Do you remember uncle Ilya?

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Do you remember uncle Ilya?

by novemberfoxtrot

Summary

Vlada sees unexpected news about her uncle Ilya, whom she hasn't seen in years. This awakens some long lost memories, and she decides to check on him.

She hit Send. Her hands were shaking. So stupid. He won't see it anyway. God knows how many dms from fans he gets daily.
But she felt a weird sense of accomplishment.
Did she miss him? Can you miss a person you barely remember? Or did she do it solely out of spite?
Well, at least it made her feel a little better.

- Translation into Русский available: Помнишь дядю Илью? by novemberfoxtrot

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

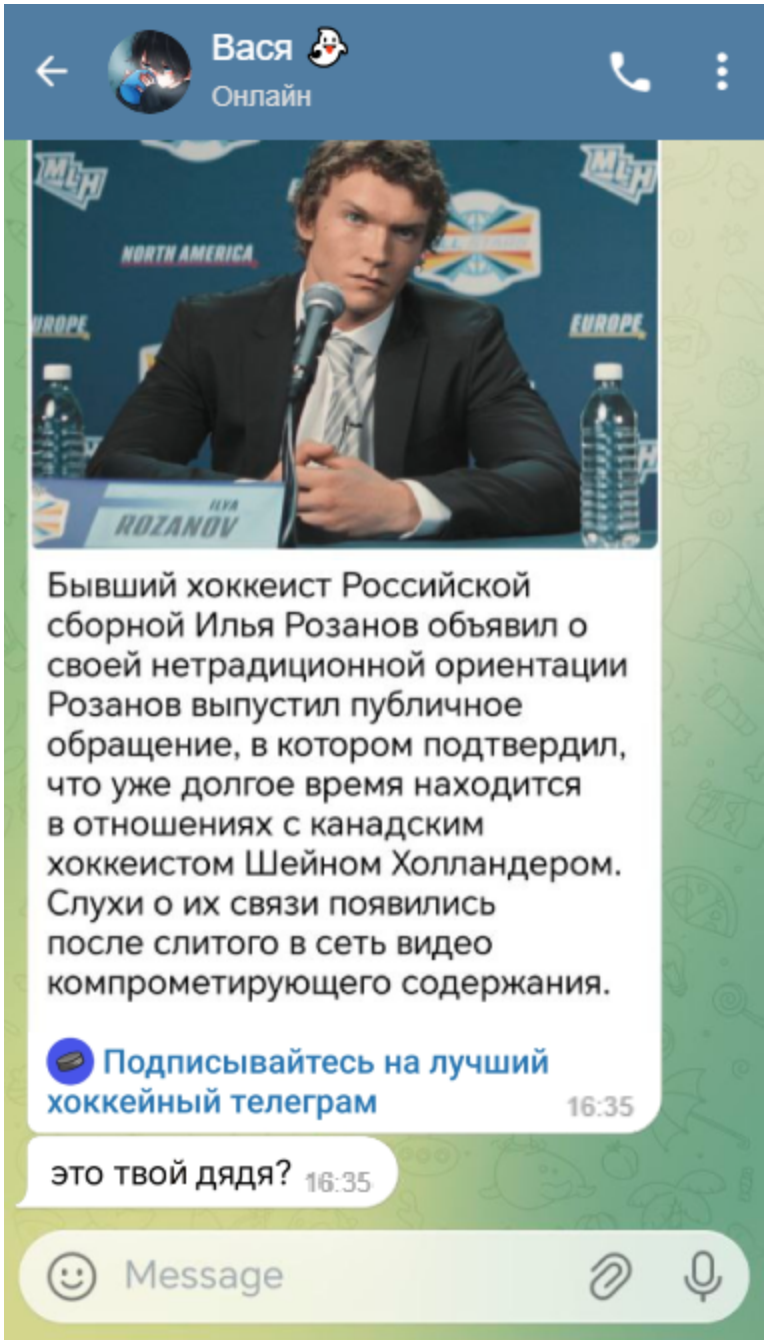
A little note about Russian names to avoid confusion. Every name has different forms.
Ilya can be Ilyusha, Ilyuha, Ilyushenka.
Vladislava can be Vlada, Slava, Lada, and in this fic Ladushka (not so common but possible AND cute).
Svetlana is often shortened to Sveta.

Russian lines are italicized for convenience.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Vlada's heart leapt with excitement as she saw the notification. She quickly looked around - the subway train was packed at this evening hour - like someone could care enough to peek over her shoulder.

She opened Telegram and saw the forwarded post with a question.



Former hockey player of the Russian national team Ilya Rozanov has made a statement about his sexual orientation.

Rozanov issued a public statement in which he confirmed that he has been in a long-term relationship with Canadian hockey player Shane Hollander. Rumors about their relationship appeared after a compromising video of them was leaked online.

Vasya: Is this your uncle?

Vlada stared at the screen and suddenly felt dizzy.

She hadn't thought about her uncle in a long time. Didn't really have a reason to.

The last time she had seen him was at grandfather Grigoriy's funeral. Her memories of it were blurry - some dark room full of gloomy faces, smell of dust and candles, a ride home with mom and dad in heavy silence.

She vaguely remembered him playing with her and bringing her expensive toys you can't buy here. She couldn't say he was bad to her, but one time she asked her parents why uncle Ilya doesn't visit her anymore and dad yelled at her to never mention him again.

Dad sometimes still brought him up though, when he was drunk - cursing him and complaining about uncle Ilya abandoning his family to live in the degenerate West while still dragging their mother's name through the dirt and telling lies about her.

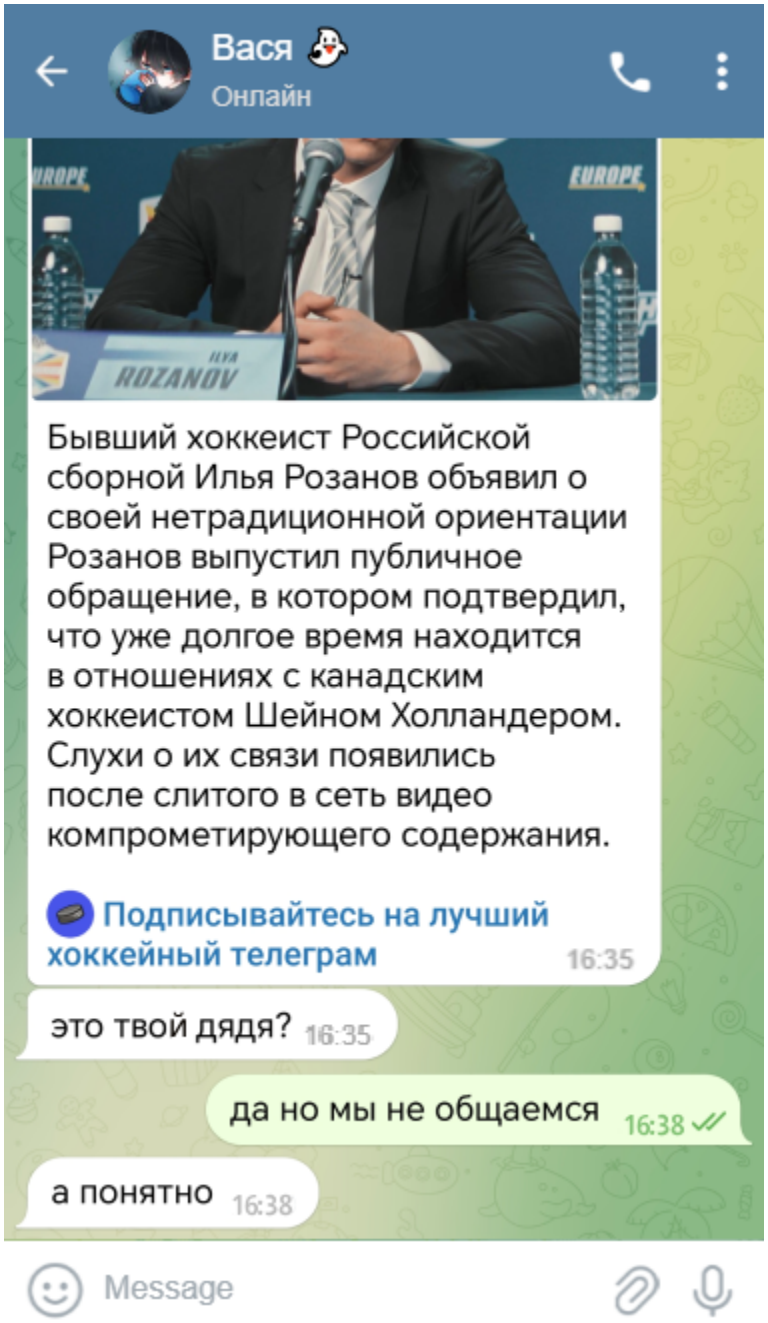
So Vlada knew better than to ask about him, ever.

She didn't see him on the TV or in the magazines that often either. Just brief mentions in a sports section of the evening news broadcast - look, our athlete won again. It seemed like even after his move to the West, Russia was entitled to his victories somehow. But then the victories stopped, and so did any mentions of him.

So to her, he might be as dead as grandfather Grigoriy, just a vague memory from her childhood.

She typed "no just someone with the same last name" but deleted.

Then answered "yes but we're not in touch"



Vasya: ah got it

Vlada didn't dare to check the comments under the article. She knew for a fact they were brutal.

The rest of the way home Vlada was antsy, constantly checking her dms with Vasya and looking again and again at her uncle's photo in that article. It was definitely an old picture, he looked so young and nervous there. How old was he back then, nineteen, twenty?

She didn't know why this post bothered her so much and kept plaguing her thoughts all evening. She couldn't shake this sticky feeling of shame and awkwardness, even if this whole thing with uncle Ilya had nothing to do with her.

If Vasya saw it, then other classmates must've seen it too. Would they make fun of her tomorrow because of it? A couple of them definitely will. Were her teachers going to treat her any different?

Mom's ‘Dinner's ready!’ pulled her out of her thoughts.

Vlada was picking at her plate, working up the courage to ask one question.

“*А почему мы не общаемся с дядей Ильёй?*” / “Mom, why did we stop talking to uncle Ilya?”

“*Что, новости увидела?”* / “You saw the news, huh?”

“Ага…” / “Yeah…”

“Ну вот поэтому и не общаемся.” / “Well that's why.”

Mom looked at her puzzled face and elaborated a bit.

“Отец твой с ним сильно поругался. И Илья оборвал все связи с семьёй и уехал в Америку. Сказал никогда ему больше не звонить и не писать. Я уж подробностей не знаю, у отца спроси.” / “Your father and him had a big fight. And Ilya cut off all ties with the family and moved to America. He explicitly asked to never call or message him again. I don't know the details, go ask your father if you're so curious.”

Well *that* she wouldn't do. She doubted dad would say anything new besides his usual rants about how ungrateful and entitled Ilya was. She didn't like calling dad without a good reason anyway - his mood was so unpredictable, and even more abrasive after the divorce. Vlada was perfectly content with meeting him for one weekend a month.

“*Ладно, мне просто интересно было.”* / “Okay, I was just wondering.”

“Ну Илья конечно даёт.” / “Your uncle is… something else, I tell you,” mom sighed and stood up from the table.

Vlada felt a pang of bitterness in her chest - so uncle Ilya really wanted nothing to do with them after all. She just had this naive assumption that it was a matter of time and distance - unintentional drifting away rather than going fully no contact.

But she clearly remembered aunt Sveta getting her toys and clothes ‘from uncle Ilya’ after he moved. Maybe she lied?

Well, whatever. She just hoped her classmates wouldn't make a big deal out of it tomorrow.

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Vlada was sitting in the backseat of her dad's car, phone in her hands, earphones in her ears. They were going to her grandparents for the May holidays, to their dacha 2 hours away from Moscow. Dad reluctantly agreed to give them a ride.

Him and mom were in the front, talking about something - well, Vlada knew exactly what it was. The same thing she was looking at her screen.

Hockey player Ilya Rozanov is getting married to another hockey player, Shane Hollander, who is Canadian of Japanese descent. So our boy first changed his country, and now his sexuality. Maybe he's doing it for Canadian citizenship? Someone tell him there are easier ways! Or are only same-sex interracial marriages allowed in the liberal West these times? First, he competed with Hollander and hated him, then they started a money laundering NGO together, and now he's the groom (or the bride?). That's how brainwashing happens.

With a morbid curiosity Vlada scrolled through the comments. As expected, they called her uncle all sorts of names, ‘traitor’ being one of the kindest.

She took one earpiece out - parents were still talking about him.

“- было похуй на нас. Делает что хочет, на остальное поебать. Мужики на работе до меня доебываться начали.” / “- never cared about us. Just doing what the fuck he wants, not a care in the world. Guys at work already give me shit for it.”

“Не ругайся при Владе!” / “Don't swear in front of her!”

“Да ладно как будто она этих слов не знает.” / “Oh come on. Like she doesn't know those words.”

He looked back - Vlada pretended she hadn't heard him.

“Ее теперь одноклассники загрызут. Всё из-за него. Позорище блять.” / “Now watch her classmates bully her too for this shit. Fucking disgrace.”

“Успокойся.” / “Calm down.”

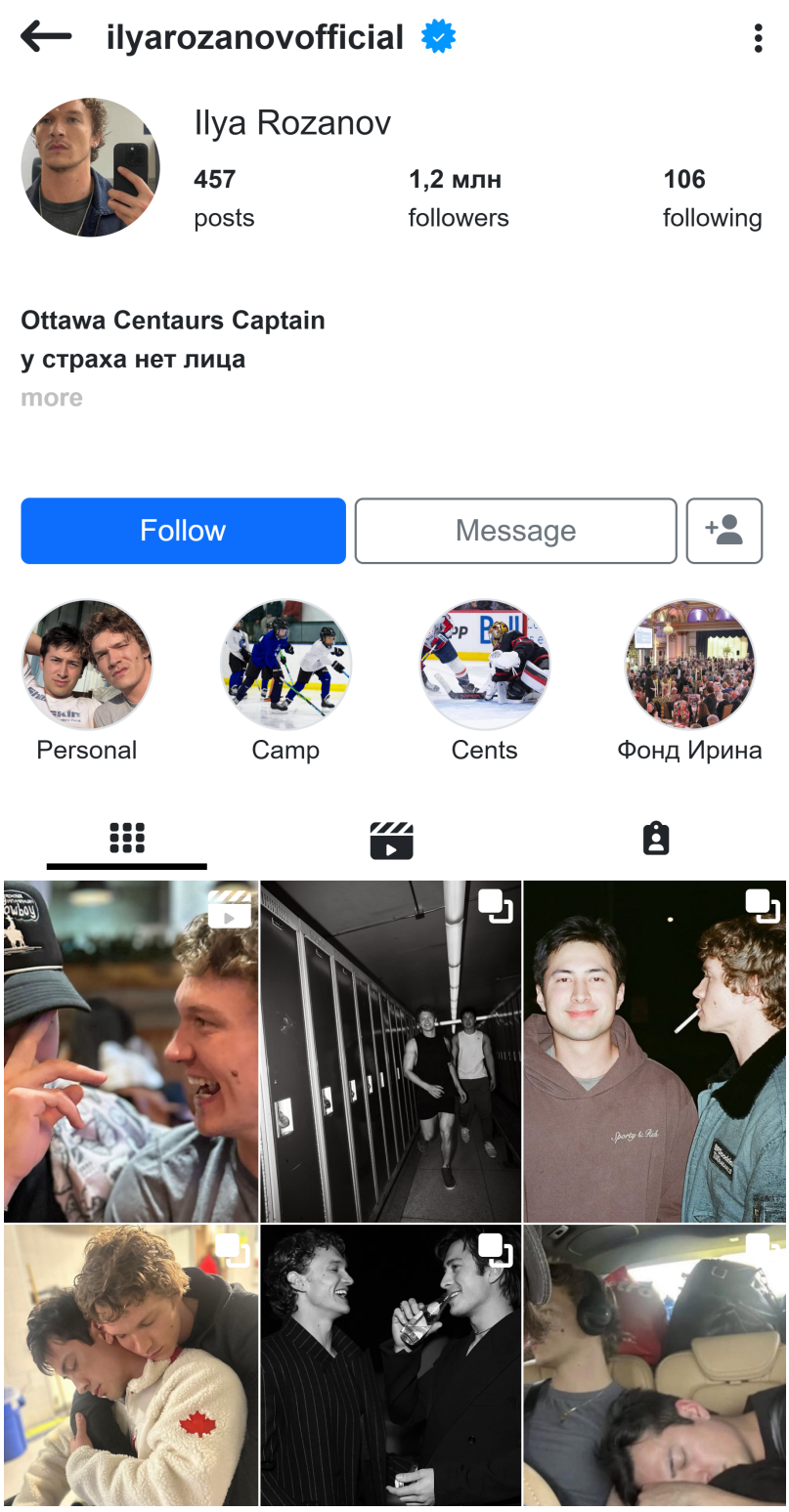
“Успокойся? Этот пидор-” / “Calm down? This faggot-”

Vlada put her earphone back.

Her eyes stung. She blinked back the tears and closed the comments under the post.

She looked at the photo again. Uncle and his soon-to-be husband looked very serious and too pretty for regular men's standards. He looked nothing like the man she remembered.

She googled Илья Розанов. One of the top links was his Instagram profile. She tapped on it.



The last post was a video.

Ilya, hair disheveled and face tan and freckled, was waving at the camera.

“Hello! I am Ilya, and this is my boyfriend, Shane. Say hello, Shane.”

Another man appeared in the frame, looking confused, and mumbled, “Um. Hi.”

“Shane, when are we getting married?” Ilya asked with a frown, pretending to not remember.

“July.” Shane said and a bashful smile blossomed on his face.

Ilya made an exaggerated surprised face. “Wow, July!”

“Still can’t believe it, huh?” Shane's smile grew bigger.

“We are getting married. And then we are going to keep playing hockey, break more records, and win more cups. Yes, Shane?”

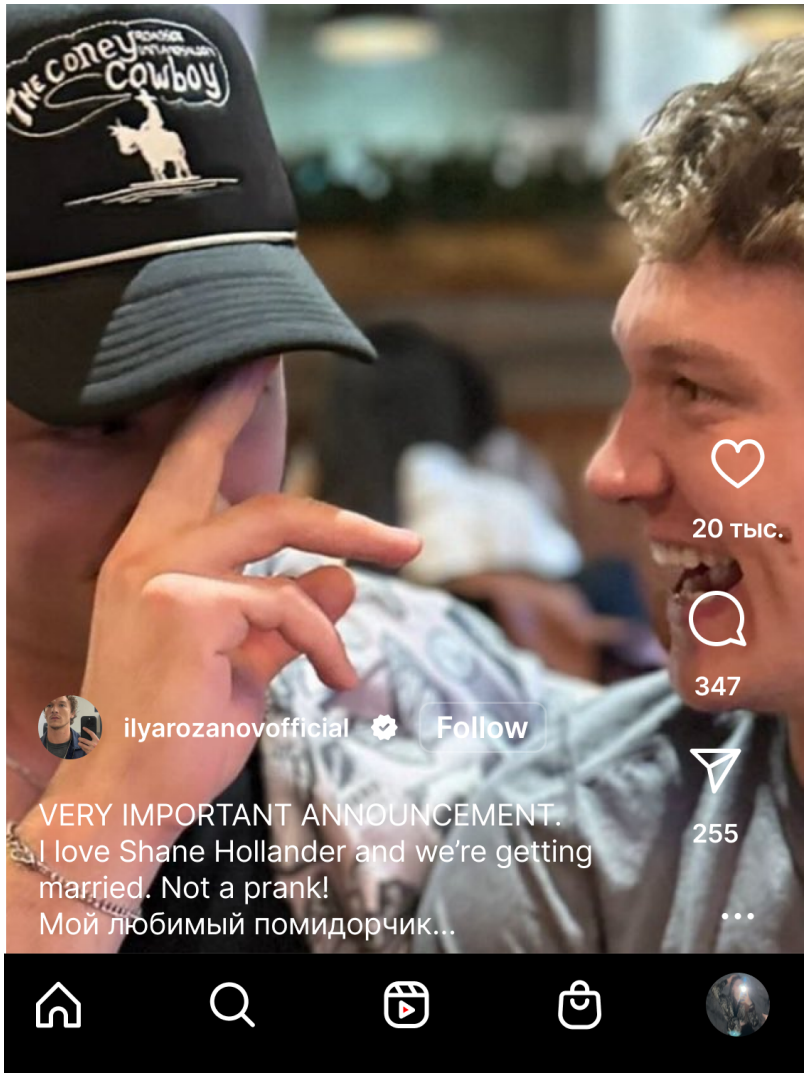
“Hell yes.”

He sounded a bit awkward but really excited.

“See you in October, hockey fans,” Ilya said and threw up a peace sign.

Then he kissed Shane on the cheek with a loud smack, and the video ended.

The description under the video said, “VERY IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT. I love Shane Hollander and we’re getting married. Not a prank!”



And below, *“Мой любимый помидорчик”* / "My beloved tomato"

Vlada huffed a tiny laugh. This had to be an inside joke or something.

She watched it again. Then tapped through his recent stories - all cute pictures with his boyfriend, smiling and goofing around.

So this is what people are mad about? Two men laughing and kissing?

Seeing uncle Ilya smile like that, wide and boyish, brought back some memories.

She almost forgot this smile, his real one. He never smiled like this in the press photos.

But he smiled like this with her, a long time ago. When he chased her around the apartment pretending to be a big bad wolf, growling and laughing. When they played with the fancy dolls he just gifted her. When he gave her piggyback rides.

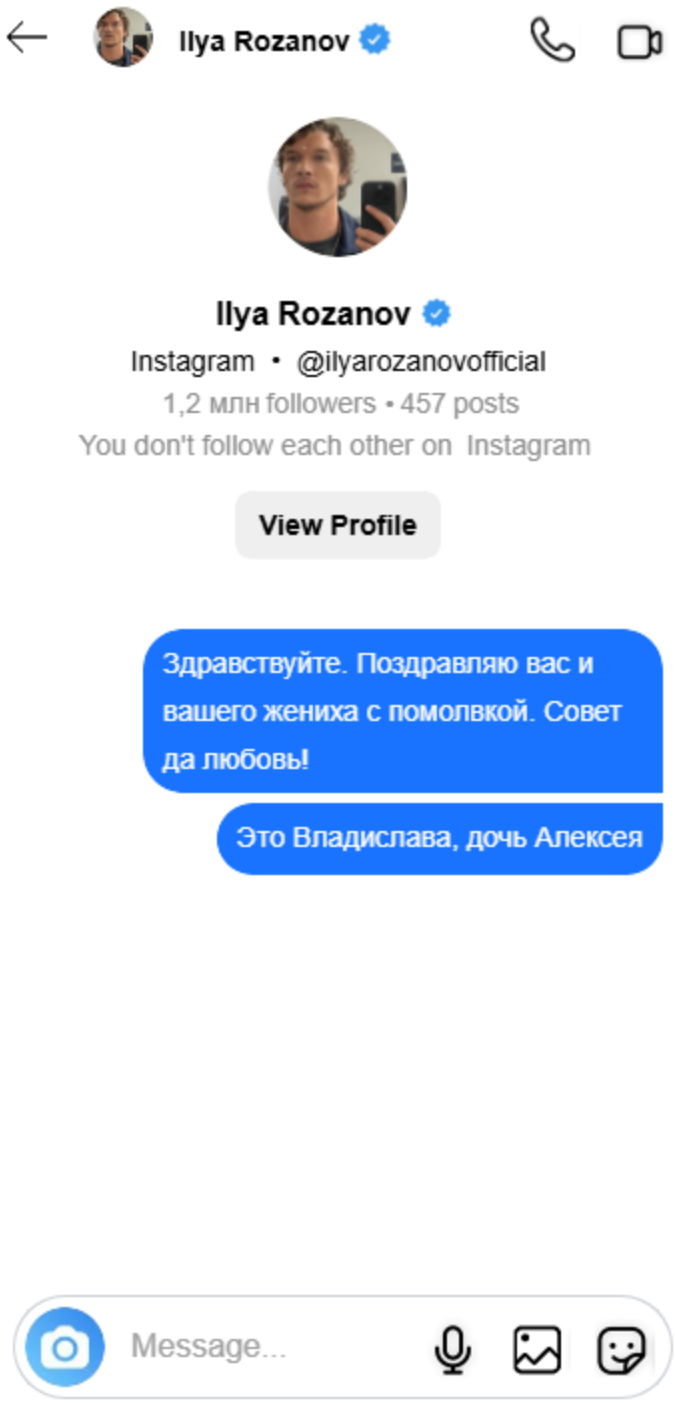
All the memories washed over her in a sudden, suffocating wave. She felt a stubborn urge to do something. She tapped on his dms and typed.

Hello. Congratulations to you and your fiance on your engagement. Wishing you a happy marriage!

She paused. He would probably not even recognize her. He probably forgot all about her like she did about him.

She added.

This is Vladislava, Aleksei's daughter.



She hit Send.

Her hands were shaking. So stupid. He won't see it anyway. God knows how many dms from fans he gets daily.

But she felt a weird sense of accomplishment.

Did she miss him? Can you miss a person you barely remember? Or did she do it solely out of spite?

Well, at least it made her feel a little better.

She kept glancing at her notifications throughout the morning. What time was it in Canada, nighttime? He won't read it until… well he won't read it anyway so no use worrying.

She stopped thinking about it after a few days spent with her grandparents and her mom, her real family.

Holiday break was over in a blink and she reluctantly woke up for another day at school.

She turned off the alarm and unlocked her phone.

Her heart skipped a bit at the sight of an Instagram notification starting with IlyaRozanovOfficial: *Ладушка?....*

She jolted from her bed.

Ladushka. Only Ilya called her that.

She opened the app. It was real. She really saw it with her own eyes.

Ladushka??? Is it really you?

She closed the dms. Took a second to catch her breath. She tapped on her profile and looked at it, trying to see it from an outsider's eyes.

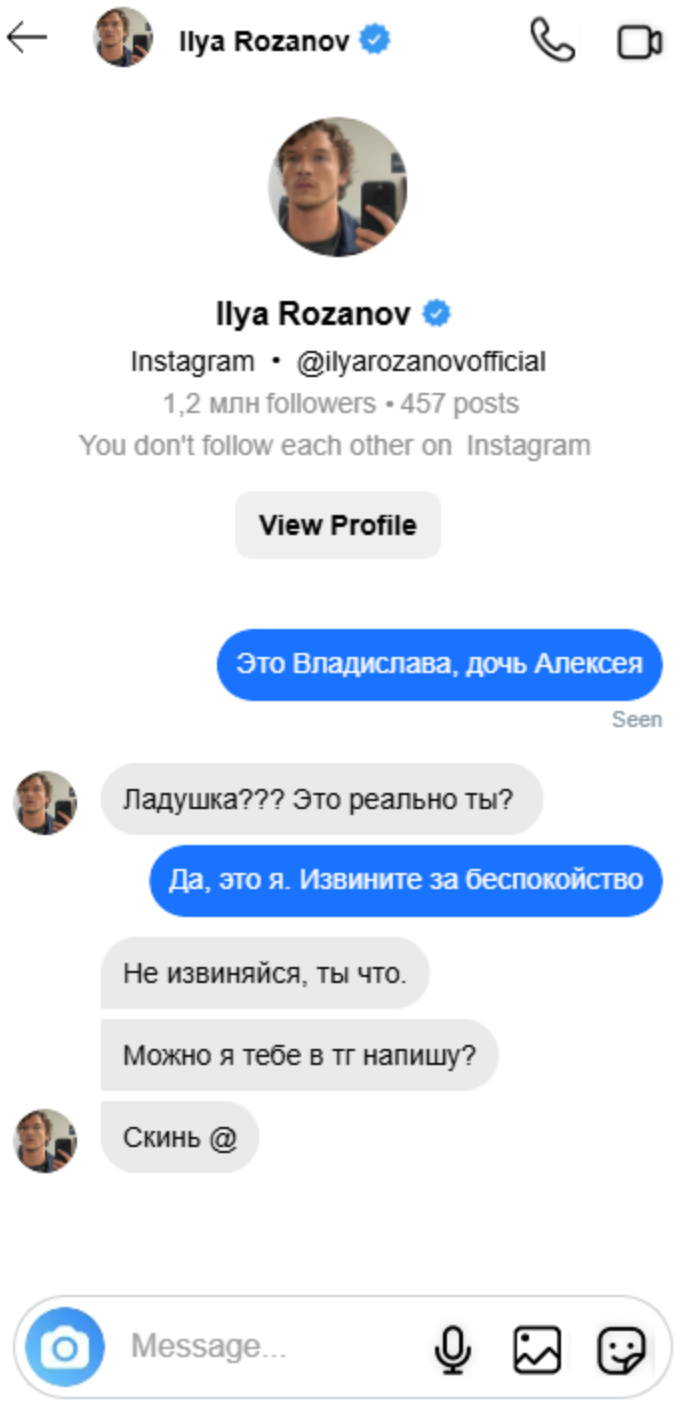
God, it was so immature and stupid. Photos of her and her classmates goofing around and making faces at the back of the classroom. Photo of her school bag with keychains and pins with her favorite anime characters. Flowers she got for her mom for March 8. A close up of her new cool sneakers. Middle finger to the math book.

She felt her cheeks flush with embarrassment. She mustered some strength to reply.

Yes, it's me. Sorry for bothering you.

She left her phone on the bed and hurried to brush her teeth and get dressed for school. She dared to look at the screen again while eating her breakfast.

He replied.



No no don't be sorry.

Can I message you on telegram?

Give your @

So he's replying in real time? Right now? He’s sitting somewhere in Canada and waiting for her reply?

She googled Canada time. It was around midnight for him.

She replied.

He messaged on telegram almost immediately.

Ilya: It’s Ilya

Vlada: Hello

Ilya: Can I call you right now?

Vlada: Sorry I can’t talk right now, I have to get ready for school

Ilya: Right

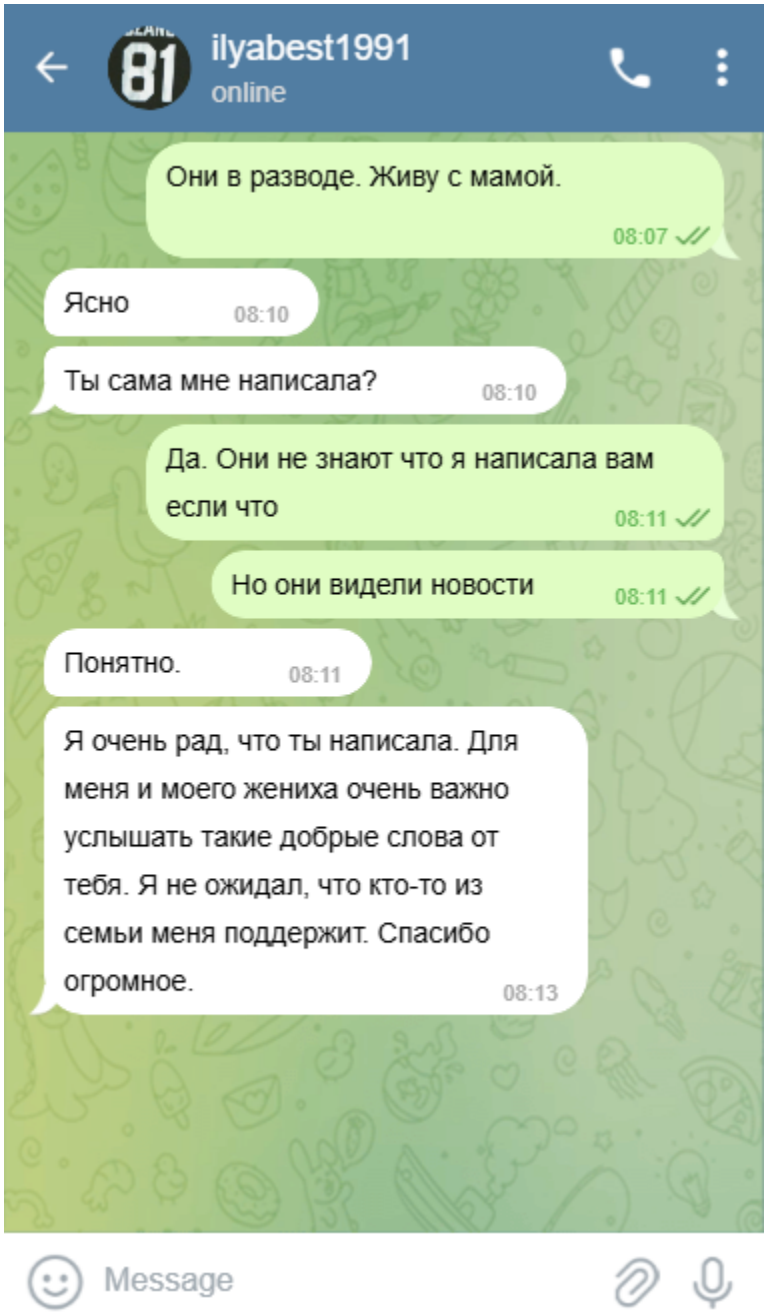
Ilya: You’re 17 right? What grade?

Vlada: 11

Ilya: How are your parents doing?

Vlada: They divorced. I live with my mom

A pause.



Ilya: Okay

Ilya: Did you message me on your own?

Vlada: Yes. They didn't know I messaged you

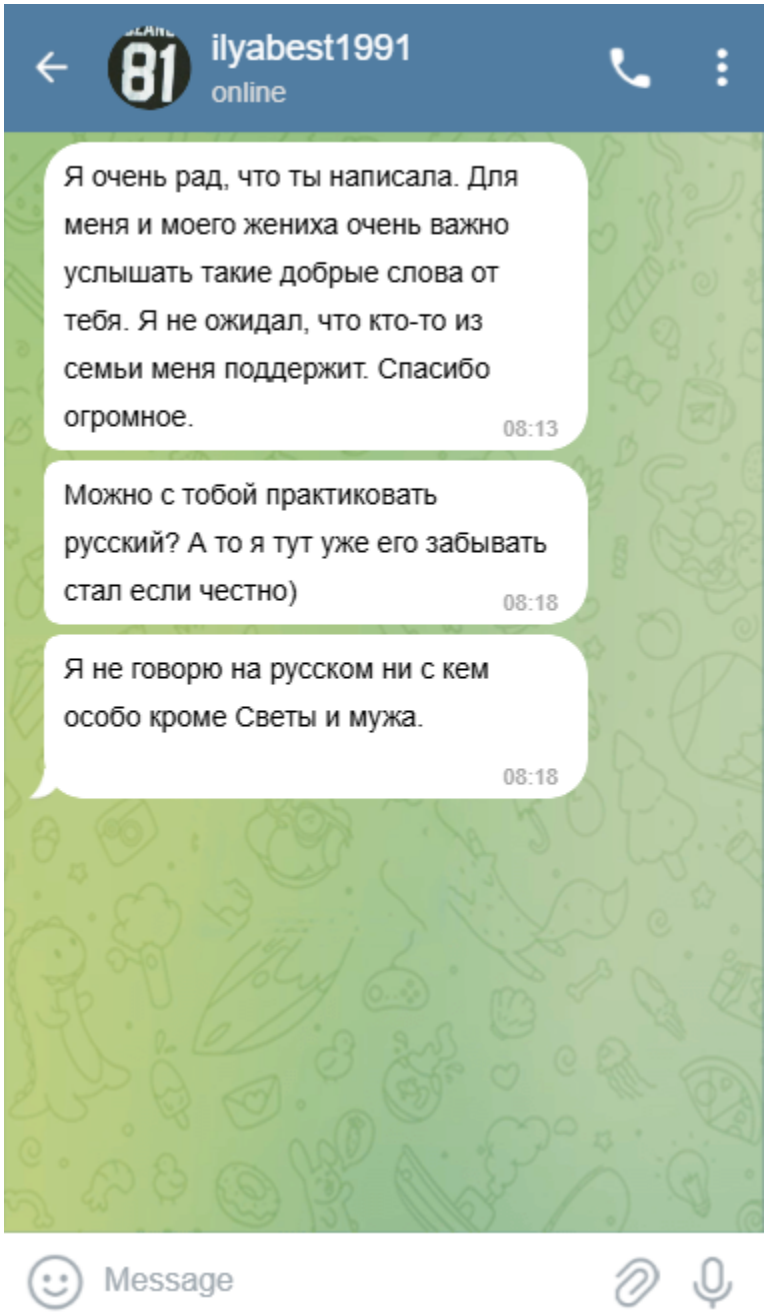
Vlada: But they saw the news

Ilya: Ah. Okay

Ilya: I’m very happy that you reached out. It’s very important for me and my fiance to hear such kind words from you. I didn't expect anyone from my family to support me. Thank you so much.

Well it felt like an appropriate message to end the conversation. They probably have nothing to talk about besides that, so that was his way of saying it politely.

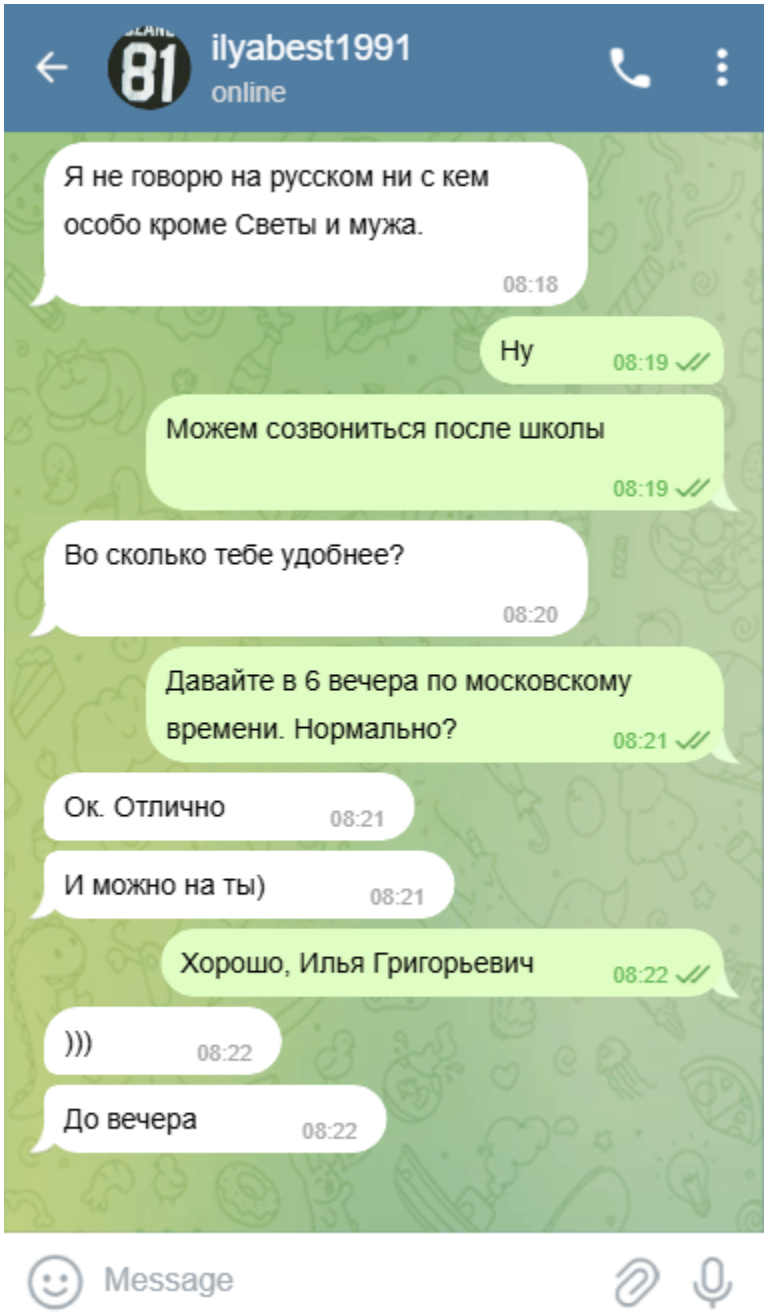
But when she was already on a train on her way to school, another message popped up.



Ilya: Can I practice Russian with you? I started to forget it to be honest)

Ilya: I have nobody to talk Russian with except my husband and Sveta.

My husband. She kept staring at the screen. It was so weird to see a man saying ‘my husband’. Weird in a good way though.



Vlada: Well

Vlada: I can call you after school

Ilya: What time?

She compared the time zones.

Vlada: 6 PM Moscow time. Deal?

Ilya: OK. Great

Ilya: And you don’t have to speak so formal with me)

She smiled and replied.

Vlada: Got it, Ilya Grigoryevich

Ilya:)))

Ilya: Later

Chapter End Notes

at first i tried to figure out how to make the timeline work (i mean her age and events from the books) but she'd be too young so i said fuck it we ball, the idea's too good.

thanks to my beautiful twitter friend Edy for beta'ing и спасибо моей хорошуле Насте за то, что подсказала имя.

дайте знать если нужен полный перевод фика на русский мне было лень делать две версии но если спрос будет...

comments are welcome dont be shy

Upd: damn no one noticed that Ilya covered Shane's feet with 😈 emoji in their ig story lol. Yuna said no free feet pics!

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

1. fyi russians use))) at the end of a sentence as a smiling emoji in texting, its kinda millenial coded and sometimes can be seen as passive-aggressive, gen z don't really use that tho

2. new formatting in this chapter, if a character uses an English word among Russian, it's italicized in translation.

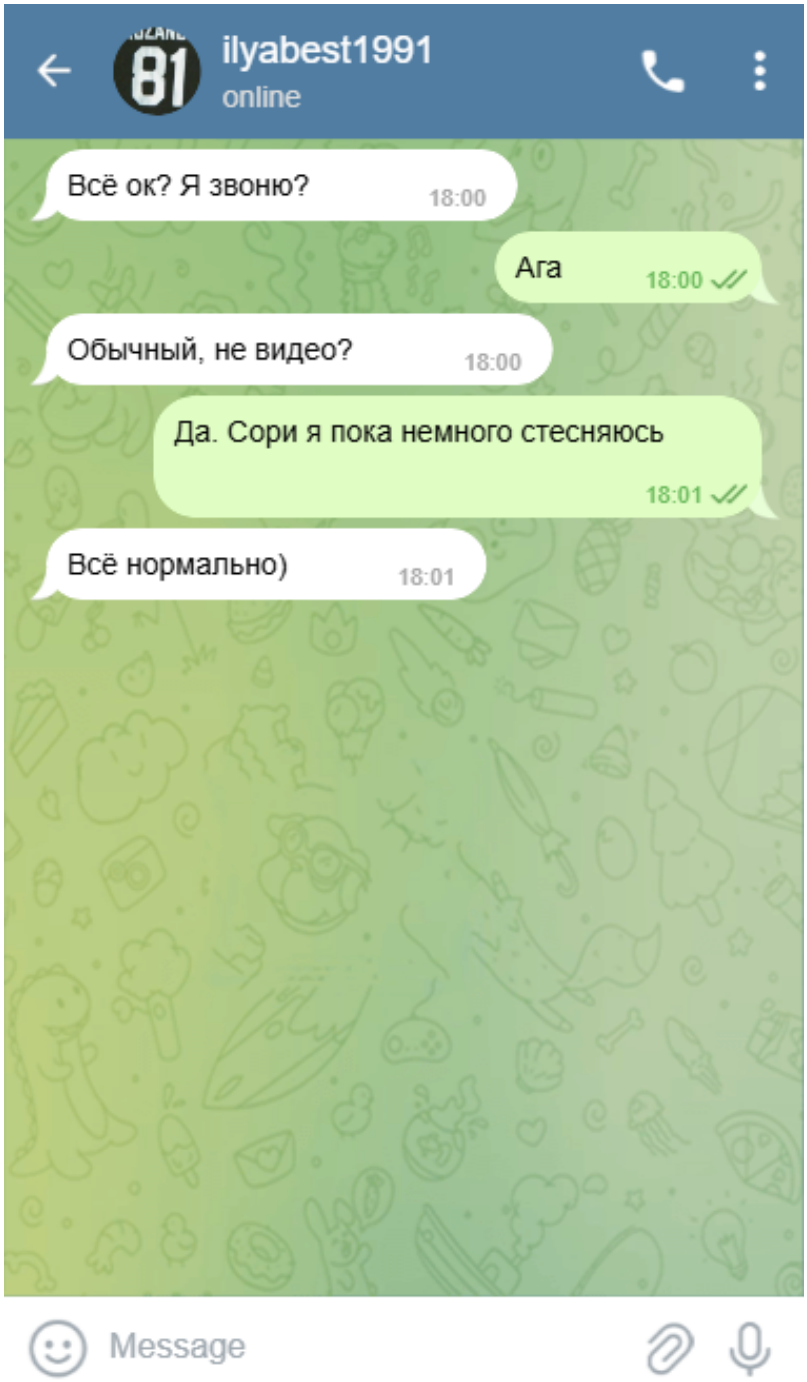
3. Oladushka means 'little pancake'

Vlada got through the day fine. She got a few mocking remarks from one annoying classmate (she just told him to fuck off) and that was it. No one really cared that she had a gay uncle in Canada.

She was dreading and looking forward to that call at the same time.

When she got home, she sat at her desk and stared at her phone like it was about to blow up.

At 6 PM sharp, a message appeared.



Ilya: Is it okay to call now?

Vlada: Yeah

Ilya: No video, just voice?

Vlada: Yes. Sorry I’m kinda shy

Ilya: That's okay)

She picked up the call.

"Привет, Лада." / "Hi, Lada."

His warm steady voice transported Vlada to her childhood instantly. It really *was* him.

"Здравствуйте. Ой то есть привет." / "Hello. I mean, hi."

"Как твой день прошёл?" / "How was your day?"

"Да как обычно." / "The usual."

"Я же не знаю, как обычно. Расскажи." / "Well I don’t know your usual. Tell me about it."

He had an accent. Barely perceptible, and Vlada couldn't put her finger on what exactly gave it away, but something was off. Maybe he wasn't joking about forgetting Russian.

"Ну уроки до 3. Сдвоенный урок математики. Обычно я еще к репетитору хожу, но сегодня нет." / "I was in school till 3. Had 2 math classes. Usually I go to a tutor after school but not today."

She felt so stupid telling him about her day filled with irrelevant stuff.

"А у вас… тебя как дела?" / "And how are you doing?"

"Недавно проснулся, скоро на тренировку пойду." / "Just woke up. About to go to the gym."

He seemed to read her mind, because he added.

"У меня сильный акцент, да?" / "I have an accent, don’t I?"

Vlada hesitated. He chuckled.

"Только честно." / "Be honest."

"Ну есть немного." / “A little bit,” She said with a smile in her voice, relaxing slightly.

"Черт, я теперь никакой язык нормально не знаю. Русский с акцентом, английский с акцентом." / "Damn now I can't speak anything right. Russian with an accent, English with an accent."

He groaned in comical frustration.

"А ты английский знаешь?" / "Do you speak English?"

"Да, мы в школе учим. У меня пятёрка." / "Yes, I study it in school. I have an A."

"О, молодец. Как школа вообще? Хорошо учишься?" / "That's my girl. How’s school? Doing well?"

"Да нормально… без троек. Готовлюсь к поступлению." / "Alright… Not bad. As and Bs. Getting ready for university."

"На что поступать собираешься?" / "What university do you want to get into?"

"Экономика, финансы, что-то такое." / "Something in finances, economics, I think."

"О, бизнесвуман, значит." / "Oh, so you’re a businesswoman."

She stifled a laugh.

"Мама говорит, что так я без работы не останусь." / "Mom says that's a guaranteed job after graduating."

There was a pause.

"Как дела у твоей мамы? / "How’s your mom doing?"

"Да нормально… работает в мэрии." / "Good, I suppose. She works in the city council administration."

"А папа?" / "And your dad?"

"Ну… там же." / "His old job."

"В полиции?" / "Police?"

"Ага." / "Yeah."

Another pause.

He broke the awkward silence, this time his voice was surprisingly serious.

"Я хочу, чтобы ты знала, что я о тебе не забывал. Ты не виновата, что у меня… что я не общаюсь с твоим отцом." / "I want you to know that I didn't forget about you. It’s not your fault that I had… That I don’t talk to your father."

Her throat suddenly got tight.

"Ничего, я понимаю. Вы не обязаны…" / "It's okay, I understand. You don't have to…"

He kept on talking.

"Я пытался что-то сделать через Свету, но твои родители были против." / "I tried to arrange something through Sveta but your parents were against it."

Vlada was taken aback a bit. She thought it was because aunt Sveta had fully moved to America by then.

"Ладушка, я помнил о тебе. Прости меня, пожалуйста, что я не выходил на связь." / "Ladushka, I always remembered you. Please forgive me for not finding a way to reach you."

He nervously cleared his throat and added.

"Я не был уверен, что ты вообще захочешь общаться со мной." / "I wasn't sure you'd even want to talk to me."

This voice, so soft and familiar, the one that calmed her down when she scraped her knees and whispered fairy tales when she was half asleep.

Ladushka.

He said, fixing her shoelaces.

He said, twirling her in his arms.

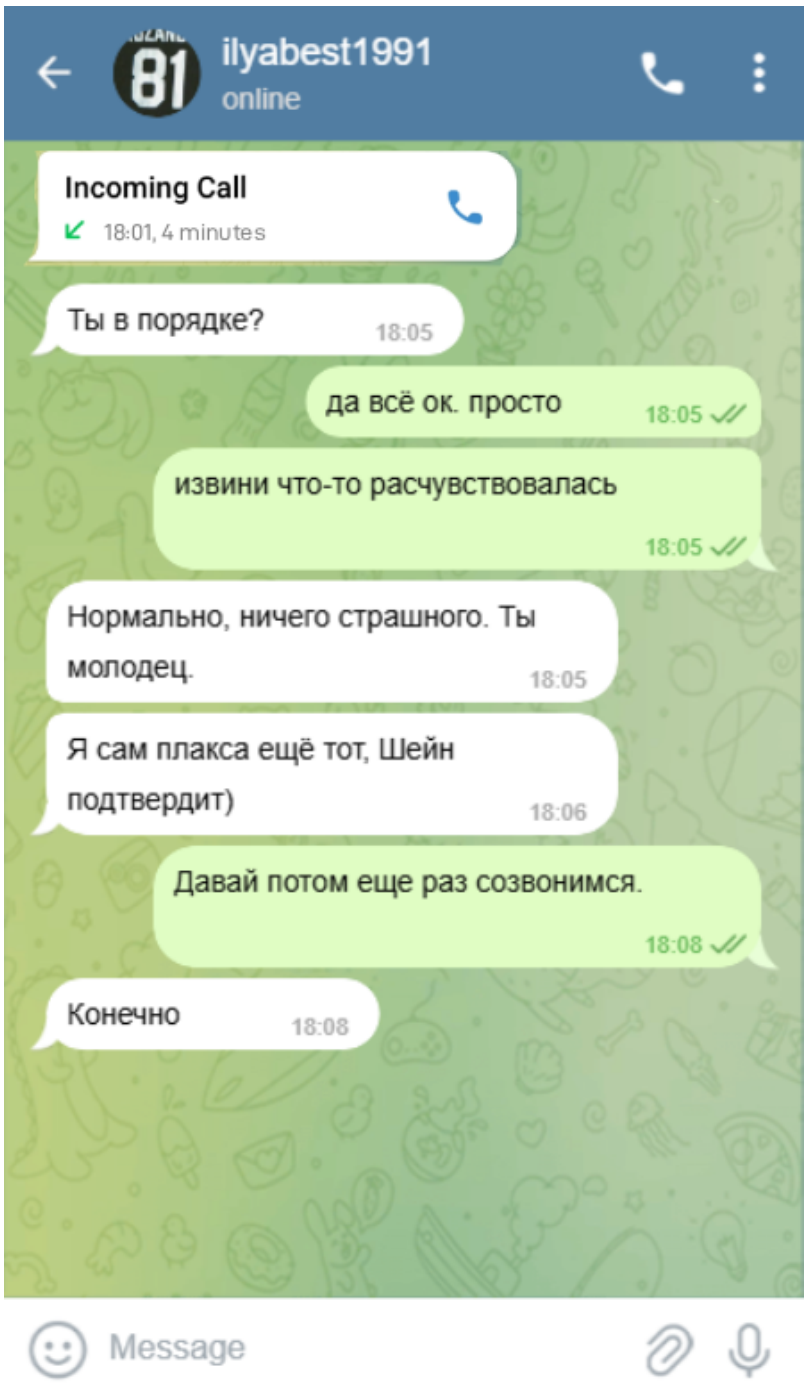
He said, holding her tiny hand and saying goodbye in a dimly lit room, not knowing they'll never meet again.

Vlada tried to say something but couldn't. She choked on tears.

Ilya made a surprised noise.

"Эм, Лада?" / "Erm, Lada?"

She realized he must've heard whatever pathetic sob of a sound she made. She hung up in panic.



Ilya: You’re alright?

Vlada: yes im ok. im just

Vlada: sorry i got emotional

Ilya: That’s totally fine. No big deal.

Ilya: I'm a crybaby myself, Shane can confirm)

She wanted to type ‘I didn't even know I missed you’ but didn't. She just typed

Vlada: Let's talk again later

Ilya: Of course

—----------

They were on a video call - she put her phone up on her desk on speaker while doing her English homework.

Ilya was rambling about being stumped in a video game he was playing, complaining that he should've stuck to sports simulators and not RPGs.

She interrupted him.

“*Помоги мне с заданием плиз. Косвенная речь.* Reported speech. *Изначальное предложение* John and Jane said “we were late because of the traffic”. / “Can you help me with my homework please? *Reported speech.* The original sentence is *John and Jane said “we were late because of the traffic”.*

She read out the assignment from her English textbook.

"Нужно переделать в John and Jane said that they, *пропуск,* Late because of the traffic. *Что там?* Had been late? Were late?” / "I gotta fill in the blank. *John and Jane said that they*… blank… *Late because of the traffic.* What is it? *Had been late? Were late?”*

Ilya made a face like she asked him to name all elements in the periodic table.

“Ну ты и спросила! Never in my life have I used this so-called reported speech. *Я просто говорю* and they were like something something ‘cause of traffic”. / “Why are you asking me? *Never in my life have I used this so-called reported speech*. I just say *‘and they were like something something ‘cause of traffic’.”*

“The traffic,” she corrected.

"Видишь ты знаешь английский лучше меня!" / "See, you know English better than me!"

"Ну и зачем мне тогда дядя в Канаде!" / "What's the use of having an uncle in Canada then!"

"Вот так значит, я тебе нужен только домашку делать. Понятно." / "So you only need me for your homework. Got it."

They laughed. She gave up on getting any help from him.

"Как подготовка к свадьбе?" / “How's the wedding planning going?” she asked.

"Я хотел большую свадьбу, ну знаешь, всех позвать, white limo, *гулять два дня,* live band and DJ… *но Шейн против. Так что в закрытом кругу, только семья и друзья. В коттедже под Оттавой."* / "I wanted a big celebration, you know, 200 guests, *white limo*, the whole weekend, *live band and DJ*… But Shane didn't like it. So it’s family and close friends only. At his Ottawa cottage."

"Прикольно." / "Nice."

"Но даже с этим Шейн умудряется быть…" / "But even now Shane is being…"

He snapped his fingers, looking for the right word but ultimately opting for English, *“*control freak.”

He sighed.

"Три дня выбирал дизайн приглашений. Неделю составлял меню. Я ему говорю Шейн…" / "He spent 3 days picking out the invitation design. A week on the menu. I said to him, Shane…"

"Hey! Are you talking about me?"

She heard a voice off camera. It sounded like it was coming from another room.

"Это Шейн?" / "Is it Shane?"

"Ага. А ты… может, хочешь с ним познакомиться?" / "Yeah. Do you… Want to meet him?"

They've been texting and video calling for 2 weeks now but Ilya seemed to be hesitant to show off Shane, until now.

"Конечно!" / "Of course!"

She grabbed her phone to take a closer look.

Ilya seemed to be kinda relieved - his shoulders relaxed and the crease between his eyebrows smoothed.

"Эй, Шейн, иди сюда! / “Hey Shane! Come here!” He yelled to the side in Russian, then added in English, “Get your ass here.”

Ilya grinned, beckoning with his hand.

“Okay, Shane, say hi to Vlada.”

The camera was now pointing at the man she'd only seen in photos before.

He looked delighted and a bit flustered.

“Privyet, Vlada!” Shane said in Russian, “*Rad s toboi poznakomitsya.”*

She was surprised by him speaking Russian.

Well, why wouldn't he? He's been with Ilya for quite some time, of course he learned some Russian.

“Здравствуйте!” she greeted him as politely as she could.

Ilya put the camera back on himself.

"Ну как оцениваешь его русский?" / "So how do you rate his Russian?"

"Десять из десяти." / "10 out of 10."

"Не льсти ему, давай честно. Ужасный акцент, да?" / "Don't flatter him. Terrible accent, right?"

He laughed, looking at Shane.

Shane frowned and added in a perfectly cordial voice, “Can you guys speak English, please? I'd like to understand you.”

“Aw, you want to feel included?” Ilya said mockingly.

“Знаешь, он прав. / You know, he’s right,” Vlada interrupted, “And I need to practice my English, I have an exam in June.”

“Okay,” Ilya rolled his eyes, “Shane, we were just talking about how much your Russian sucks.”

“Nooooo,” Vlada laughed, “He lied! Mister Hollander, you speak it so well!”

“Thank you. And you can call me Shane.”

Ilya was cackling off camera.

“Mister Hollander… Call him mister Rozanov! Because he's about to be!”

“Pfft, dream on,” Shane nudged him lightly with his shoulder.

“I'm so happy to finally meet you, Shane,” Vlada smiled, “Ilya talks about you very often.”

“Oh does he? Only good things, I hope.”

“Well… Not only,” she laughed.

Shane glared at Ilya.

“You're such…” he didn't finish that line and turned back to her. “Well he mentions you all the time too, talking with you is a highlight of his day. So thank you for putting up with him.”

“Putting up?” Ilya gasped in mock offense.

Vlada frowned in confusion.

“Highlight?... What is…”

She didn't know that word, at least in that context.

"О, ну это значит… лучшее событие за день, типа того." / "Oh it means like… the best thing of the day," Ilya explained eagerly.

"Правда?" / "Really?"

"Правда, Ладушка-оладушка." / "Really, Ladushka-Oladushka."

She smiled. Her vision suddenly went a little blurry.

"Хватит меня так называть. Мне же не 5 лет." / "Stop calling me that, I’m not 5."

She pouted and acted like she didn't like it.

“Now I will use it even more,” Ilya said in English.

A new incoming call appeared on her screen.

From: Vasya 👻

"Ой, мне нужно отключиться." / "Oop, I need to go."

"Мама пришла?" / "Your mom’s home?"

"Нет, Вася звонит." / "No, Vasya is calling."

Ilya squinted and said.

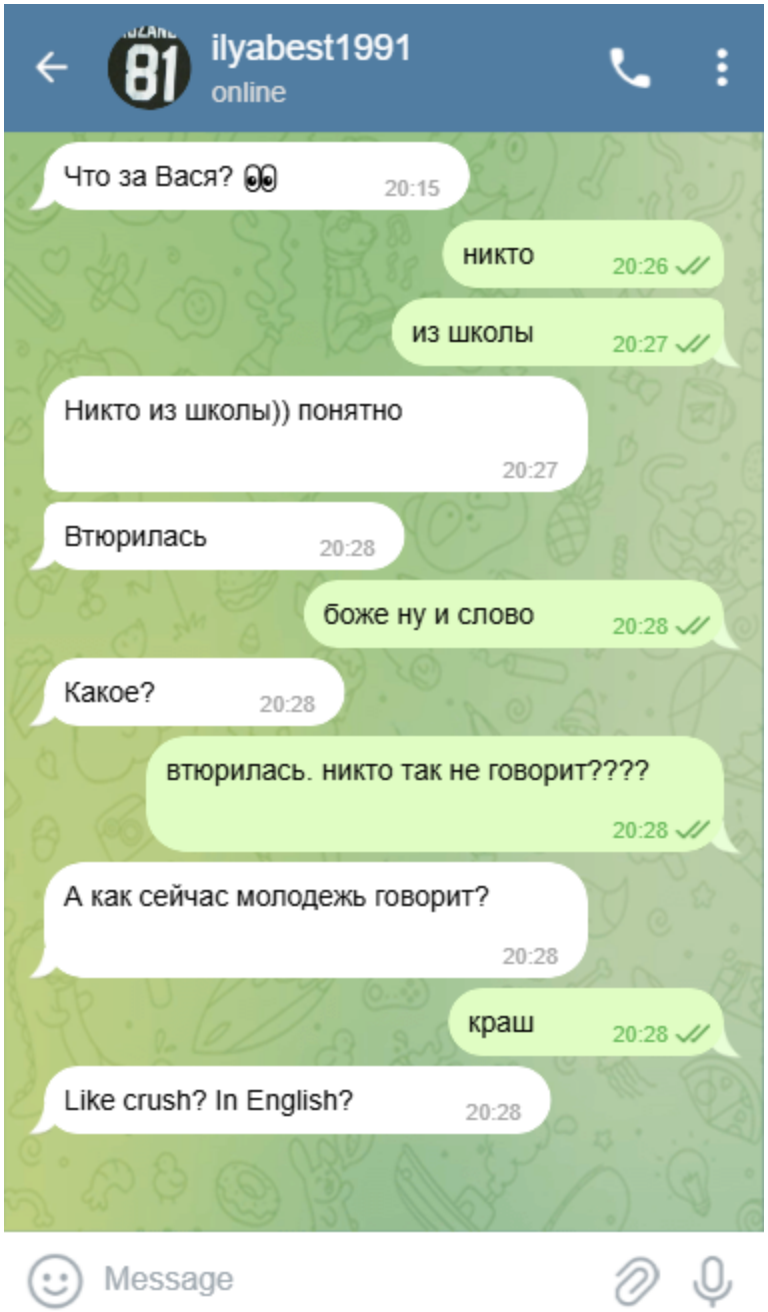
"Окей. Шейн скажи пока." / "Okay. Shane say bye."

“Poka-poka!” Shane waved his hand.

It was adorable.

“Bye bye!” she said and hung up.

Later she found new messages from Ilya.



Ilya: Who’s Vasya? 👀

Vlada: no one

Vlada: classmate

Ilya: No one from school)) mmkay

Ilya: Fell for someone

Vlada: ew dont say it like that

Ilya: Like what?

Vlada: no one says fell for????

Ilya: Well how do kids these days say it?

Vlada: that it's a *crush*

Ilya: *Like crush? In English?*

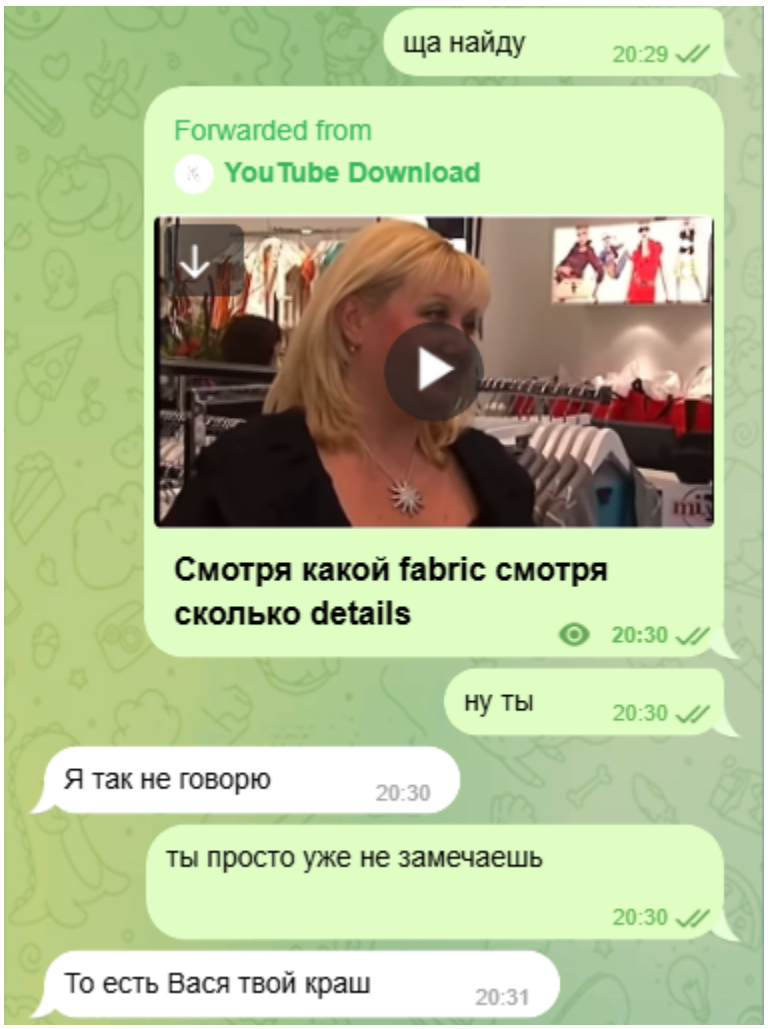
Ilya: You kids over there forgot Russian

Vlada: hmmm says the man who talks like that lady from that *fabric details* video???

Ilya: What?

Vlada: you haven't seen it? lady who talks in a mix of russian and english

Vlada: hold on

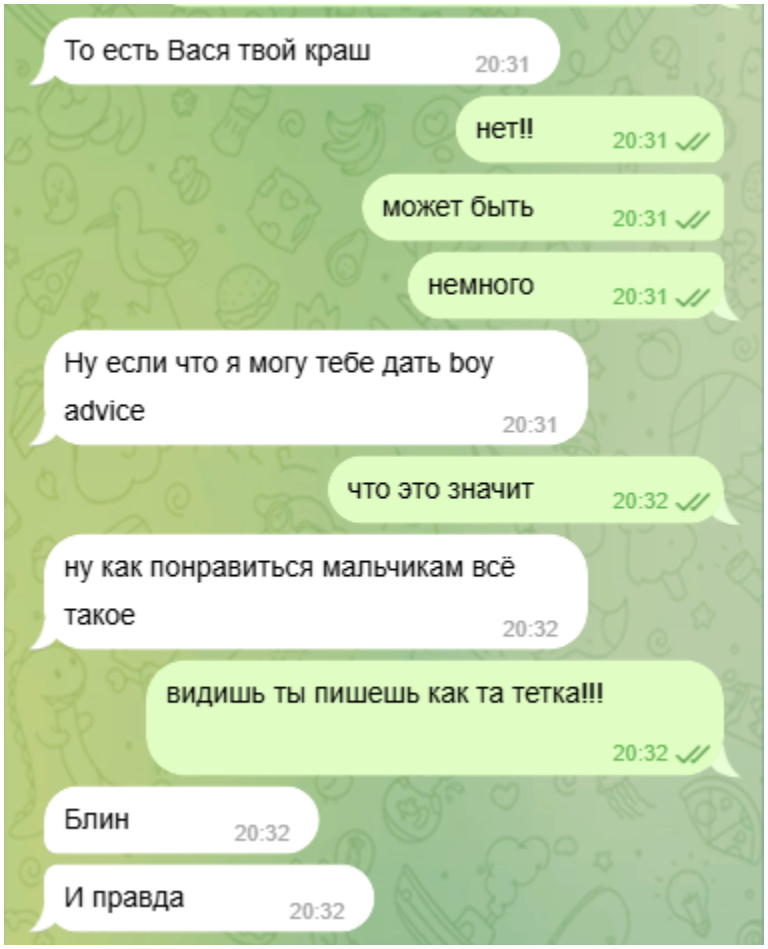


Vlada: **[video link]** thats you

Ilya: I don't speak like that

Vlada: you do you just dont notice

Ilya: so Vasya is your *crush*



Vlada: no!!!

Vlada: maybe

Vlada: kinda

Ilya: I can give you *boy advice*, you know

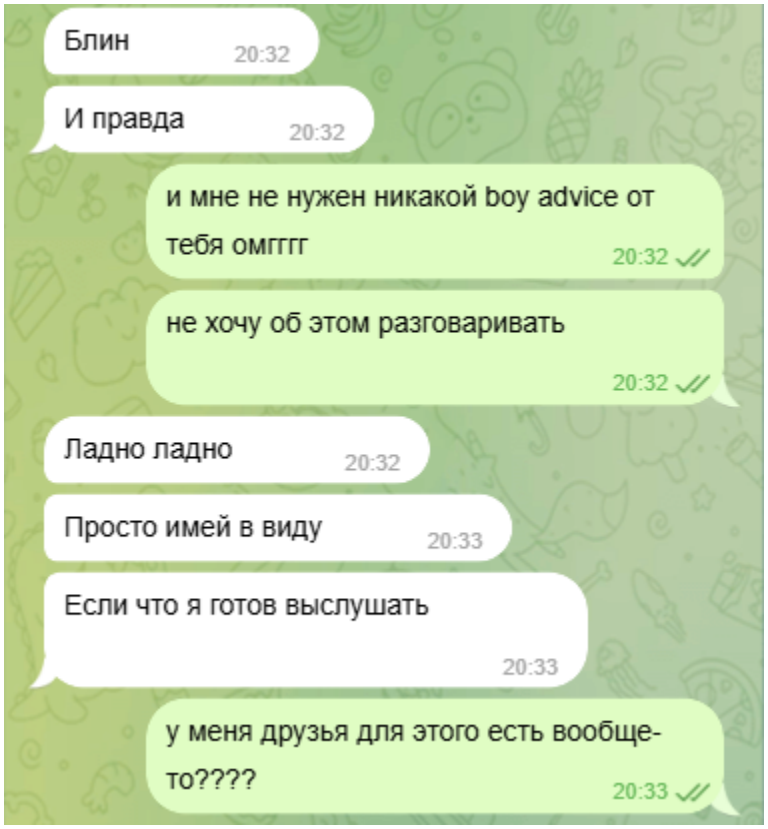
Vlada: what does that mean

Ilya: how to get a boy to like you and stuff

Vlada: see you talk like that lady

Ilya: Damn

Ilya: I do



Vlada: and i dont need *boy advice* from you omgggg

Vlada: i dont want to talk about it

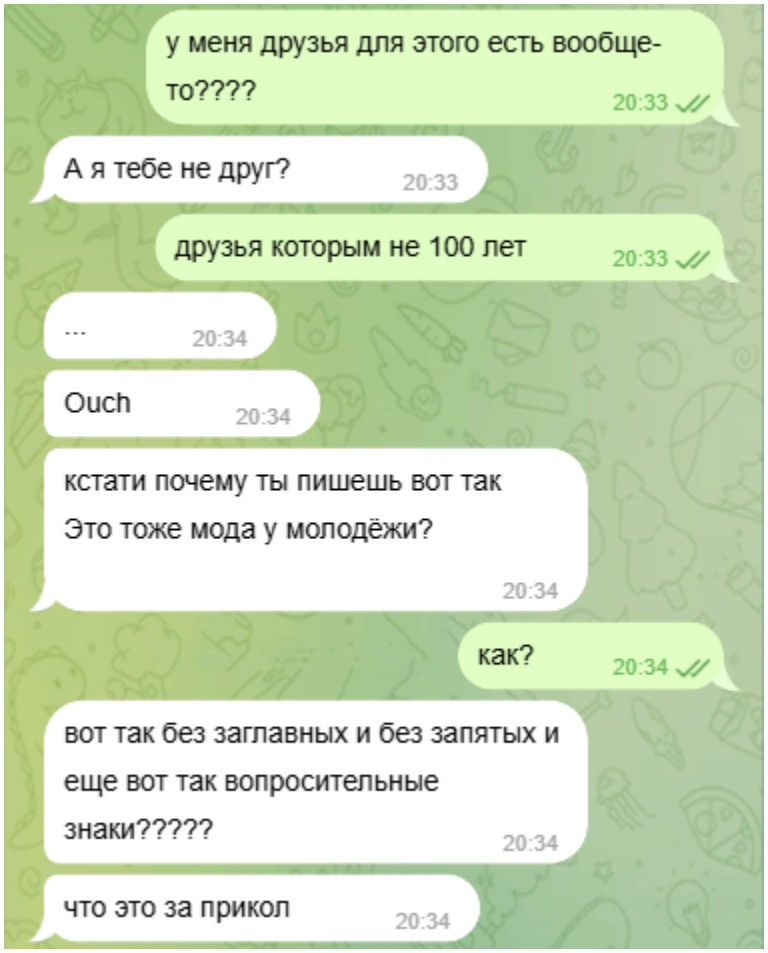
Ilya: Okay okay

Ilya: Just keep in mind

Ilya: I'm here if you want to talk

Vlada: i have friends for this????

But in all truth she couldn't talk about it with her friends either. She just couldn't. They wouldn’t understand.



Ilya: Am I not your friend?

Vlada: friends who arent 100 years old

Ilya: …

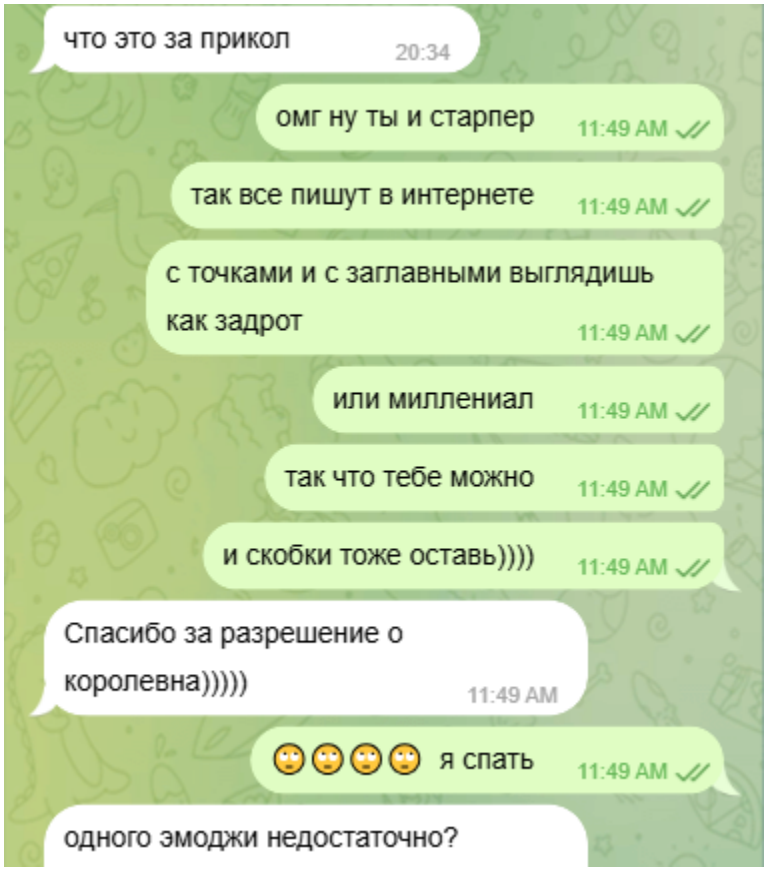
Ilya: *Ouch*

Ilya: btw why do you write like this

Ilya: Is it in with the kids?

Vlada: like what?

Ilya: like this no caps no commas and questions marks???? whats up with that



Vlada: omg you're old

Vlada: everyone on the internet does it

Vlada: commas and periods make you look like a nerd

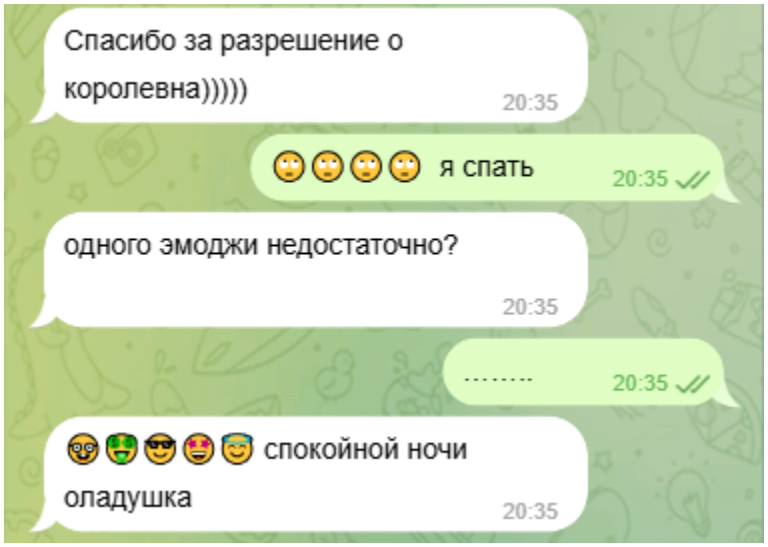
Vlada: or millennial

Vlada: so you’re allowed to do it

Vlada: and you can use parentheses))))

Ilya: Thank you for the permission your royal highness)))))

Vlada: 🙄🙄🙄🙄 im going to bed



Ilya: one emoji is not enough?

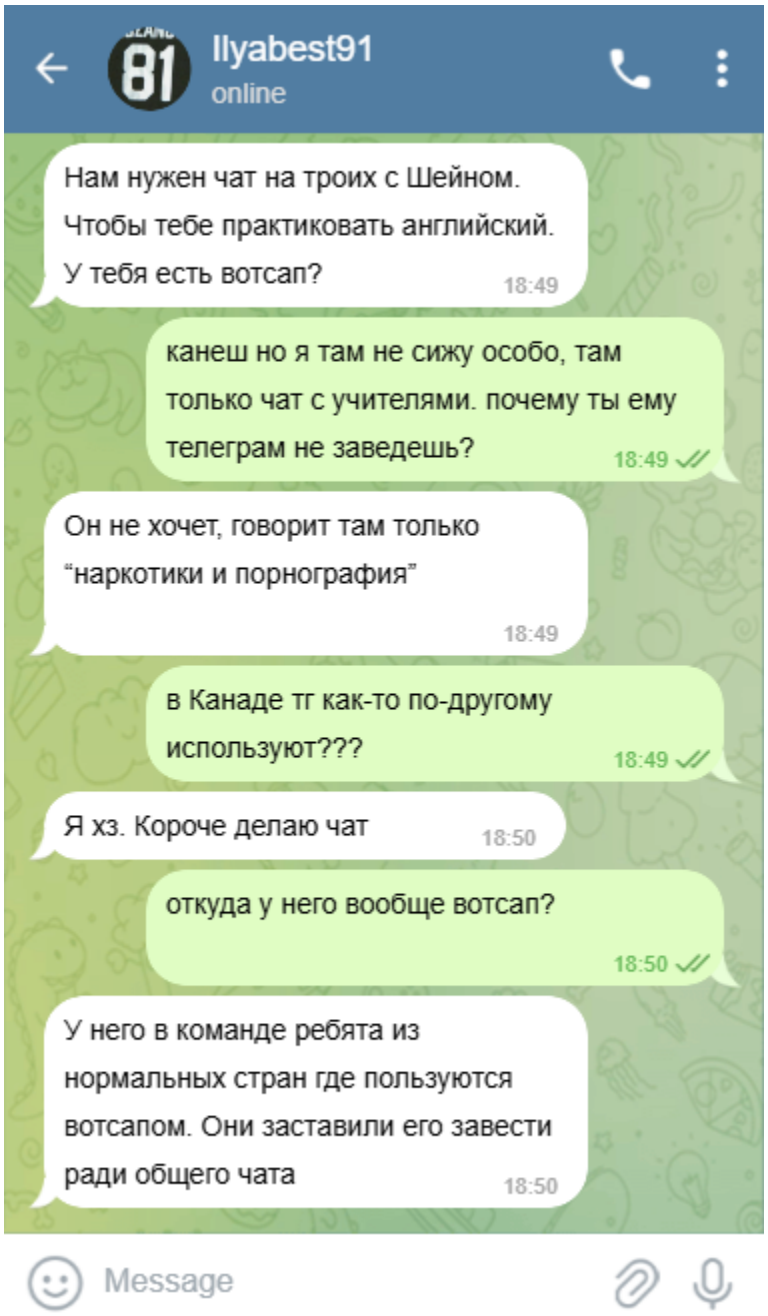
Vlada: ……..

Ilya: 🤓🤑😎🤩😇 good night oladushka

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes



Ilya: We need a group chat with Shane. For you to practice English. Do you have whatsapp?

Vlada: ofc. but i use it only to text with teachers. why dont you get him a telegram acc?

Ilya: He doesn't want to, he says it's for ‘drugs and pornography’

Vlada: they use it differently in Canada???

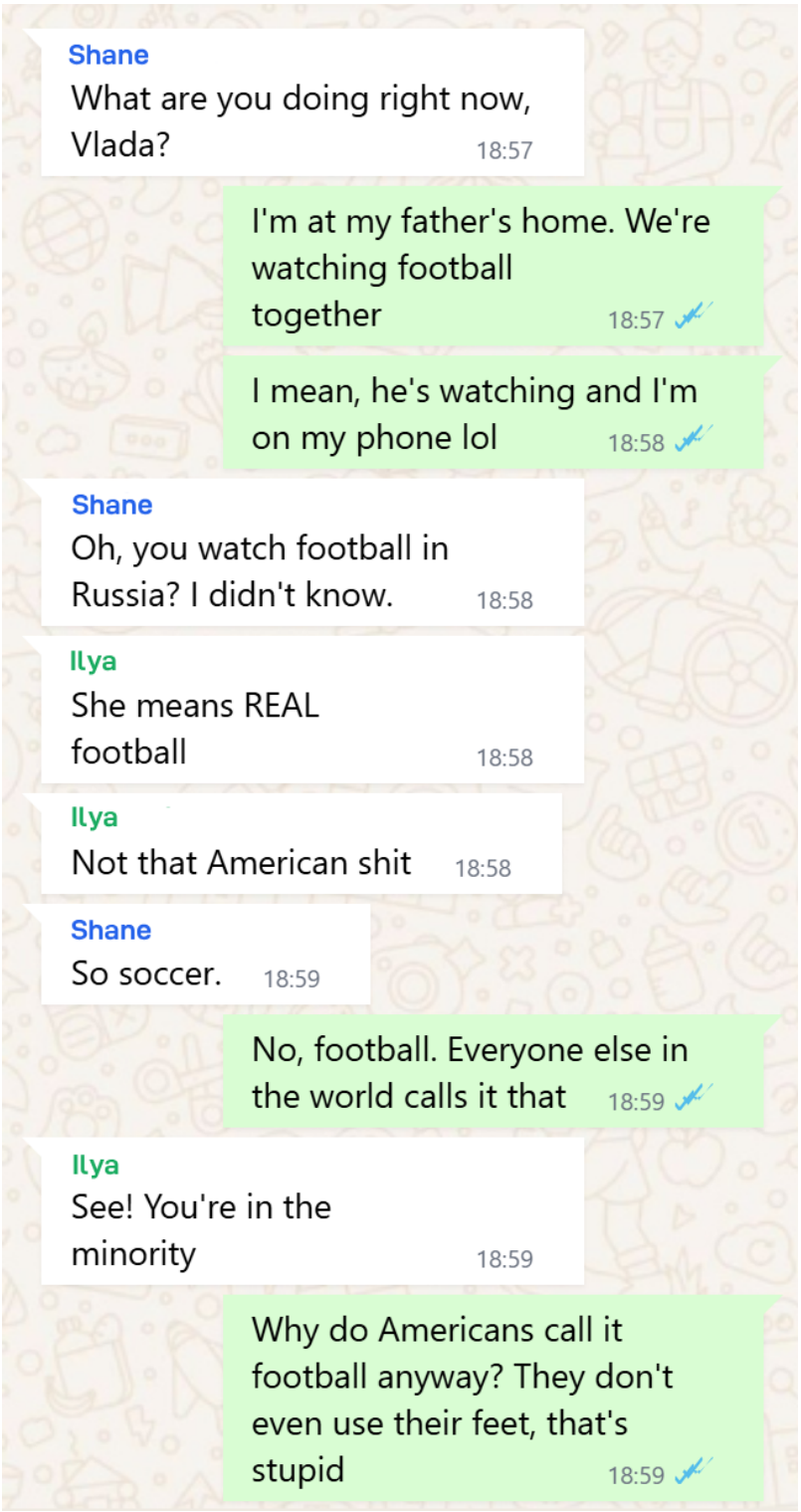
Ilya: idk. I'm making a gc

Vlada: why does he have a whatsapp acc anyway?

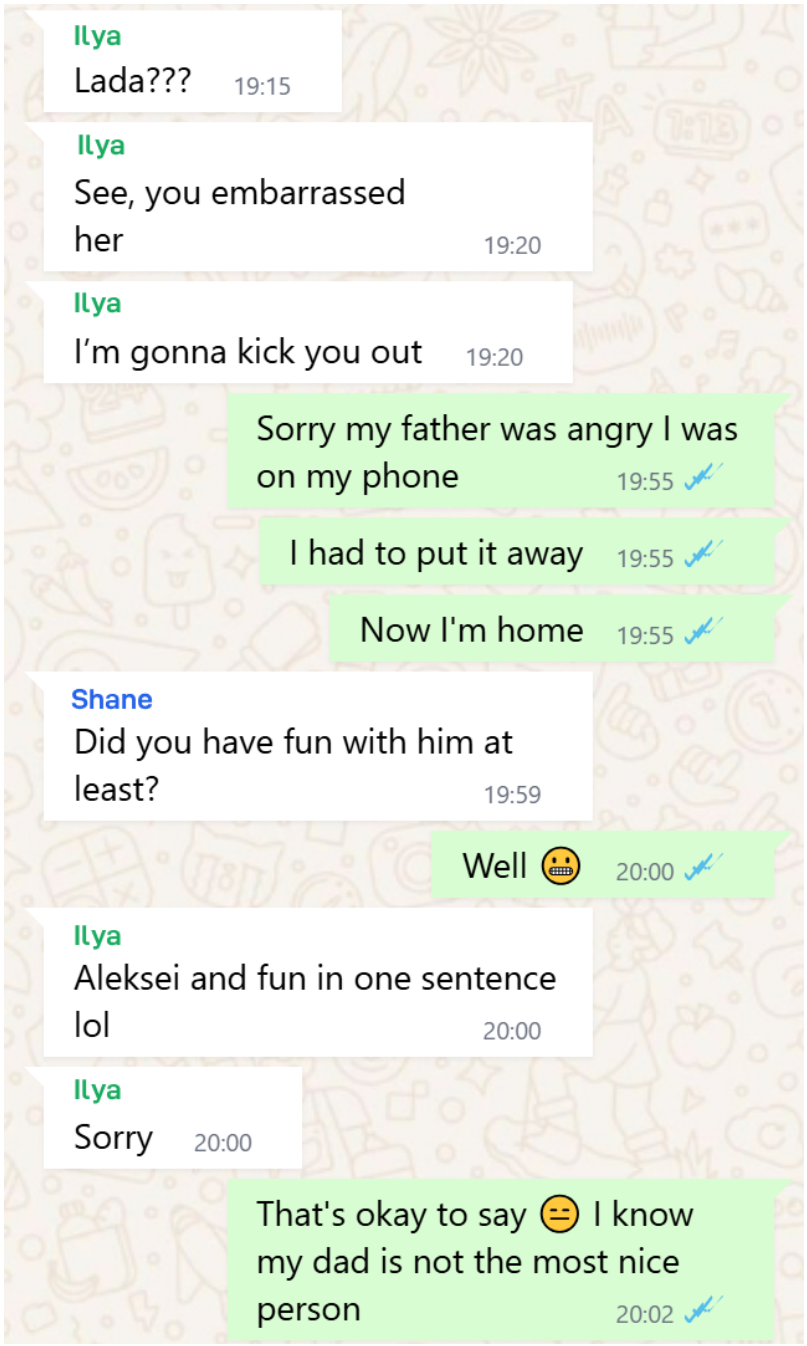
Ilya: He had players on his team from normal countries that use whatsapp. They forced him to join

GC name (Rozanovs)

Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane
Shane
Розановы? I'm not taking your last name, how many times do I have to tell you? 18:55
Ilya
You're honorary Rozanov. Be honored 18:55
Hello Shane! 18:56
Shane
Hello Vlada! 18:56
Ilya
No hello for me??? 18:56
Ilya said it will be good to practice my English with you 18:56
Shane
Yes, it's a good idea. 18:56
Ilya
If you make fun of her English or correct her I'll kill you and then divorce you 18:56
Oh no, please, correct me if I make a mistake, it's the whole point 18:57
Message


Shane
What are you doing right now, Vlada? 18:57
I'm at my father's home. We're watching football together 18:57
I mean, he's watching and I'm on my phone lol 18:58
Shane
Oh, you watch football in Russia? I didn't know. 18:58
Ilya
She means REAL football 18:58
Ilya
Not that American shit 18:58
Shane
So soccer. 18:59
No, football. Everyone else in the world calls it that 18:59
Ilya
See! You're in the minority 18:59
Why do Americans call it football anyway? They don't even use their feet, that's stupid 18:59

Ilya
18:59
Shane
I'm Canadian, not American.
18:59
Canada is in North America, isn't it?
19:00
Shane
Ah, so you made this group chat to bully me, I see.
19:00
Nooo uncle Shane I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that
19:00
Ilya
Uncle Shane
19:00
SHANE just Shane
18:55
Shane
That's okay, I know I'm uncle age
19:00
Ilya
I'm not
19:00


Ilya
Lada??? 19:15
Ilya
See, you embarrassed her 19:20
Ilya
I'm gonna kick you out 19:20
Sorry my father was angry I was on my phone 19:55
I had to put it away 19:55
Now I'm home 19:55
Shane
Did you have fun with him at least? 19:59
Well 😬 20:00
Ilya
Aleksei and fun in one sentence lol 20:00
Ilya
Sorry 20:00
That's okay to say 😑 I know my dad is not the most nice person 20:02

Shane
He still loves you, right? That's what matters 20:02
Shane
And it's *the nicest 20:02
Ilya
you corrected her in a moment like this??? 20:03
Shane
He threw a pillow at me Vlada help 20:05
Lol that's okay 20:05
Ilya stop!!! He's just being a good teacher 20:05
I have an English test in a week! I really need to get good grades to get into a good university 20:06
Ilya
Good luck 20:06
Shane
You can text me anytime if you have questions, I can't always reply right away, but I'll try. 20:08
Thanks! 20:08

Ilya, you studied at a university, right? How did you pass your entry tests? 20:08

Ilya
🤣 do you think I really took any tests 20:09

You didn't? But you have a diploma. It says so on your Wikipedia page 20:09

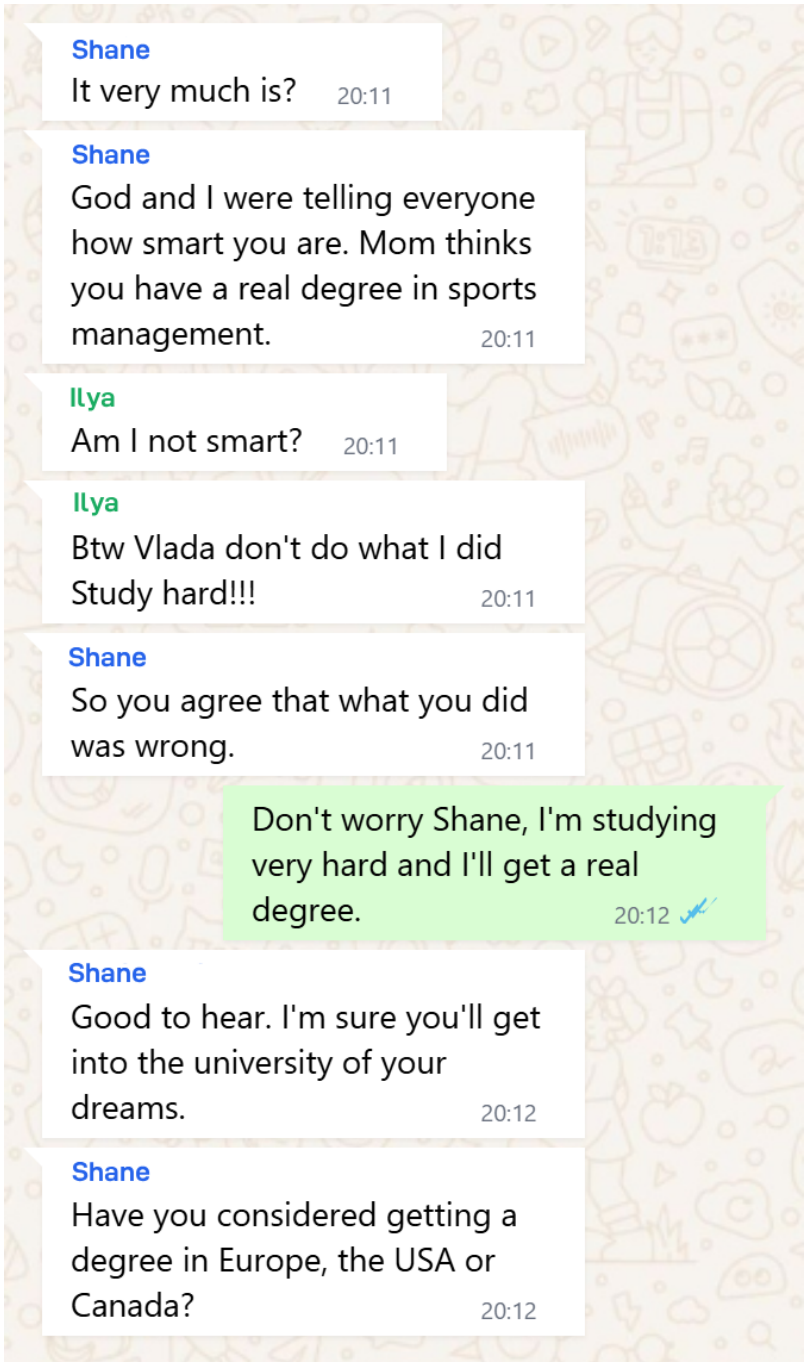
Ilya
Well I just paid to get in and didn't attend a single class 20:09

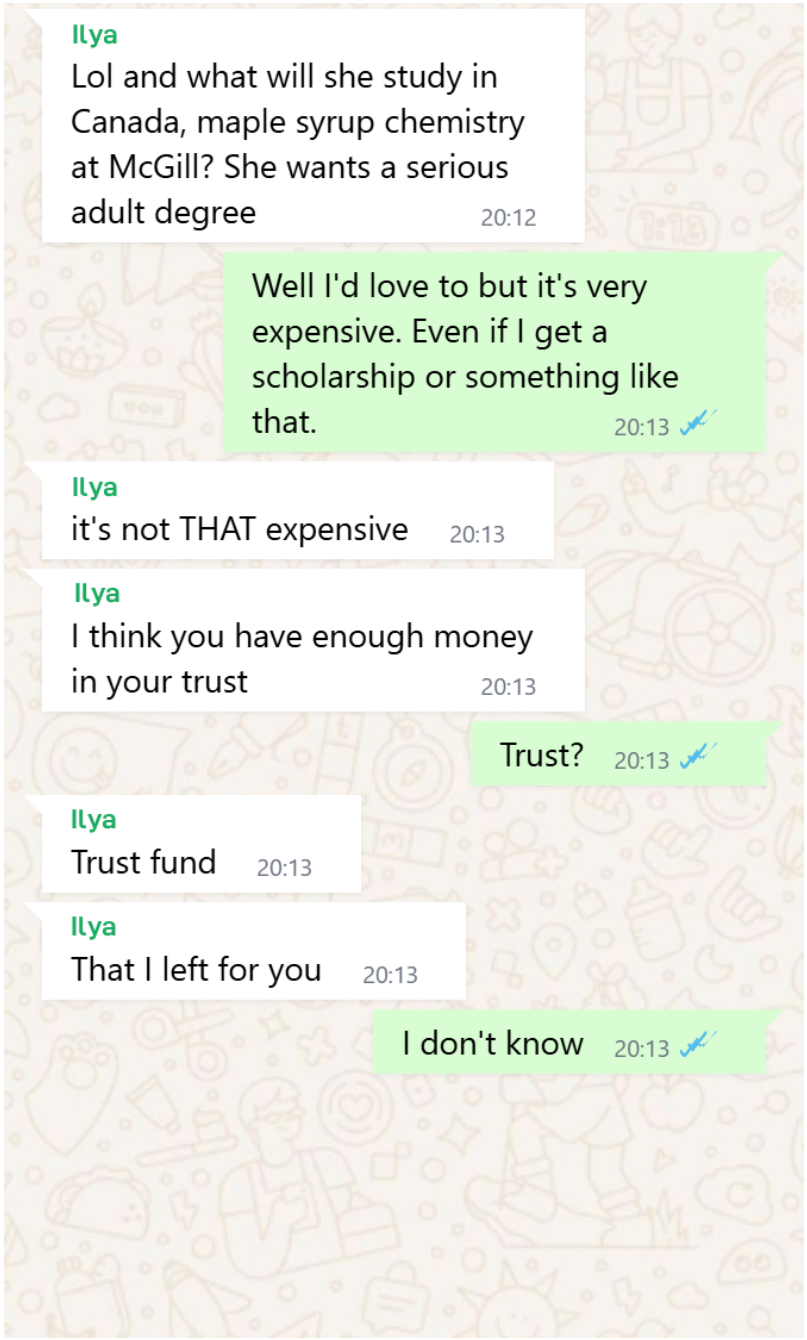
Ilya
I gave them money once a year and they gave me a diploma 20:09

Shane
Wow 20:10

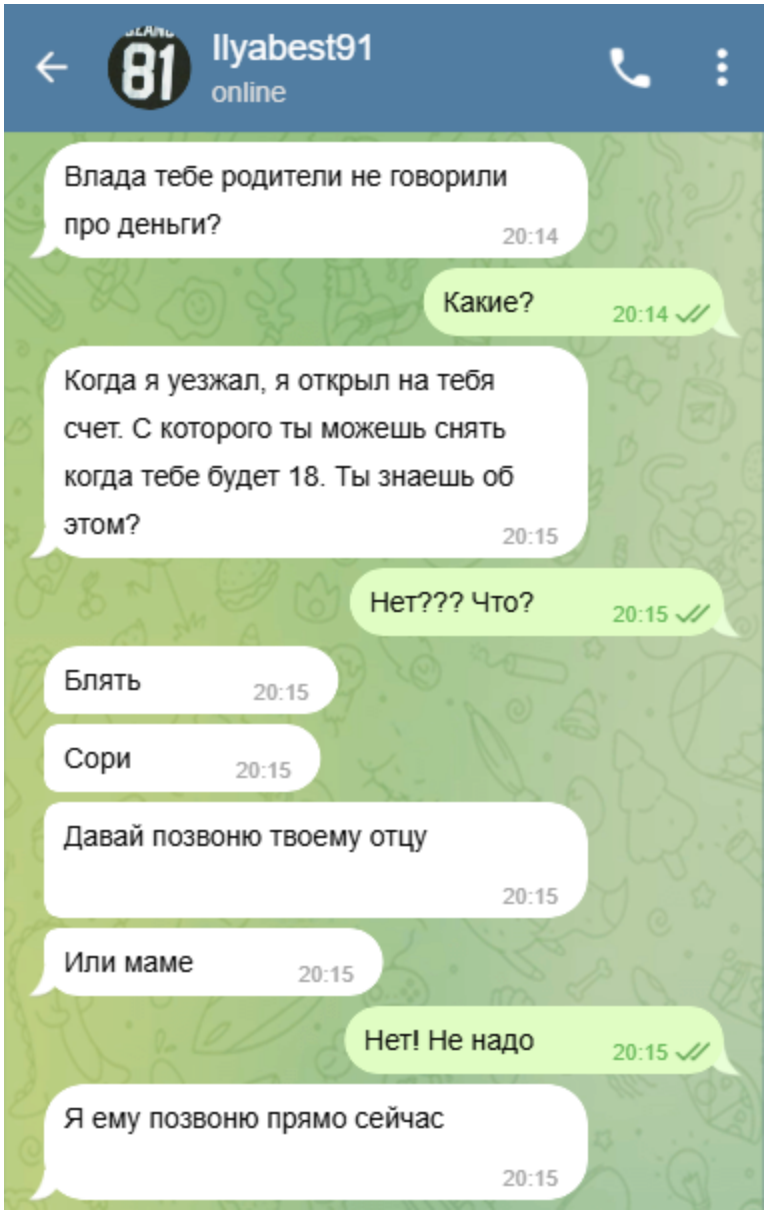
Shane
So you have a fraudulent degree. 20:10

Ilya
It's not fraudulent if I paid for it 20:10


Shane
It very much is? 20:11
Shane
God and I were telling everyone how smart you are. Mom thinks you have a real degree in sports management. 20:11
Ilya
Am I not smart? 20:11
Ilya
Btw Vlada don't do what I did Study hard!!! 20:11
Shane
So you agree that what you did was wrong. 20:11
Don't worry Shane, I'm studying very hard and I'll get a real degree. 20:12
Shane
Good to hear. I'm sure you'll get into the university of your dreams. 20:12
Shane
Have you considered getting a degree in Europe, the USA or Canada? 20:12



A message in Telegram popped up.



Ilya: Vlada did your parents tell you about the money?

lada: What money?

Ilya: Before I left I opened an account in your name. You can access it when you're 18. Do you know about it?

Vlada: No??? What?

Ilya: Fuck

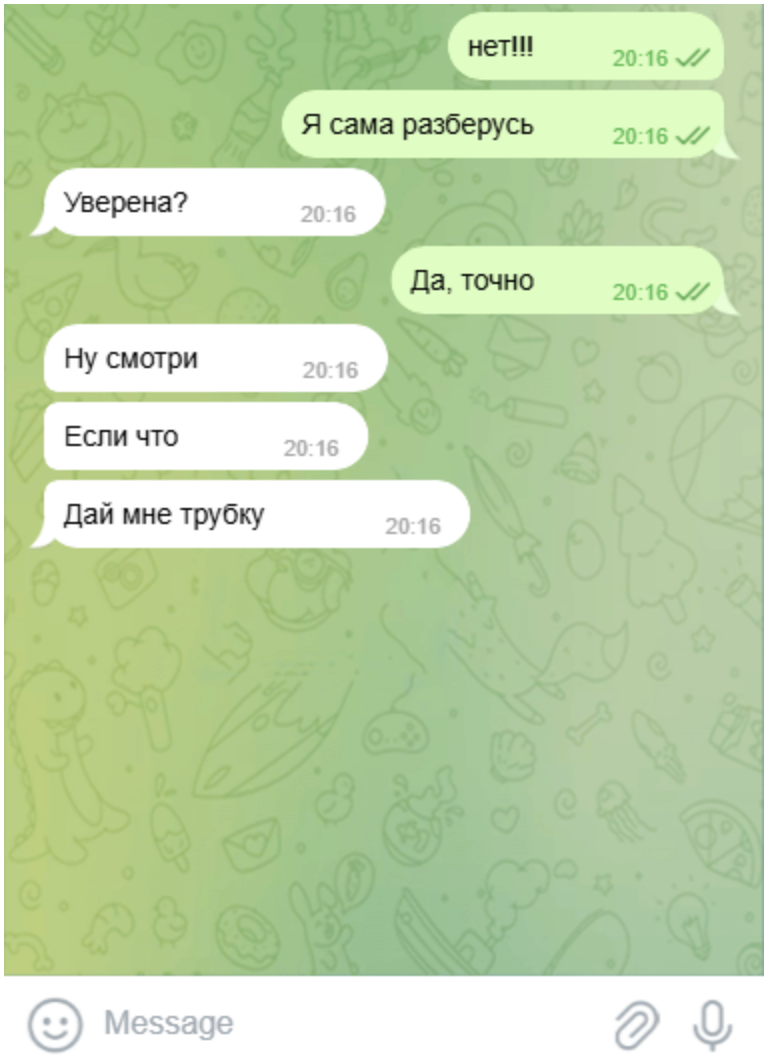
Sorry

Let me call your father

Or mother

Vlada: No don't

Ilya: I’ll call him right now



Vlada: no!!!

I’ll deal with it

Ilya: You're sure?

Vlada: Yes sure

Ilya: Suit yourself

But just in case

You can call me

Rage started to boil in her blood. How could they hide it from her?

She stormed out of her room. She heard her mom washing dishes in the kitchen. She took a second to collect her thoughts and not get too mad.

She walked into the kitchen with her palms sweating.

“Мам, нам нужно поговорить”. / “Mom, I want to talk to you.”

“О чем?” / “What about?”

Mom stopped the faucet and dried her hands with a towel.

Vlada tried to sound calm, but her voice cracked slightly.

“Я хотела у тебя спросить… На мое имя есть счёт?” / “I want to ask you something. Is there… a bank account in my name?”

She froze.

“Какой еще счет?” / “What account?”

She was a bad liar.

“От дяди Ильи”. / “From uncle Ilya.”

“Кто тебе сказал?” / “Who told you?”

Her reaction told Vlada everything.

“То есть да?” / “So yes?”

“Да, но это не твои деньги, а твоего отца. Дядя оставил их ему за то, что он сидел с дедом Григорием.” / “Yes but it’s your dad’s money. Uncle left it for him for caring for grandfather Grigoriy.”

She didn't sound convincing.

“Тогда почему их могу снять только я в 18 лет?” / “So why can it only be taken out when I'm 18?”

“Для… сохранности.” / “For… safekeeping.”

“Но они же мои?” / “It’s mine, right?” Vlada insisted.

“Ну технически”. / “Well, technically.”

“Технически?” / “Technically?”

“Ну ты же не можешь их потратить. Это огромная сумма, в долларах. Тебе таким рано распоряжаться.” / “Well you can’t spend it. It's a ridiculous sum, in dollars. You're

too young to be trusted with it."

"Почему? Я же не буду тратить их на хрень какую-то." / "Why? I won't spend it on some bullshit."

"Вот исполнится тебе 18, пойдём в банк и возьмём вместе ипотеку." / "When you're 18 we will go to the bank and put it as a downpayment for a mortgage."

"Зачем? У нас есть эта квартира." / "Why? We have this apartment."

"Ты же не собираешься со мной вечно жить? У тебя потом будет своя семья, дети, тебе нужна квартира в Москве." / "You can't live with me forever. You'll have a family of your own, a husband, kids. You'll need a place in Moscow."

For some reason hearing this made Vlada's skin crawl.

"Может, я вообще не хочу оставаться в Москве. В России." / "Maybe I don't want to stay in Moscow. Or in Russia."

"Это что еще значит?" / "What does that mean?"

"Может, я хочу за границу уехать учиться." / "Maybe I want to go abroad and study there."

"И что там такого, чего нет в России? Глупости не говори." / "And what do they have that Russia doesn't? Don't be ridiculous."

Angry tears filled Vlada's eyes.

How she hated this in herself - such a crybaby. But she couldn't help it.

"Но я..." / "But I…" she mumbled.

"Поступи сначала тут. За границу она захотела." / "Get into a university here first. Talking about abroad," Mom sneered.

"Но я же хорошо учусь!" / "But I do well at school!"

"Оценки в школе это вообще не показатель. Экзамены хорошо сдай. Первую сессию. Тогда посмотрим." / "School is just the beginning. You have to pass the tests. Finish the first year. Then we'll see."

"Я же пробные нормально сдала..." / "Well I passed the mock exams just fine…"

"Институт это совсем другое, тебе там никто помогать не будет. Всё надо самой. А ты в телефоне сидишь постоянно, хихикаешь что-то там. Несерьёзно." / "University is different. You'll be on your own, no one will be helping you. And you're always on your phone, giggling. You're not taking it seriously."

Mom peered into Vlada's face and frowned. Her tears seemed to annoy mom even more.

“Разговор окончен. Иди к себе. Потом ужин.” / “Enough talking. Go to your room. I'll tell you when the dinner's ready.”

Vlada returned to her room and collapsed onto her bed.

She opened the chat with Ilya and kept typing and deleting. How could he help from across the ocean and time zones?

She insisted on sorting this out herself, and now she was feeling helpless and dumb.

She slammed her phone on the mattress and buried her face in the pillow.

He left her a future, and she couldn't even take it.

Maybe she is too young to make any decisions.

She tried to steady her breath, but it came out in muffled sobs. She felt the pillowcase get damp.

She let out a growl into her pillow, angry at herself. A growl turned into another sob.

God, why was she so emotional? This only made her look more childish in mom's eyes.

She didn't know what upset her more. That her mom didn't take her seriously? That her parents didn't say anything about the fund until she found out herself? That she's about to be 18 and will have to make real, adult choices?

Vlada heard the door open and her mom's soft voice.

“Пошли ужинать.” / “Come, dinner's ready.”

“Не хочу есть.” / “I don't want to eat.”

‘Пошли.” / “Come.”

“Я не голодная.” / “I'm not hungry.”

Mom mumbled something and closed the door.

Vlada sat up in her bed. Enough self-pity.

She checked her phone. One concerned “*как всё прошло?* / how did it go?” from Ilya on Telegram. One “Vlada, don't worry, we can pay your tuition at any university, if it's necessary” from Shane in their WhatsApp chat.

She had the money. It was hers.

She just needed to make a plan. It's probably too late to try to get into universities abroad. Maybe she should look up double degree programs? She knew some universities had them.

She will present her plan to her parents and get them on board. Well, mom at least.

And if they don't agree… they can't just take away that money, right? She'll be 18, a legal adult. She can manage her money however she pleases. She can weather through some tantrums or silent treatment from her parents. They'll come around eventually. It's not like they're gonna disown her.

A small, annoying voice in her head added, “Well, they can. But for a different reason.”

She shook it off. She needed to focus on one problem at a time.

Vlada stayed up late on her laptop, going through websites and blogs about studying abroad and exchange programs.

Her mom opened the door again. Vlada didn't look back at her.

Lada, mom whispered to her, then walked up closer and put a plate with a sandwich, apple slices, and a peeled tangerine on the desk.

“Ты ничего не ела, поешь.” / “You haven't eaten anything, here.

"Не хочу," / "I'm not hungry", Vlada lied. Her stomach was grumbling.”

Mom stroked her hair.

“Лада, я тут подумала, с учёбой-то хорошая идея.” / “Lada, I thought about this idea of yours, about studying abroad. It's not bad.’

Vlada looked up to her.

“Правда?” / “Really?”

“Просто понимаешь, нужно к этому ответственно подойти. Это все-таки очень большие деньги. Как бы тебя где-то не обманули, или еще что…” / “You just need to understand, we have to do it responsibly. It's a lot of money, you know. I don't want you to get scammed or something…”

“Это понятно.” / “I understand.”

“Давай вместе всё посмотрим, разберёмся.” / “Let's look into it together, figure it out.”

“Я уже смотрю!” / “I already am!”

Mom looked at her laptop and nodded.

“Вот и хорошо.” / “That's good.”

“Папе будем говорить?” / “Do we have to tell Dad?”

“Надо бы. Вообще он спрашивал недавно про этот счёт…” / “Maybe. He was asking about it recently…”

Vlada shuddered at the thought that she'd have to talk about it with Dad.

“Я с ним поговорю, не переживай.” / “I'll talk to him, don't worry.”

“Только не обещай ему ничего. Я не дам…” / “Don't promise him anything, please. I won't…”

Mom laughed bitterly.

“Я ему ничего не дам. Еще чего.” / “I won't give him anything. Fat chance.”

Vlada sighed in relief.

“После того, что он провернул с дедушкиной квартирой…” / “After what he's done with that old apartment…”

Mom was still angry about the fact that they had to sell grandfather's old apartment during the divorce and buy this one, a lot smaller. The rest of the money went to dad, and he spent all of it on god knows what. She complained about it sometimes, usually after Vlada came home from dad's.

“Хорошо.” / “Okay,” Vlada smiled.

Mom kissed her on the top of her head and left her alone.

Vlada texted in the group chat.

“I talked about it with my mom. Everything's fine 👍”

—----------

Vlada felt bad for not texting more in their group chat, but she was too stressed with the final tests. She had to get as many points as possible in Russian, Math, and English if she wanted to carry out her plans and get into one of the better universities with exchange programs.

She spent all her time between exams studying for the next one, going over the standardized tests over and over again, and working with different tutors.

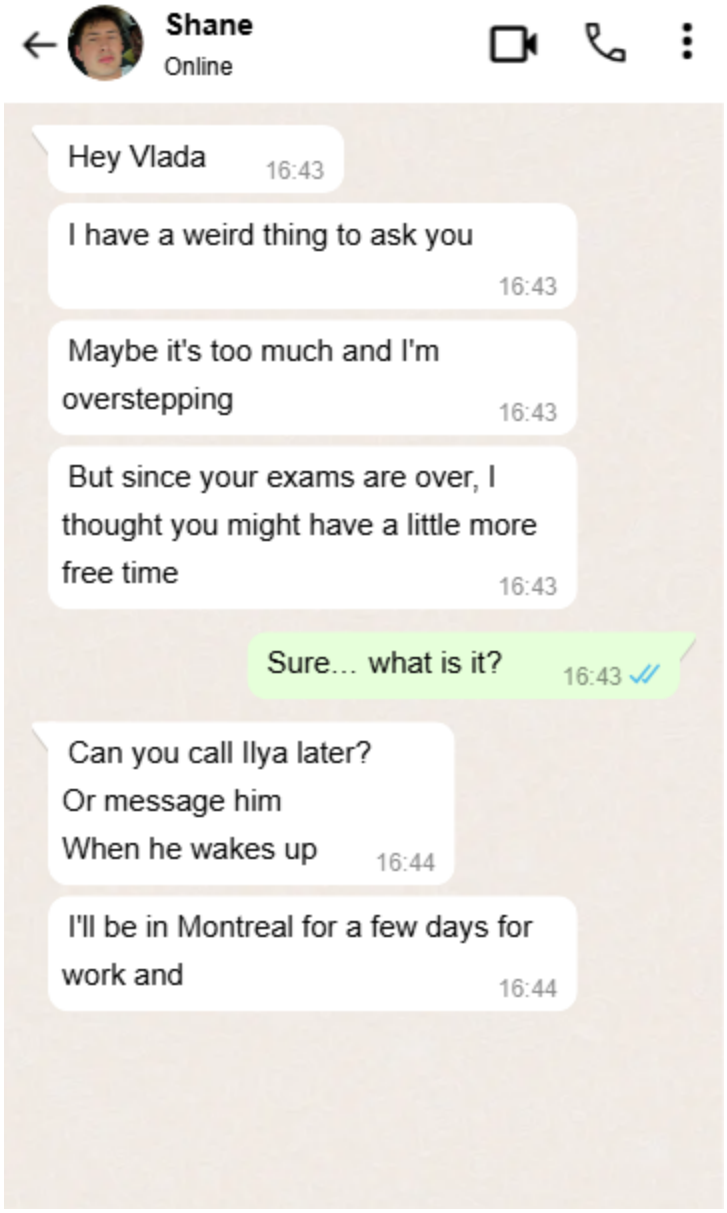
Ilya and Shane weren't that active in the chat either, probably overwhelmed with the wedding preparations.

They made sure to hype her up before an exam and wish her good luck. She helped them pick a flower arrangement or a tie color.

After she was finished with the last test, English, she texted immediately.

Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane
Omg I'm done!!!!! 16:13
Shane
Congratulations! Do you think you did well? 16:26
I don't know, maybe??? The multiple choice part was easy at least 16:26
Shane
I'm so proud of you anyway 16:26
@Илья and you? You want to say something to your niece? 😒 16:38
Shane throw something at him 16:38
Shane
😅 sorry I'm not home 16:39
Shane
I'm with my mom, we're on our way to a work meeting 16:39
@Илья not even a comment about mama's boy Shane? Wow 16:42
Shane
Ilya was home last time I checked. Maybe he's asleep still 16:42
Message

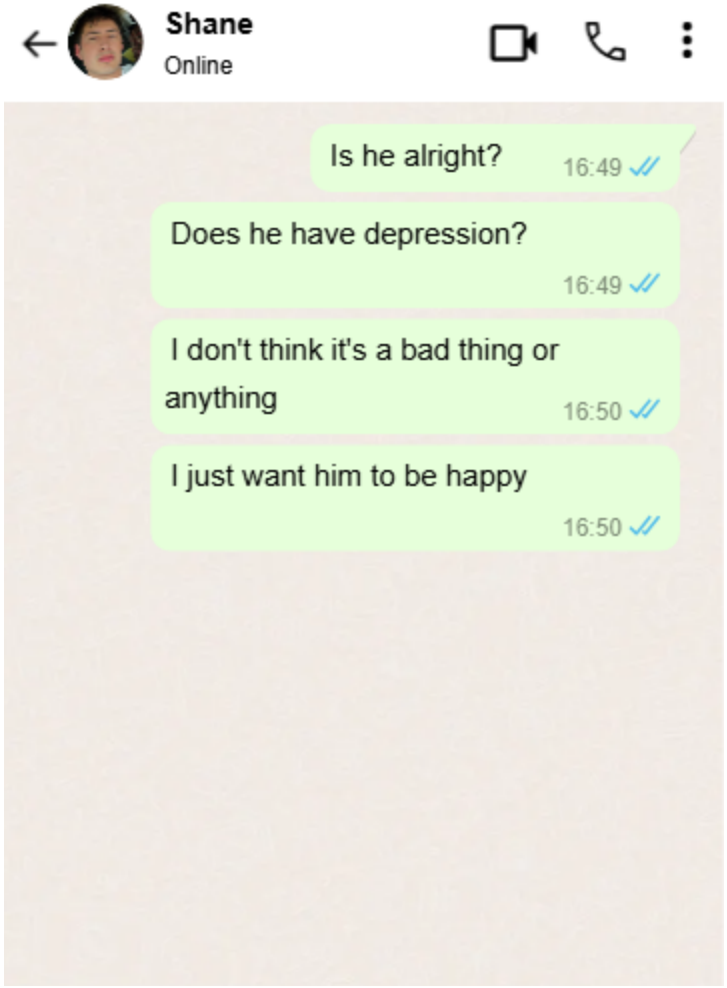
She was a bit surprised to see a message from Shane in her DMs.



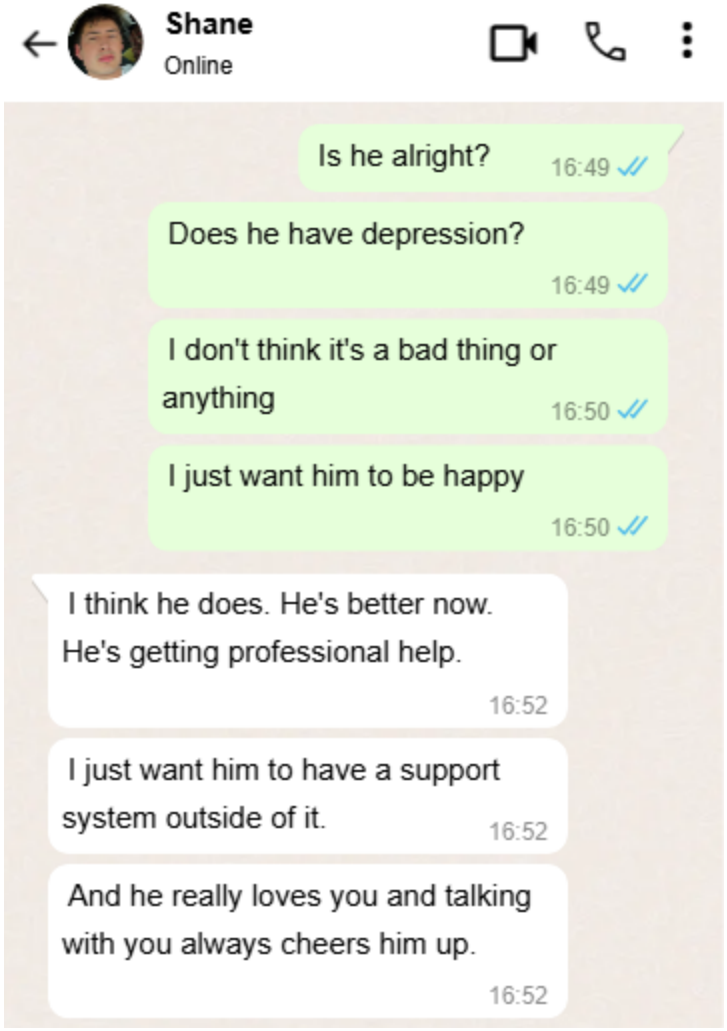
Vlada looked at dots appearing and disappearing. She could just imagine Shane blinking nervously, as she noticed he always did when he was embarrassed or confused.

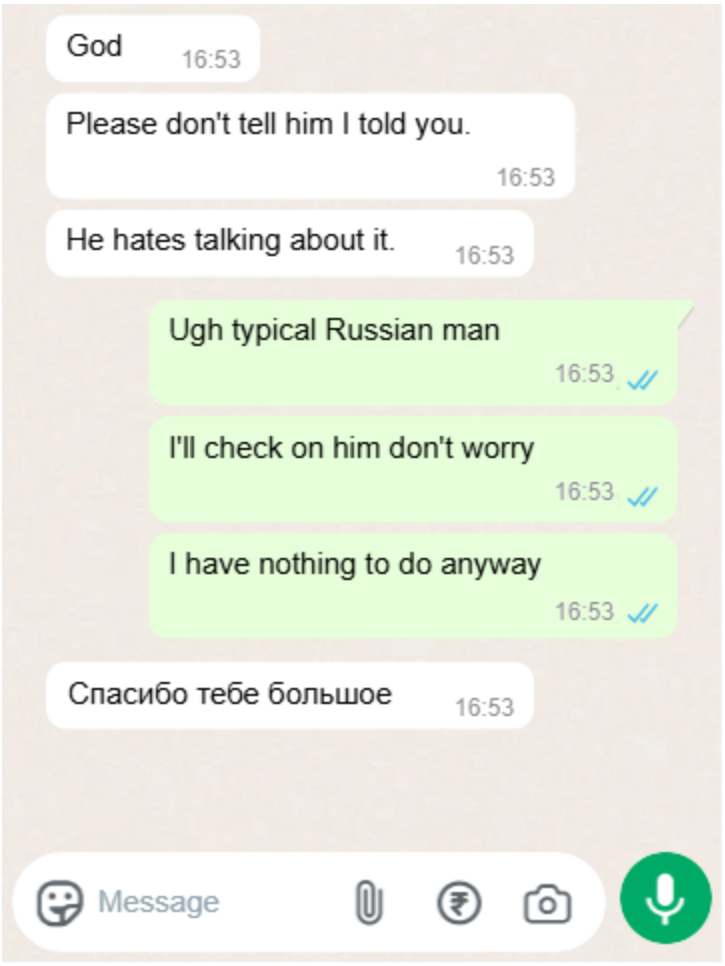
She got a weird feeling in her chest. Her dad didn't tell her much about grandmother Irina, but she knew what happened to her from the Irina foundation page and Ilya's interviews about it.

She urgently added.



Shane took a solid minute to respond.


Shane
Online
Is he alright?
16:49
Does he have depression?
16:49
I don't think it's a bad thing or anything
16:50
I just want him to be happy
16:50
I think he does. He's better now. He's getting professional help.
16:52
I just want him to have a support system outside of it.
16:52
And he really loves you and talking with you always cheers him up.
16:52



(S: *Thank you so much*)

She texted Ilya "*позвони как проснешься, соня*" / "call me when you're up, sleeping beauty".

It was a couple of hours before she heard her phone vibrate.

"Привет, Лада!" / "Hey, Lada!"

"Илья! Ты что в чате не отвечаешь?" / "Ilya! Why don't you reply to me in the chat?"

"Я… был в зале. Но я видел. Поздравляю!" / "I was… at the gym. But I've seen it. Congrats!"

"Рано поздравлять, я еще результаты не знаю. Может, там по нулям все." / "Too early for congratulations. I haven't gotten the results yet. Maybe it's all 0."

His voice sounded cheerful but lacked the usual levity.

"Я верю в тебя, все будет нормально." / "I believe in you. It'll be great."

“А что ты без видео?” / “No video this time?”

“Я… Не очень выгляжу после зала. Поверь, ты не хочешь это видеть.” / “Nah, I… look horrible after the gym. Trust me, you don't want to see it.”

He made a sniffle-like sound and asked in a soft voice.

“Но можешь ты включить? Хочу видеть твое лицо.” / “But can you turn the camera on? I want to see your face.”

“Хорошо.” / “Alright.”

Vlada turned on the camera. She waved her hand.

“Вот я. Пришла полумертвая с экзамена.” / “Here I am! Nearly dead after the test.”

She talked a bit about the test, how one boy was probably cheating, and how she barely made the time limit with her essay. She knew it wasn't particularly interesting, but she felt like Ilya just enjoyed hearing her voice. He seemed weirdly quiet, and didn't even crack one joke the whole time.

She wanted to get him in his usual chatty mood. Maybe he missed Moscow?

“Посмотри на вид из окна.” / “Look at the view.”

She flipped the camera and pointed it at the window. She could see the green crown of the trees in the park below and a part of the busy street with a tram line. The sun was blinding.

“Смотри, такая погода. А меня заставляют учиться.” / “Weather is so nice. And I was stuck doing stupid tests.”

He only made a low ‘Hmmm’ in response.

She held up her phone to the window for half a minute, not saying a word.

“Где это?” / “Where is it?” he broke the silence.

“Сокольники.” / “Sokolniki.”

Vlada, at one point, told him they didn't live by the waterfront in the city centre anymore. He probably found this view less impressive than the one from his childhood home.

“Ты скучаешь по дому?” / “Do you miss home?”

“Дому…” / “Home…” he mused.

“Я скучаю по городу, которого уже нет.” / “I miss the city that doesn't exist now.”

“Что это значит?” / “What does that mean?” she asked, confused.

“Так… Ничего.” / “Nothing. Nevermind.”

It was so unusual to hear his voice so solemn and weak. She didn't remember that much about him from her childhood, but he was never like this.

What did he always do when Vlada was in a bad mood or tired? She tried to do the same.

“О знаешь, я недавно видела рекламу с тобой.” / “You know, I saw an ad with you recently.”

“А?” / “Huh?”

“Не радуйся, это была старая реклама. Увидела сзади журнала на даче у бабушки с дедушкой. Какой-то энергетик, который уже не продают.” / “Don't get too excited, it was an old ad. I saw it on the back of a magazine at grandparents’ dacha. Some energy drink that they don't sell anymore.”

She couldn't help a snorting laugh remembering it.

“Ты там такой в черных очках… с каким-то белым медведем вместе. Выглядит ужасно.” / “You're all like… cool, in the sunglass, next to a cartoon white bear. Looks ridiculous.”

“А, это. Господи.” / “Ah, this one. God.”

She heard a faint laughter.

“Я помню.” / “I remember.”

“Ты на любую хрень за деньги соглашался, да?” / “You used to do anything if the price was right, didn't you?”

“Конечно. Тебе на твои куклы зарабатывал, дите неблагодарное.” / “Of course I did, I was working hard to buy you those expensive ass dolls, you ungrateful child.”

“Ты там такой малыш.” / “You look so young in that ad, a baby.”

She actually found his photo in that ad kinda endearing - winking at the audience over his sunglasses, unnaturally bright smile plastered on his face.

“Малыш? От малыша слышу.” / “A baby? Said a smaller baby.”

They shared a laugh. She could swear she heard the same old sparkle in his voice again.

She wished she could hug him. She bet it would feel just as warm and fuzzy.

“Как ты думаешь, ты сможешь когда-нибудь ко мне приехать?” / “Do you think you could visit me, ever?”

“Лада, ты же понимаешь…” / “Lada, you know that…” he paused.

“Пока не получу канадское гражданство точно.” / “I can't until I get my Canadian citizenship.”

“Понятно. Я просто… А вдруг.” / “I know, I just thought… Maybe.”

She sighed.

“Мне пора на тренировку с командой, Ладушка. Давай, хорошего дня.” / “I gotta go to the practice with my team, Ladushka. Have a nice day.”

“Ага. Пока тогда. Не теряйся.” / “Yeah, bye. Don't be a stranger.”

She waited for him to end the call, but he was hesitating for some reason.

“Спасибо, что позвонила.” / “Thank you for calling me,” he said and finally hung up.

The rest of the day, she kept texting with Vasya and ended up making a video call before bed. They talked about their futures - they dreamed about getting into the same university so they can ‘keep being friends’. Vlada feared they would drift apart if they went different paths - she knew this new life, new friend circle, new experience could overshadow what they had between them.

Well, maybe there was nothing between them, and Vlada only imagined it. She was too scared to try to define things.

She was mindlessly scrolling through her DMs when she tapped on the one with Ilya and typed.

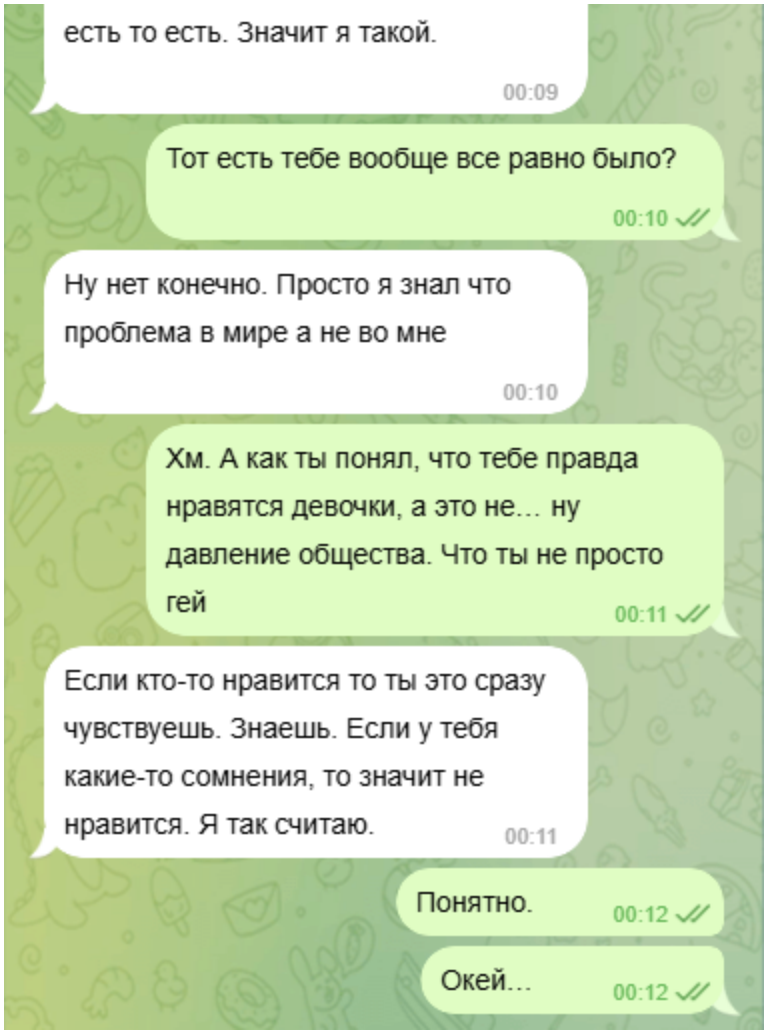
V: When did you know you liked boys?

I: Wow. Unexpected question

I: Around 13. When I hit puberty. First girls then boys.

V: Weren't you like. Ashamed?

I: Not really. I just accepted it. It is what it is.



V: So you didn't care at all?

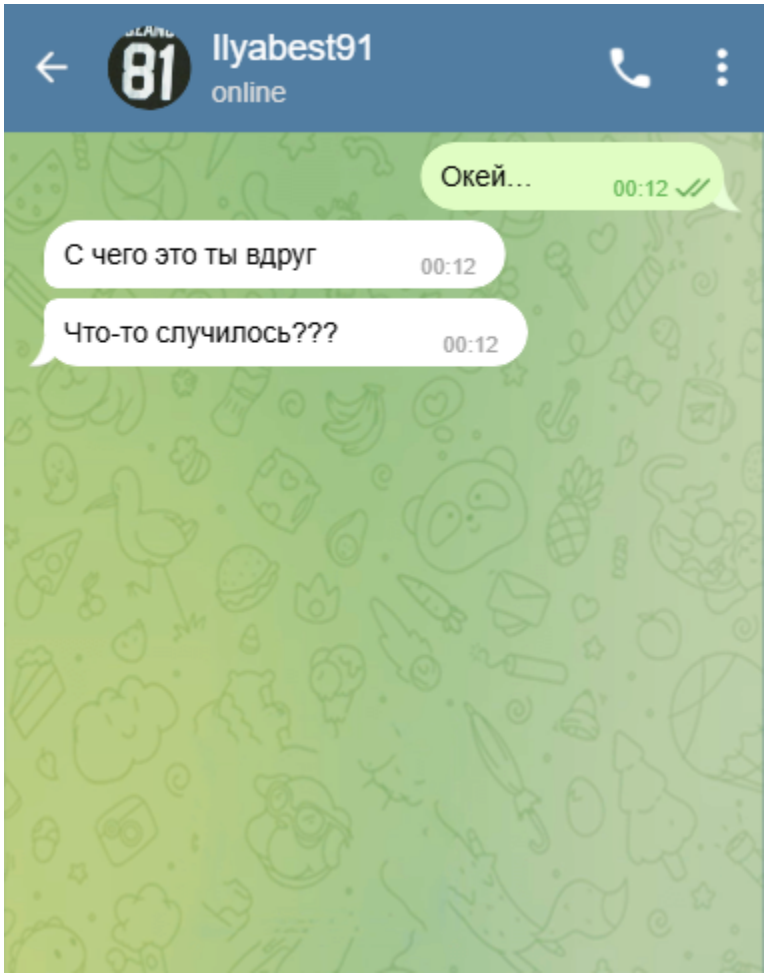
I: Of course I did. I just knew it was an outside problem, not a me problem

V: Hmm. How did you know you really liked girls and it's not like.. peer pressure? That you’re not just gay

I: If you like someone you feel it right away. You know it. If you have doubts then you don't really like them. That's my take.

V: I see.

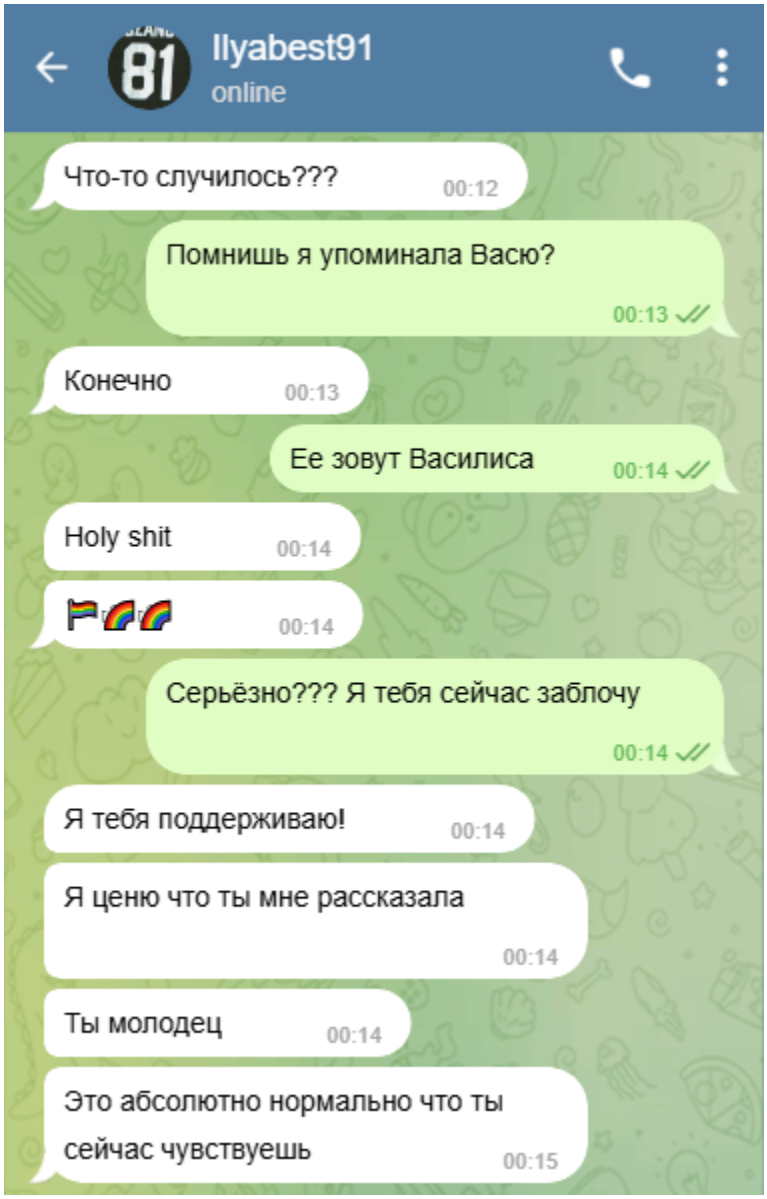
V: Right…



I: Why this question all of a sudden

Something happened???

She took a deep breath.



V: Remember I mentioned Vasya?

I: Of course

V: Her name is Vasilisa

I: *Holy shit*

🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍🌈

V: Seriously??? I'm about to block you

I: I support you!

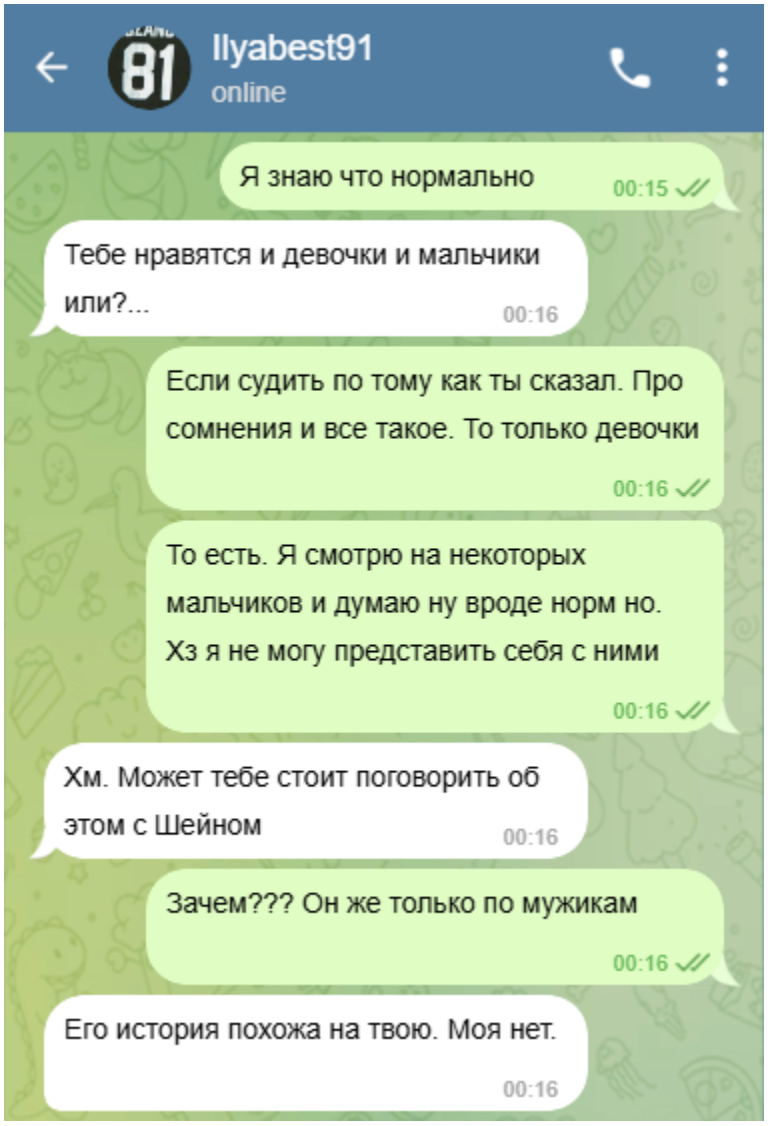
I appreciate you telling me this

You're doing great

Whatever you feel right now is absolutely normal

She rolled her eyes and typed “I know it's normal”.

But she was still glad he said it.



V: I know it's normal

I: So you like both girls and boys or?...

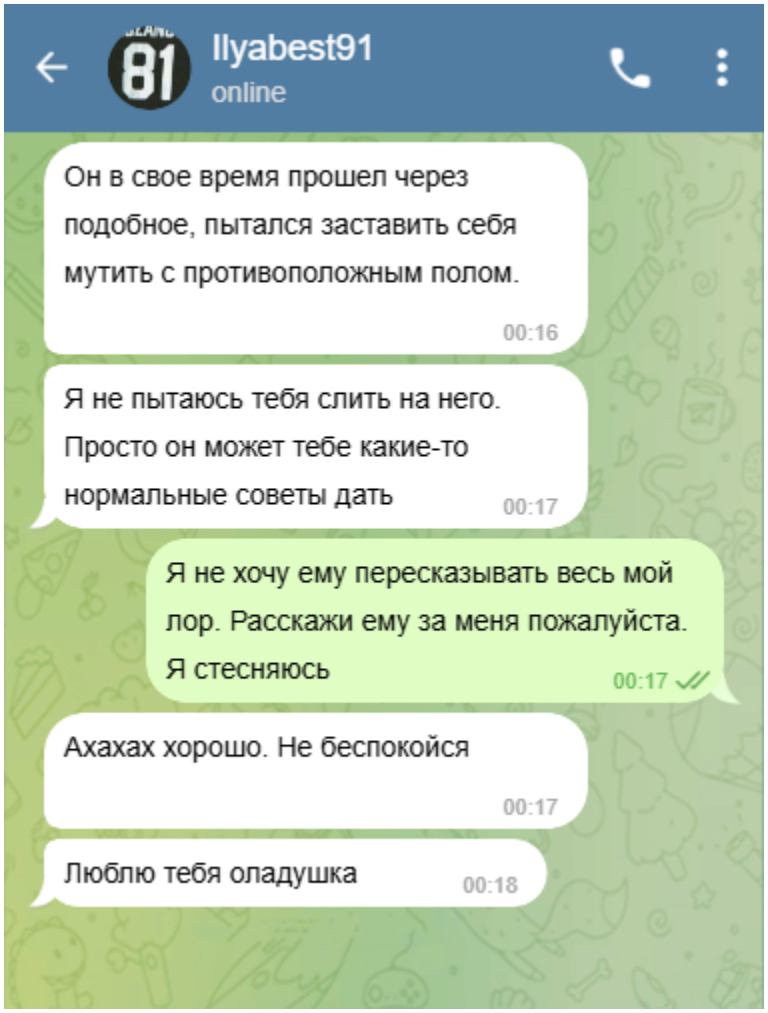
V: If I go by what you said about doubts and all. Then only girls

V: I mean. I look at some boys and think well he's alright I guess. But idk I can't picture myself with them

I: Hm. Maybe you should talk to Shane about it.

V: Why??? He likes boys only

I: His story is like yours. Mine isn't.



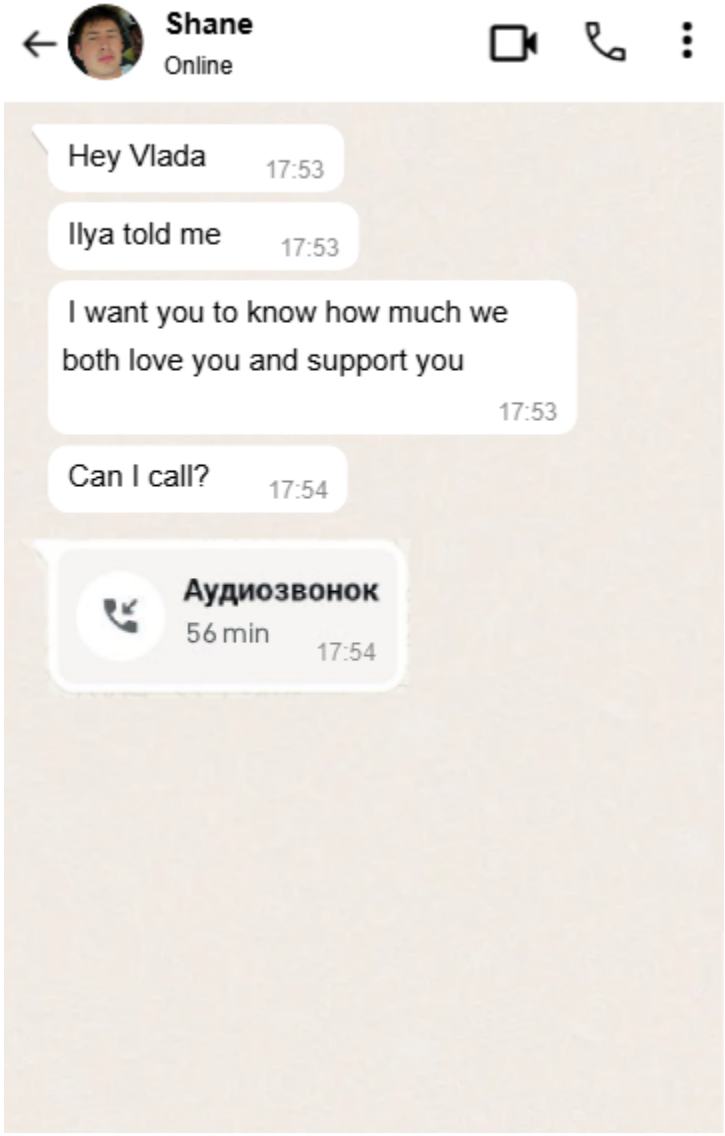
I: He went through what you're going through. He tried to make it work with the opposite sex.

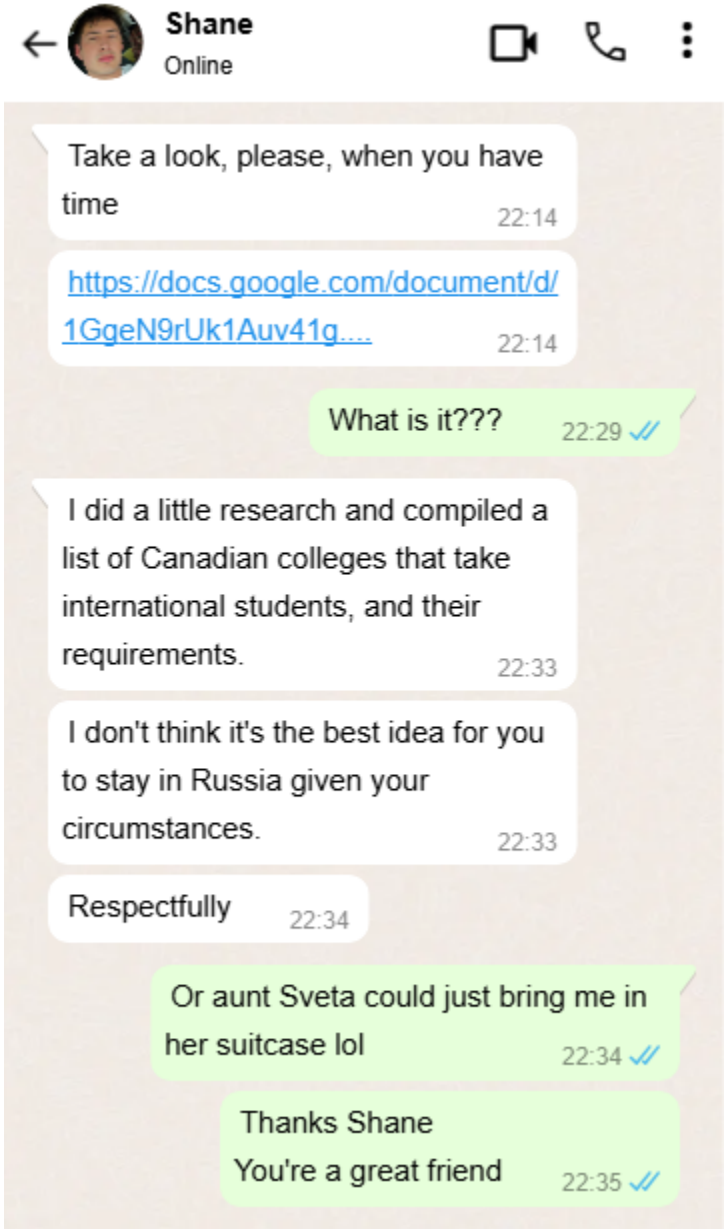
I: I'm not trying to avoid this conversation. I just think he can give you better advice

V: I don't want to tell him all this again. Tell him instead of me please. I'm too embarrassed

I: Ahaha ok I'll do it. Don't worry

Love you oladushka


Shane
Online
Hey Vlada 17:53
Ilya told me 17:53
I want you to know how much we both love you and support you 17:53
Can I call? 17:54
Аудиозвонок
56 min
17:54



Chapter End Notes

1. Sokolniki is a neighbourhood in Moscow. Not as cool as where Ilya's old flat was but still not too far from the city center, near a big park.

2. Vasya is a short form of both a male name Vasiliy (very common) and a female name Vasilisa (not as common). So obv Ilya's first thought hearing it was that it's a boy.

one more chapter to goooo! the wedding! honestly i was waiting till the golden globes so i can use some photos as their wedding pics lmao so new chapter Very soon

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Vlada wished she were there with them on their wedding day, but a video call from aunt Sveta was the next best thing.

Sveta was basically live-streaming the whole event for her. She showed Vlada the rows of lawn chairs between the house and the riverbank where all the guests were supposed to be sitting for the ceremony. The aisle was decorated with flowers, but not as extravagantly as Vlada expected. It all looked kind of simple, not in a bad way. She suspected it took a lot for Shane and his mom to rein Ilya in with his urge to go big and flashy.

Sveta pointed the camera at Shane's best man.

"Hayden, say hi to Ilya's niece Vlada! She's watching all the way from Moscow!"

"Hey, Vlada!"

He waved at the camera.

When the guests were seated, Sveta kept the video call going. So Vlada just sat in her room and watched her uncle and his almost husband walk down the aisle, Ilya in a white suit and Shane in dark gray.

The lady officiating the ceremony read out some fancy speech about holy unions, but Vlada didn't really pay attention. And neither did Shane and Ilya, it seemed. They stared at each other, giddy and smiling and trying not to laugh. They didn't say vows, just exchanged the rings.

Vlada heard aunt Sveta go 'awwww' off camera, and the video got shaky for a second. Finally, the officiant lady declared, "I hereby pronounce you, Shane and Ilya, husband and husband. You may celebrate your marriage with a kiss."

Shane went for a modest peck, but Ilya pulled him in for a longer kiss. The crowd erupted with cheers and applause.

Ilya took Shane's hand, threw their hands in the air and roared, "We are married!"

Vlada could swear she felt the warmth from his smile radiating through the screen.

Then Shane's parents walked up to hug them and said something that was drowned out by cheers and laughter.

Sveta flipped camera on herself and said, "*Так, мне нужно кое-что сделать, Роуз будет дальше снимать. Сейчас будет самое интересное"* / "Okay, I gotta go do something, Rose is gonna keep the live stream running. This is the fun part."

She gave Vlada a conspiratorial smile and gave her phone to someone next to her. The camera was now again pointed at the aisle.

“And now, time for a Russian wedding tradition!” Sveta loudly announced, making everyone silent.

She slowly walked to the new husbands, holding a giant round loaf of bread on a silver tray.

Vlada giggled to herself, knowing what was coming.

“This is a special bread, a symbol of a happy and generous future for our newlyweds. Now each one of them has to take a bite of it. Whoever bites off more is destined to be the head of the new family.”

Ilya said something in Shane's ear, and they both laughed. Shane playfully shoved Ilya in the shoulder.

“Ready?” Sveta held up the tray between them, “And no hands! Hands behind your back, guys! No cheating!”

“Okay, okay!” Ilya said loudly, “I will win anyway.”

“Like hell you will!” Shane protested.

“We'll find out soon, right?” Sveta gave a glance to the audience over the shoulder, “Okay, one, two, three, go!”

Ilya and Shane immediately shoved their faces into the giant loaf.

Sveta yelped and tried to hold the tray steady in her hands. Because neither Ilya nor Shane was going easy on it, sinking their teeth into the bread and biting as much as they could.

“Wow, careful!” Sveta laughed.

Vlada couldn't help but laugh with them.

They both looked absurd. Ilya would unhinge his jaw like a snake if it were humanly possible, Vlada was sure.

“Okay, let's see the results!”

She checked the bread, then showed it to the audience.

“Oh wow, seems like Shane will be the head of this family!”

Ilya swallowed down with a visible effort and yelled in mock anger.

“What? No way! He only won because it was an excuse to eat carbs!”

“That's my boy!” Shane's mother cheered and gave her son a high five.

Shane smiled victoriously, still chewing.

“Well, the law is the law! Shane is the family captain now!” Sveta smiled.

Ilya didn't seem too mad, though. He wrapped his hands around both Shane and his mom.

Sveta put the tray somewhere out of the camera and returned to Shane and Ilya again.

“And another tradition!” She faced the crowd, “You guys can do it throughout the night, just repeat after me. *Gor'ko*! *Gor'ko*! Got it? ”

Guests responded in a cacophony of voices, trying to imitate a Russian word.

“Good enough!” Sveta laughed, “It literally translates to ‘bitter’. And to make it not bitter but sweet, newlyweds must kiss every time they hear ‘*gor'ko*’. Let's go one more time! *Gor'ko*!”

The last word boomed in Vlada’s earphones.

Ilya grabbed Shane's face and gave him a hard, heartfelt kiss. When he let Shane go, Shane was all red-faced and looked happy and embarrassed in equal measures.

They were ready to walk away, but the guests started shouting ‘*gor’ko*’ again, as if to test whether they really had to kiss every single time. Shane went for it first, already knowing the drill; he dipped Ilya in a kiss movie-style, almost dropping him to the ground. Cheers turned to laughter.

Ilya got back on his feet and yelled, “Okay, enough for now. We have to sign documents inside. Then you can shout горько all you want”.

Sveta went back to her place and grabbed the phone.

“Видала, а? Шейн совсем обрусел.” / “Did you see that? Shane's turning Russian,” she laughed.

“Это точно.” / “He really is.”

“Конечно, лапуля. Вот ты и побывала на первой кринжовой свадьбе с дурацкими конкурсами.” / “Of course, sweetie. Now you can say you’ve been to a classic cringe wedding with stupid traditions.”

“Вообще я была как-то у тети с маминой стороны, но мне тогда было мало лет, уже ничего не помню.” / "I've actually been to one, my mom’s cousin’s, but I was so little I barely remember it.”

“Мне нужно было придумать еще какие-то смешные конкурсы для гостей, но не было времени. Типа лопать шарики жопой. Или продавать куски торта.” / “I should've prepared something equally stupid for the guests. Like popping balloons with your ass or auctioning the first piece of the wedding cake.”

“Блин, пришли мне торт почтой.” / “Send me a piece in the mail,” Vlada joked.

“Так, танец начинается, кажется.” / “Hold on, the dance is starting.”

Slow romantic music began playing, and Sveta pointed her phone at the newlyweds dancing before the guests. Any grace and rhythm those two demonstrated on the ice were not present here in the slightest. It was extremely awkward, but Vlada found it kinda sweet too. At least they loved each other enough to be embarrassing together. The music changed to some upbeat pop song, and the guests flooded the makeshift dance floor at the end of the aisle.

Sveta said loudly, trying to overcome the noise, *“Лапуля, я пойду танцевать, окей?”* / “Baby, I'm gonna go dance, okay?”

“Иди, конечно! Всё равно у меня тут уже поздно. Передай им мои поздравления еще раз.” / “Sure! It's so late here anyway. Give them my congratulations again.”

“Bye bye!”

Sveta blew her a kiss and ended the call.

Vlada took her earphones out and sat at her desk, looking at a black screen, overwhelmed with joy and a weird, melancholic longing.

Vlada always hated the idea of a wedding - a bunch of distant relatives who don't really care about you, loud tacky music, cringey speeches and toasts, and a constant annoying stream of ‘*горько*’.

She never really could picture herself as a bride. She knew she was supposed to want it, as a girl. Supposed to dream about a white dress, a groom, and a fairytale ending. And the thought about it only made her sick. She didn't really consider the possibility that it could be different.

But this felt different with Ilya and Shane. They seemed so happy, and Vlada felt happy for them. Maybe weddings aren't so lame if you are actually in love with the person you're marrying. Maybe it could be her too one day. There was a world out there where it was possible.

Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane

Congratulations again!!! 22:19

Совет да любовь!!! 22:19

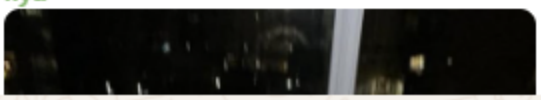
Send me more photos later 22:20

Today

Shane

I like this one 06:36

Ilya



Message

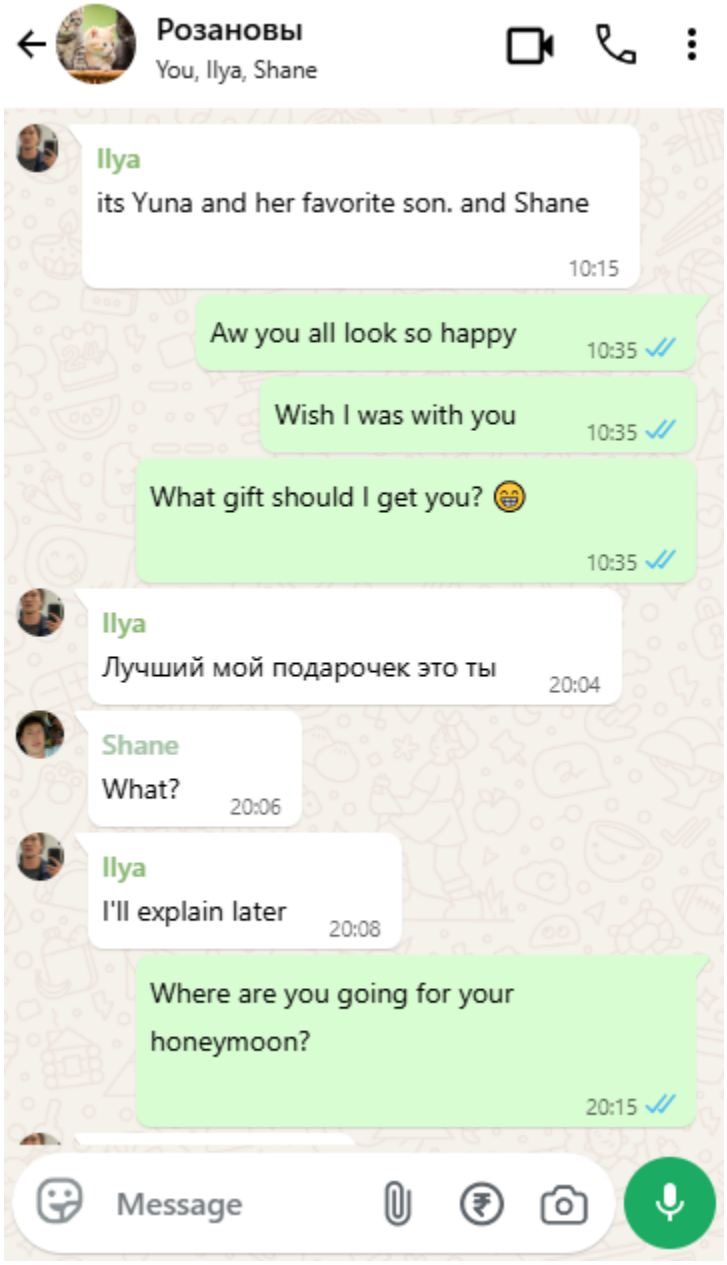
Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane

Ilya

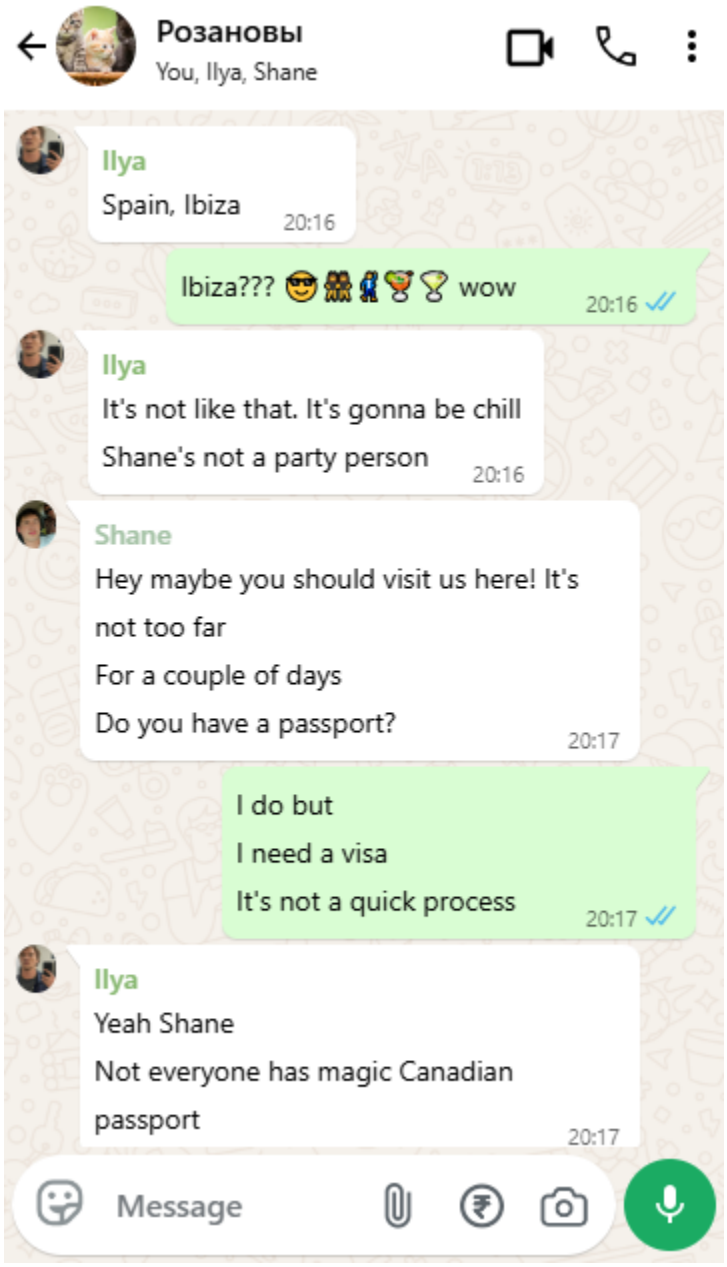
afterparty 10:15

its Yuna and her favorite son. and Shane 10:15

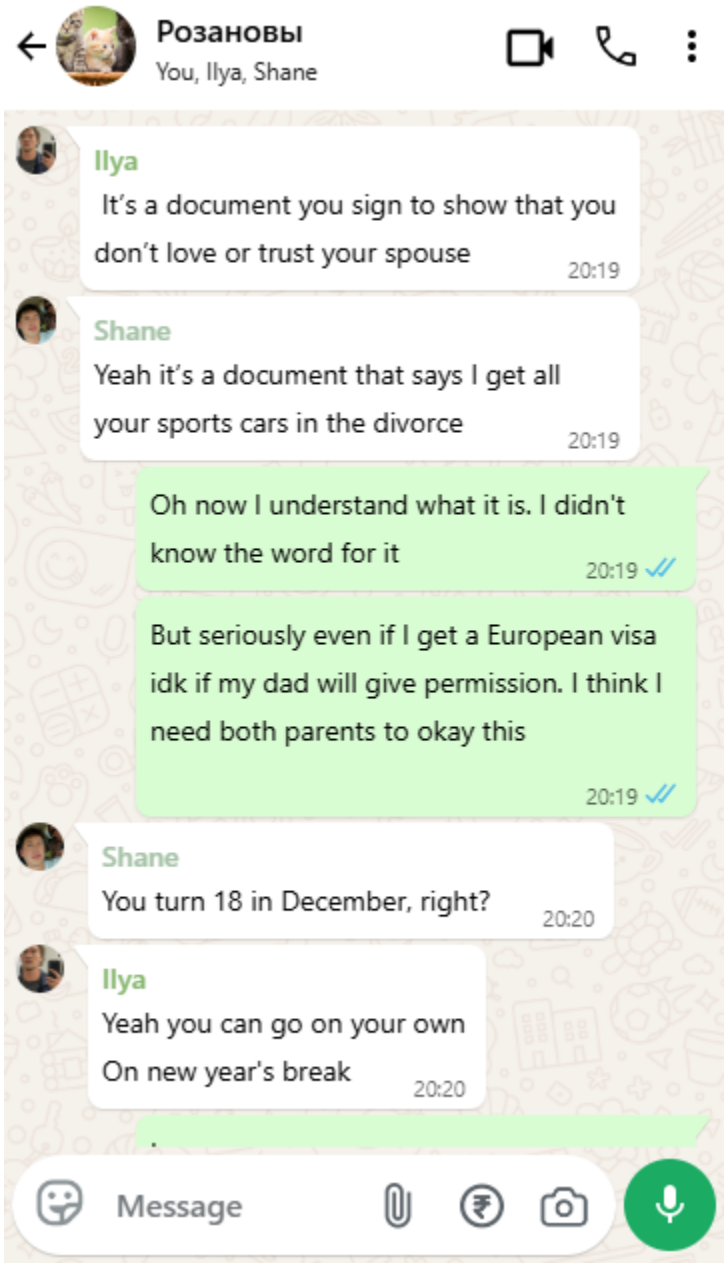
Message

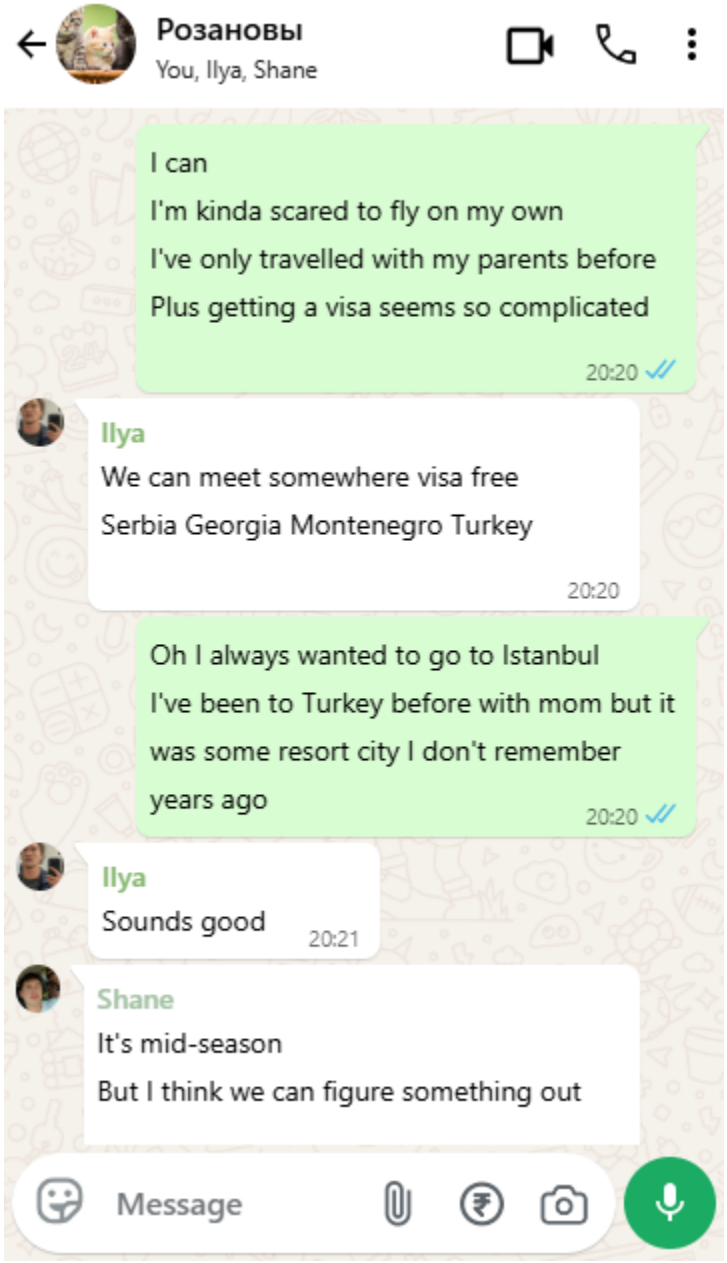


*Ilya: You're my best gift (*it's a reference to a soviet cartoon)


Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane
Ilya
Spain, Ibiza
20:16
Ibiza??? 😎👯🕺🍻🍸 wow
20:16
Ilya
It's not like that. It's gonna be chill
Shane's not a party person
20:16
Shane
Hey maybe you should visit us here! It's not too far
For a couple of days
Do you have a passport?
20:17
I do but
I need a visa
It's not a quick process
20:17
Ilya
Yeah Shane
Not everyone has magic Canadian passport
20:17
Message

Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane
💀
Adopt meeeee
I want that magic passport too
20:18
Shane
Oh sorry
I forgot
20:18
He married you for that Canadian citizenship, don't you know
20:18
Ilya
Yes. No other reason
20:18
Shane
Oh wow
I should've gotten a prenup
20:19
What's a prenup?
20:19
Ilya
It's a document you sign to show that you
Message


Розановы
You, Ilya, Shane
Ilya
It's a document you sign to show that you don't love or trust your spouse
20:19
Shane
Yeah it's a document that says I get all your sports cars in the divorce
20:19
Oh now I understand what it is. I didn't know the word for it
20:19
But seriously even if I get a European visa idk if my dad will give permission. I think I need both parents to okay this
20:19
Shane
You turn 18 in December, right?
20:20
Ilya
Yeah you can go on your own
On new year's break
20:20
Message



—----------

She walked out, her heart beating out of her chest.

“Напиши, как доедешь.” / “Text me when you get home,” said dad before closing the door.

She skipped down the stairs as if dad would know somehow and chase after her.

But he wouldn't notice it's gone anytime soon. He shouldn't.

But she still felt like the weight in her backpack pulled her down to the ground. Her face burned, and her hands were shaking.

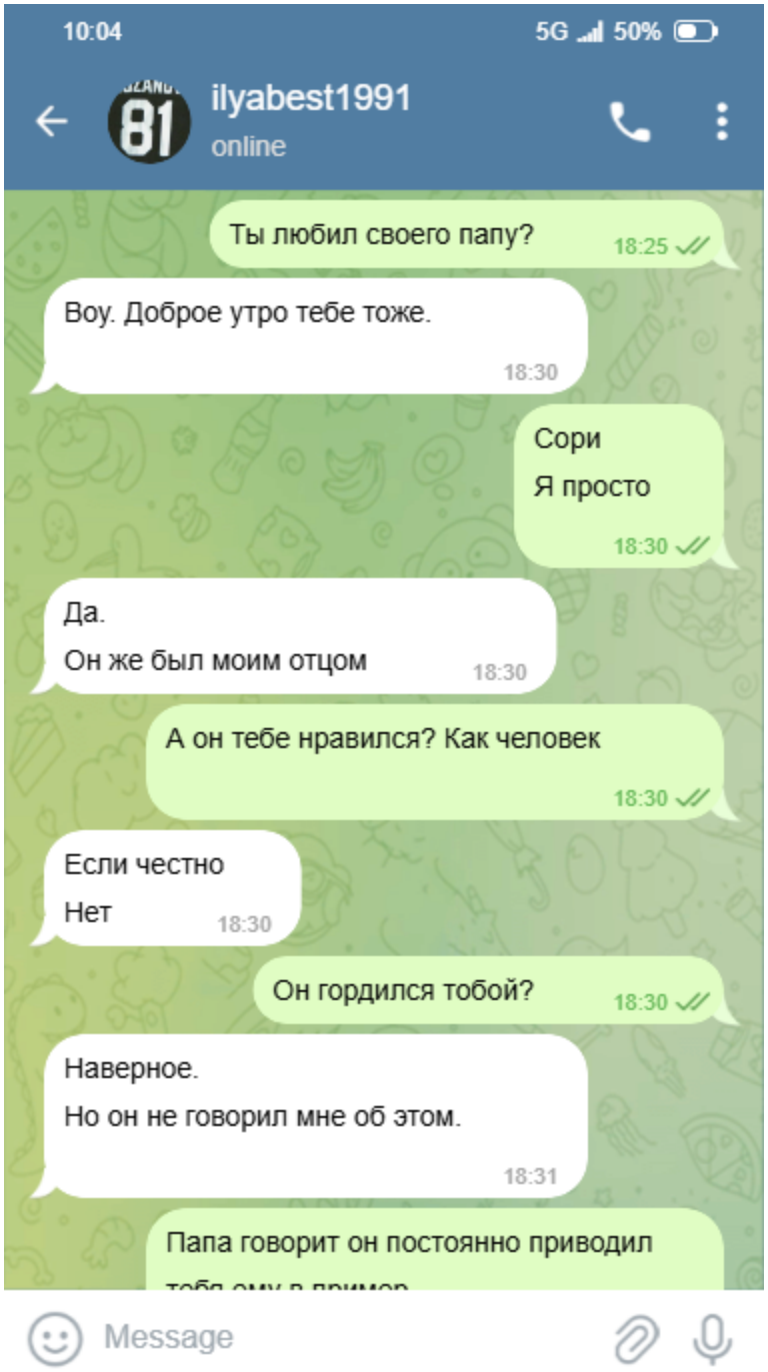
She didn't do anything wrong, did she?

A tiny voice in her head whispered, “except stealing from your father”.

God, he would be so mad if he found out. She tried to push those thoughts out of her mind, in vain.

When did it all go wrong? When did she become so distant from the man who taught her to ride a bike, took her to the zoo, and helped her with her homework?

When she got home, she texted her dad and then immediately texted Ilya.



V: Did you love your dad?

I: Whoa. Good morning to you too.

V: Sorry

V: I just

I: Yes, I did.

I: He was my father after all.

V: Did you like him?

I: Honestly?

I: No.

V: Was he proud of you?

I: Maybe.

I: But he never told me.

V: Dad says he used to hold you as an example for him

V: Ilya this and that

V: That you provide for the family and he's just mooching off everyone

V: He brings it up occasionally

I: Really?

V: yes

I: Hm. Okay

V: Is this why you tolerated it for so long?

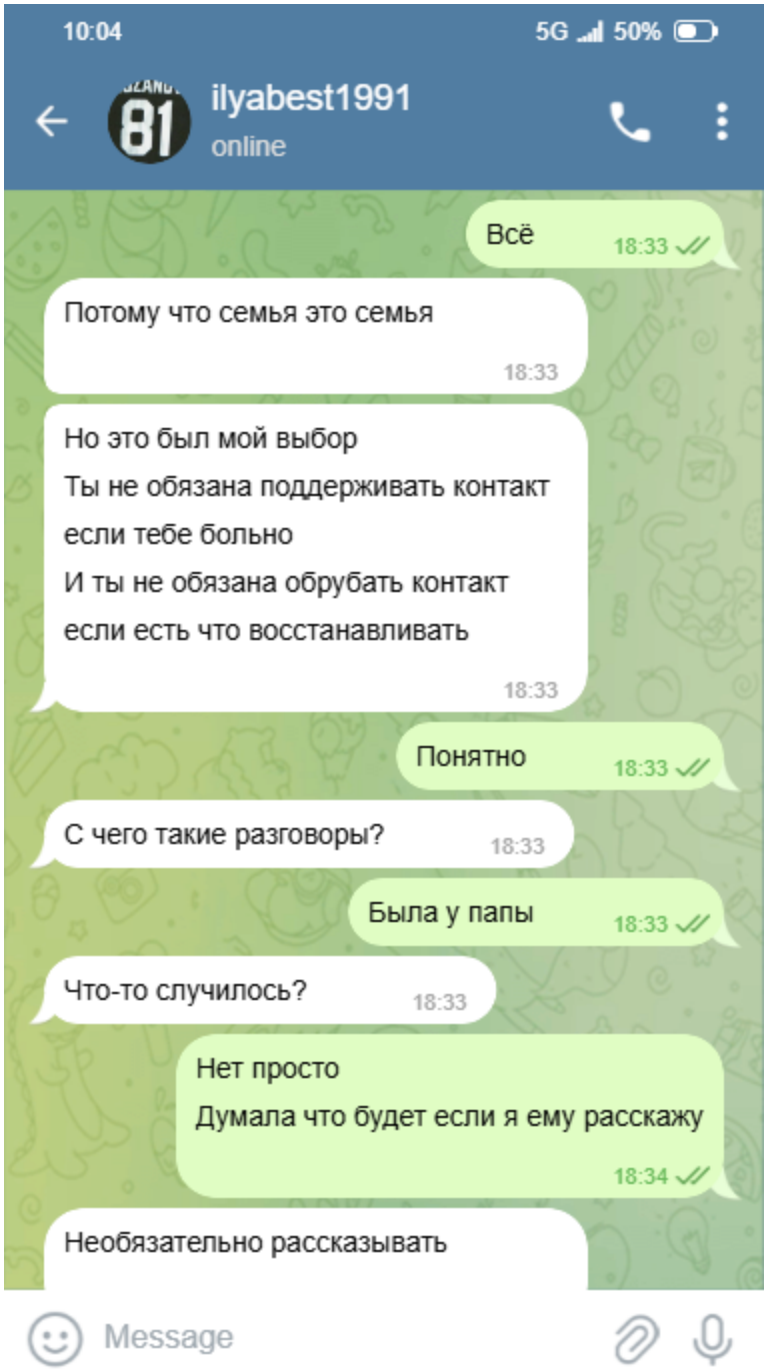
I: Tolerated?

V: Sorry I said it wrong

V: I mean

V: You supported my dad and grandfather despite

She thought about the words to describe the gap between who Ilya really was and how his family saw him, and couldn't find them.



V: Everything

I: Because family is family

I: But that's what I chose

I: You don't have to keep communicating if it's hurting you

I: And you don't have to cut everyone off if there's something left to restore

V: I understand

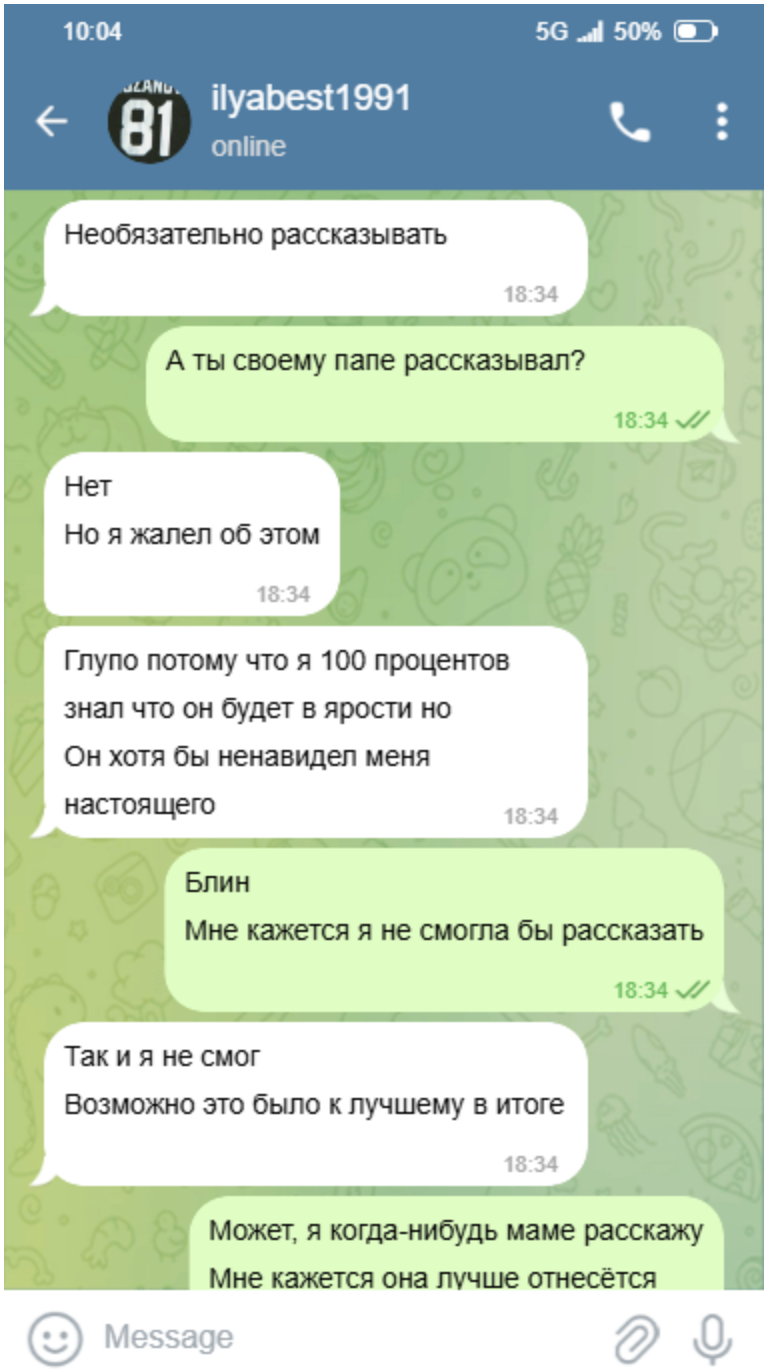
I: Why's that all of a sudden?

V: I came home from dad's

I: Did something happen?

V: No just

V: I was thinking what would happen if I tell him



I: You don't have to

V: Have you told your dad?

I: No

I: But i regretted it

I: It's stupid because I know 100% he'd be livid but

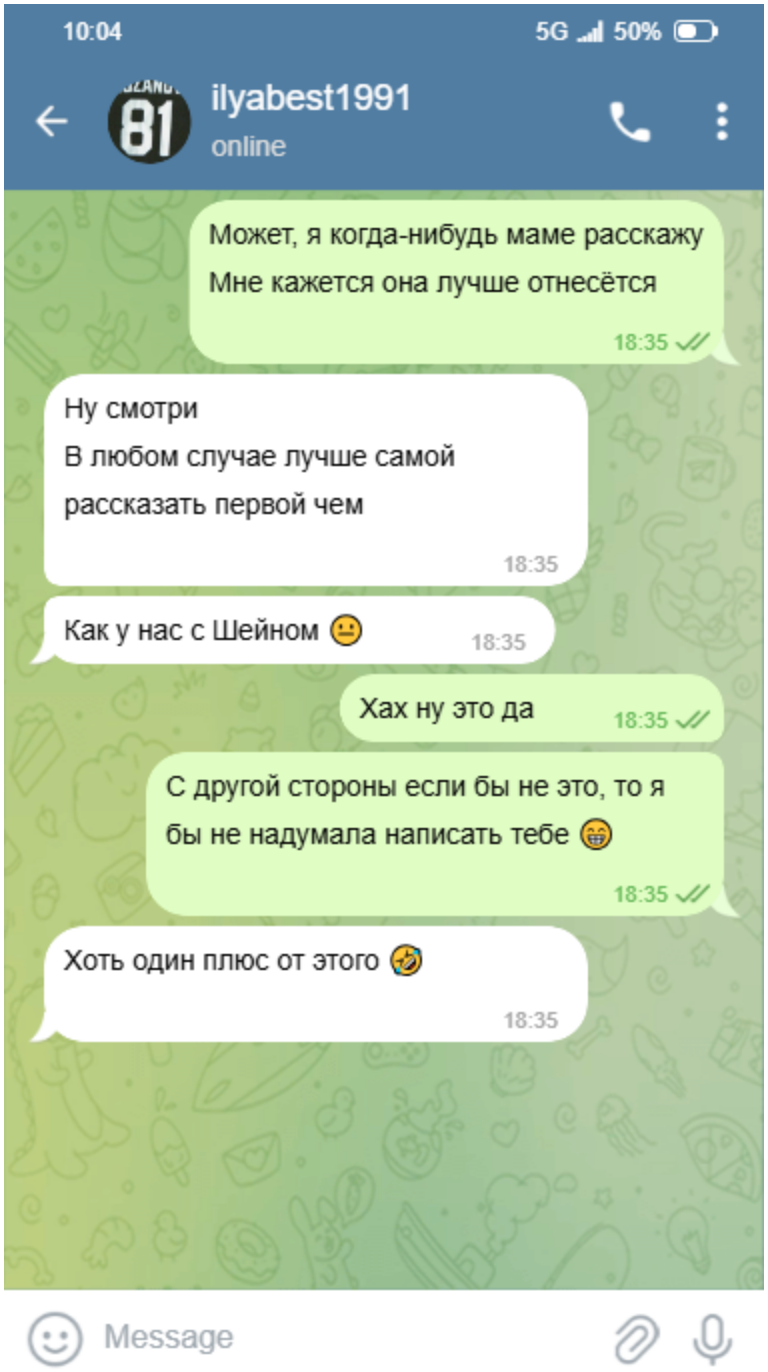
I: at least he'd have hated the real me

V: damn

V: I feel like i couldn't have done it

I: Well I couldn't either

I: Maybe it was for the best



V: Maybe I'll tell mom someday

V: I feel like she might be more chill about it

I: It's your choice

I: Anyway it's better to do this yourself then

I: better than what happened to me and Shane 😐

V: haha right

V: On the other hand if this didn't happen i wouldn't have messaged you 😁

I: Well that's a bright side 🤣

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Vlada walked out of the corridor into the arrival area. She instantly felt disoriented and overwhelmed by the number of people and the size of the airport.

She frantically looked around. They were supposed to meet her.

She finally spotted them - standing together and talking about something. Shane was in sunglasses and a ballcap, trying to look inconspicuous. Ilya was holding a sign with ВЛАДА written unevenly by hand in bold black marker. He didn't seem to care about being recognized as much as Shane, just covering his head with a hood.

Vlada could barely resist just running up to them at full speed. She walked in long strides towards them, her backpack bouncing with every step. She didn't pack much - just enough clothes for 2 days and one old photo album. The very album she stole from her father's apartment.

Inside that album was their shared heritage. The closer she got to Ilya, the clearer she saw it. The same dirty blonde curls and the same clear eyes, like in photos of grandmother Irina, holding tiny Ilya in her lap. Or in a photo of 5 year old Ilya standing beside a New Year's tree with bunny ears on his head. Or Vlada's own pre-school photo, printed by mom before the divorce and put right on the last page of the album.

She couldn't help but yell *"Илья!"* and wave.

He turned his head from Shane to her, and his ever-present smirk blossomed into a wide, blinding smile.

"Ладушка!"

He spread his arms, ready for a hug.

Vlada sprinted towards him, not afraid anymore of looking too impatient. She crashed into his arms, instantly getting squeezed by the tight embrace.

She could feel his whole body shaking with thundering laughter, then her feet getting off the floor, and the world starting to spin around.

She felt like she was 6 again, tiny in her uncle's arms. She felt like an adult for the first time in her life, making her own choices. She felt it all.

She tried to blink away the tears when Ilya put her back on the ground. She was relieved to see Ilya's eyes glistening too.

“Hey, Vlada,” Shane hugged her with one hand, “Let me take your bag.”

“Oh, right. Hi, Shane!”

He took her backpack, and they chatted a bit about nothing in particular. Vlada felt awkward for no reason, but she knew that it would go away soon.

“Пошли?” / “Let’s go?” she looked at Ilya.

He nodded.

With every step, she was getting a little closer to something. She didn't know. But she felt it was something good, waiting for her, right around the corner.

Chapter End Notes

thats all folks! now im onto my next fic (moscow underground gay club drag performer Ilya AU heheheh ive already started writing)

Thanks again to Eden for helping me. And BIG thanks to my sister for being my editor, making all the freaking screenshots (and showing me how to do it) and photoshopping stuff. Without her this fic would be a bit dull so <3

And thanks to everyone who read and commented! its was nice to wake up and see all the feedback all these weeks. Its my most popular fic so far i was floored, im not used to writing for popular fandoms lol

come say hi to me on twitter i need more HR moots @zhaokinnie

Works inspired by this one

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