

blind date(s)

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blind date(s)

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Summary

Jackie and Hayden conspire to set Shane up with one of Jackie's friends by inviting him over for dinner without telling him that said friend will be present.

Shane and Ilya decide it's time they come out to the Pikes as a couple, so Shane invites Ilya over to the Pikes' place for dinner without sending Hayden a forewarning.

Cue: a jealous man, a confused house guest, and one very kid-friendly Russian.

Notes

to everyone who has left me a comment on previous works: i love you dearly and i am trying my very best to catch up on replies <3

Update: a lovely reader has translated this work to Russian [here](#)

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

It had been Jackie's idea.

She'd come home one evening, chewing at her lower lip, scheming as she made dinner. Hayden, ever the patient husband, waited her out, helped her feed the kids, then let her stew in silence as he scarfed down his meal. It wasn't until they'd been lying in bed together, scrolling socials in tandem, that she brought it up. She tried to play it off as casual, like she hadn't been sitting on the idea for three hours. Hayden's been married for seven years now. He knows not to point out her little neuroses.

"So I've been thinking..."

And that's how Hayden found himself where he is now, working diligently in the kitchen while Jackie keeps her friend, Sam, entertained. The two of them are joking about something as they sip at their wine, swivelling around atop the barstools across from Hayden.

Sam is one of Jackie's closest friends. They met in spin class a few years back, and it was platonic love at first sight (at least, this is how it's been relayed to Hayden. That's not the description he uses for his and Shane's friendship, even though the sentiment is there). Sam's a personal representative for some corporate firm. She's witty, sharp, and very good at leading conversations. She's at every one of Jackie's "girls' nights," every book club gathering the two of them joined around the same time, and they've signed up for several other workout classes together. Sam is funny and charming, someone who navigates all social situations with ease. She's been to their house plenty of times and is clearly relaxed as Jackie relays to her a story about some mischief the twins got up to this week.

Sam is also newly single.

Hayden has heard the drama all secondhand via Jackie. How the guy had cheated on her after two years of commitment. How he'd had the audacity to ask *her* to move out of the apartment when she'd been paying more than fifty percent of the rent.

The arrogance of some men, Jackie had bemoaned; Hayden nodded along like he doesn't work with bottom-of-the-barrel scumbags. The NHL doesn't exactly breed "wife guys." Hayden's a rare commodity.

Jackie's plan had been simple, really. And, when she pitched it, it even made sense... at the time. It went a little something like this:

"Sam needs to stop dating douchebags, you know? I wish she could just find a nice guy."

"Right."

"Someone who treats her well. Who has a good head on his shoulders. Routine. Commitment. That kind of thing."

"Sure, babe."

(By this point in the conversation, Hayden's hands had begun to travel south. After all, "wife guy" doesn't directly translate to "celibate.")

"Someone like Shane."

Hayden's hands stopped in their tracks.

He'd tried to explain that Shane has never agreed to any other date they've tried to set him up with over the past few years. How he has this girl, Lily—

"Who we've never met!" Jackie insisted. "So it can't be serious."

Shit. Well, Jackie had him there. But, still, the no blind date rule Shane had established was going to be a thorn in their side.

"Then we just won't tell him," Jackie quipped, letting her own hands wander (so conniving). "I'll let Sam know what I'm thinking, have them both over for dinner, and let it be a surprise. Really, Hayd, what's the worst that can happen?"

He's not sure. He once witnessed Shane speedrun all five stages of grief when he forgot to pack his toner for an overnight game, so he's guessing the answer may be a bit more extreme than Jackie had been willing to hear. He prays Sam's conversational skills and (quite frankly) killer legs are enough to distract Shane from the clear betrayal.

She came dressed to impress, but nothing overly formal. Showing just enough cleavage to be considered "tasteful." Hayden has not once, in their seven years of knowing one another, heard Shane make any sort of remark about a girl's boobs. Or butts. Or anything, really. When he was dating Rose Landry, and one of the guys on their team asked him if her bust was actually real, Shane just stared at him like a lost baby deer and shrugged.

"Don't talk about women like that."

Hayden likes to think he's above locker room talk. But hell, if he'd been dating Rose Landry, he'd want to say *something* to show off. Anything. But Shane? Nothing. Hayden thinks he once mentioned she's "pretty funny." That's about as lecherous as he got.

"What time did you say he's coming?" Sam asks curiously, turning to Hayden as she takes another sip of wine.

"I told him seven. He's usually a little early thou—"

The doorbell sounds, and Jackie grins. Like a pack of ferrel beasts, all three of Hayden's (walking) children run toward the door, screaming "Uncle Shane!" Amber burps and giggles in her playpen.

Hayden sets down the spatula he'd been using to sauté their vegetables and heads toward the foyer. He rounds the corner, grateful the entryway to their house can't be seen from the kitchen. He can at least give Shane a five-second heads-up. He feels guilty for springing this on Shane, knowing his best friend likes to be prepared for everything, but he doesn't think this is a panic attack-inducing surprise. He'll probably get an eyeroll at worst.

The twins have already opened the door, and Shane's got Arthur in his arms, giving him a warm hug. He sets him down and remains squatting so Ruby and Jade can each wrap their little arms around him.

"Quite the welcome party," Hayden grins, crossing his arms as he leans against the wall. Shane just smiles, nodding at Ruby's "Did you miss us? We missed you!"

"You know me," Shane says, deadpan. "Hip with the kids." He stands, and Hayden gives him a brief side-hug. His shoulders feel a little stiff, but maybe it's just cold out.

"Hey, uh, I'd better forewarn you. Jackie's invited someone over for dinner, too." He stands back, trying to relay *someone she wants you to meet* with his eyes. No dice. Shane's not looking at him, eyes nervously glancing between the path to the kitchen and the front door.

"Oh, uh, man, I wish I'd known. I kinda also invited someone to—"

"Hayds?" Jackie interrupts, rounding the corner and wearing a bright smile. "C'mon guys, the food'll get cold."

"Up, up!" the twins cry in unison, and Shane kneels so he can hoist both of them up, one in each arm.

"Hayden, listen, I really need to tell you something—"

"Sure, man," Hayden flashes a smile over his shoulder, following his wife back into the kitchen. "Over dinner, yeah?"

"No, I— shit," Shane stumbles after him, and Ruby chastises him with a loud "Swear Jar!" When they make it to the kitchen, Sam's standing near the corner of the kitchen island, holding her wine glass in one hand, waving flirtatiously with the other.

"Hi," she smiles, cheeks dimpling and eyes visibly softening at the sight of Shane entering the kitchen, lugging two chatty Pike girls in both arms. Shane doesn't see her for a second, head tilted down so Jade can whisper something in his ear, but when he finally looks up, he does a double-take. Hayden meets Jackie's eyes across the room, and they share a mental high-five.

"Oh, uh, hey. Hi. Um, sorry, I'd shake your hand but—" He hoists both girls up onto his hips as if to say, "See?" Sam giggles, waving her hand at him.

"I understand. They're a handful."

Shane swallows, visibly nervous.

"Right. Um..."

"Girls, why don't we save the climbing all over Uncle Shane for after dinner?"

"But *moooooom*—"

"Girls."

They each huff, Ruby patting Shane's cheek like she's consoling him, then they generously unwind their arms from around his neck so he can set them down. They immediately scramble back toward the livingroom where they've got their arts and crafts spread out across the carpet. Shane looks on after them mournfully, almost like he wishes he could join them.

Sam takes a step closer, hand outstretched. Hayden reaches out and presses his palm to Shane's upper back, nudging him forward. Shane shakes his head, then steps forward, camera-ready smile plastered on his face. He takes Sam's hand and lets her shake his. Slowly.

"Right. Sorry, umm, Shane. Shane Hollander."

"I know," Sam teases, her smile turning playful. "Sam."

"Sam," Shane slips his hand out of Sam's quickly, pocketing them both at once. *Odd*, Hayden thinks, making note of the clear discomfort Shane's exuding. Hopefully just nerves?

"So how do you, um," Shane nods his head toward Jackie, "know each other?"

"Oh, we—"

Before Sam can answer, the doorbell rings again. Hayden misses whatever answer Sam's about to offer because he's racing his twins to the front door, yelling, "Don't answer the door for strangers!" after them. He opens the door, a bit confused. Jackie hadn't invited anyone else, had she? Surely, she would have told him if—

"Ah, hello, Pike."

Hayden stares, door open halfway. Standing before him, wearing a starched shirt and a pair of nice jeans, is none other than Ilya Rozanov.

"Umm," Hayden's brain short-circuits. Luckily, he's saved from answering by the sound of a synchronized "Who is it?" at his feet, followed by a clearing of someone's throat from behind him. He opens the door a fraction wider, and Rozanov tilts his head, staring at something just past his shoulder.

"Ilya," Hayden hears from just behind him, the name spoken through gritted teeth.

Ilya, he thinks, craning his neck to send Shane an incredulous look. *Since when the fuck are you on a first-name basis?*

He turns back around, just in time for the twins to shove their way through the door, staring up at Rozanov with matching pairs of curious blue eyes.

"Hi," says Ruby, extending her hand up. Rozanov's mouth ticks, showing signs of the beginnings of a smile. Hayden wonders if that's the look he sends all his prey before pouncing. It's definitely treading the same territory as the smirk he likes to wear when he slams Hayden into the boards. Hayden grabs his daughter's hand, tugging her back behind his legs.

“Ruby, what have I told you about talking to strangers?”

“Ah, but we are not strangers, Pike.” Rozanoz squats down, extending his hand *between Hayden’s legs* for the twins to shake. Jade takes his hand tentatively, and Rozanov’s responding grin is practically predatory.

“Ilya,” he says solemnly.

“Jade,” Hayden’s daughter responds, giggling slightly.

“Miss Jade, could you please tell your daddy to let me into his house?”

Hayden’s about one chirp away from kicking his false teeth in.

“Daddy can let you into the house,” Ruby pipes up, extending her own hand once again (traitor). Jade still has Rozanov’s right hand in hers, so he crosses his own arm with his left to shake Ruby’s hand. All still transpiring between Hayden’s legs.

“You have to say the secret password, though,” Ruby manages to get out between her own little huff of giggles. Rozanov continues to shake both their hands in an exaggerated manner as he puts on a falsely pensive face.

“Hmm, I am thinking—”

Hayden hears a chastising “Ilya” from behind him. It goes ignored.

“—is password: ‘Boston is the greatest team in the NHL?’”

“Nooooooo,” the girls laugh in unison. At least they’re loyal in this one aspect of Hayden’s life.

“Rozanov, what the fuck are you doing here?” Hayden spits, glaring daggers at the man still shaking his kids’ hands *between his legs*. Rozanov glances up innocently through his fringe of curls, like he’s only just noticed Hayden’s still there. Before he can answer, Shane speaks up from behind.

“I, umm, I invited him.”

“*What?*” Hayden turns bodily, knocking his daughters’ and Rozanov’s handshakes apart. “Why?”

Shane’s got his hands in his pockets, his shoulders rising to his ears in a defensive posture.

“I told you about the charity we’re starting.”

“Yeah... okay? And?” Hayden isn’t exactly sure how his best friend’s insane side project (which he’s still trying to wrap his head around) has anything to do with Rozanov showing up at his doorstep.

“Well, I—” Shane shifts his feet from side to side, staring down at Hayden’s feet. “I thought maybe you should meet him.”

Hayden side-eyes Rozanov with a pointed glare. Rozanov, by this point, has risen from his crouch and is staring at Hayden, wearing that signature smirk, like he knows something Hayden doesn’t.

“We’ve met,” Hayden says dryly, pursing his lips.

“Oh, but not like this, I don’t think,” Rozanov grins, sticking his hand out at grown-up level for a grown-up handshake. “Hayden Pike, nice to meet you. I’m Ilya Rozanov, Shane’s bo—”

“Hayden?” Jackie rounds the corner to the foyer, dragging Sam in with her. “Who’s at the door?”

No need to answer the question. She stops dead in her tracks when she sees Hayden’s least-favorite six-foot-two Boston hockey player standing in her entryway. She frowns slightly, and Hayden thanks whatever god is out there that at least *somebody* in this household is loyal to him.

“Mommy!” Jade exclaims, waving toward Rozanov with the same enthusiasm she brings to finding frogs in their backyard. “Ilya!”

“I invited him,” Shane says tightly. Hayden turns, catching the tail-end of some sort of pointed look Shane sends Rozanov’s way. “Ilya, this is Jackie, Hayden’s wife.” He gestures toward Jackie, then shifts his hands minutely, open palm held out toward Sam. “And this is Sam. Jacke’s friend. Who I’ve never met before, and who I don’t know.” He says the last part through gritted teeth, and Hayden whips his head around to see Rozanov’s eyes widen before he nods slightly, eyebrows drawn together in thought.

“Ah,” he says softly. “I see.” He smooths down his buttoned shirt with his palm, then turns toward Jackie and Sam, throwing on that charming, Rozanov smile. Camera-ready, heartbreaking. He looks like the Cheshire Cat, smiling like that at Hayden’s pretty wife. Hayden wants to stab him.

Rozanov steps through the door, side-stepping Hayden like he’s not standing there physically trying to stop him from entering. He reaches for Jackie’s hand, shaking it earnestly.

“Is a pleasure to meet you, Jackie.” His smile doesn’t dim as he turns to Sam. “And Sam.”

Sam reaches for Rozanov’s hand coyly, letting her fingers drag across his palm once the handshake ends. Her answering smile is demure. Hayden’s hackles rise, and when he looks at Shane, he sees a glint of something heated flicker in his eyes.

Great. They haven’t even sat down for dinner, and Jackie’s plan is already unraveling in Rozanov’s nasty playboy palms.

“Um,” Jackie jerks at Sam’s elbow, and Sam finally turns her heart eyes away from Rozanov to meet her gaze. “Food’s getting cold, so maybe we go eat?”

“Right, yeah,” Sam appears to snap out of it. “We set the table while you guys were out here. Ilya,” she turns her head, smiling once more, “we can set a placemat out for you at the end of the table.”

“No bother,” he replies, voice smooth and sultry. Hayden’s going to be sick. “I’ll sit next to Shane.”

The women start leading the way out of the foyer, Rozanov following them, the twins taking up the caboose. Shane’s about to trail after them, but Hayden grabs him by his upper arm, yanking him back with enough force to make him stumble.

“Dude, what the fuck?” Shane whisper-yells, glaring at him like a sulking toddler.

“‘What the fuck,’ me? How about, ‘what the fuck,’ you? Shane, what the *hell* is going on? Why’d you bring that dickwad into my house?”

Shane looks down at the ground, lower lip pulled beneath his teeth.

“He’s not a dickwad.”

“Debatable.”

“No, he’s— ugh!” Shane let’s out a frustrated huff of air, spinning in place and putting his hands behind his head. Suddenly, he pauses, spinning back around to point an accusing finger at Hayden.

“What about you, huh? What’s this whole ‘Sam’ business? I thought this dinner was just supposed to be us! I may be a little slow on the social uptake, Hayden, but I’m not stupid. I *told* you I’m not interested in Jackie’s friends!”

“Oh, come *on*, man! You’ve been saying no for *years*! And for what?” Hayden dips his head closer, whispering as he says, “You’ve gotta admit she’s hot, right? I mean, even Rozanov couldn’t keep his douchy little eyes off her—”

“He was *not*—” Shane seethes, and Hayden’s grinning like the cat who caught the canary.

“I knew it! You’re so into her! Jackie was right about this one, I can’t wait to talk to her tonight after—”

“No, Hayden, that’s not— Christ!” Shane squeezes his eyes shut, pinching the bridge of his nose between thumb and forefinger. “You *really* don’t understand what’s going on here.”

Hayden tilts his head, confused. Okay, so he’s finally listening. He takes in Shane’s rigid posture, his unsteady breaths. He reaches out, resting a gentle hand on Shane’s shoulder. He waits for Shane to open his eyes and meet his gaze before speaking.

“Hey, man. Hey. Okay. What’s going on here?”

They’re close, close enough for Hayden to see the panic in Shane’s expression. He swallows thickly, nervously, but his eyes harden with resolve. He stares straight at Hayden as he begins

to say:

“Hayden, I—”

“Boys!” Jackie hollers from the kitchen. “Dinner! Now!”

Shane shuts his mouth so hard his teeth make a clicking noise. Hayden pats his shoulder and mouths “later” before leading them into the kitchen.

Jackie’s laying out filled plates on the dining room table. Luckily, Hayden had thought to roast a lot of chicken in case Shane was extra hungry this evening, so there’s enough food for Rozanov. Sam’s getting utensils and water for everyone, and Rozanov—

Rozanov’s squatting down again as Arthur shows him something in his giant picture book filled with blown-up photos of bugs. Hayden’s eyes widen. He tries to shoot Jackie a look signaling alert, but she’s got her head down, focused on giving everyone an equal amount of sauteed vegetables. Hayden approaches Rozanov from behind, hoping to stop the inevitable meltdown that will surely occur when Rozanov tips his hypersensitive child over the edge; but when he gets closer, he picks up on their conversation.

“—and this one’s *theraphosidae*. They’re my favorites.”

“Yes?” Rozanov nods his head, like he has any idea what the fuck Arthur is talking about. “Why is this?”

“Well, they’re really fuzzy, but the fuzz isn’t fur. It’s a defense mech-ah-nis-him—”

“Hey buddy,” Hayden approaches timidly, rounding Rozanov’s broad shoulders so he can meet Arthur’s eye. “I know you love your insects—”

“Arachnids,” Arthur corrects solemnly.

“Right, Arachnids. Um, but maybe Rozanov here—”

“Ilya,” Rozanov corrects him with matched solemnity.

“I’m sorry, what?”

Rozanov points a thumb at his own chest.

“Is Ilya.”

Hayden gives him a withering look.

“Um. No. It’s not. Anyway,” he turns back to Arthur, “I’m not sure our *guest* here,” Hayden spits the word out like poison, “is much interested in learning about *Arachnids* before dinner.”

“No, no. It is okay.” Rozanov pats Arthur’s hand, the one holding open the book, and Hayden visibly flinches. “We were having a good time with the spiders, yes?” He smiles at Arthur,

then looks past Hayden's shoulder at something. "You don't have to worry, Pike. I'm good with shy ones." For a second, Hayden thinks Rozanov is *winking* at him before he hears a scoff from behind his shoulder. He turns, only to find Shane standing directly behind him, wearing an expression that can only be described as *fond*.

Hayden's given no time to explore *that* look too deeply. Jackie calls them over for dinner, and Hayden finds himself seated between his wife and Amber's high chair. Sam is on Jackie's other side. On the opposite side of the table sits Shane, then Rozanov (seated directly across from Sam) and Arthur. Ruby and Jade had initially begun arguing over who gets to sit next to Uncle Shane until Jackie satiated them both by telling them they could sit at the heads of the table (the queen's position, according to the twins). Arthur keeps the book open in his lap, seemingly determined to study his bugs throughout the meal. Hayden would scold him for not tuning into family time, but thinks better of it. Maybe he doesn't want his kids tracking their dinner conversation too closely this evening.

"Full house," Sam jokes cheerfully, sending Hayden a wink over Jackie's dinner plate.

"Mm," Hayden hums through his first mouthful of food. Maybe, if everyone eats fast enough, he can feign fatigue and get Rozanov out of his house as quickly as possible.

"Is good chicken, Mrs. Pike. Thank you," Rozanov says politely, shoveling another bite into his mouth. Hayden waits for the insult to follow, but it doesn't, and Jackie smiles.

"Thanks, but it was all Hayden."

"Ah, well then, in that case, could use a little salt."

"Hey man, come on! You just said it was good."

"Ilya," Shane chastises, sending Rozanov a *look*. Rozanov huffs, rolling his eyes, then, for the first time in Hayden's life, he hears something he never thought he'd ever be gifted the chance to hear. Rozanov *apologizes*. Not to him, to Shane. But damn if it isn't a close second. Jackie clears her throat, turning to Sam.

"Shane here cooks a lot. He makes the best chicken parm."

"Oh? Is that so?" Sam tears her eyes away from Rozanov to offer Shane the fraction of a second of interest she probably feels he deserves.

"It's just my dad's recipe," Shane mumbles, shoulders tensing up beneath the heavy eyes of everyone at the table.

"Is very good," Rozanov beams. Sam's eyes snap back toward him like a compass pointing North.

"Oh? You've had it?"

"I have!" Ruby pipes up from her end of the table. "Uncle Shane's food is the best!"

“And what about you, Ilya?” Sam asks smoothly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. “Do you cook?”

Shane snorts.

“If you consider DoorDash cooking, then yeah. He’s great at it.”

“Hey! I resent that,” Rozanov sniffs haughtily, turning his nose up in a playful manner. “I make delicious borscht. And I have it on good, ah, ah—”

“Authority,” Shane offers. Rozanov snaps his fingers in glee.

“—authority that I make excellent sandwiches.”

“Wow,” Hayden deadpans. “Real charmer.”

Rozanov shoots him a glare. Surprisingly, so does Shane.

“I’m sure you’re very busy,” Sam offers, reaching for her glass of wine and smiling directly at Rozanov over the rim. “With all the travel you have to do for hockey, hardly leaves you any time to relax.”

“Is true,” Rozanov nods with false solemnity. “Shane here has not known this word since 2008, I think.”

“She was talking about you, jackass,” Hayden mumbles around his bite of chicken. Jackie shoots him a glare. *What?* he mouths back. She rolls her eyes, turning back to the conversation at hand.

“Hey! I know how to relax!” Shane defends himself, turning to Rozanov bodily.

“Right! Yeah, Shane’s got a little cottage outside of Ottawa,” Jackie pitches in, a little too intensely. “You have jet skis and stuff out there, right, Shane? He goes every summer,” she finishes, speaking to Sam directly.

“Ah, yes, our little Shanya, the definition of ‘fun.’” Rozanov teases, smiling at Shane fondly.

“At least his ‘fun’ isn’t splashed all over the tabloids,” Hayden snipes. Rozanov just shrugs, stabbing at a piece of chicken and popping it into his mouth nonchalantly.

“Not all of us have an army of children we need to come home to, Pike. Some of us enjoyed our youth.”

“‘Enjoyed?’ Like past tense?” Sam asks curiously. “And are you looking to settle down now?”

Shane is openly glaring at Sam by the time she wraps up her sentence. Hayden and Jackie share a panicked look. *What do we do?* Hayden reads in the wiggle of her eyebrows. *How the fuck should I know?* He sends back via a complex twitch of his lips.

“Ah, I don’t know. Entire child army looks like a lot of work...”

Shane’s grip on his fork relaxes by a fraction. Hayden feels... very confused. Rozanov, notorious womanizer, isn’t exactly flirting back. In fact, it sounds like he’s deflecting.

“Well, you don’t start with the kids,” Sam winks, not catching on to the awkward atmosphere.

“Shane’s great with kids!” Jackie pipes in, almost hysterically. “He babysits for us, like, all the time.”

“It’s true!” Jade nods enthusiastically. “He plays lots of games with us. And cuts our apples into stars. And he lets me be Princess Elsa even though Daddy accidentally bought me the Anna costume for Christmas.”

“Oh?” Rozanov perks up, turning to Shane with a wide grin. “Do you play princesses too? Surely there are pictures.”

“Uncle Shane is not a princess,” Ruby butts in, completely serious. “He is a prince. The boys are princes.”

“But— but what if I want to be Elsa?” Arthur asks quietly, peeking out from over the edge of his bug book.

“Okay, *fine*,” Ruby huffs, “All the boys *except Arthur* have to be princes.”

“I don’t know,” Rozanov says around a bright smile. “I think you’d make an excellent princess.” Rozanov boops Shane on the nose with his index finger like that’s a totally normal, hetero-friendly thing to do. Hayden shakily chalks it up to his eurocentricism and ignores the burgeoning panic rising from his gut, a task proving to be increasingly difficult when he spots Shane’s responding smile.

“Shut up, idiot.” Spoken way too fondly.

“Ilya, do you want kids?” Sam tries, pulling the two men from whatever small bubble they’d found themselves in. Rozanov clears his throat, tearing his eyes away from Shane’s like it physically pains him.

“Ah, I don’t know. Maybe? I am not sure I’d be the best father.”

“I think you’d be a good father,” Shane says to his plate, refusing to meet anyone’s eyes. “I’ve seen you with kids. You’re great. Patient.”

“Right,” Hayden snorts. “Because that’s what I think of when I think ‘Ilya Rozanov.’ I think *patience*.”

“Is true,” Rozanov says with a flourish of his hand. “I am the poster boy of *zen*.”

“No, I think that’s definitely Shane.” Jackie turns to Sam. “Did I tell you he does yoga?”

“Jackie, oh my God.” Shane squeezes his eyes shut and slumps into his seat. Hayden loves his best friend, really, he does, but he’s not exactly putting his best foot forward right now. He truly has no idea what kind of spectacular, autistic rizz this man used to pull Rose Landry last winter, but it clearly had an expiration date.

“Is true, I’ve seen it. Knows all the complicated poses. What was that one I caught you in the other morning? ‘Doggy style?’”

“Ilya!” Shane hisses, sitting up ramrod straight in his seat. “It’s called ‘down dog!’”

“Oops,” Rozanov giggles—*giggles*— and shrugs. “My bad.”

“Wait, what were you doing at Shane’s the other morning?” Hayden asks, gaze ping-ponging between the two men in confusion. Shane wears a look that can only be described as “mildly constipated.” Rozanov’s a little smoother, but still slightly panicked.

“Well, they’re friends, right? I mean, you guys showed up together, so I assumed…” Sam gestures toward them, trailing off when she catches the *look* Jackie’s sending her.

“They’re *not* friends. We hate the guy, right?” He turns to Shane, looking for backup, but Shane won’t meet his eyes. “Shane, right?”

Shane shrugs half-heartedly, staring down at his empty plate intensely.

“I don’t exactly hate him…”

“Wow, such a romantic,” Rozanov smiles warmly, knuckling Shane’s jaw gently.

“Would you fucking stop, you weirdo?” Hayden seethes, fork clattering to his plate. “I still have no idea what you’re even *doing* here!”

“Oh!” Sam’s eyes widen by a fraction, her stare shifting between Rozanov and Shane rapidly. “Oh, I—”

“Shane’s just really nice,” Jackie supplies, resting a reassuring hand atop Sam’s forearm. “He’s very forgiving when it comes to people who’ve wronged him.”

Sam rests her free hand on top of Jackie’s, staring at her with deep sympathy.

“Jackie, sweetie. Respectfully, I do not think that’s what’s going on here.”

“I—” Jackie looks around the table, eyes landing on Shane. “What?”

“I’m gay,” Shane says, rapid-fire. He lets out a deep breath, staring down at his plate before squeezing his eyes shut and bringing both palms to them. “I’m— shit, guys, I’m sorry. I’m like, really gay.” Rozanov turns to him, rubbing his upper back with the palm of his hand. The final puzzle piece slots into place, and Hayden suddenly feels the manic urge to rip his own hair out. He feels like he’s watching a train wreck play out in slow motion as Rozanov’s hand travels up Shane’s spine, resting at the base of his neck. He leans forward, getting

directly in Shane's personal space, and whispers something quietly in Shane's ear. When he pulls back, he locks eyes with Hayden, and Hayden knows, he *knows*.

"Oh, God," Hayden groans, burying his head in his hands. "Christ, Shane, no. Please, no."

"Pike," Rozanov warns, voice sharp, all teasing leached from it in the timespan of two seconds.

"Not him," Hayden ignores him, airing his grievances to the table top. "*Anyone* but him."

"Wait, what?" Hayden peeks his head up to see that Shane's done the same. They lock eyes across the table, Shane looking wary. "You don't care that I'm gay? Just that it's—" He gestures vaguely toward Rozanov, who shoots Hayden a malicious wink. Hayden's going to strangle him.

"Are you—" Hayden clears his throat, tries again. "Are you *sure* you're gay? I mean, what about Rose? Or that whole thing with Boston Lil—" He cuts himself off, dawning horror washing over him when he catches Rozanov grinning at him, wide and salacious. "Oh, *God*."

"I am *so* sorry," Sam cuts in, saving Hayden from voicing his grievances any further. "Ilya, if I had known you were taken, I promise I wouldn't have even *tried*—"

"Ilya?" Jackie squeaks. "We brought you here to meet Shane!"

"Ah, yeah, well," Sam blushes and ducks her head bashfully. "I mean, c'mon, Jackie. You know I have a type."

"Yes," Hayden groans into his palms. "Raging douchebag."

"That's an insult to my taste," Shane mumbles.

"Well, your taste is *bad*!" Hayden's head shoots up, and he glares at Rozanov with enough force to burn through a thousand buildings. Or so he wishes.

"Wait, so you are not angry that Hollander is gay?" Rozanov asks, completely unhelpfully. Hayden blanches.

"What? No, of course not! I could give two shits about him being gay. It's *you* who I have a problem with. Did you put him up to this?" He leans forward, gaze hardening as he hisses, "Are you blackmailing him?"

Rozanov, to his utter shock (and horror), starts to laugh. He wraps his arm around Shane's shoulders and plants a sloppy kiss on the side of his head. Hayden tries very hard not to vomit on the spot.

"Sweetheart, you have very good friends. Very loyal. I think maybe you have nothing to worry about."

"Yeah, only your plotted death," Shane grumbles. Rozanov waves his hand, like Hayden's animosity is a phantom pain.

“He may join the long line.”

“Well, forgive me if I’m not ready to be his best friend,” Hayden says to Shane petulantly. “Until like two minutes ago, I thought you were at the front of that line.”

“So, this is why you brought Roza— Ilya by tonight?” Jackie asks timidly. “You wanted to introduce us to your...”

“Boyfriend,” Shane supplies shyly. Rozanov is positively beaming.

Arthur looks up from his bug book, glancing over at Rozanov with a shy but curious expression.

“Does that make Shane your—”

“Yes,” Rozanov nods, interrupting him. “My princess.”

“Jesus fucking Christ,” Shane and Hayden groan in unison.

“If I recall correctly,” Sam pipes up, “doesn’t your household have a swear jar?”

“Yes,” Jackie says, glaring at her husband. “We’ll be settling debts once everyone leaves.”

Hayden points an accusatory finger at Rozanov.

“Oh, c’mon now, he’s been swearing up a storm this entire night!”

“I did not know about this ‘swear jar,’” Rozanov says to Jackie. “From here on out, no more swears.” He puts a hand over his heart, thumb and pinky finger curled inward. “Scott’s honor.”

“It’s *scout*, babe,” Shane supplies helpfully.

Rozanov shakes his head.

“No, I swear on Scott Hunter. Is older than institution.”

Jackie lets out a quiet snort of laughter, and Hayden sends her a quick eyebrow message. This one’s easy to decipher:

Traitor.

“You won’t, like, say anything, will you?” Shane’s turned his attention toward Sam, who’s been watching their banter with a soft smile on her lips.

“Who me? Babe, I work in PR. I know how... delicate these things are.”

Shane breathes out a sigh of relief, glancing up at Rozanov like he’s some sort of beacon of hope.

“Does this mean we get *two* uncles now?” Ruby asks, standing on her chair and leaning forward excitedly.

“Yeah! Two babysitters when mommy and daddy want their ‘alone’ time?” Jade follows.

“Hey! Who told you to call it that?” Hayden asks, morbidly feeling a blush rise to his cheeks.

“Um, you did,” Ruby supplies, completely unhelpfully.

“Ohohoho, man. Wow. That’s a lot of revelations for one night. Maybe we should call it?” Jackie laughs nervously, glancing around their table at each of their guests.

That’s how Hayden finds himself standing at the entryway, waving off Sam and— God, he’s gonna choke— *Ilya*. Ilya, who kisses Shane’s cheek goodbye. Promising to wait up for him at the house.

Yuck.

It’s just Shane and Hayden left, standing awkwardly at the front door. Shane scratches the back of his neck, staring down at his shoes like he’s waiting for Hayden to say something. Which— shit— he probably is.

“Listen, man. I’m, uh, I’m really happy for you.”

Shane peeks up through his lashes.

“Really?”

“No, you’ve got the shittiest taste in men. But I don’t, like, care that you’re gay or anything.”

Shane smiles bashfully, glancing back down at his shoes.

“He’s really not that bad... once you get to know him, at least.”

“Yeah, sure. I’ll take your word for it.”

“Really,” Shane rebuts, meeting his eyes now. “I mean it. I want us—” He gestures around them, both at nothing and at everything. “I’d like it if we could hang out, you know? You, me, Jackie—”

“The devil.”

”Hayden.”

“Okay! Okay, fine. I get it. I’ll—” Hayden sucks in a breath, tilting his head back to stare at the ceiling as he speaks. “I’ll try, okay? I just— shit, man. I just need a little time to wrap my head around it, that’s all.”

Shane lingers, fingers tugging at a loose thread at the hem of his shirt.

“So we’re okay?”

Hayden takes a deep breath, then steps forward, pulling Shane into a rare but needed embrace. Shane hugs him back, tight,

“Of course we’re okay,” Hayden says to black tufts of hair. “You’re my best friend, Shane. Nothing’s gonna change that.”

“Hey, Pike!” Rozanov yells from his rolled-down window. “You’ve got three seconds before I step out of this car!”

Hayden flips him the bird from behind Shane’s back.

“I’m gonna kill him.”

“Please don’t,” Shane laughs, pulling back with a smile on his face. “I love him.”

“Gross,” Hayden replies. There’s no bite to the insult, though. He knows he’s smiling too.

End Notes

yes, sam is a character i stole from sex and the city. no, i will not be taking any questions at this time.

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