

besides you're a northsider now

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by [hansdevice](#)

Summary

“I... don’t know how to say this,” Shane starts, slow, like he’s speaking to a wounded animal. “Honestly, I’m not sure how she found us, really. Maybe you should sit down, baby.”

But Ilya doesn’t get a second to sit down, because the door behind Shane is opening, and Ilya is turning around, and—

“*Zdravstvuyte*,” says the girl. “Uncle Ilya?”

Sometime in the future, Ilya & Shane have a visitor.

Notes

hello!

a quick disclaimer: as you can probably tell from my writing, i don't speak russian. i've tried to use websites & videos to translate words rather than google, but i'm sure there are mistakes. i am so sorry in advance. this is also why the conversations any characters have in russian are italicised (also for readability).

happy reading! i hope you enjoy :)

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

SOMEWHERE IN OTTAWA, MARCH, 2029.

Ilya is changing their daughter when the doorbell rings. She's lying on her back, this beautiful, tiny thing of his, and she looks up at him with wide, curious eyes.

"Da, *malyshe'n'ka*," he laughs. "Our family have not learnt how to knock. It is relief you are such a good girl, otherwise doorbell may have startled you."

She makes one of those gorgeous little noises, legs kicking, like she's trying to refute that statement. Ilya finishes with her jumper and frees her little hands. He makes no move to answer the bell: distantly, he can hear Shane's footsteps on their floorboards, can hear the click of the front door opening, his husband's low voice mumbling something. Their late-afternoon visitor is probably Yuna or David, sneaking over to see their granddaughter.

"*I cannot blame them*," he whispers to her. They are trying this new thing, he and Shane, where Shane speaks English and the occasional French to their daughter, and Ilya talks to her in Russian. Ilya read about it in one of his parenting books. He forgets, sometimes; talks to her in a little bit of both, but she is this brilliant thing, their daughter: Ilya can see that intelligent spark in her eyes. He knows she is beginning to understand them, at all times, in every way.

"Ilya?"

Ilya sighs. "There is your father. You will have to grow up fast so you can tell him to stop ruining our moments together, yes?" He presses a kiss to her forehead. "That is joke. Please never grow up." He hoists her up to his hip, presses her little stuffed rabbit into her hand, and opens the nursery door.

Shane is coming down the hall. He keeps getting better with age, his boring husband. Still the same man Ilya fell in love with, but now with a body Ilya knows the stories behind. He has laugh lines now, these little etchings either side of his mouth that Ilya himself put there. This older Shane is a roadmap of their relationship: the skin around his eyes crinkles like soft paper when they're flirting, when he tilts his head back and sees Ilya and their daughter watching him down on the ice.

Ilya's long since traded his stick and gloves for diaper bags and Hungry Caterpillar books, but Shane is still going strong. It's stupid, really, how good he is at hockey at his elderly age. He's older than Scott Hunter was when he was playing, but is still a valuable player for the Cens.

"Yuna?" Ilya guesses. He bounces the girl in his arms. "She will be pleased: her granddaughter is finally wearing that lumpy thing she made. Maybe do not tell her it is because we ran out of alternative clothes."

Shane doesn't laugh. He's frowning, actually. Subconsciously, he tugs their daughter a little closer to him, shifts his body so she's right in the middle of them both. "Oh. Sorry. Something is wrong?"

Shane opens his mouth. Closes it. And then, scariest of all: he steps forward. Lays a gentle hand on Ilya's shoulder. Ilya's stomach drops.

"I... don't know how to say this," he starts, slow, like he's speaking to a wounded animal. "Honestly, I'm not sure how she found us, really. Maybe you should sit down, baby."

But Ilya doesn't get a second to sit down, because the door behind Shane is opening, and Ilya is turning around, his darling girl wide-eyed and clutched in his arms, and—

Mama is in the doorway.

Mama, with her big eyes and strong nose and zig-zag lips she passed down to him. That wispy dark hair, ivory skin. For a moment, Ilya's heart is ripped out of his chest and transported to a colder climate. For a moment, he is twelve again, trying to wake her for dinner.

But — no. that soft jaw is not his mother's. Nor is that heavy browbone, those hard, steely eyes.

Oh, Ilya realises. *Oh*.

"*Zdravstvuyte*," says the girl. "Uncle Ilya?"

Yeva does not grow up knowing her uncle. She does, however, know his wealth.

She lives in an apartment nicer than anything any of her friends have: this sprawling suite, decorated with ornate gold embellishments. Ostentatious art pieces, high-backed leather couches, plush beds with thousand-thread count sheets. Her father says it's theirs, but when he misplaces his ashtray and burns a hole through the rug, they do not replace it. The amber liquid in her father's bottles runs dry, and it does not refill.

It's at these moments, when the bottom of the bottle is visible, that she learns the most about her uncle. Her father's younger brother, this *skarednyy* traitor who abandoned them all. Money up to the eyeballs and then some. Who could have spent his fortune on the people that raised him, but fled to America and then Canada instead. A coward. A lazy, spineless scumbag. When money begins to dry up and they have no more paintings left to pawn, the name of Yeva's uncle is thrown to the fire, and his ashes keep the house warm.

For a long time, she believes it. Why shouldn't she? Her father's word is truth: Yeva grows up seeing her father's name — Rozanov — in the streets of Moscow, spread across the shoulders of hockey fans, and the story adds up. She catches the occasional clip from a friend

in school, flashing past on a TV screen: Rozanov, cocky and winking, gloves off and charging like that rabid, angry bull her father had described.

Time passes, and Yeva grows older, and the jerseys begin to fade. Her father trades his regular insults for ones she hears thrown around by politicians. The TVs stop circulating clips. The story still makes sense: this faraway fantasy uncle who had angered her family first, their country second.

And then Yeva turns eighteen, and the bank gives her a call.

And there is no possible way the *podonok* she grew up hearing about can possibly be the same person as Ilya Rosanov.

Shane puts on a pot of tea. If it were any other occasion, Ilya would crack a joke about how he's thirty-eight going on eighty-nine, but he's not sure he has the words in him today for it.

His husband steers him to the living room, one hand on the small of his back, the other wrapped around their daughter. It's a good thing Shane takes her, because Ilya is on another planet.

"You okay?" Shane mutters, bending low into his ear. "I can show her out. You say the word."

Dimly, Ilya is aware he's shaking his head. "No," says a voice not quite his own, and Shane gives him a little squeeze before retreating to the kitchen.

The girl swims in front of him. A reflection of his mother, first, his father, then Alexei. He'd left when she was this tiny thing, her trust a future promise too far away to imagine Alexei being able to hold it. Her presence now is a glaring reminder at how long he's been gone from them all, how the world has kept on turning. Russia did not freeze over when he boarded the plane for the last time: it has had Summer and Spring and Autumn, a thousand moons rising and falling, a million heartbeats ticking by. What does his city look like now? The school he learnt his letters in, the bar he lost his virginity in, his father's cold house? Is Polina still alive? Is his mother's—

His niece coughs. "*I'm sorry to intrude. This is probably a bit of a shock.*"

It's Russian, Ilya realises. She's speaking Russian.

It's weird. Shane's semi-fluent now. Yuna and David are conversationally passable. Even the Cens know a fair amount — mostly the good words — and Ilya is so, so thankful, so grateful, but he is always teaching them, and they are always lagging a little behind. Unable to keep up with his fervent rambling, the way speaking Russian is like coming home for him.

And here is his niece. A little piece of home. The words so natural in her mouth. Ilya pinches himself, hard on his thigh. Focus, Rozanov. Do not lose her, too.

"You're not intruding." The words fall fast, like they'd been sitting behind his teeth, waiting to fall out. *"Can I get you anything? Food? Are you hungry? We have leftovers."*

"No, thank you," says Yeva. *"I ate on the plane."*

"Ah. Long flight?"

"USA first. Bus across the border."

Shane chooses that moment to reappear with the tea: a gifted teapot he hasn't remembered they'd had. Little decorative cups, a tiny pitcher of milk. He disappears through the kitchen doorway and comes back in with their daughter, sets her up in her little high chair with a little pot of something puréed. Shane feeds her a spoonful. The first bite makes a successful landing. The second is swatted out of midair and lands ungraciously with a loud *splat* on the hardwood floor. Yeva laughs.

"She's gorgeous. How old?"

"Nine months in September," Ilya grins. He cannot keep it quiet: she is the key to his soul, the other chamber of his heart that Shane does not already occupy. He grins. *"She's your niece. Full circle, huh?"*

Yeva smiles, but it's this wobbly, quiet thing, and Ilya feels his heart go cold again. *"I should apologise,"* he finds himself saying. *"I wasn't there. I didn't ... seek you out, either. Try and find you. I should have."*

Yeva shrugs. *"You were busy,"* she says, nodding at the baby. *"I don't think Papa would have let you, either."*

Ilya nods slowly. *"How is he?"* It's a poor stand-in for what he actually means. How are you, how was living with him, is he still the same as when I cut him off and ran.

She shrugs again. *"What was he like for you?"*

She looks incredibly childlike, in this moment, sitting in the middle of his couch, sagging into the loved cushions. Mug of tea clasped in her hands, nail polish chipping. Clothes still rumpled from the plane. He knows nothing about her, but he can see a similarity in those hunched shoulders, the red bits of torn cuticle by her thumb, forefinger, in the way she asks him about his experiences instead of trying to fumble through an explanation she has not herself come to just yet.

Ah, thinks Ilya. *I am the adult now.*

"I don't want to put any thoughts in your head," says Ilya, slowly. *"If he has changed. You know. But there was a divide between him and me."*

He tells her, in semi-censored words, the truth: his youth, how angry Alexei and his father were, how Ilya was disgusting and selfish and dishonourable if he lost but lazy and arrogant and callous if he won. Rising through the ranks of hockey with his father's fist in his collar, with Alexei by his side. Two policemen. When the decision presented itself — KHL or the NHL — he'd picked a choice that at the time he hadn't realised was to save his skin.

He tells her of the wired transfers. Ten thousand dollars. Fifteen. Twenty. Month after month of direct debit and sudden payments after late-night phone calls. More and more and more money upon the cash already dolled out to Alexei to care for his father, pay for his medications, keep a roof over all their heads. Shoves and screams and violence when he'd go back to Moscow, more, more, more.

He tells her about his father's death. The last straw. How the last thing he'd said to his brother had been about Yeva's trust, locked out of reach until her adulthood. How he had turned his back and fled to Canada. How Shane had been there with open arms. How they had built a life together, hiding but open later. How Russia had shut itself off to him then, tried to extradite him home to face charges of a crime he did not commit. The struggle for Canadian citizenship. Marriage to Shane. Starting a family. Retirement.

Their baby girl cries out then, bored of her mush, and Shane stands up to let her out. He catches the glimmer of wetness in his husband's eyes before he turns away, and his heart clenches again.

"I'm sorry," Ilya says, to her or him or maybe both. *"I'm sorry I wasn't there. I don't know what Russia is like anymore. I don't know what they've told you about me. But that's the truth."* He licks his lips. *"Family means the world to me. I would — I would have come home if I could."*

Yeva picks at her fingernail, the sharp edge of her index finger scratching at the little square of polish left on her thumb. *"I'm sorry,"* she says, and he shakes his head, but she is a Rozanov, and she wears the stubborn firmness on her face as firmly as he does. *"I didn't fly all the way over here because I don't believe you. It was more to thank you, really."* She swallows. *"And to ask you to take it back. Please. If you could."*

Ilya freezes. *"The money?"* She nods. He shakes his head. *"Yeva, it's yours. I would've — fuck, I would have spent it anyway. I would have loved to spoil you. Please. I won't take it back."*

A flash of misery crosses her face. *"But I don't know you,"* she pleads, looking so young again. *"I don't ... Papa was so horrible to you. And you ... Uncle, I can't take this. I can't."*

Ilya hesitates — and then, fuck it, crosses the space between them and sits beside her on that square of couch. Takes her worried, tiny hands in his. Somewhere, he has a flash of memory: of him holding her as a small thing, his daughter's age and then a little older. Of Yeva crying in the background of Alexei's phone calls. *Ilya, think of your family. I have mouths to feed.*

"The trust is already in your name," he tells her. *"You have been its sole owner since I transferred it. I couldn't take it back even if I wanted to."* He gives her hands a squeeze. *"You don't have to use it. Keep it for university, if you're going. Clothes. A house, eventually. And*

if your father tries to take any, call me. We can move it offshore. I will teach you how to spend it quickly. Sports cars. Good food. It's an art form, you know?"

She laughs wetly. *"Thank you,"* she sniffs. *"Thank you. Really."* And then: *"I am going to university, actually. So that could be helpful. Papa can't pay, and I didn't get a scholarship."*

She goes a little red, just across the bridge of her nose. Like Ilya does when he's embarrassed, when he firmly denies the capacity of Russians to blush.

"Tell me more," Ilya says, squeezing her hands again. *"If you want. You're always welcome here. Shane, he bought this property, and it has too many bedrooms. Take one off my hands. Please."*

She laughs louder, this full, happy sound, and then her niece does too: more of this warbling guess at what a laugh should be, but a happy bubbling noise nonetheless.

And Yeva stays.

She stays two nights — more than she'd allotted in her travel time. They talk about everything they'd missed: Yeva's parents, sure, but her life — school friends, education, the upcoming commencement of her Bachelor's degree, the rest of her North America trip before she heads home. The boy she likes back home in Russia, this loud and funny footballer who really isn't that good, but who is kind to her. Ilya winks and tells her the good bars. Tells her of his own escapades, in Europe and here in Boston, Canada.

Eventually, Yeva has to go. Ilya drives her to the airport: her overnight bus goes from there.

"Thank you," he tells her, in the airport parking lot. *"It's been so good, getting to know you."*

"I know," she grins. *"Who knew I had a fun uncle?"*

He helps her with her bag. Walks over to her bus stand, cap low on his head so no one will spot him. *"I'll come again,"* she says, toothily. *"And you can follow my Instagram."*

"I have a secret one," he grins. *"But — yes. Come again. Anytime. Seriously."*

Yeva boards the bus. He stays until it drives off, waving at her through the back window, even if he can't see her through the heavy tint.

When he pulls up back home, Shane is there, bouncing their daughter on his hip. *"I love you,"* he whispers, and they kiss, their daughter pressed close between them. *"I'm proud of you. So proud."*

Ilya stands there, on the front porch of his home, the home that he built, arm in arm with the love of his life and his beautiful daughter, their growing world. *"I never thought I'd see any of them again,"* he says.

When he cries, Shane is there to hold him.

Later, a Yeva Rozanova with the area code +7 reaches out to him on Whatsapp. She's sent two messages: one, a photo of a weathered headstone, a printed out picture of a baby girl next to it. The other, its caption: *Introducing Grandmama to her granddaughters.*

It is this beautiful thing, Ilya thinks, through streaming tears. This family he gets to rebuild, even when doors are closed. This world he has cultivated, against it all.

End Notes

hope you enjoyed! kudos & comments make my day. feeeeel free to leave some if u like :)

translations below (again, i am so sorry, they are probably wrong:

zdravstvuyte - (formal) hello

malyshe'ka - (term of endearment) baby girl, little one

skarednyy - stingy, tightwad

podonok - scum, bastard

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