

## Shades

By: Morgan Laidlaw

"My biological parents are Russian, I was born in Russia, but I was adopted by an American family when I was an infant. So, I grew up here, all I remember is here, but I've always wanted to have some sort of connection to Russia and my... I guess my Motherland. So, when I went into the Russian Literature and Culture program as an undergrad, I was looking for something tangible that I could grasp onto and put into myself. Something about which I could say: *yes, I recognize this. This is part of me. My cultural history. This is something I share with my birth parents.*"

The older man laughed again, with a soft edge of self-ridicule.

"But I never really found anything," he said, "There was no sort of personal enlightenment or revelation. But as soon as I got knee deep in language study, I got caught up in all the other aspects of language and culture, and forgot about it. Until recently that is. While I was in Russia over the summer, I tried looking for my birth parents. But nothing really came of it."

He had let the address of the adoption agency sear a hole in his chest, bigger the longer he held onto it and did nothing; his nervousness was betrayed by his hands and the way his Russian had become sluggish and impossible with the secretary at the front desk. She looked at him suspiciously before excusing herself to get her manager, an American woman with dark hair and kind eyes.

"Hi. How can I help you?" she asked in English.

"Hello," Shura sighed, "My name's Aleksandr Schaer. My parents adopted me through your agency. I was hoping you could give me the contact information for my birth parents?"

"Do you have the paperwork your parents filled out with us?" she asked.

"I didn't know I needed it."

The woman gave him a “knowing” look, “Do your parents know you’re looking for your birth mother?”

Shura resisted the urge to become curt with the woman. He was twenty-six, he wanted to tell her, and old enough to make his own decision to seek out his birth parents. But instead he just shook his head. The woman irritatingly sucked in a breath through her teeth.

“I’m sorry,” she said, “I can’t give you that information, especially without that official paperwork.”

“Can’t you look up my parents’ paperwork by my last name?” Shura asked, but the woman shook her head.

“We have a double blind process to protect the identity of the birth mother and the adoptive parents. Even if I did look up your parents’ paperwork, I don’t have access to the files on the birth parents of children. Those are kept off-site and can only be accessed through an official request signed by the adoptive parents.”

“But they’re my parents,” Shura argued, “don’t I have the right to know who they are? What if I needed their genetic medical information?”

“Do you have a letter from a doctor to that effect?” she asked.

“Well, no. But still.”

The woman shook her head, “I’m sorry. Without a signature or a letter from a doctor to that effect, there’s nothing I can do.”

The woman studied him and set a gentle hand on his shoulder, “Maybe you should think about who your real parents are, your birth parents, or the parents who love and raised you.”

Shura didn’t bother shaking off her hand. “*Thank you,*” he mumbled in Russian and left.

“Were you disappointed?” Nicho asked, “That you didn’t find anything?”

Shura contemplated for a moment.

“I was,” he admitted.