however small, however hidden

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by sidequesting (blowmymind)

Summary

> “You are asking me to be careful with his heart.” It’s not a question. He knows he’s gotten it right, this time.
>
> A minuscule nod from Shane’s father. A breath. A small correction: “No, I’m telling you.”

Ilya's never gotten a shovel talk before. There's a first time for everything.

Notes

title from the road, cormac mccarthy

happy reading! happy 2026!!!!

See the end of the work for more notes

Yuna Hollander makes her swift and untimely exit; Shane follows quickly after.

Fuck, Ilya thinks, *what am I supposed to do now?*

He looks across the table—it's gorgeous furniture, of course, like the rest of the house, and he wonders briefly which parent's decorating taste Shane's inherited—to David.

David Hollander, who is looking right back at him. His impressively square jaw shifts from side to side, as though his cheeks are being bitten raw by the words he's holding in, before he spits it out: "Son, do you know what a 'shovel talk' is?"

Ilya is vaguely familiar with the stupid meaning of certain English sayings. This—*shovel talk*—is one of them. But he has the fear of God in him, or at least the fear of his boyfriend's father-who-caught-them-necking, so the least he can do is play dumb when it really, *really* suits him best.

"Uh… no, I do not think so. Is, er, idiom? I am not so good at those." He keeps his face straight and tone even. Gooseflesh makes its unwelcome home along his bare arms and legs, and he prays that David doesn't notice.

He's been doing a whole lot of praying today. There's probably more to come in his future.

"Right," David Hollander starts, then stares resolutely at Ilya for a beat.

"Ahem," he begins again, to no avail.

"Okay," he tries, finally, and Ilya can't help butting in: "Third time is the charm, yes?"

The older man fixes him with a *look,* then, and Ilya remembers it's in his best interest to shut the fuck up. *Where is Shane? He could save me.*

"...Sorry. Please, continue," Ilya intones. The windows, wall-to-ceiling like in the so-called cottage—another genetic decorative tendency?—let in swathes of golden light and the blue sky, the black outlines of birds visible far beyond. Shane is visible, too, the pale hue of his shirt a neat match with the yawning stratosphere, as is Yuna, and they seem cloaked in tension.

Ilya looks away from the scene. Back to the task at hand—his father-in-law. Or, would-be father-in-law. *Hopefully,* at *some* point, his father-in-law. He winces. That's not looking too likely, the way Hollander the Elder is staring at him. He detects a hint of desolation in that true-blue gaze.

"Sure. Anyway. As I was saying," David mutters, before getting to what Ilya assumes is the point. "I was glad to see you wearing slippers on the deck. Wouldn't want any splinters on your soles. Yowch."

Scratch that. This can't be *the point.* What the fuck is he talking about? "Do you mean when you saw Shane and I—"

“Yes, Ilya. I’m focusing on the positives, now.” Ilya can read between the lines here: *The positives, rather than the part where I saw my one and only son sucking* your *face,* David is tactfully omitting. “Slippers. Good that you’re careful.”

“Mhm. You are right, of course. *Ouch.”* Ilya is afraid. Ilya is well and truly *scared.*

“I just hope…” David trails off, eyes losing focus and floating to somewhere past Ilya’s right shoulder. “Well, that you’re being careful in *other* ways, too.” The momentary detour—maybe to fortify himself before asking about his son’s sexual safety—is resolved as his gaze shifts once more, locking onto Ilya’s face with a terrifying conviction.

Still, at the very least, this is something Ilya knows the right answer to, certain like the slap of his stick against the puck, certain like Shane’s freckles spattering the bridge of his nose. “O-of course. We use condoms… *all* the time,” he assures, neck straining with the velocity of his nodding. “All the time. Mhm. Yes, this we do.”

To say the ensuing pause is pregnant would be a hideous understatement. The pause is nine months along. Fit to burst. Two centimeters away from total dilation, *or whatever the fuck,* because it’s been a full minute by Ilya’s frantic count and David still hasn’t said anything.

Okay. So maybe he *doesn’t* know how to handle a stick, or maybe he hasn’t done his due diligence in counting Shane’s freckles, because that answer has not elicited the reaction it should have. There’s no relieved sigh, amiable smile, attempt at lighter conversation—nothing. David’s face remains set in stone, only paling a little, like he’s going to be sick.

I’m fucked, Ilya realizes. This newfound understanding of his circumstances is compounded by David’s next words.

“That’s not what I meant. At all.”

He winces. The *at all* is really driving David’s displeasure home. But it was a reasonable assumption, no? The man had even commented on their *chemistry* at All-Stars! Sue Ilya, then, for thinking he was asking about safe sex practices instead of—ah.

“You are asking me to be careful with his heart.” It’s not a question. He knows he’s gotten it right, this time.

A minuscule nod from Shane’s father. A breath. A small correction: “No, I’m telling you.”

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Ilya's main takeaway, here, is that David Hollander has already accepted that Ilya has Shane's heart. And that, to him, is a win sweeter than any Stanley Cup.

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The smile that splits open Rozanov's face is, if David were to be unfairly generous, maybe three parts amusement to one *healthy* part incredulity. Which is fine, really. It's only fair that his son's—*boyfriend,* which is less surprising than the fact that it's *Ilya Rozanov—significant other* derives a little joy from this situation.

He looks down: the dregs of his drink have, somehow, positioned themselves in an almost-phallic arrangement. If it's supposed to be an omen, it's one he could have used a good few hours ago. Idly, David notes that there's a crack—hairline, and practically unnoticeable if David didn't have such good reason to redirect his gaze—coursing through the bottom of the mug. It's not even ceramic, and he didn't know metal could crack so easily. The mugs, a gifted set of four, are damn near close to brand-new, too, so Yuna's not gonna be happy about that. Neither will Shane—his son is a stickler for the quality of his parents' possessions, even simple mugs. Because he's a good son.

Plink. As it turns out, the sound of a teardrop against metal is almost obnoxiously loud.

Ilya stays mercifully quiet. It's like he knows just what to do when someone's overwhelmed. *Just what Shane needs,* David thinks, and smiles even as the traitorous wetness trails down to his chin. Lord, how he hates that sensation—the tacky, mucus-like feeling of tears drying down onto skin. It bugs him, but he won't let it show. Not now.

The way David Hollander sees it, Ilya Rozanov doesn't really *need* a shovel talk, in the traditional sense at least. It looks more like Ilya Rozanov needs a dad.

"Right. Alright. Uh, yeah," he murmurs, pleased that Ilya doesn't butt in with a smartass comment this time. One drag of the heel of his palm over his eyes, one shuddering breath in-out-in-out, and he's collected again, looking up at the Russian man before him, and smiling: foolish, unburdened, certain.

"You're a good one, Rozanov. Ilya. I'm glad Shane has you."

Ilya's jaw drops rather noticeably. It's not the sort of physical reaction David could have expected, from what his wife and son and the hockey world have told him over the years. Briefly, he wonders if anything to do with Shane just provokes a bodily response from Ilya, and then sorely regrets that line of thinking.

While David is chastising himself, though, the boy stutters out, “Thank you. Thank you. I—I’m so glad I have him, too. I can’t *believe* I have him.”

“No… I can believe it.” David shoots a glance outside, to where his wife and son are now embracing, and adds, “He cares so deeply. So much. But most people don’t see that. I can understand why it would take someone like you for him to feel… *safe,* maybe? Safe loving someone. I think… I may be part of why he didn’t feel safe, and I don’t think I can ever forgive myself for that.”

It’s worryingly silent. He gets the sense the Russian man has *words* ready to spill out, any moment, and it makes him smile despite the tightness in his chest. Ilya seizes the opening: “Sir,” he starts.

“Absolutely not. Call me David.”

“David, *da.* Is a little complicated for me—Russia, you know—” and here, he blows a little raspberry and rolls his eyes in true Rozanov fashion, “but my country aside, I would not be able to have a conversation about Shane with my father. Not how he and you can speak about *me.* That is important, too.” And then Ilya looks, flinty-eyed, to the window, and David turns around to track the inevitable return of Shane and Yuna Hollander to the house. Their shovel talk time is running out, it seems.

There’s only one thing David *really* needs to get out, though, before the loves of his life come back, quick and quiet: “You really do need to use protection,” he whispers, “and *stay hydrated.”*

Ilya’s raucous laugh cuts through the air like a bullet. “You and your son are really the same person.”

"That's just how genetics works," Shane chimes in from behind David, voice ever-so-slightly hoarse, but no less pedantic for it. The Russian man's face becomes, in an instant, *drenched* in love. David thinks: *We really have nothing to worry about.*

End Notes

ilya's sort of always thinking about shane huh. this loser (said through tears)

comments and kudos r always appreciated ❣️ heated rivalry i WILL be writing more of you . that's a threat not a promise

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