

family affairs

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family affairs

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Summary

“So what’s so gross about ‘*lover*’?” Ilya asks as casually as he can.

Bad choice. David is choking now.

— Ilya is left at the table with Shane's father. They talk.

Notes

As always, beware. English is not my first language.

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

When Shane gets up from the table, something childish in Ilya rebels.

“Where are you going?” he asks, even though he knows the answer.

Shane’s mom has just left the house, overwhelmed by emotions, and of course Shane wants to talk with her one-on-one. There’s a lot the two of them have to discuss — things like what comes next and what went wrong in the past. Things that Ilya has no right to hear. Things that Shane might want to confess without an audience.

Still, inside of Ilya’s ribcage there’s a small child now. A child who doesn’t want to be alone. It’s been dormant for years, but in the week they’ve spent together at the cottage, Shane has eased it back to life with tender words and tender touches.

The child now hisses and cries, and when Shane gets up it really wants to grab his hand and pull him down.

Don’t leave me here. I’m your responsibility, it says. I’m scared too.

Ilya’s actual mouth stays closed, his hands folded on the glass of vodka. Reaching out isn’t in his nature.

“I’m going to talk with mom,” Shane tells him. “I’ll be back in a few minutes.”

After that, he turns away from Ilya. The sounds of his footsteps dull, until they fade completely. The front door closes behind him with a small click. Ilya has no choice but to take a deep breath and look forward.

David is still sitting at the opposite side of the table. Illuminated by warm noon light, he seems calm and collected, almost made out of stone. Has his presence always been this imposing?

Yet, when his eyes meet Ilya’s, he looks away.

Something in Ilya’s chest coils tight, pulling on his ribs. Trying to ease it, he takes another breath. It’s the loudest sound in the room.

He breathes out. David swallows.

Someone starts tapping their fingers against the table. Realizing it’s him, Ilya stops. The tapping continues.

Back at home, when similar silence fell over the table, Ilya used to count the ticks of an old pendulum clock. One tick for each word swallowed by mom. One tock for each jab echoing in his head in his father’s voice.

Damn Canadians don’t have pendulum clocks anymore. Nothing measures time in steady beats — there’s only soft humming of a fridge and a chirping of a bird muffled by the

window. Ilya will have to count his own heartbeats instead. It's the least dependable thing right now, but it'll do. Just a few minutes more, just a few seconds...

When David breaks the silence first, Ilya almost swallows his tongue in shock.

"So, do you read *the New Yorker*?" he asks.

Because of course he does. He's Shane's father, and he reads his boring magazine weekly. And he does crosswords to keep his mind in shape, and he has the most boring job imaginable, and he used to play for some equally boring team. And he starts the conversation with the most boring topic, and Ilya doesn't feel surprised anymore.

He knows this man. Shane has told him so much about David it wouldn't be difficult to find a common ground — or at least keep the small talk going.

But Ilya misses the right beat, and David looks away again. Silence stretches thicker. The coiling in Ilya's chest pulls like a bowstring being drawn. It can snap any second. The situation needs to be fixed, and Ilya has to be the one to do it, and...

"Actually, I have a question," he starts as casually as he can. One thing has been haunting him relentlessly, and it might be a good conversation starter.

"What's so gross about '*lover*'?"

Bad choice. David is choking now.

The vodka escapes from his mouth and runs up into his nose, and he keeps coughing and coughing, and when he finally stops, his face is flushed red.

So... Ilya fucked up. Like, really fucked up. Maybe he won't have to save Shane's father, but he will definitely have to perform some kind of dramatic Heimlich maneuver on this conversation. And quickly at that, if he still wants Shane's dad to like him.

And he wants that.

God. Fuck. He really wants that.

"Sorry, no, I...", he tries again. Inside of him, everything shakes, but his voice comes out steady. "I don't read *the New Yorker*. No."

David coughs one more time, then looks back at him.

"Ah, I see... Pity."

"But I know you do," Ilya adds quickly. "Shane told me. Years ago."

"Ah."

Ilya cringes internally. Right. It must be weird to hear about a relationship hidden from you for so long — especially when it's your son's relationship. And yet...

“I’m surprised Shane talks about me,” David says instead. When Ilya looks back at him, something in his face seems softer. “Well, you see... *Ilya*... I’m quite boring.”

Someone wiser would protest immediately, but Ilya’s not wise at all. Not when it comes to Shane and his family. Especially not when Shane’s father calls him by his name.

“Shane is boring too,” he says. “Must be genetic.”

Another bad choice. Really, really bad choice. Why the hell does he let his mouth run this much? He shouldn’t—

This time, no choking happens. Instead, David snorts so hard he has to set down his glass to not spill vodka all over the table. Again.

“Must be genetic,” he repeats like a good joke. He doesn’t sound offended.

Before Ilya realizes, his own face splits in a small smile. The tightness uncoils, finally allowing his shoulders to roll down.

“Shane talks about you a lot, actually,” he says. “Not on his own, he’s bad at that. But when I ask, he tells me everything and more. He really loves you and Miss Yuna.”

David’s smile matches his.

“Just call her Yuna. I guess... You’re family now, right, Ilya?”

And god, everything was so bad a second ago, but now, somehow, Ilya could die happy. His head forehead throbs from the whiplash. His body buzzes from the inside like a thousand bumblebees. Like a can of shaken soda. Like all of these good things that seemed like stupid comparisons just a week ago.

“I really love Shane,” he blurts out, a bit naive and dumb. For the first time, his heart is on his sleeve. It’s impossible to hide it away. “He’s my everything. I love him. I don’t want to live without him.”

David keeps smiling at him throughout these confessions.

Only when Ilya runs out of words in English, he says, “I know. I can see.”

Later, he refills Ilya’s glass with more vodka and pats his shoulder in an encouragement. He suggests setting down the table for a meal. He says, “The utensils are here,” and, “We keep all the cups in that cupboard over there.” It sounds like he wants Ilya to remember.

“Shane’s a terrible cook,” he adds when they sit back down at the table. A sweet smell of a pasta sauce wafts from the kitchen, but they have to wait for their better halves to return. “So don’t expect him to feed you well. That boy...”

“It tastes good, usually,” Ilya adds not as a contradiction. “His food, I mean. But he follows recipes very carefully. Doesn’t change anything. It says dish for eight people, he cooks for eight people.”

David nods with a smile.

“He got that from me.”

There’s probably more things Shane got from his father — things like the need to stick to a schedule or his dislike for specific words or his need to escape when things get too overwhelming. Ilya will ask about it all the next chance he gets. And he knows he’ll get answers because it’s David. David feels more like a dad than his father ever did. For now, however...

“About that ‘*lover*’ thing—”

“Just use ‘*boyfriend*’, Ilya. I think Shane will like that.”

End Notes

Boyfriend doesn't sound as romantic to my non-native ears tho :(♡

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