

Divorce Papers

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Divorce Papers

by [JulianHartley](#)

Summary

Every quarter, Ilya has a new obsession in the cottage, from planting absurd amounts of maple trees, to organizing themed events such as a Night at the Frozen Lake Challenge and Drinking Ginger Ale Against the Clock, to participating in the largest tomato competition. When he starts neglecting his usual household duties because of this, Shane throws divorce papers on the table.

OR: That was supposed to be a joke. But Ilya only reads the names Hollander, Rozanov, and the word "divorce", and he panics.

Notes

it's an old fic of mine, i just made it hollanov

Chapter 1: Divorce Papers

Probably no one who knew seventeen-year-old Ilya Rozanov would believe their eyes if they saw him now, more than a decade later.

Andrei wouldn't believe it because first he was convinced that his brother would end up in juvenile detention, and later that he would die on the ice because of his stunts. Svetlana wouldn't believe it because she had known Ilya long enough to say that he enjoyed casual sex too much to want to settle down. None of his coaches would believe it, especially since Ilya seemed to be a hopeless case — an immature Peter Pan type, who loved chaos.

Above all, seventeen years old Ilya himself would not believe it, for whom love ceased to exist after his mother's death and whose only escape from reality was hockey.

However, more than ten years have passed, during which much has changed.

First, he met Shane Hollander, through whom Ilya began to believe in God again (or at least pray regularly, with one specific intention: please). Then, for a brief moment, things got even worse than before. Shane was dating Rose, Andrei was even worse than their father and Ilya was helplessly in love with his rival.

But in the end, Shane broke up with Rose, Ilya broke off contact with his brother and the entire family, and his prayers were answered, even though for years he and Shane had to hide their relationship. And somewhere in between all that, he went to therapy and - besides being a hockey player - became a... well, kind of a farmer. That's probably the strangest thing in Ilya Rozanov's entire biography, no matter which side of the story you start with. Sure, he's still the same capricious, cynical asshole. Only instead of mocking his arch-enemy on the ice, he prefers to water his flowers (to give them later to the mentioned no-longer-arch-enemy), and if he races his car, it's usually to get the best seedlings at dawn at the farmer market.

Every once in a while, on average once a quarter, Ilya finds a new obsession near their cottage.

One spring, he trimmed the hedges into whimsical shapes (mostly dicks, but apart from phallic patterns, there was also a loon and, to Shane's distress, a bear). In the summer, on a random July morning, he woke up with a sense of mission — he would dig a pond. Shane was sure that Rozanov's enthusiasm would fade before noon, when the July sun began to beat down on his shoulders, but Shane underestimated him. Not only did a pond appear between the cottage and the orchard within a week, but it was inhabited by colorful fish, a frog, and water lilies floated on the surface. And it was an absurd, they had a whole lake literally inches away. In the fall, Ilya decided he couldn't stand watching kilograms of apples from their orchard rot on the ground year after year, so he meticulously collected them in wicker baskets, then invited almost all Ottawa Centaurs team (and even Hayden with his family) to

the Apple Peeling Event to — well — peel nearly 300 pounds of apples, which he then made into compotes, jams, purees... and forgot about forever, hiding them in the cellar. Just a month later, in October, he got it into his head that he would become a master pumpkin carver. The following spring, his fruit obsession gained momentum. He left home at dawn, saying he was going to the market to buy ginger ale and some groceries and then, a few hours later, he called Shane, begging him to take the second car and come over because he couldn't fit several dozen young trees into his sports car, starting with apple trees —as if he didn't have enough of them — through cherry, apricot, pear, peach, and several fancy varieties of plum trees that both men had never heard of before.

"You got ripped off," Shane commented at the time, trying to squeeze the last tree between the seats of his car.

„Okay, dipshit. No marmalade for you, then.”

Shane thought that winter would be better. That Ilya would stay put for five minutes, he would focus on hockey and, apart from his standard morning trainings, Shane would be able to enjoy his husband's presence in the cold bed a little longer. Nothing could be further from the truth. In winter, Ilya decided it was time to renovate their winter garden, so it began: laying new boards, painting, removing corrosion from metal parts, general cleaning, and whatever else he had in mind at that time. The following spring, Ilya revealed his new fixation with one word: geese. And that was it. One day they just appeared, three geese named Katya, Dasha and Masha. A few months later, in the summer, he went on a frenzy of organizing parties for their friends. It started with Shane's birthday, where he and the whole group — including Hayden and his wife, Jackie — started a water fight with watering cans and garden hoses. Two weeks later, he sent out paper invitations to a country-themed party and forced everyone to dress up in cowboy outfits. Troy was delighted and decorated his hat with glitter, while Shane and Boodram glared at him deadly, although they didn't look serious, considering their costumes and entourage. And just like that, Friday parties at the cottage became a tradition (when they didn't have a match or a training). Each had its own name and a separate, dedicated invitation: Night on the Frozen Lake Challenge; Plucking Katya, Masha and Dasha's Feathers; Drinking Ginger Ale Against the Clock; Chubby Bunny but with pucks, instead of marshmallows; Craft Night—decorating a puck. The ideas were ridiculous. They hadn't had this much fun since, probably ever.

And so life goes in the cottage, from one of Ilya's obsessions to the next.

Ilya's current fixation is tomatoes. He got it into his head in the winter that he would grow the biggest tomato in Canada and enter it in the harvest festival contest. He also wanted to make juice, pasta sauce, puree, and whatever else you can make from one damn vegetable (which is - as Shane repeated at every opportunity, just to be an asshole - actually a fruit).

He decided that to be a true tomato father, he couldn't buy seedlings or young bushes. Instead, he insisted on doing everything from scratch – for weeks he ate tomatoes from the store, dug out the seeds, dried them on the radiator, and then planted them in yogurt cups, which are currently lined up in rows on the windowsill, taking up all the space.

Ilya is really absorbed in the tomatoes, which he is just taking out of the yogurt cups to move them to the greenhouse. He is so preoccupied with them that he does not hear the sound of a car pulling up to the house or the front door opening. It is only when Shane's head pokes out from behind the door that Ilya notices his husband has returned home.

Shane looks at the table, covered in dirt, and then at Ilya, who is even dirtier. Then he looks at the pile of dirty dishes that Rozanov promised to wash yesterday and today, too. The man sighs and mumbles: I'll be right back, I have to call our lawyer quickly. And he just leaves. Without even saying hello, let alone the usual hello-kiss. Ilya frowns, but after a moment he returns to the seedlings.

No more than fifteen minutes pass before Shane reappears in the kitchen. He is still wearing the light-colored, boring polo, and he is holding a folder, one of those with law firm's logo, in which he keeps their all documents. Without a word, he throws it between Ilya and the tomatoes, receiving an irritated *fuck, Hollander, get that out of my seedlings!* in return. Shane's gaze, however, is tepid, as if he is calculating something in his mind. He points to the folder, indicating to Ilya that he wants him to open it. Ilya, with a grimace on his face, wipes his dirt-covered hands on his work jeans and opens it, expecting another boring stuff like taxes or things that Shane usually deals with. However, he did not expect this. In bold fucking letters. Right in the fucking middle of the page, with the current date, Shane's handwritten signature somewhere at the bottom, and two names that always stood side by side.

Plaintiff: Shane Hollander-Rozanov

Defendant: Ilya Rozanov-Hollander

PETITION FOR DIVORCE

Ilya doesn't read the dozens of words that run down the page. One glance at the headline and the two names above is enough for him. With a trembling hand, he closes the folder and slides it across the table, letting it bury itself in the soil where it belongs.

“How long have you been planning this?” he asks, even though he doesn't really want to know the answer.

“I just printed it out,” Shane smiles, and Ilya feels like throwing up. It's like a slap in the face, a cynical smile he would have expected from himself a decade ago, not from his own (still) husband after so many years together.

Something crashes in the kitchen. Ilya isn't sure if it's some bird banging his beak against the window or if he himself knocked over one of the pots in which he planned to transplant the tomatoes. He wonders if it wasn't the sound of his own heart breaking.

For many years, he thought he was unworthy of love. Then, for a brief moment, he thought he didn't deserve Shane's love. And when he finally figured everything out, when they managed to survive all difficulties of a long-distance relationship, then hiding and the whole coming-out mess and finally, after three years of marriage, when Ilya thought it was truly forever, Shane practically threw the divorce papers in his face, printed between getting out of the car and dinner. As if the last decade meant nothing.

However, the anger lasts only a short while. Ilya can't really remember what it's like to be angry anymore, outside the ice rink. Instead, he feels that it's not just his hands that are shaking, but his whole body. His throat tightens as if a bee had stung him right in the larynx, his pulse quickens as if after a long run, and his heart begins to pound in his chest so hard that it probably starts to ricochet off his stomach, ready to throw up the fruit he ate for lunch. The air in the kitchen, until now light and crisp, becomes thick. Ilya begins to fight for every breath, as if he was in a lake trying to get out, but a water spirit was pulling him back by his leg.

“Ilya,” the smile disappears from Shane's face. “Ilyusha, wait, calm down, have you read...”

“I've read enough, Hollander,” the man blurts out, wanting to end the conversation as quickly as possible and leave the kitchen, which has suddenly lost half its space and twice as much fresh air.

Ilya practically rolls out of the house, stumbling over the dresser and coat rack on the way. He falls out onto the porch and looks around, unsure of where to run. Ten years ago, Ilya would have pulled the bottle of vodka. But he is no longer seventeen, he is almost thirty. He

no longer drinks alcohol, nor does he try to vent his anger behind the wheel or on the ice, because he cares too much about people and his life.

Instead, he locks himself in the garage. He sits between the wooden box where he used to keep extra tools and his car. He curls up like a frightened child who has awakened from a nightmare. Ilya knows he is moments after—and at the same time moments before—a panic attack. He remembers how he dealt with Shane's anxiety. He takes a breath, holds it for a moment, and exhales, repeating this until the ringing in his ears stops and the lump in his throat loosens enough for him to swallow.

He tries not to think about what Shane is doing. At the same time, he can't help but imagine a catastrophic scenario in which the man is packing his bags to leave the cottage with a screech of tires before Ilya returns home, without looking back. If he hasn't already done so. If Shane had indeed been planning this for a long time, he may have been packing quietly for several days. He was always good at disappearing and pretending he wasn't there.

Ilya's legs are numb, but he's not ready to go outside. Five, maybe ten minutes pass, and the door to the garage opens. Shane stands there, terrified, still in his ugly polo and beige pants, but no longer looking like a well-groomed, boring hockey player. He looks as if he has been running for several minutes or struggling with someone.

“Ilya,” Shane rushes inside and, ignoring the dirt everywhere and his own light-colored pants, kneels in front of the man. Only now does Ilya notice that Shane has brought that damn folder with him. “I've been looking for you for thirty minutes, but by the time I got moving, you were already gone.”

Ilya clenches his teeth, then his eyelids.

“Open your eyes, please.”

“Hollander,” Ilya whispers, unwilling to face reality.

“It's Hollander-Rozanov, actually.”

“Don't do this to me.” Ilya doesn't know if he means the cruelty of the phrase Hollander-Rozanov at this moment, or the whole divorce.

Shane squeezes into the space between Ilya and the car and presses his knees against his husband's.

"You haven't read the rest, have you?"

"What difference does it make?" The man shrugs. "You don't want me. I don't need to know the fucking reason."

"Ilya—" Shane doesn't finish, because the other man interrupts him immediately.

"Shane. If you want a divorce, I won't stand in your way. I want half of what's mine to go to you. But I don't need to read the reasons why, I'd rather not know. It will break my heart to see that you don't love me, or that you have someone else, or that I'm not enough, or..."

"Rozanov!" The other man raises his voice, knowing that this is the only way to get through to Ilya. "Will you let me finish?"

Ilya shrugs. Shane doesn't know whether to be gentle or firm. So he takes Ilya's trembling hand and begins to speak, lazily sliding his thumb from Rozanov's knuckles to the wrist and back.

"Now listen to me carefully. I came home today with the intention of making us dinner because I knew you'd probably been messing around with tomatoes since morning and hadn't even thought about eating anything other than two spoonfuls of jam and a pack of chips. But I walked into the kitchen and what did I see? A fucking pile of dishes that you promised to wash the day before yesterday."

"Are we getting divorced over unwashed pots?"

"If you don't let me finish, I won't have time to divorce you because I'll lock you in here and report you missing in three fucking weeks, you asshole. I saw the pile of pots and pans and thought I'd say I'm calling a lawyer, I'll write a funny divorce petition, and give it to you as a warning. Not seriously. Not a real warning, I emphasize, before you get any ideas. I thought you'd read the whole thing, roll your eyes, and wash the dishes. I didn't think you'd fall into... some kind of catatonia and panic attack at the mere sight of the word divorce. I tried to tell you at home, but you didn't even want to look at the papers a second time."

Ilya sits stunned, staring alternately at Shane's face, his hands, and the folder lying on the dirty floor.

“I don't want to divorce you, if you need me to spell it out more clearly. I love you. Even if you have weird obsessions that make you forget to wash the dishes or change your underwear.”

A hint of a smile finally appears on Ilya's face.

“I do change my underwear.”

“Not my point.”

“Your stupid fucking folder is now dirty with tomato soil and car oil. That's how much your divorce papers are worth, Hollander.” Ilya returns to his usual asshole state.

“Will you at least read the justification? I won't hide the fact that I spent fifteen minutes on it and I think I was even funny.”

“I think we have different ideas about what's funny. You're not funny.”

“Rozanov. Read.”

Plaintiff: Shane Hollander-Rozanov

Defendant: Ilya Rozanov-Hollander

PETITION FOR DIVORCE

The marriage between the plaintiff and the defendant, entered into on June 4, 2021, has suffered a permanent and complete breakdown due to an unwashed frying pan, unemptied trash, and an overflowing laundry basket, which has been piled high with the defendant Ilya Rozanov's dirty underwear for a week.

The marriage also broke down due to numerous extravagant obsessions that the defendant, Ilya Rozanov, dragged his husband, Shane Hollander, into, including: a battle with water-filled condoms in the orchard, an attempt to train geese to attack the plaintiff's friend,

Hayden Pike, learning the language of cows, stealing his husband's car to buy even more plants, and numerous immoral antics.

All attempts to save the marriage, including requests to wash the dishes, have failed. The parties see no possibility of resolving the kitchen conflict.

Therefore, I request that the marriage be dissolved by divorce without assigning fault, even though I am madly, hopelessly in love with the defendant, Ilya Rozanov, and cannot imagine life without his obsessions, quirks and strange accent.

When Ilya finishes reading the absurd text that Shane had scribbled an hour earlier, he cries. Only now does he realize that during all this time, from the moment Shane threw the folder on the table to his arrival at the garage, not a single tear had rolled down his cheek, probably due to his bewilderment at the situation. Only now, paradoxically, as the knots of emotion begin to unravel, does his body expel the last remnants. These are by no means tears of sadness. How could he be sad when the man he is madly in love with writes him a love letter through a legal document, while at the same time wanting to scold him for not washing the dishes?

"This is the most romantic divorce petition I've ever seen," Ilya says, while Shane tries to wipe the tears from his cheekbones with his thumb. "I love it. I hate it."

"Let's go home, Roz." Shane reaches out his hand to help his husband up. "I'll wash, you dry. And then we'll plant tomatoes. If we're not getting divorced, at least I want to be able to brag that my husband grew the biggest tomato in Canada."

"Nah, I'm not into tomatoes anymore, I have a better idea. Listen up..."

"Rozanov, I swear to fucking God, I still can divorce you."

"No, you won't"

Shane sighs.

"No, I won't."

Chapter 2: The Apple Peeling Event

Chapter Notes

Several of you asked for another chapter — I didn't know how to write it, so in the end I decided to write a prequel to “Divorce Papers,” which describes one (the first) of the strange parties Ilya organized. Let me know if you want to read about other events!

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

Neither Shane nor Ilya were people who could complain about having too much time on their hands. Constant training, matches, trips, the foundation and sporting events took up most of their time. That's why Shane didn't think Ilya's new obsession with working in the garden surrounding their cottage would last long.

However, this is their second off-season, and Rozanov's interest does not seem to be waning, quite the contrary. But there is something dangerous about it. Because Ilya looks like he's starting to get bored. And that never bodes well.

Shane thinks that perhaps it is a matter of... loneliness. It's not that Ilya needs special help while trimming hedges or planting more fruit trees — especially since Shane often accompanies him, reading somewhere on a deckchair nearby — but the man has the impression that all these ideas are just pieces of snow that gradually accumulate in one pile to hit like an avalanche.

And Shane – an Ilya Rozanov expert - is absolutely right. Because as soon as autumn begins and apples start falling from the trees, the situation gains momentum.

Shane wakes up on one of his days off and rolls over to cuddle up to Ilya and lie there for a moment, taking advantage of the lack of specific plans. On his right, however, he finds only a cold sheet and crumpled bedding, which Rozanov still hasn't learned to make. Shane gives up on lounging around and instead plans to find Ilya, but he doesn't have to look far. As soon as he raises the blinds, he immediately sees Rozanov through the glass wall of the bedroom, picking apples from the ground with determination on his face and throwing them into a wicker basket. *A laundry basket.*

Hollander wants to run to the garden, fight over the basket, yell at his husband that it's unhygienic, and then maybe make out somewhere under a tree, but all these plans are interrupted by his phone, which vibrates on the bedside table every few moments. That's about four messages too many for this time of day to be considered normal. Shane unlocks his phone, which displays messages from friends and teammates one after another.

Hayden

Hey man, I just wanted to ask if Ilya's idea is a stupid joke? I don't want to get the kids' hopes up, let alone drive over there just for Rozanov to yell that it's a prank?

Hayden

Plus, if it's for real, can I bring Jackie?

Dykstra

Ilya isn't replying, and I need to know in advance if I should bring clothes that can get dirty.

Troy Barret

Harris is asking if he can bring his camera and record something for our social media.

Luca

Tell Ilya he's impossible

Luca

Of course I will be there

Boodram

I understand you don't know anything about your spouse's idea? Because I don't know if this is another Rozanov prank

Boodram

He recently threw a water balloon at me, you understand my concern.

Shane doesn't reply to any messages. Mainly because he doesn't know what's going on himself, which Zane has already figured out. So he skips most of his morning routine, which includes a few exercises, breakfast and a litre of water with lemon. Instead, he just brushes his teeth, puts on a sweatshirt and goes out into the garden to confront potentially stupid idea of his non-potentially stupid husband.

"Ilya!" he shouts from the patio. "Come here, we need to talk!"

Ilya looks up, and even though Shane's voice sounds almost irritated, a smile appears on his face. He quickly closes the distance between them and in a moment is next to the other man, kissing him on the neck.

"Good morning," he mumbles. "I have no excuse, I took the laundry basket, I deserve to be punished, sir."

Shane lets out a sigh similar to that of a parent who sees another of their child's antics and can't help but feel a little touched deep down.

"We'll talk about that later. For now, I want to know why Hayden and half of our team sent me cryptic messages first thing this morning. And why most of them think it's a prank."

"I was feeling inspired this morning," Ilya shrugs, as if *inspired* explains everything.

"Inspired," Shane repeats, sitting down on the rocking bench they recently put in front of the house.

"I woke up, saw that the sun was shining and it was warm, so I went out into the garden and noticed all these miserable apples starting to rot on the lawn. I think the right word for that is... prodigality."

"Wow."

"Hm?"

"I see that spending time with my father, *a boring fan of The New Yorker*, is having a positive effect on your vocabulary."

"Fuck off."

"So what about those apples?"

"I want to make preserves out of them. Some kind of marmalade or a jam. In Russia, we often made *kompot* out of fruits. You know, we picked plums, strawberries, pears, peaches, cherries, depending on the season, and then we cut them up, pressed into jars, covered them with sugar, poured water over them and boiled the jars. We drank it with dinner. I called the fruits *dregs* and never wanted them. I was stupid. I miss *kompot*."

"I know what compote is, Ilya," Shane replies, although he probably doesn't. He always associated compote more with jam than with something you could drink.

"In Canada and America, no one makes good *kompot*. Just those chemical slurries that are good for toast and look like glue or a snort. I'm talking about real *kompot*. The kind you drink, with apple pieces, too sweet to be considered healthy."

"And you need a whole team of Centaurs to screw the lids on the jars, or..."

"Shut up. I hate peeling potatoes."

"I know," Shane rolls his eyes. "The last time you decided we were going to eat *pierogi* with potatoes, cottage cheese and onion, I had blisters for two days."

"I don't like peeling apples either. So I came up with The Apple Peeling Event. I invited the team and Pike with the kids, let's call it... team building. They'll peel, I'll be the ringleader, and at the end, in a few days, everyone will get a jar of marmalade or whatever they want. And I'll drink *kompot* with my dinner. If we make enough, we can also organise a fair for the foundation sometime. I'm convinced that jams bearing my name will sell for thousands, especially if I say that I made them myself and the team helped."

Shane actually thinks it's... cute. He was expecting something completely different. Certainly not a meeting with friends that would end up saving some food and benefiting Irina's Foundation.

"I like that idea. So go pick apples, and I'll go home to reply to everyone and clean up before..."

"Come on. We'll sit in the garden. I'll bring those big buckets to throw the peelings in. We could make healthy crisps out of them, in case you come up with another stupid diet."

"All right. But you're going shopping. I don't want to see the look on the shopkeeper's face when they see fifteen vegetable peelers at the checkout."

By late afternoon, everything is ready. Lanterns are burning in the garden, the wicker ex-laundry-basket is placed in a central, place of honour, and buckets and bowls for peeled apples, with peelers inside, are placed on benches and chairs covered with extra blankets. Shane has prepared a table with snacks and drinks, and Ilya... well, he mainly got in the way, trying to take Shane's clothes off.

Hayden and Jackie are the first to arrive with their children, who spill out of the car and run towards Anya, who is hanging around in the yard. Shortly afterwards, Harris and Troy appear, followed by Boodram, Dykstra with a loudspeaker, Chouinard, Luca, Young and Dillon.

"Hello, everyone, to our *first* cottage event..." Ilya begins solemnly, standing between the buckets.

"There will be more?" Shane asks sincerely, interrupting the speech for a moment.

Everyone bursts out laughing, thinking it's a joke, but Shane Hollander definitely didn't know that Ilya had something else planned. *Oh, Christ*, Shane has no idea that this is just the beginning.

"As I briefly explained in the message..."

"You didn't explain anything in the message, Rozanov," Hayden interjects.

"Shut up, Pike, or you'll have teeth instead of a peeler. Anyway, as I explained in the message, we're going to peel apples. Throw the peelings in the buckets so nothing goes to waste, because I already promised Hollander that I'd make *scobs for the Canadians and horses* out of it..."

"Hey!" Shane shouts.

"In the coming days, I would like to make some preserves, so please let me know in the team chat or in a private message if you would like some jam, if you like cinnamon, if you prefer xylitol or sugar, and other details that I might otherwise forget. I was thinking of donating some of them to our foundation. We could organise a fair where, in addition to the usual autographed jerseys and sticks, there would also be jars of marmalade, signed by the team. You know, with a sentimental story about how we got together here today to peel apples. Yuna will probably take care of all the health and safety paperwork so that no one can say we poisoned anyone."

The group reacts with extraordinary enthusiasm and gets to work. Ilya has no idea whether it was the craft jam or the charity work that convinced them more, but he doesn't intend to probe. It's enough for him to know that he'll spend time with his friends, save the poor apples and, incidentally, won't have to peel them. And then there's the *kompot*. The *kompot* is the priority.

"I get the impression you've found yourself some free labour," Harris remarks during a break, somewhere between the fifth and sixth kilogram of apples.

"First of all, you've been fed," Ilya points to the piece of tart with camembert in the man's hand. "Second, I'm providing you with content for social media, so you won't get fired. Third, you can cuddle with your boyfriend under a blanket in a cosy, pretty garden. Fourth..."

"Okay, okay. Does everyone agree to record a few videos? We'll post some of them on our social media now, and some during the fair, as proof that this is indeed our work."

No one objects, so Harris takes out his equipment and, as he had planned, begins recording fragments of the evening: Ilya massaging Shane's fingers, tired from peeling apples. Hayden and Jackie watching their children still running around the garden with Anya. Dykstra and Boodram, who at one point organised an apple peeling race, repeatedly missing the buckets with their peelings, which Rozanov did not fail to notice, shouting in the background of the recording *Losers! Bunglers! Aim for the bucket, blyat, I promised my husband he'd get dried apple peels with cinnamon and ginger!*

Three hundred pounds of apples disappear from the basket at lightning speed, and the piles in the bowls grow with each passing minute. But that doesn't end the party. Instead, Ilya pulls the barbecue equipment out of the garage, Shane prepares additional snacks and meat in the kitchen with the help of Hayden and Jackie's children, and Dykstra — *good God* — gets to work on the AUX cord.

"Rozanov, I think we all need to thank you for the invitation," Hayden says as they slowly begin to disperse to their cars late at night.

"And we look forward to the next one!" Luca adds.

"But next time, please send out a formal invitation."

The comment about the invitation is a joke, at least for most of those gathered. But Shane sees the sparkle in her husband's eyes and knows that this is probably just the beginning. Another event — and a potential paper invitation — will come soon. And probably no one will be expecting it.

Chapter End Notes

Man, I love kompot

Chapter 3: Drinking Ginger Ale Against The Clock

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

When Shane comes home from shopping, he does not find his husband where he expected him to be.

Shane thought Ilya would be in one of his two favourite places: on the sofa, watching television or playing one of those silly, poor-quality hockey games, or in the garden, where he has recently been fiercely battling with painting the gazebo. However, Ilya Rozanov is sitting on the floor in a strange position (Shane sees this as his own contribution and the result of their joint yoga exercises), surrounded by objects that Shane is sure were not in their home yesterday.

The first thing he notices is a glass bottle of ink, placed on the floor without any protection in the form of foil or even a coaster. In his mind's eye, he can already see the careless Ilya bumping into the inkwell with his elbow, spilling dark liquid on the floor, walls and all available surfaces. He wants to run to Ilya to move the cursed, potentially dangerous object, but he pauses to look at the rest of the equipment. He sees a fountain pen, thick, expensive-looking paper, strange red beads, a wax seal (Shane has no idea where and when Ilya managed to buy it) and... a candle?

Ilya is so absorbed in scribbling on the paper that he doesn't even notice Shane's presence. The man knows he has to play this safe. If he suddenly shouts *hey, darling* too loudly from behind Ilya, he might get scared and spill the unfortunate ink on the wooden floor, which was too expensive to have to strip and re-lay. So he decides to approach his husband immediately and say *hello*, while picking up the ink bottle from the floor. And this is definitely the best option, because as soon as Shane utters the first word, Ilya flinches and blurts out a startled *what the fuck!* just like when he first heard the sound of a loon.

"Would you like to explain what you're doing?" Shane asks, leaning over Rozanov's workstation.

"Invitations."

"Invitations to...?"

"The party. Last time, everyone complained that I informed them too late and over the phone, so they didn't believe it was real. So I'm making invitations that they'll get at training."

Only now does Shane have a chance to look at the cards with the ink still drying.

Drinking Ginger Ale Against The Clock is written in some fancy font, and just below, much less elegantly, are the exact date, time and address. No unnecessary explanations, just like peeling apples.

"And what are we going to do?"

"Drink ginger ale against the clock, duh."

And that's it. Ilya raises his hand and pretends to lock his lips with a key. Shane knows that asking questions is pointless, so instead he sits down on the floor next to him and watches as Ilya methodically folds each piece of paper, puts it in a shiny envelope, and then pours melted wax over it — what Shane had previously described as red beads — and finally seals it with a wax seal.

"What," Ilya half-asks, half-says accusingly, seeing the other man's reaction to the shape on the seal.

"A dove?"

"I had to improvise. It was either that or a heart."

"I'm sure the boys will like it."

The party takes place a week later, when everyone first told Ilya that's so cute, then they mocked him and finally confirmed their attendance. The whole team arrives, as well as Hayden Pike. Shane asked Ilya to deliver the invitation personally. Ilya was inconsolable, standing on the porch, waiting for an audience with Montreal's fifteenth-best hockey player. His only consolation was seeing the little Pikes, whom Rozanov adored.

Chairs and benches are set up in the garden, just like during apple peeling, as well as a long table with cans of ginger ale lined up in neat rows. Under a tree, *good heavens, Shane will one day take Ilya to the neighbouring state and leave him there*, a huge floor clock stands.

Shane has no idea when Rozanov managed to buy it, where he kept it all these days, and most importantly, where he will put the six-and-half-feet-tall piece of furniture after the party is over. Fortunately, that's problem for the future Shane. Maybe they'll drown the clock in the lake.

"Wow," comments Luca, who is the first to arrive at the property. "I see we'll be literally drinking ginger ale *against* the clock?"

Pike just rolls his eyes when he sees the clock. Harris whispers something to Troy, who shakes his head and says *absolutely not*. Dykstra raises an eyebrow and shakes his head. Boodram looks at the clock and says only, *I'm taller*. Ilya will be disappointed that his ideas are becoming less and less surprising to his teammates.

When everyone is in place, Rozanov stands up and, without further ado, begins to explain the purpose of the meeting.

"As you may have guessed from the invitation, we're going to have a ginger ale drinking contest. Hollander isn't participating, so he'll be the referee."

"What? Why is that?"

"You're too powerful. Pro." Ilya shrugs. "Don't look at me like that! You drink ginger ale every day, so it's obvious that it would be unfair for you to participate!"

Shane doesn't really feel the need to prove anything or compete in anything other than hockey. So he doesn't argue further, but takes his place opposite the rest of the group and picks up the stopwatch from the table, which he and Ilya usually use to time themselves when running. After all, he's not going to try to watch the competitors and the floor clock in front of them at the same time. Meanwhile, Ilya stands in the centre, where everyone can see and hear him, and, almost like before a match as captain, begins to speak.

"First of all! All the cans are on the table, and only when Hollander says *go!* you can touch them, open them and start drinking. You can't pour out more than... let's say one sip. Second rule, whoever thinks they're done, raises the can above their head and turns it upside down. Third, Dykstra doesn't touch the AUX cord..."

"Fuck off, you asshole!"

"I don't make the rules, Evan."

"Then who..."

"Last rule! A Centaur must win!"

Hayden Pike, the only non-Centaur, rolls his eyes at this remark and looks to Shane for support. However, he knows full well that he cannot count on his friend. Hollander has not been on his team for a long time. But, on the other hand, Pike still doesn't understand the strange games between Rozanov and Shane, which have been left over from their past rivalry. Maybe Hayden's victory is what Hollander is hoping for, just to rub it in the nose of the confident Centaur's captain.

"What can be won?" asks Boodram.

"Great question, Bood!" Ilya exclaims, although the team knows their captain well and can see that the man is just starting to improvise. "If I win, I get to make out with the referee. If anyone else wins..."

"You'll lend him your car for a week?" asks Shane, raising an eyebrow.

Ilya knows it's a challenge.

"Well, um..."

"Ferrari, right?" Hollander smiles innocently, his eyes sparkling. He knows they'll settle this later in the bedroom.

"Okay," Ilya says through clenched teeth. "Let's get started before someone else comes up with an equally good idea."

Everyone lines up in a row, each facing a can placed on the table. Boodram takes a few deep breaths, as if that would help in any way. Troy and Harris stand next to each other, muttering something as if they were strategising. Luca doesn't seem to believe in his chances of winning. Dykstra looks around as if he's planning how to get to the speakers and start sharing his terrible, monstrous taste in music.

"Okay," Shane says, not knowing how to begin. "I'll count to three, then I'll say *go*. As Ilya explained, you can only pick up the can then, otherwise you'll be disqualified."

"Do we have to keep our hands somewhere, or can they be near the can?" Young asks.

Shane looks questioningly at Ilya.

"You can do whatever you want with your hands, but if even the tip of your finger touches the can before Hollander says *go*, you're out."

"Okay. Ready?" Shane gives the contestants a moment to get into the most comfortable position. "One, two, three... *go*!"

One by one, the competitors open their cans, which hiss as they do so. Luca sips slowly, seemingly not even trying to win. Barret swirls the can around, as he might do with a bottle, but the strategy fails, causing the drink to spill onto his face, which simultaneously disqualifies him from further participation. Someone burps and starts laughing – it's probably Harris, who has spotted his boyfriend trying to open his eyes and brush the sticky hair off his forehead. Boodram and Dillon are fighting fiercely, as are Ilya, Young, Chouinard, Hayden and Hayes. Dykstra... where is Dykstra, anyway?

Shane doesn't have time to watch everyone in turn, so instead he focuses his gaze on Ilya, who deftly tilts the can and begins to drink in huge gulps. His Adam's apple moves up and down, a little drink leaks from the corner of his mouth and flows slowly towards his throat. It's disturbingly... attractive. If it weren't for the company, Shane would probably lick the ginger drink from Ilya's throat and then pour some more. His train of horny thought is interrupted by Hayes's shout as he raises the can above his head and turns it upside down. Shane presses the button on the stopwatch. Right behind him, Chouinard and Ilya land on the podium, unhappy with the result. Hayes yells something about picking up the keys later that evening.

"It could have been worse," Ilya mutters. "At least I don't have to give my car to Pike."

The winner's joy is suddenly interrupted because the speaker, which until now had been playing party songs from the 80s and 90s, emits something that can be described as the last moan of despair of a destroyed guitar accompanied by the sound of a hammer hitting a metal pot.

"Dykstra!" Ilya yells, only now noticing the untouched can of ginger ale on the table. "Turn it off, *fuck, blyat!*"

Ilya rips the cable out of the speaker and playfully pushes Dykstra towards the table. Rozanov's face is a mixture of amusement and something that only Shane recognises – Ilya hasn't said his last word yet.

"Time for round two. *The real game.*"

"No way am I drinking any more fizzy drinks," grumbles Dillon, whose stomach problems usually rule him out of gluttony and drunkenness.

"Luckily, what I've prepared isn't fizzy."

Shane had no idea about the second round. Ilya had barely revealed the idea for the *first* round to him.

The man disappears for a moment. When he returns, he is carrying a huge basket filled with jars of pear *kompot* made by Ilya from his grandmother's recipe.

"We're going to drink *kompot*," he explains, as if it were the most normal thing in the world.

"Hey, does that mean you're not participating?" Hayden asks, just to be an asshole.

"What?"

"You disqualified Shane because you thought it would be unfair for him to participate as a ginger beer connoisseur. Don't think we don't know you're obsessed with that... thing."

"Of course I'm participating," Rozanov protests. "I want to win and get to make out with the referee."

Shane rolls his eyes. As if Ilya didn't make out with *the referee* even without the victory. And did a lot of other things.

"It's unfair to..."

"I make the rules."

Dykstra interjects.

"Hey, didn't you say that you don't make the rules?"

"Listen," Ilya turns his head. "You haven't even had your ginger ale yet, so shut up."

No one tries to argue with Ilya any further. It's not that the rules matter, just like the competition. Everyone knows deep down that it's about the opportunity to meet and spend time together in a strange way.

Ilya explains the new rules: everyone must empty the contents of the jar, i.e. drink the juice that has been produced by 'marinating' the fruit and eat the fruit inside. Shane decides that he can remain in the role of referee (he still does not have the heart to admit to Ilya that he hates *kompot*). The new prize is a week's access to an AUX cord at the team training and at the gym, which generates more enthusiasm among the contestants than any previous promise. This time, Dykstra does not look like he is going to slip out of the competition. Hayden, the only non-Centaur, does not ask what he will get if he wins, because he knows that the answer would probably be *nothing*.

Shane counts down again and calls out a loud *go!* to begin the second round. This time, he watches everyone (not only because he missed Troy, who spilled ginger ale all over his face, but because compote is much more... technical than a canned drink). The players' strategy is... intriguing. Most of them start by drinking. *A rookie mistake* — that's what Ilya would probably call it. The thing is, when you drink the juice first, the fruit settles at the bottom of the jar. It's harder to get to them without a fork, especially since they're soft and tend to stick to the sides of the jar, as Ilya once explained, as if *kompot* was a quantum physics.

Shane glances at Ilya, who, smiling, confident of victory, pulls out pieces of fruit floating in the liquid. When the man notices that his husband is watching him, he decides to make a show of it and lick his hand or put his fingers in his mouth at every possible opportunity. And that was Ilya's only, but the biggest mistake, because in the meantime, Luca, the only one besides Ilya who started with eating fruits, drinks the juice and raises the empty jar.

Shane can't tell who is more surprised, Haas, who took the whole game the least seriously of all, or Ilya, who was so focused on tempting and teasing his husband that he didn't notice he had lost the lead.

"Stop!" Shane shouts when he sees the third jar raised. 'We have a winner! Luca, first place! Ilya... your confidence and horniness got the better of you, you're second! Dykstra... *God*, go get changed, let's say you're third, even though you spilled half the juice on yourself."

"You wasted perfectly good *kompot*?!" Ilya yells, but everyone ignores him, looking at Evan Dykstra, whose shirt is completely wet. No one — except maybe Ilya — was more motivated to win.

Suddenly, it dawns on Luca that he has won. He looks at Rozanov, his recent idol, whom he has just defeated, and then at the rest of the team. Everyone is waiting for his reaction or some words. Haas, having no experience in public speaking, simply says: *we're going to listen to Taylor Swift!*

Ilya and Shane quickly clean up the mess, Dykstra changes into a clean jumper borrowed from Hollander, and the rest of the team sits down on chairs and benches. It's logical that they won't go home right away. Rozanov, just like when peeling apples, pulls a barbecue out of the garage, Harris connects to the speaker, and Boodram promises to keep an eye on Dykstra. And it's just like that.

"Listen," Ilya says a little uncertainly, as most of the guests have already declared that they are going to go home hours later. "Maybe we could make this a tradition? Themed parties at our place, every other Friday, for example?"

"Is this a casual suggestion, or..." Troy begins to ask.

"Let's just consider this your official invitation. If I ever have to caligraph anything on paper again *in cursive*, I'll cut off my hand."

Chapter End Notes

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