boy who had been, for nearly a decade, the families' collective punching bag, the butt of many of their hockey jokes. Maybe not as collective as she thought.

"Shane." He said, a little more seriously, putting his fork down and reaching out to her son, who had his head hung low, nearly at his knees, and arms folded protectively over his own head.

"I just can't help it."

"We are good here, yes? Your family is here, your boyfriend is here..." Ilya spoke with such certainty, like even his questions, low before the mark, could change the truth. His hand was rubbing circled on Shane's back, familiar, sure. "You're good here, ok?"

He never wavered. It was a question that waited to be met, not a question that waited to be countered. Ilya knew they were good here. He was telling Shane as much. He was just waiting for Shane to feel it.

"Boyfriend?" Said her son, with so much reckless hope and fragility she didn't know how she had never seen it before. Not in their face-offs, not in their interviews, not even when Ilya had come to the hospital.

Ilya did not laugh, or joke, or give a flippant answer like she might have expected of him. He nodded, still serious, still certain. "I mean, yes. I think so, probably."

"I think." "Probably." Only if you want it. This is where I am. Are you here too?"

And then, five minutes later, Shane was fine again - nearly hopeful, half-smiling, okay with the idea of them having dinner together later. He had met every certainty Ilya had asked of him. How had this Russian boy gotten a reputation as volatile? Yuna had never seen anyone believe anything so hard.

"I wanted you to know." "I just can't help it."

This was about Ilya Rozanov as much as it was about Shane Hollander.

He wanted them to know he had found someone. He wanted them to know how much he loved him and valued him and wanted him at the dinner table, like this, wanted him fitted neatly into a title she could guess they only let into the open now it all was. There had been a space open at Shane's side for years. The label stuck onto it had been too small for her to read, but the space occupied was so obvious it was as if he had always been there. Like he had always been waiting to be there. Ilya Rozanov.

I just can't help it.

And she could see that now. Just like she had seen the rather violent kiss on the helmet at the All-Stars game, and the forced friendliness at the Lord Talon award, and the post-game interview trash talking, and the chirping at each other in face-offs and boxes, and the day Shane had wiped out - because he had been looking, too. She had thought, when she had seen that game, that he had been distracted because he was worried about Ilya gaining on him. Now she knew he had been waiting for it. Daring him on. They met each other every time.

I wanted you to know.

He hadn't known how to tell them. He had been for years. It wasn't just that he loved a man, he loved Ilya Rozanov, and he wanted them to love him too.

"Drive safe!" She called, as the two of them piled into Shane's sensible car. Ilya had bolted at least three people's portion of pasta, and still been excited about the prospect of coming for dinner. Maybe the boy really wasn't used to it. Shane had taken one look at him and agreed.

I just can't help it.

"I love you!" She couldn't help but adding. *Don't be sorry. Please, don't be sorry. I see it now. Come for dinner, bring him with you.*

"Love you!" Her son called back. Easy. Just like the hundreds and thousands of times they had said it before. And then they drove away, retreating back to his cottage, side-by-side.

David tightened his arm on her shoulder, holding her a little closer as they watched the road that had emptied too quickly. "So." He said, with a little exhale. "Ilya Rozanov. That's new."

"Since rookie season."

"Summer before." He replied. "No, but it is new for us."

I wanted you to know.

She smiled. "Not really. No, not really."

End Notes

I'm rubbing my hands together deviously as i type this

I am a master multitasker

I love them

Hope you enjoyed!

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