Inside the Monkey Habitat

by Miral (Maldiscontent)

Summary

Blue blood by birth, she's middle class by choice. He's the heir to a publishing dynasty. They've loved each other since college but oy with the hang-ups. For him, it's family responsibilities; for her, it's feeling trapped. So they said goodbye. But how do you stop a love written in the stars? Post-AYITL.

Notes

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The Rehearsal Dinner

London, England, Piccadilly Ritz Carlton, Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 6:00 pm GMT

The four long-time friends stood by the entrance of the dining room, while the pre-rehearsal dinner cocktail hour commenced. They watched as guests continued to filter through the Ritz Carlton courtyard into the Music Room.

"There's a lot of pink here," observed Colin glancing around the room.

"Yes. Very 'In the Pink Barbie," nodded Finn.

"What do you know about Barbie?" Logan replied, taking a sip of his scotch.

"You'd be surprised by what Finn knows about Barbie." Robert raised an eyebrow. "I've seen the photos."

"I resemble that remark." Finn raised his glass. "Don't give me that look. I don't have a fetish. I do, however, have a niece."

"Yeah, yeah," Logan nodded. "Well, the room may have some pink, but it's not as bad as the Marie Antoinette Room, which looks like a turn of the century brothel." Of course, the Marie Antoinette Room was his mother's favorite of the Ritz private dining rooms.

The Music Room, the room booked for the Lamontagne-Huntzberger rehearsal dinner, was the largest banquet room in London's Piccadilly Ritz-Carlton. With twenty in the bridal party, spouses, relatives, and must-invites swelled the number to well over 100. Although his mother had wanted the Marie Antoinette Room they had had to settle for the Music Room.

The Louis XVI styled room was decorated in a mix of soft pastel hues of pink and green. Sparkling crystal chandeliers dangled from the intricately detailed ceiling, while soaring windows ensured the room was awash in natural light. As he took in the chandeliers and domed ceilings, Logan conceded to the room's charms, and made a mental note to reassure his mother. It was a beautiful room.

"So our Logan's getting married. You think you're ready? Daddy, I'm tired!" Finn slapped Logan on the back and laughed.

"Disturbingly, it's not the first time you've said that to me," laughed Logan.

"Ah, princess alert." Finn's eyes were following a pretty young woman in wearing green. "A redhead. So fair..."

"Isn't that your date, Finn?" Robert gestured to a woman standing near the aforementioned redhead. "What's her name again? Suri?"

"It's Suri. Well, actually it's Pam but her stage name is Suri. She thought it would help with the casting directors if she played up the Xenu connection."

"Is she a Scientologist?" Logan asked.

"Oh, of course not! Knowing Finn, she's probably Presbyterian." Colin interrupted "Logan, do you actually know any of these people?" Looking at Logan, Colin gestured with his hand to the well-
dressed guests making their way around the room.

Logan snorted. "No, including my colleagues I introduced you to earlier, you know everyone I do. As for the rest, they're either new cast member or Arcade Fire."

At his friends' blank stares, Logan shrugged. Wrong audience.

"Rosemary and Juliet coming?" asked Colin.

"Not tonight. They're both invited to the wedding. Plus ones included, of course."


"Another reunion. We should plan out a little Life and Death Brigade fun."

"At my wedding, Finn?" Logan shook his head, grinning. "Besides, I don't think we can top the last one."

"How about a picture? Groom, his best man, and ushers?" The photographer stopped in front of the four. Unaccented and American.

"Sure, Raul." Logan glanced around the room. "We'll get one with Josh later."

"Probably had to carry Honor's handbag for her while she went into the loo," surmised Finn.

Logan chuckled. "Ease up, Finn. He's not that bad."

As the four men allowed the photographer to position them, one cast a speculative, appraising glance at the photographer.

"So, Raul is it?" Colin stared at the photographer with an eyebrow lifted questioningly. "Where are you from? Raul?"

"New Haven," he barked. "If you could just come around here. I think you should be next to Logan." He positioned Colin to the left of Logan, while Finn and Robert flanked them on either side.

Colin frowned. "It's because I'm short. I know."

A bemused smirk fell across his face as Logan turned to face the camera. Finn, Robert and Colin likewise halted their words to turn and smile perfunctorily at the camera.

After the photographer left to take pictures of the other dinner guests, Colin turned to Logan. "So Raul?"

Logan snickered. "Shira was unwilling to risk any screw-ups with the 'rehearsal dinner of the century'. She insisted on bringing a few vendors from home."

"Ah, so Raul."

"Raul." Logan nodded, taking another drink. Recognizing several newly arrived family friends and relatives entering the room, Logan shifted his gaze, smiling in greeting.

"What did your bride think of Shira's imported scabs?" asked Colin.

Logan and Finn both barked in laughter.
"Only you would view Shira Huntzberger's neuroses as a union-buster, Colin." Logan laughed, shaking his head. "Let's just say Odette is Niccolò Machiavelli when it comes to knowing which battles to take on and which to ignore. Protection of international labor agreements doesn't make the cut."

"So which battles will the future Mrs. Logan Huntzberger tackle?" prompted Finn.

"Will you two be staying in your flat?" questioned Robert.

"Is she tolerating your workaholic ways?" from Colin.

"Letting you keep the private box at Ascot?" inquired Robert.

"Blind-eying your extracurricular activities?" asked Colin.

"Do you get to keep your Yale souvenirs?" In response to Logan's quizzical look, Finn cut to the chase. "Especially the lovely, life-sized one that lives in Connecticut?"

Caught off-guard, Logan winced. Ouch. He downed his drink. "You know better than to refer to Rory that way." Logan glared at his friend. "Besides Rory and I ended things." Logan gestured to a server to get a new drink.

"You've said that before." It was Colin's turn to bust his chops, a slight uplift of his lip.

"It's for good this time," Logan turned to the waiter. "Macallan neat."

Colin, Finn, and Robert exchanged looks.

"And you've said that before, too, Logan," Finn replied, a look of sympathy flickering across his face as he downed his champagne. Sensing his friend's desire that the conversation steer away from the "R" word, Finn finally obliged. "I'm suddenly and quite mysteriously reminded of your lovely New Hampshire B and B, Colin. How much did you make when you flipped it?"

A change in topic, thought Logan. Thank God.

As his three friends launched into a conversation on real estate, Logan's thoughts turned inward. As far as wives went, Logan knew it could be worse. Odette Lamontagne was beautiful, social, and came from a wealthy and powerful family. Amazingly, neither Mitchum nor Shira found fault with Odette. Very few women of their social sphere met all the criteria of the Huntzbergers' ambitions. As for his requirements, the sex was good and after knowing Odette for several years, Logan had learned how to cope with her more vapid moments. He didn't love her but he didn't expect to; he'd long ago dispensed with the idea of lightning striking twice. As for Odette, he got along well with her. That would be enough. It would have to be.

"What do you say, Huntz?"

With a start, he realized his friends had shifted conversational gears again and were watching him expectantly.

"What's that?" he asked.

"We were just talking about non-traditional wedding songs," said Colin.

"Yeah, last wedding I went to had "She's Got You High" as the wedding song." Robert sipped his gin.
"Interesting choice," conceded Logan.

"Nasty tease. Think of the guests." Finn shook his head derisively. "So what's your song?"

"Don't know," Logan shrugged, taking another sip of his scotch. "I left it to Odette. Probably some French love song. Maybe Adele. Or Rihanna."

Colin shuddered while Finn's face contorted. Robert took a swig of his gin.

"Unacceptable, Old Man. But don't worry about it. We're your mates. We've got a few days. We'll help you figure something out. You should have a wedding song we like. I mean a wedding song you like."

Logan turned to look at his friends. Finn's eyes met his expectantly while Colin chuckled.

"You're an ass but I agree with you on this." Robert commented glancing at Finn.

"Finn'll even throw on a dress and dance with you if Odette doesn't like the song," Colin smirked. "I know! How about "As Time Goes By? A classic."


"Logan's right, Colin. That song's bloody depressing! The guests'll be slitting their wrists before the bride shoves the cake in Logan's face," sniped Finn. "Everyone'll miss seeing his $500 haircut covered in fondant."

"What?" Logan's eyes squinted in disbelief. "That's you, Finn. I go to a barber shop."

"Wait. What were we talking about? That's right. Logan's wedding song."

"How about that Linda Ronstadt song?" suggested Robert.

"Linda Ronstadt? My god! Her hit? 'You're No Good'?! For Logan's wedding song! That's bloody brilliant!" Finn doubled over in laughter, spilling much of his drink in the process. "That's the most brilliant thing I've ever heard! I can't believe bloody Robert suggested it!"

Logan cast a sideways glance at his increasingly loud friends.

"No, not that one," Robert gave Finn a scornful look. "The one with strings."

"Strings?" asked Finn. "Do I know this song?"

"That one's about unrequited love," Colin pointed out, ignoring Finn.

"So...?" replied Robert.

"I'm not sure it's appropriate."

"You don't think it applies?"

"Well, who's the song for exactly?"

"So, considering who'll be at the wedding, you think it isn't right?"

"Don't you mean considering who won't be at the wedding?"

"Oh for the love! Stop! I'm so bloody confused right now!" An exasperated Finn exploded. Ignoring
Robert and Colin, he summoned a waiter to bring fresh drinks.

Logan, like Finn, had no idea what song Colin and Robert were talking about. He could only watch silently as his friends sipped their drinks. For a brief moment, he actually thought they were done. No such luck…

"All right," nodded Finn. "That one's too complicated. My head's exploding and I still don't know what song it was. How about that old one that goes – la la la 'if you can't be with the one you love, love the one you're with, la la la...like that...?'"

Logan snorted. "Very amusing."

"Good one, Finn," Colin patted the Aussie's shoulder in approval. "That's definitely uncomplicated. But have you considered Odette will jump us if we play that at her wedding? If I have to get another knee surgery with all those male nurses hovering around me– "

"Logan, you've got to stop being so fussy." Finn took a sip from his glass.

"Yes. Huntz is putting more thought into selecting the wedding song than he put into selecting the bride."

"Don't have to put any thought into which of the groomsmen is landing facedown in the garden."

"Now, now. Stop bickering you two. As for songs, my brain is a jukebox –"

"- and little else – " added Colin.

"- and my gingko biloba's kicking in."

"Among other things." Robert muttered under his breath.

"I got it! How about 'Stuck in the Middle with You'?"

"How about we use that for your wedding song, Finn?" laughed Logan, patting Finn on the shoulder. "The right woman is out there waiting just for you."

"Oh, she's waiting for him all right. To bust her out of lock-up." Colin polished off his drink. "Question is where. My bet's on Bedlam."

"Could be Sing Sing," Robert added.

"Gentlemen, I thank you for your suggestions. I'm pretty sure Shira and Odette and possibly even Elias—"

"Rising from the grave-?"

"— would have a fit if you ruin their million dollar party with tacky 70s music."

"But those songs are iconic! Beyond compare!"

"Oh, poor little rich boy Logan! Don't even see it as your party?"

"It is what it is." Visualizing the scene at the wedding with the festivities grinding to a halt as Woodstock took over, Logan laughed with genuine, albeit sardonic amusement.

Catching his sister's eye across the floor, Logan waved.
Honor raised a brow in silent communication. Are you okay?

Nodding, Logan responded with a real smile. He loved his sister and didn't want her worrying about him. It's all good.

All good. In 72 hours he'd be married. While he'd spent much of his 20s fighting against the machine, fighting against the expectations, fighting against his family, he was done with that. Following the market crash of 2008 and the death of Elias in 2010, it was an older if not quite wiser Logan who agreed to return to the family fold and resume his role at Huntzberger Publishing Group in London. Ever a pragmatist, and aware of the realities of life as a Huntzberger, the energy, enthusiasm, and confidence he'd used to build his own life, first with Rory and then in Palo Alto, had long since morphed into a resignation that his aspirations would likely always be tempered by the responsibilities attached to his birthright.

Losing Rory in his 20s left him deflated. Losing Rory again the previous year had sealed his fate. While he'd managed to dodge his preordained life a few years beyond college, those days were long gone. He wasn't escaping it now. Denied his true desire, he had spent the past eight months resigning himself once more to his future with Odette.

At the sound of a familiar feminine laugh, Logan's head darted around. Odette, her dark hair upswept in an elaborate chignon, stood several yards away, chatting with friends. Their eyes catching, Logan grinned and raised his glass to his wife-to-be.

Returning the smile, Odette sent him two air kisses. Trying to respond in kind – if not in actual air kisses across a crowded room - Logan widened his grin.

Yes, this was his life now. It wasn't a bad life. It was what it was. And it would have to do.

An hour later, seating for dinner had finally commenced. Logan, Finn, Colin, and Robert, not in any hurry to abandon their sub-party, remained standing, drinks in hand. Waiting patiently, they looked on as around them, the other guests began to settle at their tables.

"I suppose that vacancy over there is for you." Finn motioned with his head to the empty seat beside Odette.

Silently Logan nodded. Yes. In three days Odette would be his wife and his place would be by her side. Forever. Forever started tonight, apparently. Staring at the liquid in his glass, his eyes took on a glazed look.

"Well?" Colin roughly shook Logan's shoulder.

"Well, what?"

"Are you gonna get that?"

With a start, Logan realized his cell phone was buzzing. Removing it from his pocket he glanced at the screen. He recognized the area code as a common Connecticut number. It was similar to one of Rory's past numbers. Before he could answer, the phone went silent.

Shrugging, he took a step towards his table. Absently he nodded as Colin and Finn commented on the table settings and menu. Phone still in hand, the second time it buzzed, he answered without a second glance.

"Logan Huntzberger."
"Logan. Thank God you picked up."

Startled, he recognized the voice immediately— even though it was someone he hadn't talked to in over ten years.

"Lorelai?"
London, England, Piccadilly Ritz Carlton, Wednesday, May 17, 2017, 7:00 pm GMT

Mystified as to why Rory's mother would be calling him, Logan realized belatedly that every bit of this confusion was likely playing out on his face. Observing that his father- seated midway across the room, talking business with Odette's father- had taken note of his own standing form and was starting to shoot curious looks in his direction, Logan quickly masked his features.

"I'm sorry to call you out of the blue like this," Lorelai continued quickly. "But I really had to talk to you. And it's urgent or I wouldn't be calling you because, hey, why would I be calling you?" She paused to breathe. "Is now a bad time?"

Logan nearly laughed at the question and its ill-timed irony. Had things gone a different way, this woman would've been his mother-in-law. Instead of being on the phone five thousand miles away, Lorelai would've played a starring role at his wedding.

Lorelai's voice sounded the same, he mused, the cadence the same. There was, however, something about her tone. He sensed that it was more than just nervousness at talking to her daughter's former boyfriend for the first time in a decade. To be honest, he couldn't imagine a world in which he made Lorelai Gilmore nervous. Whatever it was, it wasn't his. And whatever it was didn't sound good. What would prompt Lorelai to call him? He could only assume it was about Rory and that it wasn't good. He knew, under normal circumstances, he wouldn't make Lorelai's short list.

"No, it's fine." Ignoring his father's increasingly icy stare, now joined by Odette's curious gaze, Logan motioned to Colin, Robert, and Finn that he was ducking out of the ballroom to take the call.

"Important business," he whispered to his friends as they continued to wander in a haphazard fashion, albeit haphazardly in the general direction of their assigned seating.

"Nice try, Logan," Colin whispered back.

"We heard you. Hope all's well in Connecticut." Finn's eyes belied more than his words.

Robert's gaze met Logan's.

Ignoring them, Logan made his way outside the ballroom and into the hotel's open courtyard.

"I'm sorry," Logan said. "I'm at an event. Just looking for a quiet place to talk." He refrained from elaborating as he moved further into the courtyard's interior and away from the open doors that led to his and Odette's reception.

"Oh." Lorelai fell silent. After a moment, it sounded like she was going to say something but then stopped herself. After a second false start, Logan wondered if the usually loquacious Lorelai was actually at a loss for words.
"Lorelai?" He came to a stop at the far edge of the courtyard.

"Logan, I'm sorry for disturbing your evening. I wouldn't be calling you if it wasn't important."

"Yeah. I get it, Lorelai. Don't worry about the dinner. It was just a business thing." He let out a breath. "So what's going on?" As he listened closely to her growing silence, his eyes fell on a rose bush. "I gotta say you're making me nervous here, Lorelai." He felt something settle in the back of his throat. Ignoring it, he forced from his lips the thought that was echoing in his head. "Is Rory okay?"

Logan heard Lorelai take a steadying breath. When she finally spoke, he could hear something heavy in her voice.

"Yeah, Logan. Rory is fine but there is something I need to tell you and I don't think you're going to like it. You're probably gonna be pretty upset, actually. You may wanna yell or punch a wall or curse like a sailor -"

"Lorelai..." What was going on? "Lorelai, why don't you just tell me whatever it is you have to tell me? And I promise I'll keep it together?"

"No, no. I'm not saying you can't react and you can't scream or punch something, a wall or hey, maybe that dad of yours. You totally can do any or all of that stuff. If you need to react – and I think you'll need to – you should. But you need to hold off on it for now and hear me out."

Reining in his increasing trepidation mixed with impatience, Logan managed to keep his voice even. "Agreed," he replied. "Now tell me what's going on."

"Okay, so here it is…the last time you and my daughter hooked up on one of your transatlantic booty calls, you made a baby. And that baby – Lucas Richard Gilmore - was born this past Monday."

"What? What?" What? Stunned, Logan loosened his tie and sank onto the brick bench that served as the retaining wall for the flower garden that ran along the courtyard's perimeter. Staring at the patio's multi-colored brickwork pattern, Logan struggled to wrap his mind around Lorelai's news as a tense silence settled over them. After a few moments, he was finally able to speak. "What the hell, Lorelai?! You're telling me I have a son? Rory and I have a son?" Closing his eyes, he attempted to count to ten. He made it to five. "Why are you calling me with this now? Why didn't Rory call me? Why didn't Rory call me months ago?"

"Hey. You remember what you agreed to? Not more than two minutes ago? I'm holding you to it, Logan. I get that you're upset. And confused. And you're justified in feeling that way, but there's no time for that now." Lorelai let out a breath. "This isn't about you. You get that? And Rory tried to tell you. Maybe next time you shouldn't ignore your messages...Anyway you'll have to discuss that with Rory. It doesn't matter now. The only thing that matters is Lucas."

Suddenly it clicked. The timing. Since he last saw Rory at the end of September and now, the middle of May. Not nine months. More like seven and a half. In an instant, he understood. What Lorelai wasn't saying was becoming increasingly clear.

"Something went wrong, didn't it, Lorelai? That's what this is all about? Something went wrong- " Logan slumped as he sat, his free hand on his forehead. A visceral pain unfurled inside him, starting in his stomach and rolling upward to his chest. His breathing now coming in irregular spurts, he struggled to push out the words. "Is Rory...?"

"No, no. Rory's okay. I promise. Yes, she's had some...she's okay now. But the baby was born a
So he had a child. A baby boy. A premature baby boy. Rory's okay. So that meant…

"It's the baby," Logan breathed.

"Yeah." He could hear the tension in Lorelai's voice.

Prior to that moment, if anyone had posed the hypothetical to him, asking him to describe what he'd feel if he one day learned that he not only had a child but that the child was sick, maybe even dying, he'd be hard-pressed to predict the emotion that would emerge. Lacking a connection to the child, he would've guessed the loss would be best characterized as a sad, but mostly indifferent sense of regret. But as he concentrated on breathing, he felt that giant tidal wave in his stomach rise upward once more, threatening to close off his breathing. The reality was Logan didn't know what he was feeling but he knew it was far from indifference.

Opening his mouth, he was surprised when no words came out. Clearing his throat he tried again.

"Where's Rory? Where is he?" At this mention of the little boy that was his and Rory's son, Logan's voice cracked.

"St. Joseph's in Hartford –the 80 Seymour Street building. Maternity is on the 6th Floor."

"Rory's okay?" He needed to reassure himself of that, at least. He'd never forgive himself if anything had happened to her on account of him.

"Rory's okay. The baby's in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. She hasn't been able to hold him yet. She's scared." The line went quiet. "She wanted me to let you know. She wanted you to know so you could come and see him – if that was what you wanted to do."

She wanted you to know so you could come and see him – if that was what you wanted to do. Lorelai's words repeated in his head. Did Rory honestly think that he wouldn't want to come?

As Logan continued to sit, he glanced up. His eyes fell on the doors he had exited a few minutes earlier. All the guests were probably seated, including his own friends, who'd likely exhausted their delaying tactics. Peering at his watch, he reasoned that, given the time, the first course had either been served or would soon be served. Realizing he was staring blankly at the exterior of the hotel, he made a conscious effort to rouse himself; shaking his head, he attempted to battle the inertia that seemed intent on keeping him rooted to the patio.

"Logan? You still there?"

"Yeah, I'm still here. Listen, Lorelai, please tell –" Logan hesitated, his eyes not straying from the dining room entrance. What could he possibly ask her to tell Rory?

"Listen, Logan. I don't know what's gonna happen - but I want you to know that I think you coming would actually be good. Good for Rory. Not that my opinion should make a difference one way or the other – this is between you two. But…this…I know she'll be relieved she can talk to you in person."

Closing his eyes, Logan contemplated the situation. What exactly was he going to do? He was supposed to get married in three days. Three days. It was quickly approaching, but, on the other hand, he still had three days. Three whole days. He had no idea what -if anything - Rory wanted from him or would accept from him. But, a lot could happen in three days. Look at what the last five minutes had delivered. But he needed to leave now.
"Lorelai, tell Rory I'll be there as soon as I can get a flight out of London."

"Good. And Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"Remember, when you get here, if you need to yell or curse at someone, yell and curse at me. Or better yet, talk with my mother. God knows she'll be excited to see you. But Rory…Rory’s really going through enough right now."

"Got it. I'll be in touch, Lorelai."

"Okay. I guess we'll be seeing you soon then."

"Yeah. Guess you will."

Rising slowly from the bench, Logan clicked 'end call' and started to make his way back to the reception. Still stunned, he shook his head, a half-smile frozen on his lips.

Lucas Richard Gilmore.

After the call with Lorelai, Logan debated whether it would be better to return to the ballroom, make up an excuse and leave; or to just disappear without a word. He didn't trust his father - or Rene, for that matter - to not pepper him with a lot of questions. In terms of overbearing, Mitchum Huntzberger had met his match in Rene Lamontagne. Logan knew executing his departure without arousing suspicion would be impossible without a strategic partner.

Decision made, Logan navigated his way back into the ballroom to seek out his fianceé. He knew the instant Odette spotted him. Rising from her seat, she sailed towards him in her off-white lace designer gown. As she approached, he returned her smile. He couldn't deny that his fianceé was a beautiful woman.

"Where'd you disappear to?" Her accent was slight, diminished by years spent in America and in the company of Europe-based American ex-pats.

Fortunately -or unfortunately - coming up with stories to explain absences to Odette was something Logan had acquired practice with over the past couple of years. There was one deal he'd been negotiating solo. Since no one - not even Mitchum - knew anything about the proposed purchase, he could say whatever he needed to about it; no one could blow his story.

"Bad news." He gave her a solemn look. "The acquisition of the multi-media company in Ukraine hit a snag."

"It's not right to work at our rehearsal dinner."

"Better than working on the actual wedding day."

Odette sighed. "I suppose. So what are you doing?"

"I'm heading into the office. It'll be easier. All the files are there. I'll probably be back before the first entree has been cleared. Okay?" He looked at her. It might not be the worst thing to lay down a few truths. Once she knew the full story, she'd probably be grateful to have dodged a bullet. "This is what it's gonna be like being married to me. You know the hours I work. You may as well get used to it."

"I know," she sighed. "I guess. Don't take too long."

"I'm only gonna stay as long as I need to." Not exactly a lie. "I don't wanna deal with Mitchum right now. We disagreed on the Ukraine acquisition and I don't wanna get into it with him. I'm gonna just head out. If he asks, let him know I've gone to the office. Okay?"

"Sure," she nodded. "I'll tell them we're delaying the toasts until after dinner."
Logan mentally winced. Odette was going to be disappointed when he didn't come back. She might even be disappointed if they wound up not getting married, something Logan was increasingly starting to believe might be the case.

"I'll see you." He leaned in to give her a quick kiss on the cheek.

Odette smiled and then turned to rejoin her friends.

As far as he was concerned, he'd made his excuses to the one person he needed to. Everyone else could wait. Looking in the direction of his friends, he made eye contact with Finn, Colin, and Robert. As he made his way out of the ballroom into the hotel's Grand Hall, he saw them following suit.

"What's going on, Logan?" asked Colin.

"Excellent question."

"Does it have an excellent answer?"

"Yeah, mate. Where're you off to? Does it have to do with your favorite Yale souvenir?"

"Yes," Logan debated on how much to tell them but Finn, Colin, and Robert had been privy to the details of his life, including his on and off relationship with Rory, for a long time. Besides that, he knew they cared about her. "Rory had a baby two days ago."

"A baby?" repeated Finn.

"And this effects you...?" asked Colin.

"It's my baby. Lucas Richard Gilmore."

Logan let that sink in. He couldn't help but be amused at his friends' dumbfounded expressions. There was a reason he routinely trounced them at poker.

"New Hampshire."

Following a moment of shocked silence, Finn was the first to react.

"My God, Logan!" Finn scowled. "I thought you said 'buck her up' not 'knock her up!'"

"I'm with Finn on this," Colin shook his head. "I can't even say this is vintage Huntzberger. You really outdid yourself this time."

"Keep your voices down." Logan smiled at some dinner guests moving past them a few yards away.

"How'd it happen?"

"It was admittedly a magical time, Finn. But I'm pretty sure it happened the usual way."

"It was an accident."

"Accident or fate?"

Logan chose to ignore Finn's remark.

"I have to say - that's a fine cap to a Life and Death Brigade event. You've got quite the ten-year bookends, Huntz. You nearly died in Costa Rica. Ten years later, you create a Little Huntzberger to
carry on the family Life and Death traditions."

Logan swiveled around to glare at Robert. "Are you crazy? No son of mine is gonna pull that shit."

Taken aback, his three friends stared at him silently.

Logan had no idea where that outburst came from, but his annoyance was quickly escalating into anger. "If any of you could do any math whatsoever, you would've realized the baby was born early. He's in the hospital."

"Ah, Logan." Finn's voice was sympathetic. "I'm sorry, mate."

"I don't know anything beyond he's in the intensive care unit and Lorelai sounded worried."

"We know you're used to doing whatever you want but you do remember you're getting married in three days?" pointed out Robert.

"I know I was supposed to get married in three days."

"Hold on. What about the pre-nup?" asked Colin. "Wasn't there something in there about ensuring the progeny of the merger - I mean, marriage - are the 'only heirs to the kingdom'?"

"Yeah," Logan nodded. "Something like that."

"So the baby's existence invalidates the pre-nup." At Logan's nod, Colin continued. "So what happens when your new father-in-law catches wind of this?"

"Good question. You went to law school. Figure it out."

"But I didn't pass the bar."

"Who among us would ever pass a bar?"

"Cute, Finn. Before you two marry, you'd have to waive parental rights," continued Colin. "Rory would have to sign off on a financial settlement and non-disclosure."

"You would do that? You'd turn your back not only on Rory but also on your son?" Robert, his crush on Rory still in place after ten years, made no effort to hide his disgust.

"It must be a cold day in hell as I'm agreeing with Robert for the first time in my life," Finn said, a sad look on his face. "I always thought you'd be more than your dad, Logan. Never had you pegged for being less."

Logan flinched. He always knew the boys liked Rory. Possibly even loved Rory. He never could've predicted a situation like this. Ouch.

"Listen - and again - keep your voices down." Logan forced a smile at several passing dinner guests. "I don't know what's gonna happen. Rory didn't tell me about...him. I have no idea what she's thinking. Lately she's been good with letting me know what she doesn't want, but not much else." He let out a sigh of frustration. "The only thing I know for sure is I'm not signing anything. And I'm not getting married on Saturday."

As the words flew from his lips, Logan knew them to be the truth.

"What're you saying? Time for a course correction?" asked Colin.
"Maybe."

"Hallelujah! I can see!" Finn called out. "You know what I always say: It ain't over till the fat lady sings. A pregnant woman giving birth should count." He paused. "Don't tell Rory I said she was fat. Women can be so sensitive." Finn's lips curled in a devilish grin. "Can I watch you break the news about Logan Jr. to Endora and the Dark Lord?"

"I'm not saying a word now. You aren't either."

"So what're you doing? Going to Stars Hollow?" asked Colin.

"Hartford actually. I have to go. I have to see them."

"You want us to go with you?"

"Ah, think of the lovely Lorelai. You may need back-up." Finn's eyebrow quirked up at this suggestion.

"I'll take my chances," nodded Logan. "No offense, but you didn't exactly make the best impression on her."

"You did?" shot back Finn.

"I'm sure whatever points I had banked have long since gone belly-up."

"What did you tell Odette?" asked Colin.

"I told her there's a problem with an acquisition I've been working on. She knows I'm taking off and may be gone an hour or two but nothing else."

"You've got her running interference with Mitchum?"

"I figure he'd ask her before he'd ask you. She knows what to tell him. You three might want to avoid him if you can."

"Logan, don't take this the wrong way, we know he's your dad, but we already do what we can to avoid him."

"Yeah, I know."

"Well, tell us what you need from us, mate."

"Colin, your family jet nearby?"

"Maisie took it to Edinburgh for a couple of days."

"Not taking the Huntzberger jet?" asked Finn.

"No. I need to keep a low profile."

"Maybe you should have thought about that before, Huntz."

"Yeah, well. Good advice. Just a few months late." He met Robert's eyes, then glanced at Finn and Colin in turn. "I need to get out of here. Don't say anything."

"Our lips are sealed," promised Finn.
"Give our best to Rory," requested Colin.

"Which hospital is she at?" asked Robert.

"St. Joseph's." Glancing at his three friends one final time, he nodded. "Gotta go." Logan turned and started to walk away.

"Logan!"

At Finn's voice, Logan turned back. "Yeah?"

"In omnia paratus."

Logan nodded, a slight smile on his lips. "In omnia paratus." He shook his head as he turned and made his way to the elevator bank. Those words had never been more appropriate.

Since he had been staying at the hotel, Logan had only to go up to his room to toss some things in a suitcase. He changed quickly – it wouldn't do to arrive at the hospital wearing a tux.

As he'd told his friends, taking a Huntzberger jet was out of the question as he didn't want anyone - his father in particular- to know where he'd gone until he was ready to explain. He knew his father could and would track him down immediately regardless of how he traveled, but Mitchum could easily ground a Huntzberger jet. Colin's family plane would've been ideal. Unfortunately it wasn't available.

Logan picked up his cell.

"International Travel."

"Hi. Could you tell me what flights you have from Heathrow to Hartford."

"Hartford in Connecticut? In the United States, sir?"

Logan bit back a impatient reply. "Yes."

"Bradley International Airport in Hartford, Connecticut. When are you planning to travel, sir?"

"As soon as we end this call."

"Oh! Are you at Heathrow already?"

"No."

"How long do you need to get there?"

Glancing at his watch, Logan grimaced. Usually the drive would take about 35 minutes. There was no way in hell he'd be able to tolerate a ride going along with the posted speed limit. "Let's say 20 minutes."

"There's a 7:55 American Airlines flight that gets you in at half past noon."

"Noon? Tomorrow?! That's direct?!"

"Oh, no! Hartford doesn't get many direct international flights. If you're willing to fly to the New York metro area-"

"But that doesn't get me to Hartford, does it?"
"You could take a taxi from JFK to Hartford."

Damn. Logan let out a sigh of frustration. This was why Huntzbergers had private jets. "What time is the New York flight and what time does it get in?"

"It's British Airways and it leaves at 8:50, getting in at 11:00 pm New York time."

It was 7:35. That gave him a little over an hour. "Fine. First class."

"Yes, sir. Do you have a frequent flyer account?"

"Tell you what, don't bother with that. Just book the flight. I'm kinda in a hurry here."

"Oh! Yes, sir. I'll just need your credit card number."

Three hours later found Logan safely ensconced in First Class. The taxi ride had been brutal, fraught with traffic jams seemingly every step of the way. But then the queues opened up. With his frequent traveler status, he was able to breeze through security. With his First Class ticket, he boarded the plane immediately. It wasn't until he'd finally taken his seat that he realized the sense of urgency that had been propelling him since he'd hung up with Lorelai was also what had been keeping him calm. Absent that urgency, now alone with his thoughts, his mind took on a rather unfamiliar restless quality.

Leaning against the seat back, Logan closed his eyes and tried again to process what Lorelai had told him. Following that initial burst of anger, shock had taken over, effectively blotting out all other emotions. Now that the wave of shock had subsided, and the adrenaline that had galvanized him into action was no longer needed, he couldn't help but acknowledge his anger.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Logan couldn't understand Rory. He couldn't understand why she hadn't told him about the baby. Yes, she had wanted to end things between them. He had reluctantly agreed that - considering everything - it was the logical thing to do. But this was so beyond the two of them. This baby was as much a part of him as he was a part of her. She didn't have the right to keep the baby from him. And she knew as much.

Even though she had finally called -or, rather, she'd told Lorelai to call - he had a hard time shaking the suspicion that he'd received that call only because there was a fear that the baby wouldn't survive. If the baby had been born on time, how long would it have taken him to find out? Would Rory have kept it a secret from him forever if she could have? Would she have just let him remain in London, oblivious? Maybe a mutual acquaintance would've dropped the bombshell eventually. Maybe they would've been thrown together at a Yale alumni event. Maybe she would've mentioned it in her book acknowledgements.

Damn.

"Hey," he waved down the flight attendant. "Could I get a scotch neat? In fact, make it a double."

The female flight attendant, attractive and blonde, smiled at Logan. "Yes, sir. Please let me know if there's anything at all you need."

Logan frowned. That kind of cloying attention was absolutely the last thing he needed. "Just the drink. Thanks."

In addition to the fear that Rory hadn't wanted to -and had the situation been different—wouldn't have told him he had a son, Logan couldn't help but feel blindsided. Had Rory told him about the baby months ago, he could've planned for it. He could've been in Connecticut. He could've made
sure she had the top doctors. He could've made other arrangements. He certainly wouldn't have agreed to finally setting a date for the wedding.

Praemonitus, praemunitus. Forewarned is forearmed. Maybe not as catchy as in omnia paratus but in some ways, better.

Finding out now – after the baby was born – the only thing he could do was react. His hands were tied for the next six or seven hours since he was stuck in the air. Ignorant of what was going on with Rory, and not daring to think about his son, there was little he could do but imagine the many ways in which his life in London was likely imploding at that very moment. Not only had he gone AWOL from his own wedding rehearsal, it would soon become apparent he'd gone AWOL from his wedding, as well.

Not that his absence from London mattered. If he hadn't pulled the plug on the wedding, Rene Lamontagne would have. Logan snickered at the irony.

A Lamontagne relative had been taken to the proverbial financial cleaners by a mistress suing for child support, palimony, breach of contract, everything under the sun. This situation – having arisen not long before the Huntzberger-Lamontagne pre-nup was crafted – fed not only Rene's paranoia, but also hours of legal research and contract wrangling. The end result was any out-of-wedlock children were to be fully disclosed and financially provided for prior to the wedding.

Of course, the true irony was that had Logan had any children, any heirs, he would not have conceded to the marriage in the first place. So the timing of Lucas' birth was beautifully, miraculously timed. Even if a little early.

The flight attendant brought over his scotch. Smiling, she wordlessly handed it to him. Logan accepted the proffered glass in silence.

Taking a sip, he considered calling Lorelai to let her know he was on his way. He mulled over the idea for a few minutes. What if she told him something bad had happened? What if the baby hadn't survived? If that was the case, what could he possibly say to Rory's mother? Would Rory even want to see him? What was he supposed to do? How could he not see Rory, even if she didn't want to see him? Rather than open a potential pandora's box, he decided against making the call.

Logan's mind still on Lorelai, he couldn't help but feel some trepidation at the accusations left unsaid during their brief call. Even though he and Rory were in their thirties, and far from being reckless college kids, he fully expected Lorelai to excoriate him when she saw him. As far as she knew, he had gotten Rory pregnant and then returned to London to marry another woman. Viewed under that light, it was pretty damning.

Contemplating his son – Lucas Richard Gilmore, he reminded himself – he wondered about the baby's condition. Maybe it wasn't as dire as Lorelai made it sound? But he knew Lorelai. And he knew Rory. He couldn't imagine the situation being anything other then as presented. There was no angle. No game. Rory had given birth prematurely and the baby's health - for whatever reason - was currently perceived as touch-and-go.

Logan took another mouthful of his scotch.

As London faded in the distance, so too did thoughts or concerns about what was unfolding there. Ever rational, Logan couldn't help but acknowledge that he should've been more concerned about the ramifications and the fall-out from his hasty departure. But in those minutes of quiet solitude miles above the earth he couldn't force himself to contemplate outcomes he cared little about, just as he couldn't force himself to feel emotions he didn't feel.
Logan sighed as he looked blindly out the window into the darkness of the Atlantic skies. Smiling wryly, he thought of Rory. With little warning, everything in his well-constructed life was suddenly turned upside down. For the first time in a long time he had no idea what tomorrow would bring. He smiled. He couldn't help it. This was always the reaction Rory Gilmore elicited. Since he was twenty-two and she nineteen.

Again he wondered at Rory's reason for not telling him about the baby. What possible excuse could she have? What excuse existed that made it understandable, much less acceptable?

But none of that mattered if the baby didn't pull through. And if Rory told him to take a hike. If those two things happened, he could theoretically return to London immediately. All he needed to do was come up with a story for Odette, and the wedding could go on as planned. Not this Saturday but maybe a week from Saturday or a month from Saturday.

If that was what he wanted. If that was what Rory wanted. It wasn't lost on him that what Odette wanted was not even a consideration. He felt his throat tighten.

Finally done with his rather admittedly pathetic naval-gazing, Logan realized he had a second wind. He chuckled silently. It was the kind of second wind you only get when you're surprised with the knowledge that the woman you love has given birth to your son.

Logan powered up his laptop. He had plans to make. The flight would put him in New York at 11:00 pm. The drive to Hartford would take at least two hours putting him in Hartford at one in the morning eastern time. Since he obviously would not be staying at the Huntzberger estate, he needed to book a hotel room. Settling on the downtown Marriott, he reserved one of the hotel's few luxury suites. Next he brought up a florist shop website. Clicking around the website, he grimly realized he couldn't send anything until he knew more about the baby's condition. No flowers. No teddy bears. He'd have to wait until he understood the situation and make due with gifts from the hospital shop.

Glancing at his watch he saw that it was 11 pm in London, and only 6 pm in Connecticut. He again considered calling Lorelai and again nixed the idea. It was too late to change course. He was going to Hartford regardless of anything anyone said to him.

You jump, I jump…

Considering how to best use his time before his arrival at JFK, Logan made a mental note of things to research. Common complications afflicting premature babies… Best Neonatal Intensive Care Units in the northeastern United States… Connecticut forms for establishing paternity… DNA tests for establishing paternity… But first he needed to ensure the rest of his trip went without a hitch.

Pulling up a contact from his cell, he powered up the in-flight phone.

"Hi, Logan Huntzberger here. I haven't used my account in years since I've lived mostly in London. I'll be arriving at JFK at 11:00 tonight. How about I get a car to Hartford? …Great…Does Frank still work there?...Yeah, if he's available, that would be great. I'd like to have him on call for the next few days, based out of Hartford…"

Hours later Logan walked out of the British Airways Terminal arrivals. Still apprehensive about the baby, the research he'd done while on the plane had put his mind somewhat at ease. He pulled out his cell and switched off airplane mode. As he'd expected, nearly everyone he knew had blown up his phone. He had voicemails from Finn, Colin, Lorelai, Odette, Honor, and his father. As for texts, he had a very lengthy and berating message from his father. There was also a three-word text from Lorelai.
He's doing better.

Logan's eyes closed in relief. Three simple words.

He's doing better.

Clicking 'reply' before he could talk himself out of it, he typed a response.

Very relieved to hear that. I'll be at the hospital by 9 am

Stepping out into the balmy New England air, Logan didn't waste a second in making his way to the taxi queue.

He's doing better.

Seeing his former driver standing next to a limousine, he waved. "Hey, Frank!" he smiled. "It's good to see you."
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Thursday, May 18, 2017, 8:45 am EST

Unexpectedly, Logan slept soundly that night. He was grateful for that. During the two hour ride from JFK to Hartford, he'd decided not to listen to any of the voicemails except the one from Lorelai. Lorelai's message basically gave a few more details to her text. Apparently, since Lucas had been born nearly six weeks early, his lungs weren't fully developed. Breathing tubes had been inserted into his nose to help him breath. As a result, he'd also been having difficulty swallowing and so they had been feeding him via a feeding tube. Since he was finally able to swallow better, they were planning on removing the feeding tube.

Thursday morning, at 8:45, Logan, upon exiting the hotel lobby, spotted Frank right away.

"Morning, Frank."

"Good morning. So, St. Joseph's?"

"Yeah, the 80 Seymour Street building."

"Got it." Frank pulled the car away from the curb. "Should I wait? Do you know how long you'll be staying?"

Logan nearly laughed in response to Frank's very practical question. He realized anew he was incapable of predicting any part of the day that lay before him. "I may be there all day. How about I text twenty or so minutes before I'm looking to go?"

"Sounds good."

Within minutes, Logan was exiting the car in front of the 80 Seymour Street building entrance.

Hesitant, he turned and watched Frank drive away. Standing there alone, Logan knew his zero hour was quickly descending. Rory. Lorelai. Emily. Luke, Rory's stepfather. Rory's friend Lane who'd let him have an earful on the phone the summer before. Maybe even Rory's father, Christopher, though last he'd heard Rory and her dad weren't particularly close.

Pausing on the walkway outside the building entrance, Logan stood in the morning sun, allowing its rays to warm his face. Nervousness was an unfamiliar feeling. Brought up in a protected environment, he had been raised to be fearless, untouchable. That perception was not false. There was a team of lawyers to solve any problem. There were resources to pull in any medical professionals necessary. There was always money to bail him out of any jam and make sure he was brought home safe every time.

Even when he had every reason to be guarded - like when his internet start-up imploded in a cascade of lawsuits - he still had approached the endeavor like the blueblooded teflon don his father had
raised him to be. The thought of his father brought to mind thoughts of his son. What role would he have in raising Lucas?

He figured it was not a coincidence that the few times in his life he had felt nervous had to do with Rory Gilmore. Unlike nearly everything else in his world, Rory was never a done deal. She was never a given; she always had to be earned and, very often, re-earned. Looking back, he could easily tick off the times in his head. Getting Rory to give him a chance to be her boyfriend. Persuading Rory to take him back after their split. Convincing Rory to forgive him for the bridesmaid fiasco. Managing to keep their relationship going after his graduation.

But he always lost when the stakes were highest. The disastrous post-graduation proposal. And then, of course, last year. He grinned remembering Rory's name for it.

Mr. Toad's Wild Ride.

Now he didn't know what the future held. But apparently Rory and he shared a son. Mindful of the promise Lorelai had managed to extract from him, he was making a conscious and recurring effort to talk himself out of jumping to conclusions; he was trying not to get angry. He didn't know why Rory hadn't told him about the baby. He did know he would be asking her that very question as soon as he saw her.

Deciding it was time for his sub-party of one to end, Logan finally made his way through the building's revolving doors. Allowing his eyes to adjust to the indoor lighting, he observed the hospital's lobby. He noted the lounge area to his left, the Au Bon Pain - he knew he could at least pick up decent coffee for Rory- beyond the lounge, an elevator bank to his right, a security guard stationed by the elevators, and finally, directly in front of him, the information desk.

As he walked up to the counter, he spotted a familiar form already standing there. Although she looked slightly older, the woman also looked more fit and surprisingly tan from the last time he'd seen her. Aside from that, she seemed very much the same. In that instant of his perusal, she glanced up from her handbag and their eyes met.

"Logan! I didn't expect to see you here." Her opinion of his presence at the hospital was made all too clear by the acid dripping from her tone. Logan mentally braced himself. He had no idea what Rory had told her grandmother about the nature of their relationship.

"Emily," nodded Logan. Recognizing that defending himself to Rory's grandmother was likely an exercise in futility, Logan let her condemnation roll off him. It wasn't important he reminded himself. He continued to meet her gaze. "How's Rory? And the baby?"

"Rory's fine. Tired and worried but fine. Little Lucas is still in the NICU but yesterday turned out to be a very good day. They didn't have to ventilate him and they were able to remove the feeding tubes."

A strange feeling washed over Logan as he let out a breath. Relief. Gratitude. Awe? He'd read Lorelai's text and had listened to her voicemail. It was still very different to hear the boy's status described in real time from the lips of his great-grandmother.

Behind the information desk stood a grey-haired woman wearing a "Friends of St. Joseph's Hospital" pin. At his approach, the woman had switched her gaze from Emily to Logan.

"Are you here to visit someone in Maternity too?"

Silently Logan nodded as he turned to the woman.
"The general visiting hours in Maternity don't start until noon."

"But I just flew in from London. Can't an exception be made?" Logan gave her his most winning smile. Hearing a snicker, Logan's eyes shot over to Emily who was standing nearby, waiting.

"Oh. Well, the hours are unlimited for close relatives. So fathers, grandparents and siblings." The desk attendant explained, an apologetic note in her voice. "If you're one of those…?" She broke off as she looked at him questioningly.

Regardless of where things stood, it wasn't fair to Odette to send an ugly firestorm of paparazzi and tabloids to her door. After a brief pause, he nodded. "I'm her brother."

Emily snorted derisively.

"Then please sign in." The woman gestured to a binder. "Maternity is on the 6th floor. Just take those elevators," she pointed to the right, "and follow the signs once you're on 6."

"Thank you," replied Logan, signing his name.

"Yes, thank you," seconded Emily.

As Emily started to turn towards the elevator bank, Logan hesitated. Glancing back to the desk attendant, he noted her name-tag. "Maggie, could you point me in the direction of the gift shop?"

Before the woman had an opportunity to answer, an impatient Emily intervened.

"Really, Logan, I doubt they sell wedding bands in the hospital gift shop and I can't fathom what else you'd think an appropriate gift for my granddaughter after she just gave birth to your son."

Eyes wide the information desk attendant's gaze shot back and forth between Emily and Logan. "The gift shop is on this floor." She lifted her arm to gesture. "It's over - "

"Of course, I should know better than to expect appropriate from you - or from any member of your family," Emily huffed. "I bet Shira is going to try to palm off one of her monthly liposuction treatments on Rory!"

Caught off guard, Logan snorted. No, his mother would never do that. She depended on her monthly liposuction too much to give up even one session. The woman behind the information desk, meanwhile, was shocked into silence. Emily, Logan realized, was not just impatient; she was irate. She was also not finished.

"Honestly, I still can't believe this happened! But I guess I have to acknowledge my own culpability," Emily continued. "Richard and I should never have renovated the pool house. Imagine spending $40,000 on renovations so your granddaughter and her boyfriend have a more comfortable place to have sex!"

The woman's eyes went wide. "Well," Maggie squeaked. "It sounds like it worked!"

Emily turned to glare at the woman. "What the hell is the matter with you?" she barked. "Are you a complete moron?"

Startled, Logan snickered.

"I just meant, congratulations on the birth of your great-grandson." The woman smiled nervously at Emily before turning to Logan. "And to you. On the birth of your son." She paused, an odd look on
"Or nephew."

"Thank you." He smiled. Best to just let this go.

"I don't believe this. We're wasting valuable time here." Peeved Emily turned her ire on the woman. "Isn't it your job to provide information? Not to gossip about the hospital patients?"

"But I wasn't gossiping -"

"You are paying an inordinate amount of attention to Mr. Huntzberger's and my conversation."

"I wasn't," she glanced down at the sign-in sheet, "Mrs. Gilmore, Mr. Huntzberger..." The woman's eyes seemed to narrow in recognition.

Logan could see the wheels turn as she processed his name.

Glancing up from the binder, the woman focused on Emily. "Are you related? You do know it's the Lorelai Gilmore Maternity Wing?"

It was Logan's turn to stare at Emily. Apparently it was not his name that had struck a chord.

"Oh, you don't say? What a lucky coincidence my grand-daughter is named Lorelai Gilmore." Emily rolled her eyes. "Imagine if her name were Betty Boop, we'd still be driving around looking for a hospital."

"Yes, ma'am." The woman smiled nervously at Logan. He returned the smile. Albeit unintentional, he appreciated the way she had distracted Emily from targeting her vitriol onto him. Maybe he'd pick Maggie up something from the gift shop as well.

Emily let out an exasperated sigh. "Oh for heaven's sake, Logan, don't just stand there. Come on. Rory carried that baby for over seven months. The least you can do is make your way up to visit her and thank her in a timely fashion."

Shaking his head, Logan laughed silently. This was the Gilmores he reminded himself. With Richard's death nearly two years earlier, it was down to Emily, Lorelai, and Rory. And now his son. The 3-day-old infant on the 6th floor. The thought that he had a son still filled him with wonder. He hadn't predicted the lightness he'd feel at the news that the baby was doing better.

The Gilmores.

Logan found himself marveling that, unexpectedly and seemingly overnight, his life had become intertwined with the lives of the Gilmores. Just how intertwined was still to be determined.

Logan smiled. Given the recent modifications to the dynastic plan, he didn't think he could be faulted for feeling optimistic. He knew what he wanted. It was what he'd always wanted. And, now, there was one significant reason to ensure the plan materialized.

That would be Lucas.

But there was one important party who might still require some convincing before she'd allow herself to buy into the plan.

That would be Rory.

Logan knew it wouldn't be easy. Once more he'd have to work for it, earn it, earn her.
But he did have a pretty good track record. And now he wasn’t alone in the quest.
Fifteen minutes later Logan was on his way up to the Maternity ward. Exiting the elevator onto the sixth floor, he paused for a second to gain his bearings. As he had not taken one of the main elevators, he found himself in a narrow, mostly empty corridor. Following the noise to the floor's main desk, he shook his head and laughed to himself as he passed a "Lorelai Gilmore Maternity Wing" plaque on the wall. Finally arriving at the central nurses station, Logan positioned himself at the counter. About to ask the nurse about Rory, he stopped upon hearing his name.

"Logan told the woman at the sign-in desk that he was her brother. Her brother, Lorelai! Can you imagine? What is he? Ten? Talk about failing to live up to your responsibilities!"

"Mom, I'm sure he was just caught off-guard. His family is well-known. He's probably worried that if word got out -"

"Did he sign his own name, Emily?" That was an unfamiliar female voice. Logan fought the urge to glance over.

"What?"

"Did he sign in using his own name or did he sign in using an alias?"

"Sookie, I'm not sure how that's relevant." Ah, Sookie. Lorelai's best friend.

"Well, if he signed in using his own name, that means he's not afraid of anyone finding out he visited her. But, if he signed in as John Smith or Jack Smith - "

"What does Jack have to do with this?"

"What?"

"Sookie, mom's new boyfriend is named Jack Smith."

"Really? Emily, I didn't know you have a new boyfriend! That's wonderful!"

"He's not my boyfriend. Lorelai, stop telling people I have a boyfriend. He's my dinner companion. He's just a friend."

"Whatever," replied Lorelai. "If I don't have a problem with Daddy Jack, I don't see why anyone else would."

Logan missed hearing the next part of the conversation as a nurse chose that moment to speak to him.

"Excuse me, sir," the man addressed Logan. "Can I help you? Are you here to visit someone?"
Chagrined, Logan realized how obvious it was that he was eavesdropping on the Gilmore’s conversation. "Yes," he nodded. "I am here to visit someone. I just need to check my messages first..." Carefully he laid the gift shop flowers and stuffed animal down on the counter, and pulled out his cell phone.

“Well, let me know when you're ready." The young man with red hair and dark-rimmed glasses turned his head to peer over at the Gilmore. "Although you may never be."

Disconcerted by the man's words, an increasingly uncomfortable Logan met the man's eyes.
"Thanks." After the nurse walked away, Logan remained standing by the counter. Cell phone in hand, he pretended to check emails as he continued to listen to the Gilmore.

"And then, he goes shopping. Shopping, Lorelai! In a hospital gift shop! What's he going to buy her? A pair of orthopedic socks and a copy of the Wall Street Journal? Honestly, I have no idea what's wrong with that boy."

"It's okay, mom. I'm sure he just wanted to pick up flowers or candy for Rory."

Logan glanced at the daisies and the hideous stuffed alpaca that lay on the counter before him.

"How did he seem? Upset?" asked Lorelai.

"Upset?! Why should he be upset?! He has one woman to marry while another is giving birth to his child! He's building a harem like it's perfectly acceptable. Maybe they can all move in together like on that awful television program-"

"Oh! I know! 'Sister Wives'?"

"Not helping, Sookie." Lorelai turned her attention back to Emily. "Anyway, Mom, he didn't know. Logan didn't know about the baby. Rory -"

"What are you talking about? 'He didn't know'? How could he possibly not know? He certainly knew he was having sex with her, didn't he? I know he wasn't the best student at Yale but certainly somewhere along the way he must've shown up at a class where they explained the birds and the bees! Good grief! They teach children all about sex in songs and in puppet shows nowadays!"

"Ew. Mom, where are these freaky puppet shows you're watching?"

"Well, actually, Emily-"

Logan strained to hear the slightly muffled male voice that he assumed was Luke.

"-it is possible for a man to not know he's going to be a father. Especially if -"

"Yes, yes, Luke. This does seem to be a thing in this family," agreed Emily. "Other families have insider trading or cross-dressing uncles. We seem to be cornering the market on secret baby-daddies. How is April, Luke? I don't think I've seen her since the holidays. You must bring her to Nantucket this summer. And I certainly hope you're taking a lesson from this. Whatever you do, I'd recommend you not renovate a sex house for her."

Sex house?

"What? What sex house? Lorelai? What's your mother talking about? Do I know about the sex house?"
"Yeah, what sex house?" repeated Sookie.

"Oh my God! I can't believe we're going back to the sex house! It's been like a gazillion years since the sex house!"

"Well, not everyone knows the story, Lorelai," Sookie pouted.

Logan nearly laughed. Sookie sounded really disappointed at not knowing the story.

"All right! Fine! It's the pool house, Luke. And we're safe from the sex house because we don't have a pool much less a pool house! And before we can renovate the pool house into a sex house, we'd need to have a pool house! And for that we'd actually need a pool! And - according to Taylor - we don't have enough space in the yard for a pool! So until we move, we're all safe from the sex house!"

"Good to know," Luke paused before continuing. "So, switching gears here. We might as well talk about the elephant in the room. Lorelai, I still think it was wrong of Rory not to tell him."

"Good man."

"Luke -" started Lorelai.

"Rory didn't tell him on purpose?!" Emily interrupted. "I thought you said she reached out to him and he ignored her! How did I get that wrong?"

"Mom, Luke, she did try to let him know. She texted."

Logan's ears perked at that disclosure.

"Lorelai, this isn't like pulling together a booty buddy call! You don't text. It gives the other person the option to ignore you. We should have done it the old-fashioned way by having my lawyers serve him with papers."

What? Logan wondered again just what Rory had told her family about the nature of their relationship.

"Mom, I really doubt Rory wanted to get lawyers involved. This is a family matter and - "

"Family matter. Family matter she says." Emily huffed. "It was months before anyone told me Logan was the father!"

"Hey, she was trying to get on with her life! She didn't exactly talk much about it with me either. It wasn't like we left you out of the slumber parties."

"I still don't understand what she was planning on doing. I mean was she going to pretend that boyfriend of hers was the father? What was his name?"


"Honestly Lorelai, it doesn't matter if the man's name was Jesus or Judas, none of us can remember him. I suppose she could've let us all think Jesus was the father. Since no one remembers what the man looked like, it'd never occur to us that Little Lucas is the spitting image of Logan with Rory's eyes."

Logan sucked in his breath. He hadn't been expecting to hear that.

"Listen, Mom, Luke, I know it seems wrong that he didn't know until now," Lorelai replied. "Rory
insists she texted him a bunch of times asking him to call her and he didn't."

Logan, listening, felt his heart lurch. What?

"I don't know if she ever sent him a 'Hey you're gonna be a daddy' text. I think she was more
discreet because of live-in fiancée." Lorelai said. "It doesn't matter. He never texted or called her
back. She took that as his answer. Then with the complications, I think she just decided to wait
before trying again."

Complications?

"Oh. I didn't -" Luke started to say something when he was cut off.

"Wait? Wait for what? The baby? Or his wedding?" Emily snorted. "If that was her intention, it
didn't work."

"What do you mean?" asked Lorelai.

"He's still not married, Lorelai."

"What? How do you know?"

"He's not wearing a ring."

At Emily's words, Logan heard the group fall silent. Finally. He took that as his cue. Sliding his
phone into an interior jacket pocket, he grabbed the flowers and the stuffed animal from the counter.
Taking a fortifying breath, Logan strode the ten or so yards from the corridor side of the nurses'
station over to where the Gilmores stood in the floor lounge. Stopping at the outer edge of the
carpeted area, he was finally in full view of Rory's family.

years ago. At the hay bale thing." At her nod, he turned his attention back to Lorelai and Emily.
"Listen, it seems we need to clear the air on a few things. First, I haven't received any texts or calls
from Rory. Nothing. Not a word since we saw each other last fall. Second, Emily is right. I'm not
married. Still engaged, technically. For the moment. But definitely not married."

Comprehension dawnd as the group realized Logan had likely heard much if not all of their
discussion. Lorelai was the first to recover.

"Logan, I only know what Rory told me and she wouldn't lie about something like that. She says she
texted you. I have to believe her."

"And I agree one hundred percent, Lorelai." Shrugging, Logan gestured with his right hand, while in
his left, he held the flowers and the alpaca; he met Lorelai's gaze head on. "There has to be a
reasonable explanation. I don't know what it is. Yet. But I intend on finding out. Now that we've
gotten that out of the way, you think I can see them? I'd really like to see Rory and my son."

Incredulously, he let those words play back in his head. I'd like to see my son.

Lorelai exchanged looks with Luke and Emily.

"Well, he's here now, Lorelai. You brought him here. You can't keep him from seeing them."

"Thanks, Emily."

"Don't thank me, Logan," replied Emily with something resembling polite scorn in her eyes.
"Believe me. If you knew how much time I've devoted over the past few months to imagining you harpooned and gutted, you would not be thanking me."

Logan nodded his head slowly, considering. "You're probably right on that one, Emily."

Emily bestowed upon him a perfunctory smile.

"Okay, so..." He turned expectantly towards Lorelai.

"Logan, I'm not going to keep you from Rory or from the baby. Rory knows you were coming and she wants to see you. But I am gonna remind you that she's had a rough few days. I don't know what happened between you two, but you really need to remember that."

Falling silent, Lorelai searched Logan's eyes for confirmation.

"I promise I'll remember that, Lorelai." Again that word, complications, resonated in his mind. He didn't think talking in front of Rory's mother would make things any easier, but he also didn't need an angry, protective Lorelai on his case right from the word go. He could make a concession. Especially when he knew with near certainty Rory would veto it anyway. "Listen, if you're worried I'll upset Rory, I'm fine with you staying in the room while we talk. You can pinch my arm -or even punch me - if you think I'm crossing a line."

"Lorelai, I think that's a good idea," offered Emily. "But maybe Luke should be the one to punch him."


"Don't mention it, Luke."

Logan's eyes canvassed between Rory's grandmother and stepfather who exchanged slight smiles before turning their attention back to Logan.

Great. They choose now to become close?

Lorelai let out a breath. "Okay, let's do this."

Unbidden Lorelai's words triggered a bittersweet memory and brought Logan back to his and Rory's New Hampshire goodbye. This was a much better 'this' to be doing. A smile lit up his face.

"Let's do this," he agreed.
Several nerve-wracking minutes later, Logan found himself standing outside the closed door of Rory's room waiting for Lorelai to let him know it was okay for him to come in. From inside the room he could make out the murmur of voices. Finally, it was quiet. A moment later Lorelai opened the door.

Showtime.

Bracing himself, Logan paused in the doorway. His breath caught at the sight of Rory. Taking her in, Logan conceded that she was as beautiful as she was every time he saw her. She looked tired and a bit paler than her usual shade of alabaster, but still beautiful. Her blue eyes met his brown eyes unflinching.

"Come in, Logan," Lorelai, who was standing to the right of an empty bed, gestured to a chair on the other side of Rory's bed, near the window. "You wanna sit?"

Surmising that Lorelai would not be leaving, a slightly surprised Logan stepped into the room and pushed the door shut behind him. Glancing around as he made his way, he noted that the room's curtain divider had been pushed back as far as it could go to allow daylight to filter through the room. As the second bed was empty, Logan deduced that Rory was the room's sole occupant. Gifts - including flowers, stuffed animals, books, 'New Mommy' balloons, baby clothes - covered nearly every inch of the room.

As he stopped at the foot of Rory's bed, Logan realized it hadn't even occurred to him to think about how this moment would play out. He had been so busy mentally adapting to his new reality and physically negotiating the complex logistics of his departure and arrival, he hadn't given a thought as to what he would actually say to Rory when he saw her.

Thinking about how to talk to Rory wasn't normally necessary, although it did come up periodically during "Vegas." He hated that aspect of Vegas. He preferred the natural, easy, banter when they allowed themselves to enjoy each other. Those conversations had always been organic, fun, and free, springing up out of whatever…

The last time they had seen one another – in New Hampshire – the tone had been somber and sad, two lovers saying goodbye. And now? Despite the overarching happiness he felt at the news of his son, right at this moment he felt wary. Tense. Gazing at Rory, he could tell she felt similarly. He didn't like it and he was going to do what he could to dispel the feeling.

"Hey Ace." He forced his lips to curve into something he hoped resembled a smile.

"Hey." Rory's lips were pulled tight; it looked like she was grimacing. It occurred to him that it
could, in fact, be a grimace; no one had yet explained the 'complications'.

"You okay?"

"What?" She looked at him, startled.

"The look on your face. You're not in pain, are you?"

Rory smiled, a more genuine-looking grin. "No, I'm okay. They keep me doped up on Tylenol."

"Tylenol." He nodded. "Better watch out. I hear it's the new gateway drug."

"Really? I hadn't heard that. Thanks for the heads-up, Huntzberger."

Not moving his eyes from Rory's, Logan finally sat down. His mind still perusing memories of New Hampshire, he settled on his next words.

"I guess Mr. Toad's Wild Ride was a little wilder than originally thought?"

Rory laughed. "Yeah. You could definitely say that."

Another silence fell over them. This one, though awkward, was slightly less tense.

"What've you got there?" Rory jerked her chin to the stuffed alpaca.

"First, this is for you." He set the ceramic duck filled with white daisies and yellow spray down on the table beside her bed. "It's called Ducky Delight. I know daisies aren't your - " He hesitated, unsure of what he was trying to say. "It was slim pickings down there."

"No, they're lovely, Logan. I like daisies. But what's that?" She gestured again to the stuffed animal.

"This is Macchu the Alpaca. It's a Blabla doll. It's knit. Fake fur always seemed kinda creepy to me."

He held it out to Rory, who took it. He kept his face still as their fingers briefly touched.

"Blah blah doll? Did they have a Scott Baio?" She pulled her eyes from Logan's as she set the doll down on the bed next to her.

"Ah, the Bob Loblaw Blabla doll?" He smiled at her, shaking his head. "No, Ace."

"Oh, hon. I think a Scott Baio doll would be too creepy for Lucas. Even your grandmother gives him side-eye now."

Logan started at Lorelai's comment. He nearly snorted at seeing Rory do the same. They both seemed to have forgotten Rory's mom was in the room. Lorelai had taken a seat on the other side of Rory's bed.

"You're right, mom." Rory turned to look at Lorelai. "Momentary memory lapse. Must be the baby hormones. That reminds me." She swung her head back around to Logan. "Can't be an easy time to be in the news business."

"We're holding our own," he shrugged. "Only kicked out of two press conferences so far. Besides, alternate facts are nothing new to my dad."

"I can vouch for that. He is, after all, the one who 'gave me my start'." She air-quoted the last part of her comment.
"Air quotes?" Logan shook his head, grinning.

"I guess I need to work on my sarcasm." Rory let out a nervous chuckle. "Especially if I'm gonna be seeing him - them - at some point."

Another silence loomed. Say something...

"So, I see it only took you three days to get them to name the hospital wing after you. Cool diva move."

"Oh, yeah," she smiled. "J-Lo's got nothing on me. I've got a full rider of demands. Popcorn-flavored jellybeans delivered on the hour. All the pop tarts I can eat. No one's allowed to wear perfume within 20 feet of me. And - at night - they alternate playing Sonic Youth and the Les Miz soundtrack."

"Subversive. I like it." He nodded before settling his gaze on her once more. "You look good, Rory. Really good."

"Liar," she snickered. "I look like hell and I know it."

"No. No you don't." He shook his head. "You look...beautiful." Looking at her, he couldn't help but add what he was thinking. "As usual."

At his admission, their eyes locked and held. Lorelai cleared her throat.

Rory finally pulled her gaze from Logan to make eye contact with Lorelai. "Mom, I think we're good here."

"You sure?" asked Lorelai.

"Yes." Rory's eyes went back to Logan's. She picked up the Blabla doll and waved it around. "I'm a mom now. If Logan doesn't behave, I'll hit him with Macchu."

Logan chuckled. "Okay."

Lorelai stood, her eyes fixed on Rory. "It's your call. Text if you need anything."

Rory nodded. "I will."

Lorelai quietly made her way to the door. Peering back as she exited, she repeated, "Text if you need anything, Rory."

"Copy that."

After Lorelai left, Logan and Rory stared silently at one another. Finally Rory spoke.

"You know I tried to tell you. I texted. A bunch of times. I asked you to call me. You didn't."

Logan's face took on a quizzical expression. "So your mom said. I didn't see your texts. When did you send them?"

"Months ago," she answered. Pulling her eyes from his, she focused them on Macchu. "I didn't say anything in the texts. Just that I needed to talk to you. I asked you to call me since I couldn't call you."

Shrugging she brought her eyes back up to meet his. "When I didn't hear back from you, I figured you'd made your peace and didn't want to talk to me."

"Made my peace,?" Logan repeated incredulously. "What's that supposed to mean? And even if
you thought I hated you – which I don’t and I’m not sure I ever could – I still have a right to know I'm gonna be a father."

"Yes, and I tried to tell you." Starting to get angry, Rory's next words were heated. "Hey, it's not my fault you didn't look at your texts. It's not like I could call you."

"That's ridiculous! You could've called me! You should've called me! You can always call me! You know that! Even without the baby! But definitely with the baby! That's a damn good reason to pick up the phone!"

"First, lower your voice. Unless you want my mom or Luke in here. As for me calling...No, I couldn't. I stopped being able to call you the second Odette moved in. Remember? What if she answered your phone?" Rory rolled her eyes. "Seriously? What was I supposed to say?" Rory continued in a slightly breathless, bimbo voice. "Um, hi, Odette? This is Logan's ex-girlfriend-slash-geisha. I called to tell him I'm pregnant. Could you please put him on the phone?" It was Rory's turn to glare at Logan in disbelief.

"Well, sure, that would've done the trick. Come on, Rory. You think I care about that? Besides Odette doesn't work at HPG; she's nowhere near me during the day. You know the hours I work. There's plenty of Odette-free time for phone calls."

"I always tried not to bother you at work."

"Thank you for that," Logan nodded his head vigorously. "I appreciate you not calling me at work to tell me I was gonna be a father. You probably spared me hours of mockery for being a slack-jawed vegetable rocking myself in the corner."

"Are you serious?" asked Rory, surprised by his reply.

"No!" He shook his head. "I don't give a damn what they think about me! Maybe I would've been shocked into a catatonic state and collapsed in a heap on the floor! They could've stripped me naked and locked me out on the roof! Or stuck pins under my fingernails! I still wouldn't have cared, Ace!"

"Oh. Fine. Message received. I should've called. But you're forgetting the reason I didn't call was because I never got a reply from you. I sent you a lot of texts, Logan. And I never heard a word back. Not one word."

"Are they still on your phone?"

"What?"

"Are they still on your phone? The texts? Did you delete them?"

"No they're still on my phone."

"Can I see them?"

Rory's eyes didn't leave Logan's. Finally she replied.

"Wow. You don't believe me. I."

"No, Rory. I just want to see if the texts were delivered to my phone."

"Oh." Rory grabbed her cell phone from the nightstand and, logging in the password, brought up the texts. Scrolling through the conversation, she frowned. "You're right. Usually they say "Delivered"
or "Read." These say nothing. How did I not notice?"

"Can I see? Please?"

Without another word, Rory handed him her phone.

Logan silently perused the texts, a grave expression on his face. There was actually a dozen messages sent over the course of several months. Even though her efforts were seemingly in vain, it was a relief to him to know that she had tried. Replacing Rory’s phone to the night stand, he pulled out his own cell phone, and scrolled to his Rory text conversation. None of the texts appeared there. There had been no new text messages since last summer. Finally it occurred to him to do something he probably should’ve done the second he heard Lorelai mention the texts. He went into his contacts and brought up Rory’s information.

And there it was. What the fuck...? Who the hell...?

"What? Logan? What happened?"

"Sorry. Did I say that aloud?"

"Yes. What?!"

"Someone programmed my phone to block you."

"What?"

"So I wouldn't receive your texts or calls."

"Really?"

"Take a look." Logan held the phone out to Rory who took it. "Look at the bottom of your contact info." 

"It's says 'Unblock this caller.'" After glancing at the screen, she held the phone out to him.

"Yeah and the reason it says that is because you're blocked." Taking the phone, he unblocked Rory's number before slipping it back into his jacket pocket.

"You didn't do it?"

"Rory, listen to yourself. In what universe does that sound like something I'd do?"

"Yeah, you're right. You wouldn't do that."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Who do you think did?"

Logan looked grimly at Rory. "I have my suspicions, but it'd be hard to prove."

"You think it was Odette."

"Yes."

"Could've been your dad."

Logan had been staring at the floor. At Rory's words, his eyes shot back up to hers.
"You brought me to that restaurant, Logan. He saw us together. He knew we were in touch. He probably suspected there was more going on. You know how your parents are when it comes to me."

Logan's face took on a pained expression. "Rory, my dad doesn't hate you –"

"Right, that was just your mother and your grandfather. Your dad just thinks I'm a crappy journalist –"

"He doesn't think that. He just - " Logan let out a sigh of frustration. "Who the hell cares about any of this? It's all beside the point! Rory, fact is now you're their grandson's mother. The other stuff doesn't matter. You know none of that ever mattered to me. And, for what it's worth, Honor always liked you. She can't stand Odette."

Rory snorted. "Great. That's one out of three." Closing her eyes, Rory buried her face in the stuffed alpaca.

"More like two out of four. Hey, don't mess that up. It's for him."

Opening her eyes, she stared at Logan. "His name is Lucas Richard Gilmore."

"I know," he nodded gently. "I got Macchu for Lucas. Ducky Delight was for you. I can get you your own Blabla doll if you want."

Rory continued to study Logan. "What did you tell your parents, anyway?"

"Nothing yet."

Cringing, Rory turned her head back into the stuffed alpaca. Her next words were muffled but he could make them out. "Your dad will probably suggest "Shiv" for the baby's name."

"Cute. I'm not planning on asking my parents for suggestions on the baby's name. Besides he's already got a name."

"They gonna be okay with that?" She turned back to look at him.

"Don't worry about them. I'll handle them."

"No. We'll handle them." Rory glanced up at the wall clock before bringing her eyes back to Logan. "Promise me you'll always let me know what they're up to. They always blindside me. The restaurant. The dinner. The internship. That has to stop. Especially now that there's Lucas to consider."

"Agreed. I promise."

"Thank you."

Another slightly awkward silence seemed to be descending upon them. Logan sat, legs apart, with his elbows resting on his knees and his hands steepled.

Rory, meanwhile, continued to absentmindedly play with the stuffed alpaca.

One difficult topic covered, next...

"How did it go? Your mom said there were complications...?"
"Yeah, the pregnancy was a little difficult," nodded Rory. "Go figure. Your son gave me trouble in utero." She shot a look at him, one eyebrow raised.

"He's 'my son' when he causes trouble?"

"Yeah," she nodded, smiling.

Caught off guard, Logan chuckled. What he wanted to do was rise to his feet, close the distance between them, and kiss her. Instead, he returned her smile.

"I'm sorry he gave you trouble, Ace. I'll talk to him."

It was Rory's turn to laugh. "Yeah, you do that. I don't think it's gonna help."

"Hey. So what was the problem?"

Rory sighed before answering. "I was diagnosed with high blood pressure. I just had to take it easy. Limit stress. Every time I texted you or thought about calling you, I got myself all worked up. So I decided to wait until things were easier. Except things didn't really get easier and then he came early."

"Ah," Logan rubbed his temple, and then glanced around the room contemplating what he wanted to say. He couldn't fault her. He could blame whomever it was that messed with his phone, but he couldn't blame Rory. Especially knowing it wasn't an easy pregnancy and he wasn't there for her.

"How are you doing now?"

Rory shrugged. "I'm fine. They tell me I have a slight fever so I won't be able to go with you to see Lucas. Hopefully I'll be able to see him later today. He's the one I worry about."

At Rory's words, Logan felt an ache in his heart.

"Rory," he reached out and took her hand. "I'm sorry I wasn't here."

"You didn't know." Her eyes dropped to their joined hands.

"No, I didn't. I could've reached out to you."

"We said goodbye, Logan. We said goodbye." As she spoke, she shifted her gaze back to his eyes.

"Yes, we did." He paused, considering his next words. He decided to keep it simple. "It's no longer goodbye, Rory."

"I know."

"So what is it?"

"I don't know."

Glancing down at the floor, he let Rory's response play back in his head.

I don't know.

There were definitely worse answers someone as verbally dexterous as Rory could have offered. As far as he was concerned, the door was open. He lifted his head and his eyes once more sought hers.

"Hey, I'm here now. Let me help. First, I'm gonna cover whatever your insurance doesn't. Or even
whatever your insurance wants you to fill out extra forms for. Why should you or Lorelai have to deal with paperwork?"

"Logan, my insurance is really not that– "

"Rory, Lucas is my son. If he needs medical care, his father” the word felt foreign yet right falling from his lips "can make sure he gets the best money can buy." Logan saw that Rory's eyes were glassy. Once his own vision had blurred, Logan knew he too had tears in his eyes. "Let me do this, Rory. Please. I'm not going anywhere. Not until he's home. I'm gonna be right here. For him. And for you."

"Okay. " She bobbed her head slightly.

"Okay," he repeated, nodding reflexively.

Logan watched as Rory quietly stared at him. He knew she was mentally scoring the balance sheet. There was a balance sheet, he knew; it weighed the pros and cons of allowing him into her -now their- life, against the pros and cons of being dragged into his.

"You know you're making a lot of blanket promises, Huntzberger. And you haven't even seen him yet. Maybe you should wait until you've met him."

"You think I'll change my mind once I see him?"

"No," she shook her head, smiling.

"He's cute, right?"

"Very. I'd say he's the cutest but I have to admit I'm biased."

"I'm not gonna have to say he's 'precious' or 'breath-taking', am I?"

"Nope, he's legitimately cute. But he is gonna have to grow into his looks."

"There's plenty of time for that, Ace."

Choking on emotion, Rory nodded. Logan had never been good with seeing Rory's tears. He wasn't sure if it was what she wanted - or was comfortable with - but he moved from the chair to sit on the edge of her bed. Dismissing a moment of hesitation, his arms quickly found her as he gathered her into a hug.

"It'll be okay, Ace. He'll be okay. I'll move heaven and earth if I have to. I promise." He laid his lips on her temple.

They sat like that for a while. As Rory sobbed silently, Logan held her close, gently rubbing her back. Finally she quieted. Halting his arm movements, he tightened his embrace. He felt her arms circle around his back. It felt good having her in his arms again. Lowering his head, he breathed in her scent.

"Hey, before I forget. I've got something else for you." Logan pulled away from Rory and removed an envelope from his jacket pocket. Fixing his eyes on hers, he handed her the blue envelope.

"What is this? A card? You didn't have get me a card, Huntzberger," she laughed. She swiped at the tears coursing down her cheeks.

"Yes, I did," he replied, his face serious. "Open it."
Confused she made a face at him and then turned her attention to the envelope. Pulling the card out, she took a good look at it. As she did, her eyes watered up again. "Oh, wow…when…how’d you…?"

"No miracle on my part. It was this past Sunday. I was lucky the gift shop's slow with their inventory."

"You even signed for him." She fingered the spot where Logan had signed 'Lucas and Logan.' Her voice shook as she spoke. "Thank you."

Thank you.

"Happy Mother's Day, Rory." Logan wrapped his arms around her once more. "It'll be okay. I promise."

It would be okay. He meant his promise. He would settle for nothing less for Rory and their son.
Minutes after leaving Rory's bedside Logan found himself in an awkward procession to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit with a silent Lorelai. Doubting that Rory's mother could make it all the way to the NICU without saying something, he decided to leave it up to her strike up a conversation. Knowing Lorelai as he thought he did, he was confident he knew exactly what topic she would bring up if and when she decided to speak. As for Logan, he didn't feel a need to talk with Lorelai. He was too busy doing a mental rewind of his visit with Rory. A visit that he thought had gone pretty well.

"So, how're the wedding plans coming along?"

Bemused, Logan's eyes cut to Rory's mother. If there was one thing he appreciated about Lorelai Gilmore it was her ability to not mince words.

"I'm not really planning on a wedding at the moment."

"Planning on a wedding or planning a wedding?"

"Both."

"But you're still engaged. Right?" Lorelai's head shot around as she focused her blue eyes on him. "That is what you said? Before? That you're still engaged?"

"Yes. I believe my exact words were that I was still engaged, technically."

"So... technically? What does that mean? You expecting your status to change?"

"If you're asking the question, I think you know the answer."

Lorelai came to an abrupt halt. Sighing, Logan stopped and swung around to face her.

"Got another question?"

"Yeah, Logan, I do. What exactly are you thinking? About all of this?" Lorelai waved her hands to emphasize her point. "About Rory? About Lucas?"

"Again, you're asking a question that doesn't need to be asked."

"No, I do need to ask. You were all set to marry Odette the Heiress! What happened? How does that change just like that? Why? How do you think Rory feels? I mean – it's just her - she's good enough for booty calls but not for marriage? But then –when it comes to Lucas - all your plans go out the window?"
Logan brought his hand up to his head and rubbed his temple. He focused his gaze on Lorelai.

"It seems Rory's given you the cliff notes version of our relationship. I'm gonna leave that for you two to sort out. Rory knows exactly what she means to me." Logan chuckled, momentarily lost in a memory. "I think the lucky dress was luckier for me than it was for her. Where we go from here, yes, Lucas is a big part of it. But don't think for a second that Rory's not the biggest part."

With that, Logan turned away from Lorelai and resumed his strides towards the NICU, leaving a momentarily speechless Lorelai staring after him.

While Logan could appreciate that he might've just jarred Lorelai's long held opinion of him, and maybe she needed a minute to regroup, considering how far he'd come – both physically and emotionally – to get to this point, Lorelai's delaying was killing him. Absently it crossed his mind that this was definitely a Roryism inherited from Lorelai. He paused and turned around to face her again.

"Lorelai, we're like ten feet from the NICU. You think maybe we can pick this up later? It's been a crazy twenty-four hours. I'd really like to see him before I lose it."

His plea shook Lorelai from her pensive reverie.

"Oh, yeah."

"Thanks."

Logan hastened his pace and closed the gap to the NICU nurses station ahead of Lorelai. Logan bestowed a smile on the woman at the counter. "Hi. I'm hoping you can help me."

"I'm Miss Morgan, the charge nurse. Who're you here to visit?" The nurse, attired in pink floral scrubs, was an African American woman in her mid-forties.

Lorelai, who had been a few steps behind Logan, suddenly emerged from behind him. "Hi Miss Morgan."

"Oh, Miss Lorelai," the nurse smiled. "Hello there. Your grandson's doing very well today. He has a good appetite. He's gonna be a big boy."

Logan felt his mouth suddenly go dry. His features froze in place.

"Thank you! That's so good to hear!"

"Where's Miss Rory?"

"Rory was running a slight fever this morning. Hopefully she'll be down later. Is Dr. Cleary around?"

"Dr. Cleary won't be back until tomorrow morning. Dr. Allen is here now. I'll let her know you'd like to talk to her."

"Thank you."

The nurse turned her attention back to Logan who'd been standing quietly, observing.

"And do we have another visitor for Young Mr. Gilmore?"

"Yes, he's part of the Baby Gilmore party." Lorelai replied. "This is Logan, Lucas's father."
"Oh, is that right?" Miss Morgan's friendly demeanor chilled. "Miss Emily must be ecstatic."

"Yes," Lorelai agreed, a tight smile on her lips. "You know my mother."

"Hm-hm."

What the hell?

Logan's eyes shot back and forth between Lorelai and the nurse. There definitely seemed to be a need for some damage control. Looking at the nurse's impassive features, he figured it wouldn't hurt to turn on the charm.

"Miss Morgan," Logan smiled at the woman as he spoke. "Rory said Lucas would likely be in the hospital another two weeks. If he's doing as well as you say, might we be able to bring him home sooner?"

At the last part of his question, Lorelai's expression became stony.

"That's a question for Dr. Allen. I'll make sure she talks to you before you go back to Miss Rory." Miss Morgan turned back to Lorelai. "Did you ever get any rest?"

"Oh, me? I'm part Mayfly. I don't need to sleep." At the nurse's pointed look, a sheepish Lorelai amended her statement. "I mean yes, I went to the hotel last night."

"Good. You need to take care of yourself. You're a grandma now. Rory's gotta take care of Lucas. You need to take care of Rory."

Hearing that, Logan couldn't help but be piqued; he wanted to be the one to take care of Rory. And Lucas.

"Yeah, I know," replied Lorelai.

Miss Morgan nodded but it was obvious she didn't quite believe Lorelai. "Okay. So Miss Lorelai, you know the drill. I trust you can explain the rules?" As the nurse spoke, she quickly and efficiently placed a hospital bracelet on Logan. "You get a daddy bracelet. Gives you all day access."

"Thank you," he replied. He glanced over at Lorelai's wrist. "Is that a grandma bracelet?"

"No, it's a Lorelai bracelet." The nurse's unwavering gaze found Logan's. "Parents get all-day access bracelets – it's like your press pass. Since there was no daddy here for three days, Rory wanted her mother to be able to come down when she couldn't."

That the not being there those three days -just as not being there the past seven plus months - hadn't been his decision seemed to matter little in the scheme of things. Logan conceded that Lorelai, having supported Rory every step of the way during her pregnancy, fully deserved press privileges.

"Yep, I can do the spiel, Miss Morgan." Lorelai peered at Logan. "Come on, Logan."

With that Logan followed Lorelai to the Neonatal Nursery entrance. Lorelai motioned to a washing station adjacent to the door.

"They're pretty strict with the whole keeping things sterile. We need to scrub from fingertips to elbows with surgical sponges and put on hospital gowns."

Logan noted the hands-free washing station with the automatic soap dispenser, water faucet, and towel dispenser. Taking a look around the floor he noted the unit's other amenities.
"So your grandmother paid for all this?"

Startled Lorelai looked up at Logan, and then glanced around the floor. "Well, she funded the wing when it was first built. I'm sure they've done a lot of upgrades since then." She shook her head. "I see the name every day but I guess I don't really see it."

As they started to ready themselves for entering the nursery, Logan realized he had no idea how the Gilmores had been managing the past couple of days.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Emily sold the house in Hartford, right? Where are you staying?"

"We've got a couple of rooms at the Marriott."

"How long are you planning on staying there?"

"Don't know, Logan. However long we need to."

"I was just thinking that it might be better to rent an apartment. More comfortable. Find something closer to the hospital."

"Yeah, maybe it would be better." Pausing, Lorelai faced Logan. "Honestly, we've been too worried about Rory and the baby the past couple of days to think about that. It's been enough that Rory's healthy and Lucas is doing better."

"Lorelai, I wasn't saying it as a criticism. I just meant," he paused. "I can arrange it. A place. Nearby."

Lorelai's eyes narrowed. "Where are you staying?"

"The Marriott. But I'm planning on renting a furnished place either by the week or the month. I could easily rent a second place."

"What about your parents' house? Isn't it 100,000 square feet of vaulted ceilings and rarified air, paintings from the masters, and a ten-to-one servant to Huntzberger ratio?"

"My parents' place is not exactly the Chase Mansion. It's more like 10,000 square feet but feels like a mousetrap when occupied. There is some cool artwork. I remember Rory liking the Velazquez. It's --" his words fell off. "It's not where I want to be right now."

"Oh."

Without another word they waved for admittance and were buzzed into the nursery.

"The incubators are called giraffes. Don't ask. Lucas has wires attached to his chest. It's how they monitor his heart and breathing rates. Then he's got another one taped to his toe that tracks his oxygen level."

"Got it."

Thinking about it later, Logan could pinpoint the exact moment in the nursery when the reality of the situation struck him. Following Lorelai's lead at first, Logan felt an overwhelming wave of impatience when he knew he was finally nearing his son. A large room, there were about 10 giraffes
positioned along the room's perimeter. It was obvious which of the newborns had visitors by the partitions that had been pulled out to provide the families some privacy. Logan didn't know where his son was until suddenly he did. Stepping past Lorelai, he hurried forward; his breath caught when he finally saw him.

Upon catching up to him, Lorelai gave Logan a quizzical look. "Cool party trick. How'd you know that was him?"

"Just a feeling." He couldn't explain it.

"Yeah? Well, I can smell snow." At Logan's uplifted eyebrow, Lorelai clarified. "Before it actually comes down."

"Ah," he nodded.

Finally standing over Lucas, the two turned their attention to the sleeping baby. Peering into the giraffe Logan was overcome with an avalanche of emotions that seemed to tumble onto one another. Relief. Fear. Awe. Responsibility. Happiness. Leaning over the boy, who was lying on his side, Logan noted every one of his features.

A nurse appeared. "Hi, I'm Nicole, Lucas' primary nurse."

"Can I touch him?" asked Logan.

The nurse nodded. "Gently, on his hand."

Logan lightly stroked the baby's hand and wrist. "He's got ten of everything?"

"He's got ten of the stuff he's supposed to have ten of," replied the nurse.

"Everything's okay? He seems good. A little small." Logan met the nurse's eyes.

"He's doing very well. No episodes today -"

"Episodes?" Logan's eyes bore into the nurses before he turned to Lorelai.

"Dr. Allen will explain," said Lorelai.

Logan nodded absently at Lorelai's reassurance.

"Wave if you need me." The nurse checked Lucas's monitors before departing. Logan briefly watched the woman walk away before turning his attention back to the infant. Crinkling his eyes, he stared at his son.

"So I told your mom I'd talk to you about you giving her a hard time. This may not be the best time but I figure I could use the practice. And I'd like to be able to tell your mom I kept my word. So, kid, why'd you kick up a rumpus?"

Logan and Lorelai watched as the baby stretched, his eyes opening briefly.

"I'm sure your mom eased up on the coffee once she knew about you." Logan smiled as he continued to talk to his son. "Maybe you got a little too much Java before she knew?"

Lorelai stood transfixed watching Logan with Lucas.

"Were you just in a hurry to meet your mom? Can't blame you there, kid. Your mom's awesome."
Glancing up at Lorelai across the crib, Logan hurriedly added, "Your Grandma Lorelai's pretty awesome, too."

Lorelai snorted. "No point in trying to sweet talk me, Logan. That ship has long since sailed. Or should I say yacht?" Her eyes settled on him, unflinching. "I will admit you're surprising me."

"Yeah? How?"

"Well, paying for the medical bills and an apartment - not so surprising. But you –here, like this - surprises me."

"I know my way around kids, Lorelai. Honor has three."

"That's your sister?"

Logan nodded, his eyes still glued to Lucas, while Lorelai continued to study Logan. The two stood in silence watching the baby, taking turns stroking him gently.

"Is he always this quiet? Doesn't he cry?"

"He does. But not much. He's a good baby. Pretty chill." Lorelai glanced at Logan. "He takes after Rory."

Logan laughed. It was almost like she was daring him to disagree. "You're probably right."

Logan sighed but didn't take his eyes from his son. They quietly continued to watch the baby.

Finally Lorelai broke the silence. "We should find Dr. Allen."

After both Logan and Lorelai caressed Lucas goodbye, they left the nursery and made their way back out to the nurses station. Once free of their gowns, Logan and Lorelai returned to Miss Morgan.

"Miss Lorelai, Dr. Allen is sitting at the other nurses station waiting for you."

"Great," she replied. "Thank you."

Logan followed Lorelai to another nurses' station located at the other end of the unit.

"Dr. Allen. Hi. Lorelai Gilmore. Lucas Gilmore's grandma."

"Yes, hi Lorelai." The doctor cast an appraising eye on Logan. "And you are?" She asked Logan.

"I'm Logan, Lucas's father."

"Oh," the doctor nodded. "That's good. Rory'll need all the support she can get- even if you two aren't together. Good you were able to get away from your wi- other commitments for a while."

"Uh, that right?" He turned to Lorelai. "Was everyone in this hospital given a copy of the cliff notes?" He directed his next comment to the doctor. "For your information, I don't have a wife."

"That's not any of my business. Sorry."

Lorelai let out a sigh. "My mother has become a little chatty of late."

"It seems that way. Am I the only topic?"

"You. The DAR. Whales."
"Whales?"

"I'll explain later. Let's talk to Dr. Allen." Lorelai smiled at the doctor. "So, Dr. Allen, Logan just got here today. Why don't you fill him in on Lucas's condition?"

The doctor smiled. "Sure. Lucas was born at just under 35 weeks. Full-term infants are born at around 40 weeks. He's what we call a near-term baby. Technically he was born early but not that early. As for the complications, it depends on the baby, the mother's health, the conditions of the birth. He was 5 lbs 6 oz at birth – he's a little more than that now. The cutoff for what's considered low-birth weight is 5 lbs 8 oz. Lucas' lungs were not developed fully so he's needed a little help breathing. The first two days he was having trouble coordinating swallowing and breathing. So we fed him through a tube. But since yesterday he's been able to suck and swallow on his own, so no more tube. He's been getting breast milk the past couple of days."

"Oh," an obviously surprised Logan shot a look at Lorelai.

"What?" she asked.

"Rory didn't mention she was breast-feeding."

"Well, she isn't. Not yet. She's been pumping."

Logan nodded, thinking over everything the doctor had said. "Dr. Allen, everything you've described so far sounds positive. What's going on that he can't go home?"

"Well, while he's doing better, Lucas is still a premature birth. We've been monitoring his breathing, which is a bit irregular. He's demonstrating periodic breathing. That's when a baby pauses between breaths. If he stops for longer than 15 seconds, that's apnea. Apnea may be accompanied by a slow heart rate called bradycardia. The sensors on his chest are to monitor his heart rate." Dr. Allen glanced at Lorelai. "He didn't have an episode while you were in with him?"

Lorelai shook her head. "No."

"What do you mean? Episode?" asked Logan.

"Apnea. When he stops breathing for longer than 15 seconds. We have to help him get started again."

Logan grimaced at that; he definitely didn't like the sound of that.

Logan had been weighing something over in his mind. He knew it would probably piss off Lorelai, but it had to be done.

No better way to kill a wedding intended to satisfy the need for progeny to carry on the family dynasty than to announce the family heir had already been born to a woman other than the bride-to-be.

"Dr. Allen, I need to ask a favor of you. Everyone in this hospital seems to be aware of the fact that Rory and I are not together. I know, obviously, that Lucas is my son -"

"He has your nose and probably your dimples but he hasn't smiled yet, so too soon to say."

The doctor's words left Logan momentarily speechless.

Finally the doctor spoke again, breaking the silence. "What was the favor? I'm sorry – was it
"Logan?"

"Yes," he hesitated briefly, "Logan Huntzberger. I need a DNA test to confirm paternity."

"Oh!" Dr. Allen was surprised.

"It's for insurance purposes." He quickly added.

"Yes, of course. When do you need it by?"

"Actually, I need it as soon as possible."

Sneaking a peek at Lorelai, Logan could tell his request had elicited the exact response he expected. She was furious. He wondered what she would say; he doubted he'd have long to wait.

"You know something? I can't believe I was gonna give you a chance! After everything you've put Rory through. These past few months."

"Lorelai -"

"-I was thinking maybe he's right. Maybe I don't know the full story. But I don't need any more stories! That!" Angrily, she pointed her finger at him. "That's all I need to know! A paternity test! It's one thing to do whatever with Rory – hey, it takes two to tango and she's 32 and it seems to be a mutual thing -"

"Lorelai -"

"-that you two can't quit each other but now there's an innocent baby here! How dare you put that out there!"

Logan, after several failed attempts to interrupt Lorelai during her tirade, was finally able to respond.

"Lorelai, I swear to you. I know Lucas is my son. I have no doubts. But... there are other things going on." He let out a breath. Tired, he met Lorelai's eyes. "Believe me, I don't want to put him through anything. I don't want to put Rory through anything. But with my family and the wedding – which was supposed to happen this month."

At Logan's confession regarding the timing of his wedding, Lorelai's jaw dropped.

"- I need the issue of paternity to be a non-issue."

Stunned, she remained silent a few moments. "What was the event you were at when I called you in London?"

Logan weighed his options on how honest to be. As incensed as Lorelai was, he doubted it could get any worse.

"The rehearsal dinner."

Lorelai glared at him, silently fuming. He waited for her to say something but she didn't. He watched as she stormed off without another word. He assumed she was going to tell Rory about the paternity test. Briefly lost in thought Logan was surprised when he looked up and saw the doctor watching him with a mix of aversion and pity.

"For the DNA test, we'll just need to take a cheek swab."
At her words, Logan nodded silently.

"But we'll need Rory's permission before we do anything."

Logan sighed. Of course they would.

"I could get your DNA sample now, though. As long as you're here."

"How long will it take to get the results?"

"Typically a week," Dr. Allen paused. "But there are private companies we can refer you to. As long as you're willing to pay, they might be able to turn it around in as little as one day."

Logan nodded. The sooner the better.
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Thursday, May 18, 2017, 12:00 pm EST

Logan had briefly toyed with the idea of going after Lorelai but then shrugged it off. Lorelai hadn't liked him the first time around - he recalled her comparing him once - albeit favorably, but still - to the guy who thought up smallpox blankets. Yeah, he couldn't see how his getting Rory pregnant while engaged to another woman would have improved her opinion of him.

Logan would rather have been the one to tell Rory about the paternity test and he'd really have rather been the one to break the news about the interrupted wedding, but there was nothing to be done about that now. As much as he would have preferred to spare Rory Lorelai's onslights on both topics, he hadn't been prepared to race Lorelai through the hospital and tackle her in the corridor. Rory knew her mother. And Rory knew him. They had managed to navigate a two and a half year relationship during college and had somehow found each other again eight years later. Rory had a track record of putting Lorelai's opinions in proper perspective when it came to him. He'd have to trust that that filter was still in place.

If Logan explained the paternity test, he would make it clear to Rory that it was necessary because of the Huntzbergers. Lorelai would do her best to put a negative spin on the reasons for the test. Maybe she'd even try to plant a seed that Logan didn't believe that he was the father. He knew that the suggestion was ridiculous and he knew Rory would know the suggestion was ridiculous. But he still would rather Rory not have to deal with a riled up Lorelai on his account.

As for the fact that the wedding had, in fact, been scheduled for that week, Logan knew Rory - already uneasy about her and Lucas's reception into the Huntzberger world - would take the news as yet another excuse to worry and invent reasons for his parents to hate her. Getting that news from Lorelai was probably worse than getting the paternity test news because he knew Lorelai hated his parents - not that Shira and especially Mitchum hadn't done plenty to earn that hatred. Lorelai, he assumed, would emphasize his parents' possible reactions to the news that their son's wedding to the "perfectly acceptable" heiress had been cancelled because of their son's "perfectly unacceptable" ex-girlfriend.

Instead of running after Lorelai, Logan stuck around the NICU and provided Dr. Allen with the swab she needed for the paternity test. He assured the doctor he'd talk to Rory about the paternity test and get her to agree to taking the necessary swab from Lucas.

Once he'd finished up with Dr. Allen, Logan found himself uncharacteristically hesitant on his next steps. Between seeing Rory for the first time in months and meeting Lucas for the first time, ever, it had been an intense morning. That wasn't even including everything else that had happened over the course of the past day.

Glancing at his watch, Logan realized it had been nearly 20 hours since he'd left London. He would definitely be missed by now. He couldn't dodge his family and friends forever. He would have to
step back into reality eventually. The NICU had a family lounge area adjacent to the nursery with comfortable chairs and sofas. Taking off his suit jacket, he laid it on the arm of a chair and settled onto a cushioned seat.

Pulling out his cell phone he powered it up. Glancing at his messages, he saw that there were texts from Finn, Colin and Honor. Grinning, he quickly surmised they all amounted to the same thing: "what the hell is going on?" Honor had obviously, at some point, extracted the truth from his friends; her last three texts were requests for pictures of the baby.

Finally, there were three voicemails.

Voicemail number one:

Logan, I don't know what the hell this is all about - I thought you got all this rebelliousness out of your system years ago. What the hell are you doing? Damnit. You like Odette. Remember? Not that you care about this but your mother is at her wits end. I know you flew to New York and took a car to Hartford. Call me.

Voicemail number two:

Logan, where are you? We're still getting married on Saturday, aren't we? Please call me.

Voicemail number three:

F: Logan, we wanted to let you know we were all right. The Dark Lord has not yet ensnared us into the underworld.
C: Yeah, Finn's gone incognito!
F: Logan, have you any idea how soft these Ritz Carlton robes are?
R: I'm actually enjoying myself, Huntz. Your wedding has improved dramatically in your absence.
F: Now, what was I saying? Honor outsmarted us so she knows about Logan Jr.
C: I think she drugged me, Logan.
R: Seriously Huntz. You should refrain from showing up to all your future shindigs.
F: We wanted to let you know -

British accented hotel attendant: Excuse me? Sirs? Can you please lower your voices? Perhaps this is not the right place for using a speaker phone. Also we must ask that guests be properly attired when sitting in the hotel common areas. We're getting complaints from the other guests.

F: Complaints? From whom? How dare-
C: Finn, you should drop the robe. They obviously don't know the meaning of the word 'complaint".
R: I don't think he should do that. It would crush his delusions of adequacy.
Following this interplay there was a cacophony of raised voices as everyone spoke at once. Then it suddenly ended.

Dial tone.
Bemused, Logan looked quizzically at his phone. Reading between the lines of what had - and hadn’t been said, he deduced several things.

Although he knew where Logan had gone—probably through his credit card—Mitchum still didn’t know why he’d left. Despite his firmly entrenched network of investigative reporters, Mitchum hadn’t yet caught wind of the fact that Rory Gilmore had been admitted to St. Joseph’s maternity ward. If his father was still monitoring Logan’s credit card, he’d figure it out soon enough since Logan had given the hospital his credit card information as secondary insurance for both Rory and Lucas.

Odette had no idea what was going on.

Finn, Colin, and Robert had somehow managed to extricate themselves from the Huntzbergers—with the exception of Honor—without breathing a word about Lorelai’s call. Considering the amount of alcohol they seemed to have consumed, that was no small accomplishment.

Finally, Finn seemed to be going through a naked phase.

All things considered, Logan knew he needed to get the paternity test results to his father and his would-be father-in-law as quickly as possible. Once Lucas was common knowledge, the wedding would be officially put on hold. Permanently.

Logan smiled. Marriage to Odette—although long accepted as a tolerable concession to his family responsibility—had only ever elicited in him a feeling of ambivalence. The new option—not marrying Odette and instead getting Rory to one day agree to marry him—evoked hope and happiness. Enthusiasm. If he didn’t already feel tugs toward his son, that alone would cement undying devotion. The kid’s timing was perfect.

Logan was amazed at how it felt to suddenly lose the ambiguity that had long defined his personal life. For years, whatever happy moments he’d been able to grab had been moments stolen here and there. Rory. Even hanging out with Finn, Colin, and to a much lesser extent, Robert. But now? Now he was excited for his future and not just the stolen moments on the side. Thinking about the baby that was part him and part Rory asleep on the other side of the wall, Logan grinned. Rising to his feet, he decided to visit Lucas once more before rejoining Rory and the Gilmores.

Upon his return to the maternity ward, Logan saw that the Gilmore group had filtered out. Lorelai, Emily, and Sookie were nowhere to be seen. Only Luke remained, sitting in the lounge area outside Rory’s room. With the others gone, Logan wondered if there was a reason for Luke’s continued presence.


"Hey, there, Logan." Luke stood, laying down the copy of The New Yorker he’d been perusing. "Lucas good?"

"Very. He’s a good kid." Logan’s eyes met Luke’s. "You couldn't ask for a better namesake."

"Uh, yeah," nodded Luke, obviously uncomfortable with the topic. "Well, you know. About that—I’ve known Rory since she was little and ."

"Hey, I didn’t mean anything by it. I get it. It’s fine." Logan shrugged. "Huntzbergers don’t do the junior thing."

They stood in an awkward silence.
"Rory awake?"

"She dozed off before. Might still be asleep."

"Lorelai and Emily leave?"

"Yeah, Lorelai needed to check on the progress at the new place. Emily went with her and Sookie went back to the Dragonfly." Luke looked down before lifting his eyes back up to Logan's. "Did Rory mention Lorelai bought an old folks' home that she's renovating into an annex to the inn?"

"I don't think so. Makes sense though. Times I was down there the place was always busy. A lot to be juggling now. Can't be easy on you, all the back and forth. Sounds like you and Lorelai have pretty much been here around the clock."

"Lorelai especially," nodded Luke. "Rory may be 32 but she'll always be Lorelai's little girl."

Logan nodded. "Yeah, I get that. I want to thank you. For being here for her. For being here for both of them."

"Rory's like my daughter." Luke made a face, obviously uncomfortable. "Logan, Lorelai's pretty upset about the whole DNA test thing. She feels like she didn't do a great job protecting Rory from having a crappy father. She doesn't want to see the same thing happen with Lucas."

Crappy father? Ouch. Tell me what you really think.

Glancing over Luke's shoulder at the nurses station, Logan saw the red-haired male nurse from earlier standing there avidly watching them converse. "Luke, I don't think it's a good idea to talk about this right now."

"No one's paying attention. Besides there's all these hospital privacy rules."

"I'm pretty sure the privacy rules don't extend to waiting room drama." Logan jerked his chin toward the nurses' station.

"Oh?" Luke looked behind him to glance at the nurses station. He scowled. "I don't believe this," he muttered. "Is nothing sacred?" Luke, still staring at the nurse called out harshly. "Hey buddy! You want some popcorn to go along with the show?"

The red-haired nurse appeared affronted at being called out for his obvious watching and eavesdropping. Chastised, he made a show of sitting facing away from the lounge.

"Listen, Luke," Logan held up a hand and continued in a lowered voice. "While I appreciate your and Lorelai's concern, it's not my intention to be a crappy father -"

"Lorelai thinks otherwise."

"Yeah, well," Logan let out a frustrated sigh, "with all due respect, I don't care what Lorelai thinks. Or what you think. The only ones I care about are Rory and Lucas."

"Yeah? What do you think Rory's gonna think when she finds out you need a paternity test?"

So Lorelai hadn't told Rory about the paternity test?

"It's not for me. I know Lucas is my son. And Rory knows that."

"Then why the need for a paternity test? Even if it has to be done -for insurance like you said - does
it have to be done now? They're still in the hospital. They don't need this."

Logan let out a breath. Pulling ten-year old memories from his brain, he decided to appeal to Luke based on what he knew of the older man's experience. He was, after all, the family's other 'secret baby daddy.' Logan smothered a laugh.

"Luke, you have a daughter?" At Luke's nod, he continued. "But you didn't know at first. You found out later. I seem to remember that she was some kind of child protégée who did the paternity test herself as a science project…?"

"Yeah, that's right. April's very smart."

"If she hadn't had proof, would you have accepted she was your daughter at only her word?"

Logan paused as Luke considered. When the older man remained silent, Logan continued.

"You knew her mother. You knew the girl's age. Did she look like you? Maybe you could've just accepted it at her word, no proof needed. But what if you had a family with money? A lot of money? And constant talk of heirs and birthrights?"

"So what you're saying is this test isn't for you," said Luke, more as a statement than a question.

"You got it," Logan nodded. "I don't need it but it's still pretty important it get done. Now. Before the rumors start," he paused. "And to justify what I'm doing."

"What're you doing?"

"I'm torpedoing the dynastic plan." After saying the words aloud, Logan shook his head, laughing. He hadn't had such clarity on his personal life in quite some time.

Luke, meanwhile, was staring at him like he was insane. "What the hell are you talking about? What's a dynastic plan? You sound just like Taylor -.

"Never mind. As for - it's less about what I'm doing than it is about what I'm not doing. What I'm not doing is getting married on Saturday." Logan took a breath. "That's gonna piss quite a few people off."

"You were supposed to get married on Saturday? This Saturday?" At Logan's silent nod, Luke sighed again. "Yeah, I'm pretty sure my wife and mother-in-law can be added to that list of pissed-off people."

"I figured," nodded Logan. "I told Rory I'd stay until Lucas was released from the hospital. In order for me to do that- for me to keep my promise to Rory- I need the paternity test."

"Okay, I think I got it." Luke shot a glance toward Rory's door. "I'm gonna go say goodbye to Rory and then head back to Stars Hollow."

Logan laughed silently to himself. He had been wondering if Lorelai had stationed Luke outside Rory's room solely for the purpose of getting answers to her questions about the paternity test. Yep. Answers secured, Luke was taking off.

"You think Lorelai will understand about the paternity test?"

"I've known Lorelai a long time. If there's one thing I've learned about her –"

"Is that she can see reason?"
"-is it's best not to try to predict how she's gonna react." Luke shrugged. "If it makes you feel better, I get it. It makes sense to me. Hell, I went through all this with April and Lorelai saw that. Not that I got your kind of money, but the Gilmores were all over us about the financial stuff. Protect our assets from grifters. Get better insurance. Don't let pot-smoking bimbos into the house..."

Logan raised an eyebrow. "I have to admit I'm a little surprised you needed Richard and Emily's advice on that last one."

Luke waved a hand. "You had to be there. Anyway, I'll explain it to Lorelai. That's all I can do."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Logan hoped Luke's intervention on his behalf might help a little. But, knowing Lorelai, he wouldn't count on it.
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Thursday, May 18, 2017, 2:00 pm EST

After Luke left, Logan wasted no time before approaching Rory's room. Knocking lightly on the slightly ajar door, he pushed it open at Rory's "come in." He noted the addition of a new flower arrangement, a box of pricey European chocolates, and an over-sized stuffed teddy bear sitting on one of the chairs.

"Hey. Chocolate?" Lifting the box up from the bed, Rory held it out to him.

Looking at Rory, Logan thought he sensed something guarded behind her smile. Were they back at square one?

"Sure. Vunderschen. Someone has good taste." Logan grinned. "I'm always down for sharing your candy, Ace."

Foregoing the vacant chair, he perched himself on the edge of her bed. Reaching into the box he selected a dark chocolate covered caramel. Without saying a word, Rory slanted her eyes at him. Watching her he wondered what he'd said to inspire that kind of glare? After a mental replay of his words, Logan suddenly erupted in laughter.

"I swear, Ace. I just meant I'd enjoy a piece of candy. No innuendo intended."

"Hm," she replied as she popped a chocolate into her mouth.

Logan watched as one of Rory's eyebrows went up in mild disbelief. Logan cracked a grin. He'd missed this.

"Who are the chocolates from?"

"Finn, Colin and Robert. Now ask me who they're for."

"Who're they for?"

"Logan Huntzberger, Jr." Meeting his gaze, she studied him; he could tell from her expression that she was seesawing between amusement and annoyance. "One, I'm amazed the hospital knew to deliver them to me. Two, why did you tell the guys we were naming Lucas after you? Three, for your flight out, did you have to buy a second seat for your ego?"

Smiling, his eyes lifted at her questions. After swallowing his chocolate, he answered.

"No, in first class they let you stow your ego in the overhead. Finn, Colin and Robert know his name is Lucas. They were with me when your mom called. They send their love by the way. Finn started calling him Logan Jr. immediately. I'm not sure we'll ever set him straight. And I gave the hospital
my credit card info as secondary insurance for you both so that must be how they made the connection."

Rory rolled her eyes. "Finn! Of course! It took him months to remember my name. Tell them I named the bear Logan Jr. so you get your namesake. His head's nearly as big as yours." Her mouth widened into a smile. "Anyway, so...?" Rory stared at him, an expectant look of excitement on her face.

Logan returned the smile. He knew what she was asking but teasing her was just too much fun. He decided to play dumb. "So...?"

"Don't go all blonde on me now, Huntzberger. How did it go? You met Lucas?"

"I did." Nodding, Logan's smile deepened. "I did."

"What did you think?"

"What did I think? What did I think?" He repeated, as though seriously considering the matter. Logan laughed. "I think you did good, Ace. We did. I think he's a bit of a character."

"I know! Right?! You can totally tell! He's got an impish quality to him."

"The doctor thinks he has my nose -"

"Oh, he's too young to be able to tell that yet! His face is still a bit squished -." Rory broke off as she stared at Logan. "You know? Maybe..."

"-and maybe my dimples."

"Logan, he's only three days old! Until he smiles we won't be able to tell if he even has dimples!" Still staring at Logan, she fell momentarily silent before continuing. "Though if he does, I'm okay with that. I've always thought your dimples were pretty."

Rory gave him a smile as bright as the sun, which he was only too happy to return. Logan felt his heart skip a beat. This. This is what was missing from his life.

"Come on, Ace. After all this time -and now we have a child together - you still just want me for my looks?"

Surprised, Rory's lips opened to respond but no words came out; she just continued to watch him silently.

"Rendered you speechless, have I? I was joking."

"Ah, it felt a bit like you're calling me out."

Logan chuckled. Apparently he'd inadvertently struck a nerve.

"Not intentional, Ace. Maybe it's your guilty conscience. I'm the one who proposes marriage while you're the one who proposes friends-with-benefits."

"That's an exaggeration." She turned to glance out the window, before bringing her eyes back to his. "Not to mention it makes me sound like a ho."

That was definitely not where he wanted this conversation to go.
"Rory, you're not a ho. But you do have commitment issues. Not wanting to settle down - when it was just us - was fine. I'm a big boy. I can deal. But now -"

"Now there's Lucas."

"Now there's Lucas." agreed Logan, with a vehement nod. "Kid's got two parents who love him, love each other. His life could be a happyland dream of rainbows, lollipops, and unicorns." Logan paused; he wished she could see just how much of their future was hers to decide. "If we both agree that's what he deserves."

They fell silent. Logan thought it might be best to let that conversation peter out. He'd given her something to think about. He was sure they would have many more discussions about their future. After dodging him so resolutely and so skillfully for so long, he certainly didn't expect Rory to go soft on him now, Lucas notwithstanding. Besides, he still had another rather important topic he needed to raise with her and he needed her to be amenable to what he was asking.

"There's something we need to talk about. Did your mom say anything about our visit to the NICU?"

"Not to me. I was asleep." Rory looked at him questioningly. "What? What're you afraid to tell me?"

"I'm not afraid. I just have something I need to ask of you." Eyes never leaving Rory's, Logan sucked in his breath. "You're probably not gonna like it but, I hope, once I explain, you'll understand."

"Okay," she drawled, still eying him. Logan could see the growing trepidation in her eyes. "What is it?"

"I need a paternity test." At that, Rory's eyes widened. "Listen, before you say anything, I know he's mine, Rory. I can feel it. I walked right up to him in the nursery -"

Skeptical, Rory's eyes narrowed. "They have the names on -"

"Nice try. No. The letters are too small. It wasn't that. I just knew."

"Okay. So you knew which one was him. You've got the doctor telling you he looks just like you. You've got me telling you he's yours. You have a good handle on math and the Gregorian calendar. Why do you need a paternity test?"

Logan paused before responding. He knew there was no way he could relay this information to Rory that would not prompt at least a minor-level freak-out. He decided to go with the understated "less is more" approach and let Rory fill in the blanks.

"There was somewhere else I was supposed to be this week," he said simply.

Logan watched as Rory mulled over his words; he saw the exact moment she deciphered their meaning. "Oh, my God! You were getting married this week?! This week?! Wow! I'm really good with rolling out the drama, aren't I?"

"I never quite thought of it like that, but I guess you are good for the occasional drama," he nodded. "Though I can't complain about this. I'm actually pretty happy with how it turned out."

Flustered, Rory pulled her eyes away from his and stared sightlessly at the hospital blanket. He watched as the wheels in her mind turned. He suspected it would not be good and braced himself for her next words.
"Logan, even if we had talked - months ago - you know I didn't want to mess with your plans, don't you?"

"I know."

"You could still go through with the wedding -"

It was his turn to be annoyed. Logan rolled his eyes in frustration. She was really going to be the death of him.

"Come on, Rory! You're being ridiculous! The whole reason I was getting married was to have kids and now I've got one so there's no point in going through-"

"You still don't realize how messed up that was, do you?!" Rory asked incredulously. "Agreeing to marry someone you don't love -"

"Well, it wasn't my first choice. Or my second choice. If you'd stopped playing games at any point -"

"Whoa! Hold on! No! Don't lay your dynastic plan on my doorstep. Saying no ten years ago was the right thing to do. For both of us. We were way too young. And last year," she sighed, trying to make sense in her head what the previous year's whirlwind had been about. "Last year felt like goodbye. You were already engaged. And I don't belong in your world. It's -"

"Bullshit, Rory. You belong. Lucas belongs. In my world. With me. It's our world now. We're a family." Turning away from her, he muttered his final thought. "Whether or not I ever get you to marry me."

"That might've been the worst proposal ever, Huntzberger."

"That wasn't a proposal."

"What was it?"

"That was a statement of fact. If or when I propose again, Rory, there'll be no mistaking it for what it is."

Uncomfortable, Rory swallowed, her eyes staring unseeing at the chocolate box still sitting before her. Logan watched her as she sunk into herself. For the millionth time, he wished she didn't perceive his universe as this strange and foreign otherworld. She'd straggled her middle class childhood and the upper class that was her birthright seamlessly and unerringly for years. Of course, a more welcoming - less emotionally scarring - reception from his parents a decade ago probably would've made all the difference. But it wasn't too late. Now they had their son to consider. It definitely wasn't too late.

As he stared on in silence, Rory's eyes shot upward to meet his gaze. She seemed to have come to some sort of resolution. She cleared her throat and turned away from him, studying Macchu sitting on 'Logan Jr.'s' lap. Her eyes stayed on the stuffed animals while she spoke.

"So Lucas and I are now part of the dynastic plan?"

"Yes."

"What're my odds for dodging the plan?"

"Zero."
"Okay," she nodded, turning back to him. "I can't say I'm surprised." Logan noticed how wide her eyes were; she might not have been surprised, but she did seem shellshocked.

"Rory, come on! It'll be fun! Now when we go to the circus or for pony rides, we'll have Lucas with us! It's the perfect cover! No one ever need know it's really for us!"

Rory laughed, her worried gaze finally replaced by a slight smile.

"I'm not leaving you two. You're stuck with me now. I'm not interested in curtain number two. Not now." His eyes bore into hers. He brought his hand up to her cheek. "I know what's behind curtain number one and I love it more than anything."

Rory swallowed hard, nodding wordlessly. He wished he could just erase all her doubts. But that was on her. He could only do so much. He could certainly show her how much she meant to him. He could crack open his world as wide as he needed to to help her find a spot where she fit. He could continue to love her as he always had. But she needed to open herself up to it all.

"What am I agreeing to?"

"The test. The DNA test. Quickest way to shut down the wedding."

"So the paternity test is what? The playboy version of a doctor's note to get you out of your wedding?"

Grinning, Logan shook his head. "You always had a way with similes."

"So you've said." This time her smile was more genuine.

"Rory, we'll make it work. Whatever you want. Whatever you need. We'll make it work. I promise. Okay?"

Rory nodded.

"All they need to do is swab the inside of his cheek."

"Who do I call to okay it?"

"Dr. Allen in the NICU."

A few minutes later, Rory was hanging up the phone having given Dr. Allen permission to do the swab. Her eyes met Logan's. "I'll have to go down there and sign release forms. But as soon as I do, it can be sent to the lab. I'll go down with you when you go down."

Logan nodded. "When will you know if you can visit him?"

"Terri – she's the afternoon nurse – should be by in a bit and she'll check my temperature and let me know."

Thirty minutes later, Rory, having gotten confirmation that she no longer had a fever, also got a green-light from Terri that she could accompany Logan back to the NICU.

As they approached the NICU nurses station, Macchu in her hand, Rory filled Logan in on her idea.

"So, since Lucas came early I didn't have a chance to buy him toys."

"Isn't he a little young, Ace?"
"I'm not talking Transformers here. I just would've gotten him something. You know. Like Macchu but not as ugly."

"Hey, I'm just trying to teach him beauty is only skin deep. Macchu is a fine specimen of thready alpaca goodness."

"Hm, yeah, I'm not so sure I believe you gave it that much thought. I think your 'fake fur is creepy' is more likely the reason for Macchu's addition to the family." Rory fell silent. Logan glanced at her. If he had to guess, he'd put his money on her being thrown by her own reference to their 'family.' He hid a grin. He wasn't going to point it out to her; there was no need to make her self-conscious. This wasn't going to be easy as it was.

"Anyway, I don't have a gift. So I thought -as our first co-parenting accomplishment - we could give him Macchu together." Rory had said this with an affected breeziness. Logan cut his eyes sideways to study her profile as they walked.

Co-parenting? Wasn't that the term they used for separated parents trying not to raise a messed up kid? Like that whole 'conscious uncoupling' bullshit from a few years back? Logan smothered a groan. Getting Rory acclimated to the idea of them being together really wasn't going to be easy. Wanting to just be in the moment and enjoy the visit with Lucas and Rory, Logan decided to let Rory's "co-parenting" comment slide for the time-being.

"You sure you want to give him Macchu? I don't want to give the kid nightmares."

"Why did you buy it if you think it's so ugly?"

"I wasn't sure if it was ugly-cute or just ugly-ugly. I think I was also still rattled from my Emily encounter."

Rory's eyes went to his. "Emily? What happened between you and my grandmother?"

As they had reached the NICU nurses station, Logan just shook his head.

"Later, Ace."

"Hi, Rory," Miss Morgan smiled. "Logan."

"Hi Miss Morgan. How's our little man?" asked Rory.

"He's doing good. I told Miss Lorelai he's going to grow up to be big and strong."

Rory's smile widened. "Thanks. That's sweet of you to say."

"I call it like I see it," the woman returned Rory's smile. "You're getting discharged tomorrow? No Saturday, right?"

"Yep, Saturday," nodded Rory. Logan noticed her smile seemed to dim.

"Did the social worker talk to you about where you can stay after you leave? You're about 50 miles away, right? Good hour plus with traffic. We don't have a Ronald McDonald House in Hartford, but there are a few extended stay places we recommend."

"Thank you," Logan replied. "But we've got it covered."

Rory shot Logan a confused glance before responding to the nurse.
"Thanks, Miss Morgan. My family's been staying at a hotel. I'm not sure what we're gonna do once I'm released. I'll be sure to discuss it with the social worker."

Miss Morgan smiled at Rory and side-eyed Logan. "Gift for Lucas?" she gestured to the alpaca. "Let me wrap it so you can bring it in."

A few minutes later, the new parents made their way to the nursery entrance. They scrubbed and dressed in silence. Logan could sense something coming from Rory.

"What?"

"What did you mean when you said 'we had it covered'?"

"We haven't had a chance to talk about where you'll stay once you're released, but I have an idea."

Rory's eyes widened. "Hell, no! I'm not staying at your parents' house! I don't care if they're vacationing on the moon!"

Logan let out a sigh of frustration. Rory understood that she'd have to lose some of the chip from her shoulder, didn't she? He didn't particularly like his parents much as people either, but they were still his parents and Lucas's grandparents. He couldn't help but respect his father's business savvy. His mother, meanwhile, if nothing else, had demonstrated herself to be a survivor in a world that she hadn't been born into. Maybe Rory could learn something from Shira.

"Not the moon. London. It's more like three thousand miles away." He scrunched his face in thought. "Three thousand four hundred."

"How do you know the exact distance?"

"Uh-huh. Okay, so if the plan is not to stay at Casa Huntzberger, what is the plan?"

"I was going to rent a couple of furnished apartments. There's a development a few minutes away. We can stay late, be back and forth in a few minutes. No traffic. No headaches."

Rory nodded. "Yeah, that does sound good. You said a couple of apartments?"

"Yes. One for me. One for you and the Gilmoses."

"Did you have them build a secret passage between the two?"

Logan laughed. "Not yet, but I like the way you think, Ace. Motherhood's already working magic on your time efficiency."

"Hm."

"You have no idea how much I'd like to kiss you right now, Ace."

Looking at Rory's eyes, Logan saw in equal measures a mix of competing desire and fear. He knew he still had his work cut out for him. But, he had a good track record with Rory. And now there was Lucas. His three-day old competitive advantage.

"Ah, is that right?"

Logan didn't say anything. He figured his eyes said all that needed to be said.
Finally ready, the couple was buzzed into the nursery. They were silent as they made their way over to their sleeping infant.

"Did you tell mom, Grandma, and Luke about the apartment idea? What do they think?"

Logan snorted, shaking his head.

"Seriously? Your mom and Emily both want to see me drawn and quartered. What exactly did you tell them?"

"Nothing." Logan watched as Rory gently caressed the baby's hand.

"Nothing? What do you mean? 'Nothing'?"

"I mean nothing. I've never made a habit of talking about us, Logan."

"So, what do they think? That I knocked you up and took off?" Logan watched as Rory cringed at his words. Her eyes lifted to meet his. "That I wouldn't -or didn't -want us to be together?"

"I told my mother it was a mutual decision that we weren't gonna see each other anymore -"

"Remind me to get you a new dictionary, Ace. Sounds like the definition for 'mutual' lost something in the translation." Logan brought his hand down to his son's other hand.

"I was upset when I texted you and never heard back. So my mom knows about that. Not sure how much she told Grandma and Luke."

"Perfect. I'll be lucky if I don't get shanked."

"I don't see my mother doing that."

"Talking about Emily."

"Oh, yeah. That's another story."

"You think something can be done, Ace?"

"I'll talk to them."

"That's a start," Logan replied. "I've never been high on your mom's list. You know she once compared me to the guy who thought up smallpox blankets?"

"She did? When?"

"Remember when I got her to write that letter?"

"You're kidding!" Rory laughed. "You hear that, Lucas? Daddy's in trouble with Grandma. Big trouble."

Logan felt his eyes tear up. "I like the sound of that, Rory. Not the trouble part. The other part."

"Yeah. It doesn't suck, does it?"

"No, it doesn't. So what can I do?"

"You mean to win over Mom, Grandma, and Luke?"
"'Win over' might be ambitious. How about just get some more distance between me and the smallpox guy?"

Rory, amused, smiled. "I see three major hurdles with my family. Possibly four when it comes to my mother."

"Go on."

"First, they don't trust you."

"Noted."

"Second, they don't trust your family."

Logan shrugged. "That's fair. I don't trust them either. Not much I can do about it. Third?"

"Well," she gave him a sardonic grin. "You did knock me up."

"Happy accident. I'm not apologizing. Fourth?"

"I don't have a great track record for smart decisions when I'm around you."

Their eyes met over their son.

"Can't be all bad, Rory."

"No, not all bad."

Lucas stirred and they broke their locked gaze to watch the baby. Suddenly his eyes opened.

"I'm glad he's got your eyes."

"They say all newborns have blue eyes."

"Not that shade. Electric blue. You can tell they're gonna stay like that.

- And me on a buckskin pony
- with eyes like blue electricity
- and a mane like tangled fire,
- galloping up the hill and right off
- into the high heaven of the world."

"That's pretty. When'd you start quoting Faulkner?"

"Just now. Guess I was inspired."

The two fell into a companionable silence as they looked on at their son's once-again sleeping form.
Rory and Lane

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Thursday, May 18, 2017, 4:30 pm EST

Although it had not been the intention to visit with Lucas all afternoon, Logan and Rory wound up staying at the NICU for nearly two hours. While some of the time had been spent arranging the DNA test, most of the time had been spent with their son. Sensitive to the baby's need for sleep, several attempts were made to leave the infant when it looked like he had fallen asleep. But then they'd delay their departure a second too long and the baby would awaken. Then, seeing Lucas awake, they'd change their minds about leaving -reasoning they'd might as well stay a little longer since he was awake anyway.

The two relived the visit as they made their way back to the maternity ward.

"I don't know. Seemed intentional to me."

"Logan, he wasn't waking on purpose to keep us there. That's too...too...devious for a three-day-old."

"Hm," Logan let out a breath. "If he takes after me at all, I think we gotta allow it as a possibility, Ace. It's definitely something I'd do to keep you by my bedside."

"You would, huh?"

"Would. Have. Will do so in the future first chance I get."

Rory halted their progress and swung around to scowl at Logan.

Undeterred, Logan continued to grin. "I'm just saying I wouldn't put it past him." He shrugged. "The timing was too convenient."

Chuckling in stunned exasperation, Rory shook her head. After a few seconds, she resumed her pace back to the maternity ward. Logan followed suit.

"I can barely handle you and now I have a mini-you to contend with."

"Ace, you handle me fine. You're just outta practice. It's like riding a bike. Once you climb on again..."

"Ssh! You're working blue! Don't tell me you're not and that I'm imagining it. My imagination is not that good."

Logan cleared his throat, still wearing a half-smile. "It's not your imagination. You just have a dirty mind. Maybe you still have some pregnancy hormones that haven't worked their way out of your system yet."
Rory stopped mid-step again. Shutting her eyes, she cringed in horror. "Oh my God. How do you even know about that?"

"Come on, Ace. I'm more than just a pretty face. I can read. I actually read a lot on the flight - medical stuff, mommy blogs. It helped to stay busy."

The serious tone of Logan's final comment wasn't lost on Rory. Her eyes shot open and she turned to look at him.

"I'm sorry we called when we did. I mean it was a pretty hectic first couple of days. I was kinda out of it for a while. But, if I'd waited until today, things are a lot better today. You wouldn't have -"

"Rory, I wouldn't be here now if you'd waited a second longer. And I'm right where I'm supposed to be." Logan gently threw his arm over Rory's shoulders and turned to give her a quick kiss on her temple. He was pleased to note how she leaned in without hesitating, wrapping one arm around his back and placing the other on his chest. "It's only fair I had a worry-filled flight. You were here worrying. I had no right to an easier time."

"Well, when you put it like that, I suppose you're right." Logan watched as Rory's eyes closed. She let him lead her along the corridor.

"You tired, Ace?"

"Hm. Just wanted to rest my eyes for a few. I'm good." Logan watched as Rory yawned. "He was definitely not impressed by Macchu the Alpaca."

"At least it didn't scare him."

"Oh, speaking of scary, what exactly is going on between you and my grandmother? Did she actually threaten to shank you? Cause I'm pretty sure she knows what it means."

"How does Emily Gilmore know how to shank?"

"I'm not saying she knows how to do it but she understands the concept. From when I had to do community service. She did some research." Rory paused before continuing. "Hm, although now that I think of it, with everything she's learned about whaling, she could probably improvise something pretty easily."

Whaling? Didn't Lorelai mention whales?

"What exactly has been going on with the Gilmores, Ace?"


"You think?"

"Yep. What's new with Honor and Josh?"

"Baby number three arrived about three months ago. A little girl."

"Cool. Lucas has a cousin close in age."
"Yes and a couple of others old enough to torture him. Honor sends her love. She wants baby pictures."

"So Honor knows?"

"Honor knows. She has ways of making people talk."

"People? You mean Finn, Colin, and Robert? Somehow I don't think water boarding was necessary." Rory fell silent. "The reason everyone's together in London is because of the wedding?"

"Yeah."

"Wow. I can't believe the timing. If Lucas hadn't arrived early -"

"Yeah."

"What do you think would've happened if he hadn't...?"

"Hey! It didn't happen that way so we don't even need to think about it! I can tell you I would've pushed for the quickest divorce in Huntzberger history once I knew the truth."

"Oh."

"Yeah. 'Oh'."

As they entered the lounge area outside Rory's room, a flash in the form of a slight Korean woman flew at them. Rory disentangled from Logan as she positioned herself to return the other woman's embrace.

"Rory!"

"Lane! It's so good to see you!"

"Me? It's so good to see you! You look so much better than the last time I saw you!"

"Thanks." Rory turned to Logan. "Lane was here on Tuesday. Yeah, I feel better. And Lucas is doing much better. It's all good."

"That's great."

Hugs accomplished Lane took a step back from Rory and took notice of Logan.

"Ah, I see the rumors were true."

Logan nodded. "Yep. Hi Lane." He held out his hand. "How are you?"

"I'm good."

"Zach?"

Lane nodded, as she shook his hand. "He's good. The boys are good. Our twins, Steve and Kwon, are ten now. I'd say 'long time no speak but it actually wasn't that long ago."

"No, it wasn't." Logan shifted his gaze to Rory. "I should let you visit with Lane, Ace."

"You taking off?"
He nodded. "I'm gonna go back to the hotel for a while. I have some calls to make. Maybe if Emily's back, we can pick up our game of her giving me a play-by-play of which whaling tools she'd use on me if it were socially acceptable."

Surprised, Lane let out a nervous laugh before turning a questioningly glance to Rory.

"Oh, yeah," Rory nodded, a half smile, half frown on her face. "It's like that."

"Hm," nodded Lane. "Well, the boys love hearing your grandmother talk about the whales getting stabbed with the killing irons." She glanced at Logan. "But I can get that hearing a lecture where you're the one being stabbed with the killing irons might be uncomfortable."

"Emily Gilmore. Scaring kids of all ages, all across New England."

"Oh, please. Kwon and Steve don't scare easily. Zach, though." Lane shook her head. "Your grandma's stories make Zach a little green."

Logan smiled at her. "Lane, good seeing you."

"Yeah, you too."

Logan's next words were directed to Rory. "Your mom and Luke coming back tonight?"

"I think so. I'll give my mom a call in a bit."

"I'll send you a text if it looks like I'm gonna come back tonight."

"Okay. Sounds good. I assume you can receive my texts now?"

"Yes." Logan leaned in and kissed her on the cheek. "I'll give you call later tonight even if I don't come back."

Rory nodded. "Okay."

As the two women stepped inside Rory's room, Logan couldn't help but overhear a few words.

"So?"

"So what?"

"What's going on with you two?"

"I don't know."

"What does that mean?"

"It's complicated." Logan stifled a grin as he heard Rory let out a groan of frustration. "I guess you could say we might be on our way to being back together."

"But you're not back together?"

"No. Not yet." Rory fell silent. "At least, I don't think we are. But maybe? How can I be a mother? I suck at relationships! I can count on two hands -two! - the number of times I've been in a relationship but not sure if I was in a relationship! What kind of person is habitually confused as to whether or not they're in a relationship?! A mother should know if she's in a relationship with her baby's father, right?"
Part of Rory's tirade sounded muffled. Like she'd buried her head in a pillow. But Logan caught every word. Lane, bless her, did her best to comfort Rory.

"All right...He's here now and he seems serious. That's good. What did he say? Is it back together as in proposing to you in front of everyone he knows? Or back together as in 'meet me at the Dorchester'?

"Pretty sure it's the first one."

"So he's not engaged anymore?"

"No, he is. At the moment. Yeah."

"Okay, so he is still engaged? Ohhh...What am I gonna say to your mom if I see her? You know I've never been able to hide anything from Lorelai Gilmore. She's even worse than my mom."

"Just make sure you leave before she gets back. And if you do see her, don't say anything beyond 'hi, bye.'"

Finally, one of them pushed the door shut. Logan stared at the now-closed door.

Damn. He was still engaged. Wasn't he?

Logan knocked on the door before opening it. Peering into the room he met Rory's eyes.

"Ace, next time I see you, I won't be engaged." He turned to Lane. "That's for you too, Lane."

"Uh, okay."

Grinning, Logan backed out of the room a second time.

Rory's jaw dropped. Lane, puzzled, looked at her friend intently.

"Did he hear us? He must've heard us, right?"

"Yeah, Lane. I'm sure he heard."

Logan pulled the door shut and made strides toward the elevator bank. No turning back now. Not that he had any intention of doing anything other than what he'd just told Rory and Lane he was doing.

Now to make it happen. Pulling out his phone he called for his driver.

"Frank? Ready to go. See you in a few."

Smiling, he stepped into the elevator. Everything on this side of the Atlantic was going as well as he could've hoped. Now, it was time to check on how things were going across the pond.
Once back at the Marriott, Logan shrugged off his jacket, unbuttoned his top button and made himself comfortable, settling on one of the sofas in the living room of his luxury suite. After a day spent with Rory and his son he knew exactly what he needed to do; it was time to let his father and his fiancee know that the wedding was off.

While Rory was certain Mitchum was responsible for the blocked phone, Logan knew it wasn't his dad's style. Mitchum would just lay down the law with an expectation that it be obeyed. This sly, underhanded maneuver seemed more Odette. He could see his mother doing it as well -provided one of her more technologically savvy friends explained to her how to do it. Though Odette had unfettered access to his phone, his mother did not. But he always could've left it on a table while at lunch or dinner with his parents. While Odette could've had - and, indeed, was likely to have - suspicions about there being another woman in his life, he didn't know whether or not his father had ever told his mother about his reconnecting with Rory.

Powering up his laptop, Logan decided he'd better jump online and check the London society pages to see if anything on the rehearsal dinner had made the papers. He found a few small mentions but they were filled with facts only -who, where, when, etc. There was no mention of his abrupt departure from the evening's event and nothing intimating a possibility that the wedding wouldn't happen.

Good to know.

Seeing new emails since the last time he'd checked, Logan clicked on the new messages. He was pleasantly surprised to see the DNA lab had already completed the expedited paternity test. Opening the attached lab report, Logan smiled when he saw that the likelihood of him being Lucas' father was over 98% - which - according to the accompanying report - was the highest percentage possible.

Next he replied to an email from the management company of the Hartford apartment complex he'd decided to rent from. They didn't do monthly rentals, nor furnished apartments but Logan knew those two shortfalls could be easily remedied for the right price. The best part was that the development was a five minute drive from the hospital, less than the current drive from the hotel. Located downtown the hotel had good access to restaurants and bars but getting around the area could be a traffic nightmare at certain times of day.

Those tasks done, Logan knew it was time for the inevitable. At a little before six, he switched on his cell phone. Even though it was after eleven in London, considering what he'd pulled he assumed both his father and Odette were expecting to hear from him.

To the extent the dynastic plan prioritized 'begetting' the next Huntzberger heir, on a purely practical level it made more sense to claim Lucas and marry Rory than it did to go through with the wedding
to Odette. Logan had to believe even his parents would see that.

But his family had always been a bit strange when it came to Rory. Thank God Elias at least was long gone. He'd have to contend with his mother's prejudices but really, with her background, Shira had no right to cast aspersions on Rory.

Mitchum Huntzberger's reaction was a bit more of wild card. Yes, Rory had given birth to his grandson. But Rene Lamontagne was an important HPG investor. Logan was well aware how much Mitchum had appreciated the coincidental strategy of the proposed union.

Logan would have to make it clear to his parents that this time around there was no room for any of the nonsense they'd subjected Rory -and him -to in the past. He and Rory would be a united front. They would have to be. They were Lucas's parents. Logan smiled at that. Unexpectedly he found himself taking more pleasure in thinking of Rory as his son's mother than he thought he even would from referring to her as his wife. He might even start calling her 'Baby Mama' to see her reaction. If her reaction was what he thought it would be, it might be a good strategy for getting her to buy into the idea of getting married.

Logan hit his father's number before bringing the phone up to his ear. He wasn't surprised when his father answered immediately.

"Dammit, Logan! You better have a good reason for this stunt! Blowing off my calls. Not answering my texts. If I wasn't stuck in London running damage control on your goddamn mess, I would've been in Hartford first thing this morning to drag your ass back here. Now what the hell is going on?"

"The wedding is off."

"Like hell it is! This has been the plan for two years! I don't care if you're getting cold feet. Really who the hell cares if you marry-"

"I'm not marrying Odette on Saturday." Logan paused. What would resonate with his father? The truth? "Listen -Rory gave birth to my son three days ago."

That silenced Mitchum for a beat. Logan nearly guffawed at the confusion in his father's voice when he finally sputtered out his one-word response.

"What?"

"You heard me. Rory and I have a son. The next Huntzberger heir has already made an appearance. I'm not turning my back on him or Rory no matter what the prenup says. So the wedding is off."

Logan listened to his father's next words, which were mumbled, almost as though he were talking to himself.

"I knew something was up between you two. That's why I wanted Odette in London."

"Yeah, well. You like being right, so congratulations."

Mitchum fell silent; Logan listened intently to the sounds across the line. Or rather, lack of sounds. He waited, wondering what his father would say.

"Logan, you two weren't even together at the time. You were with Odette. Rory had other men she was seeing.-"

Rory had other men. Logan briefly tuned out his father's voice as his mind focused on those words.
There was one other, as far as he knew: Paul of "Dinner with Paul" fame. Were there other other men? And what the hell did Mitchum know about them?

"- and there's a lot riding on this. How do you even know it's your-"

"Stop. Whatever you were about to say, don't. Just don't. Aside from the fact he looks just like me, I had a paternity test done. He's mine. I'll forward you the results as soon as we're off the phone."

Mitchum sighed.

"Have you talked to Odette?"

"Not yet. Figured I'd call you first."

"You know she still might be willing to go through with it. Rene, too. We would -"

"No. I don't even care about whether they're willing to overlook the prenup. I'm not marrying Odette. I'm not looking to start a family. I already have one."

After a brief silence, Mitchum replied.

"Fine. I understand that. What I don't understand is why you didn't call off the wedding as soon as you found out about the baby?"

Logan knew his father's innate reporter skills would zero in on this line of questioning eventually. He just wished it hadn't happened so quickly.

"I did."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. I called it off as soon as I found out."

"Are you saying you just found out now? Rory was pregnant for months and never told you?"

Mitchum took Logan's silence for the confirmation that it was. "Logan, that doesn't make a hell of a lot of sense. Why would she do that? What kind of game is she playing?"

"No. No games. Not Rory." Logan wondered whether he should tell Mitchum about the phone tampering. His gut told him 'not yet'. "She tried to let me know. We got our wires crossed. Then they had some medical issues that came up -"

"What kind of issues?"

"He - Lucas - is fine. Rory's fine. He was born a little early."

"How early?"

"About a month."

"But he's okay?"

"He's doing great. They think he'll be in the hospital another two weeks but he's made a lot of progress in the past few days. I'm thinking it won't be that long."

Logan listened to his father sigh.
"You two getting married? You know it's better if the baby's not illegitimate."

Logan let out a breath. Of course, his father had a point. Logan preferred that Rory marry him - the sooner the better. While he was confident that convincing her was not beyond his capabilities, he was also intimately familiar with her stubborn streak. For all he knew, Rory intended on doing a replay of her parents' marriage. Maybe she'd hold off on agreeing to marry him until Lucas's college graduation. While Logan was willing to wait - he'd certainly put in a good amount of time already - he was not letting her postpone it until Lucas was of legal drinking age.

"Logan?"

"I heard you, dad. What can I say? I'm working on it. You and mom haven't exactly done me any favors when it comes to Rory."

"Please. Didn't I hook her up with Condé Nast? I didn't have to do that, did I?"

"No. You also didn't have to slam her on her internship only to name-drop her the following year. Not to mention all the crap mom -"

"Logan, let's get real here. That stuff is all - or it should be - water under the bridge. You two aren't in college anymore. You're not in your twenties. You're adults. You're parents for God's sake! I'm gonna trust that you realize this but does Rory? Your mother may have had a point with Rory. Does she realize what it means to be a Huntzberger? She -"

"Dad -"

"- can't just go on as though nothing's changed. Even -"

"Dad -"

"- if you two don't marry. Even if all she ever is is your son's mother, she'll still be expected to behave -"

"Dad! Enough! I got it! Yes, she's my son's mother but she is much more than that. Rory's never had any problems with being a Gilmore or being a part of my world. It's just when you and mom interfere. So I'm gonna ask that you not interfere. I got this."

"Okay, Logan. I hope you know what you're doing. It's still not too late you know."

"Not too late for what?"

"To walk away. Rory Gilmore doesn't care about our money. You know that. Hell, I know that. Even your mother - ridiculous as she can be - knows that. Rory would probably be relieved to sign something to the effect of 'let's pretend this never happened' and 'I agree that Baby Boy Gilmore is not the legal Huntzberger heir.'"

"No! Lucas is my heir! Why shouldn't he be? He's my son. I'm not signing anything and I'm not walking away!" Logan fell silent and he considered his father's words. "I didn't peg you as sharing mom's ridiculous views. What is it with you two?"

"Logan, I have nothing against Rory. I never have. I do think she handles herself with a decided lack of maturity that - I'm sorry to say - I don't really see resolving. She should've told you about the baby as soon as she knew. Even if you had to do a DNA test while she was pregnant to make sure of the paternity." Mitchum grunted. "This is just a surprise. You were supposed to marry Odette. I like Odette. She's smart. Mature. Knows how to carry herself. I guess I got used to the idea of her
becoming a Huntzberger."

Logan laughed. "That's terrific! You marry her! I was supposed to marry Rory! Odette is and has always been a runner up. Way I see it I'm getting a second chance with my top choice. I'm not gonna blow it."

Mitchum sighed loudly. "So you're serious about this?"

"Yeah."

"Fine. I'll talk to Rene. But you need to explain to Odette. I'll handle your mother too. You know, Logan, this will do nothing to endear Rory to your mother."

"Mom already hates her for no reason. What does this do? Give her a reason? Now she can blame Rory for the wedding she spent so much time micromanaging never happening? Hey tell her she can go for broke. She can blame me and Lucas while she's at it. Hell, tell her to punish the three of us by withholding her love and affection. Oh, I know. She can show us how angry she is by going to a spa for the next month. That'll show us."

"Point taken Logan. Your humor isn't appreciated." Mitchum snickered sardonically. "You don't realize how Rory influences you. You tend to become a sarcastic son-of-a-bitch whenever you're with her."

"Dad, if anyone's responsible for me being a sarcastic son-of-a-bitch, I think the answer lies in the mirror. As for the rest, if you and mom hadn't spent an insane amount of time and energy disliking Rory -and showing her just how much you dislike her- I wouldn't have to spend so much time and energy defending her. And it wouldn't have taken ten years to get us to where we are now. She's my son's mother. I have every intention of marrying her. She's not going anywhere. So you and mom need to get used to it."

"Your mother is not going to like this."

"Even the fact that she has a blonde, blue-eyed grandson?"

Mitchum sighed deeply. "Yeah, well, there's that. Send a picture when you get a chance. It's too late to call Odette. She already went to bed. I suggest you call her first thing tomorrow. Text me when you have so I know when to talk to Rene. If I talk to Rene before you talk to Odette, Rene may tell her. She definitely shouldn't hear it from him."

"Agreed."

"We're gonna have to figure out how we announce the wedding is off. I'll call in the PR crisis team. You need to talk to Odette first thing. London time. Otherwise you're gonna risk her hearing it from someone else."

"Good point."

"Oh, and Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"What hospital are they in? What name are they under?"

"They're at St. Joseph's. The Lorelai Gilmore Maternity wing as a matter of fact. Both under Gilmore."
Logan heard his father grunt. "Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"Congratulations."

Logan's lips twisted into a genuine smile for the first time during the call.

"Thanks, Dad."
Sweet Dreams

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

_Hartford, Connecticut, Downtown Marriott, Thursday, May 18, 2017, 8:00 pm EST_

After the call with his father, Logan debated calling Odette. Yes, it was late in London. Yes, he'd disturb her sleep. But then she'd be able to go right back to bed with the satisfying knowledge that she would never again be disturbed by Logan Huntzberger.

After the stunt she pulled, he was certainly looking forward to being free of Odette Lamontagne.

Odette - although it was through no fault of her own - lived in a world where she didn't have a care in the world. Her days were spent shopping, attending parties, vacationing with friends, and the occasional public appearance to make sure her father's philanthropical activities were captured by the press.

Aside from the voicemail the first day and a few terse text messages on the following day, it had been radio silence from Odette. He wondered what she was thinking. She would have to know his disappearance had something to do with Rory. How could she not? By now it was common knowledge that he'd left; there could be no misunderstanding that.

While Rory seemed to think his father could've been behind "Phonegate," any lingering doubts Logan might've had that it was Odette had dissipated. He knew she would deny it, just as he knew she was the one who did it. Realistically, she was the only one who had both motive and opportunity. That -for her jealousy and selfishness - she robbed so much from him was unconscionable. She was lucky Lucas was doing well. If this had gone another way, he couldn't even imagine how livid he'd be.

Logan reminded himself of the need to stay calm. They had been engaged and he had cheated on her. For that she had a right to be angry at him. That said, he didn't think anything gave her the right to mess with his phone, mess with his relationship with Rory, and mess with his relationship with his son. He would never regard that as acceptable behavior from anyone under any circumstances. Honestly -even without Lucas- messing with his phone was sufficient reason to call off the wedding.

He hit her number.

"Odette? We need to talk."

- ~ -

"Hey."

Logan smiled to himself at the pleasure he detected in her voice. She was happy to hear from him. In spite of herself. That was why there had been no need for a decision. It was a foregone conclusion. He knew it. She would too. Eventually. Hopefully soon.
"Hey yourself. How's my baby mama?"

"'Baby mama'? Oh my God! You're not serious!"

"Until we come to an understanding on a more appropriate title for you, Ace, I've decided that's what I'm calling you."

"Can I kick you when you do? Then I'll work on getting us booked on Dr. Phil?"

"Unless we bring the Gilmores and the Huntzbergers, we might be too tame for Dr. Phil. If you can think up a reason to sue me for five grand we could go on Judge Judy."

"Five grand, huh? The Baby Blog says a baby costs ten grand the first year."

"Only ten?" Logan frowned. That couldn't be right, could it? "Well, the kid sounds like a bargain but I'm sure you need to correct for cost of living. I was checking out baby gear and that alone could be ten grand."

"Ten thousand on baby gear? You're gonna spoil him. Or maybe it's yourself you're gonna spoil?"

"Spoil? Nah. Just indulge him enough so we've got something to guilt him with when he turns fourteen and becomes a know-it-all punk."

"Oh my God! No!"

"Ace, it's inevitable. You remember being a teenager?"

"Yeah."

"You remember the guys you dated when you were a teenager?"

Logan bit back a laugh at the horrified sound Rory made. "No!"

"Yeah! It's gonna happen. Trust me."

"Well, I'm not gonna think about that right now. My little Lucas. He's still got soft skin and fresh baby smell. I don't want to think about him mouthing off."

"Yeah, we got time. So how're you feeling?"

"Good. Lane stayed for about an hour. Mom and Luke came back. Brought me dinner. Mom and I went down to say goodnight to Lucas. He was sleeping when we first went down but -"

"But?"

"-then he woke up and we were able to visit with him a bit."

"I'm telling you, Ace. He's got a sixth sense about you."

"Well, I was his incubator for a long time. He might just know my scent or something. I suppose your theory could have some merit."

"He misses you." Logan sighed. "I know how the kid feels."

It just came out. Logan didn't put it out there on purpose to elicit a response from her but after he said it he was curious what she'd say. At first she didn't say anything. When she did finally speak, it came
"You just saw me a few hours ago."

"Yeah and what's your point? I think that only serves to support my argument. A few hours today doesn't make up for the past eight months and it certainly doesn't make up for eight years."

Logan heard Rory start to say something only to fall silent. Amused, he grinned. Rory was rarely left speechless.

"Logan I don't know what to -"

"You don't have to say a thing, Rory."

Logan hadn't intended on displaying his heart on his sleeve like that. He certainly wasn't looking to use guilt to pressure her into marrying him. Not yet, anyway. It didn't matter that he'd put his heart on his sleeve. That's where it always was with Rory. She knew he loved her. She even knew that she was the only woman he had ever loved. He hadn't exactly kept it a secret. Not when they were together at Yale. Not last fall. He certainly wasn't going to play it cool and aloof, when it was anything but that; there was a lot riding on them being together. Not just his heart.

"So what're you up to tonight?"

"Making lists."

"Lists? Should I be nervous?"

"No."

"Am I a subject of any of these lists?"

"Maybe."

"Things going in my favor?"

"Too soon to say."

"Can I weigh in?"

"Really, Huntzberger. You always trusted the neutrality of my pro/con lists. Why worry now?"

"Never had so much riding on them, Ace."

"Ah. Good point."

"Yeah, I thought you'd appreciate honesty. So what're the lists?"

"It's really too early to discuss them, Logan. I will say you're making a strong showing."

"A strong showing, huh?" Like in a horse race?

At least they was a certain symmetry to their styles. He wore his heart on his sleeve while she hung him out to dry. Clothing and laundry metaphors. No, that wasn't fair. He knew her anxieties about them came from her insecurities about finding her place in the Huntzberger universe, a legitimate concern. Lord knows he fought against taking his place in the Huntzberger universe for years. And he was born a Huntzberger. He had no choice. But Rory did have a choice. And she'd opted to
forego entry into Oz for nearly a decade. One accidental pregnancy was all it took to trip up her long-held resolve.

But maybe they could recreate Oz. With Rory and Lucas, maybe the three of them could create their own Huntzberger universe.

A fun universe.

Maybe they could have more kids. If he had a second chance at a pregnancy, he would stick to Rory like white on rice.

Maybe they could adopt a dog.

"So what did you do tonight? You said you had calls to make when you left."

Rory's question pulled him from his reverie.

"Yes, I did make some calls. I spoke to my father and to Odette."

Dead silence.

"Rory?"

"Yeah, I'm here. Just wow. Odette. And your dad. How'd they go?"

"Both calls went fine. My dad wasn't thrilled about putting the last minute kibosh on the wedding but he took it in stride. He's calling in a public relations crisis team tomorrow to unscramble the wedding fiasco."

"What did he say about me? And Lucas?"

"He said 'what hospital are they in and under what name?'"

"Really? You're kidding!"

Logan let out a frustrated sigh. That wasn't all his father said but those were his father's final words so they were definitely the most germane. The other stuff? It would do her no good to hear about.

"Rory, my father is a bully. He can be a jerk. He's got a selective moral compass. His marital vows are optional. And he's a genuine bastard when he thinks it's justified. But family's important to him. Lucas is my son and you're my baby mama."

"I'd hit you if I could."

"You can hit me tomorrow, Ace. I'll even bend over your lap to make it easy on you."

Rory burst out laughing. "You're being ridiculous. I know you're goading me but I should take you up on it. I really hate that expression."

Logan laughed too.

Give me something better, Ace. Give me something better.

"How'd the call with Odette go?"

"That was less pleasant."
"I can imagine."

"But I'm no longer engaged. You can let Lane know."

"Ha. Cute. You're becoming a serial eavesdropper. I heard about earlier with my family -"

"Ace, I walked into a hospital lounge just at the moment your entire family was talking about me. I waited for a lull in the conversation and I guess I'm rusty on Life with Gilmore. Didn't realize I was in for a ten minute wait."

"Hm. I can see that. Hear anything good?"

"Did you know your grandparents' pool house was renamed the sex house in our honor?"

"No!"

"I kid you not."

"Oh my God! That's embarrassing."

"I think we'll live."

"Back to... Did you ask Odette about the phone?"

"I did."

"What did she say?"

"She denied it. Said maybe my parents did it. Or one of my friends - which actually made me think of Robert. Not that he has the balls to do it, but he can be such a pain in the ass. And he does have a soft spot for you. As well as a soft spot on the brain. Then she suggested you did it to protect yourself from a moment of weakness."

"I - " Logan listened as Rory absorbed his words. "I don't even know what to say to that. I ... I'd never touch your phone like that -"

Logan's eyes closed in relief. The idea that Rory blocked it herself hadn't occurred to him. But after Odette suggested it, a part of him wondered if it was a possibility.

"I know you wouldn't, Ace. It takes a devious mind to even think up that crap. She did it. I know she did. The more I think about it, the angrier it makes me. She had no right. I was thinking I'd go for the high road with ending this but I'm angry I missed those eight months. I missed seeing you pregnant! I missed feeling his first kick! And I missed any opportunity I had to take care of you! Both of you! She stole all that from me. From us."

"Well, you two were engaged. She was -"

"Don't make excuses for her! There was no mistaking what our relationship was! What she did was off the rails. Lucas's health was touch and go. That she messed around with that and came between us? It's unforgivable."

"But what if she's telling the truth? It wasn't her?"

"Oh please. Who then? You? Robert? Finn? She knew she was on shaky ground and felt justified in playing games."
"But -"

"Rory! Why are you defending her? Don't! She's a snake. I thought she was better than this. Obviously I was wrong. I don't want to talk about her anymore." Not particularly amused, Logan chuckled in frustration. "You don't realize how unique you are."

"Ha! No, you're right. I'm one of a kind."

Logan could hear the self-deprecation in her voice. There was no reason for it.

"Yeah, you are. You already were pretty special. Now you're the only mother Lucas's got and you're the only baby mama I got."

"I'm keeping count, Huntzberger. Just you wait."

"I can't wait, Ace. I can't wait." Their conversation quieted for a beat. "I should let you get some sleep."

"Please. I don't sleep."

"So calm down. Try not to worry. It's all gonna work out. Worrying won't help so you might as well relax and get some sleep."

"Hm. Good advice. How're you sleeping?"

"Me? I sleep like a baby. But I'm pretty sure I take after my son. So if you were here, I'd perk right up. Can't they give you something?"

"No, I'm pumping milk. Best to lay off the narcotics unless we want Lucas released straight into rehab. What time'll you be here in the morning?"

"Nine."

"See you at nine."

"Sweet dreams Rory."

"Goodnight, Logan."
Hartford, Connecticut, Downtown Marriott, Friday, May 19, 2017, 8:00 am EST

Logan did sleep like a baby Thursday night. Between his whirlwind travel and emotional reunion with Rory as well as the first-time meeting with his son, a lot had happened between Wednesday and Thursday. Dressed in slacks and a grey sports coat, he was on his way out of his hotel room when his phone buzzed. Glancing at the picture that lit up the screen, he smiled.

"Honor."

"Hey Little Brother! Congratulations! My little brother is a daddy!"

"Thank you. Yeah, it's pretty incredible. But Rory did all the work."

"I'm a mom three times over. Believe me: I know who did all the work! Anyway what's the matter with you?! I hear about the baby from Colin, Finn, and Robert?! I get the news about the wedding being cancelled from Dad?! I thought we were close! Why am I the last one to know anything?!"

"I'm sorry. The guys were with me when I got the call. Then I took off. It's not like I had time to make the rounds."

"Well, no. I understand that. But you had your phone -"

"And I've been traveling across time zones. Since I landed most of my time has been spent in a hospital. Not exactly the best place for phone calls. Am I forgiven?"

"Hm."

"Honor?"

"All right."

"Thank you. So what's going on over there?"

"Uh-huh. No way. You first. What's going on over there? And why didn't you tell me you and Rory were having a baby? I've always loved Rory! You know she's the only girl you ever introduced to me as your girlfriend?! Sure, you looked like you were gonna throw up when you did it but still, you managed to get the words out."

"Hey, I wasn't about to throw up. And I must've introduced someone -"

"Nope. Just by names. 'This is Margo'. 'Have you met Alexandra?' I pride myself on having an excellent memory. It was in your dorm room at Yale. I'd just gotten engaged to Josh. You looked positively green. No matter. How is Rory? And the baby?! Oh my God, Logan! Does he look just
like you? Or Rory? Does he have the Huntzberger blonde hair? What color are his eyes? Are you really naming him Logan Jr."

Logan laughed at his sister's bubbly enthusiasm. Aging hadn't changed Honor one bit. Nearing forty, his sister was the same as she'd always been.

"Honor, you're asking a million questions a minute and not giving me a second to answer them!"

"Okay. Okay. Okay. They've just been building up in my head and now my brain feels like it's gonna explode if I don't get them all out!"

"Now that things have settled down I promise I'll keep my phone turned on. If you remember something you forgot to ask and your brain's gonna blow, just shoot me a text."

"Okay. Will do. So talk to me. Tell me everything."

"Everything. Right. So Rory's good. She's still in the hospital. She had high blood pressure-

"Oh no! How's the baby?"

"He's good. He was born about a month early so he's got a few challenges with breathing, feeding, his heart rate but they're monitoring him."

"And what's his name?"

"Lucas Richard Gilmore."

"Ooh! Lucas! Not Logan but trendy! I like it!"

"Trendy? What do you mean?"

"Lucas is the third most popular boys' name."

"It is?" Logan laughed. "Believe me it's a coincidence. It's Rory's stepfather's name."

Rory wouldn't be trendy if she could help it. In fact he could see her being irritated if anyone made the assumption Honor had made that she chose the name just because it was popular.

"I'm hoping to get Huntzberger added in there."

"You think Rory'll go for that?"

"Why not? Half his DNA is from me. Half his name should be as well."

"Hm."

"Hm. What, Honor?"

"Nothing. You know Rory best. Go on."

"He looks a little like me. A lot like Rory. Blonde hair. Big blue eyes -"

"You know most babies have blue eyes when they're born."

"I don't care about most babies. Lucas has Rory's eyes."

"Okay, okay! God, I can't believe all this! It's all so romantic! But why didn't you tell me? And why
were you all set to marry Odette if you were back with Rory?"

"Because I wasn't back with Rory. She doesn't want to get married. At least, she didn't want to get married."

Honor let out a dismissive, disbelieving snort.

"You two wouldn't have just had a child together -"

"Lucas wasn't planned, Honor."

"Hm. But you two were obviously together recently. Nine -or eight - months ago?"

"Yes, but Rory didn't want to get married. Not to me at least."

"You asked her?" At Logan's silence, Honor muttered. "I don't understand you two."

"I don't always get it myself," he observed sardonically.

"Well, why didn't you tell me about the baby? I can understand you not telling them but you know you can always talk to me."

"I only found out about Lucas on Wednesday."

"What? She didn't tell you?! That doesn't make any sense! Oh my God! Was she waiting for you to marry Odette before she told you?"

Logan knew the blocked contact on his phone was the number one reason for his not finding out about Lucas until Wednesday. Added to that was Rory's high blood pressure and related health issues that made for distractions over the past few months. But he wasn't a fool. He knew instinctively that Rory still had long-held reservations to the idea of upsetting his marital apple cart. He knew it all tied back to her resolve to not get caught up in the Huntzberger world.

Despite the phone, despite her health, Rory could've let him know about the baby in the cold efficient way Emily had suggested: a hand-delivered letter from an attorney. But she chose not to go that route. Because she knew, deep down, that that wasn't their path; that wasn't who they were to each other. It had to be between them, not a third party. Even though it meant he hadn't found out about Lucas earlier, he still took some comfort in not getting the news from a lawyer.

"She tried to get in touch with me."

"Odette blocked Rory on my phone."

"That bitch!"

"Exactly."

"So Rory tried to get in touch with you but you never got the messages? So she thought you were blowing her off?"

"Basically."
"Yikes. So what's next?"

"I'm still figuring that out. But, as you heard, the wedding's off."

"Yes and you have no idea how relieved I was when I heard that!" Honor said, in a sing-song voice. "My happiness maybe even makes up for mom's reaction."

"Why? What was mom's reaction?"

"You know mom. She hates anything that's not her idea."

"Yeah I know. What did she say?"

"You can't go by what mom says. She probably still had Valium in her system."

"Just tell me what she said, Honor."

"Well Josh and I saw her at breakfast. We said good morning. She just asked if she'd fallen asleep and woken up in hell."

"Great."

"Sorry. You asked."

"Is it me or is she exponentially more insane when it comes to Rory?"

"Don't ask me to explain mom. I've never understood her. And I think I'm okay with that."

"Is there anything else?"

"She asked if you'd sent any baby pictures so you'd better get on that. The woman's crazy but she loves doting on her grandkids."

"So she's good with Lucas, but not Rory?" Logan closed his eyes, wincing. For not the first time, and probably not the last time, he understood Rory's resolve. His eyes shot open.

It didn't matter. Living in London he didn't even see his mother all that much.

Except he was pretty sure Rory would not want to live full-time in London. Whether in Connecticut or New York, Shira would definitely take advantage of proximity to see her youngest grandchild. Even if she did dislike the boy's mother. He'd witnessed his mother squelch long-held hatred for people just long enough to attend a gala to see what designers attendees wore. To see her grandson - to spend time with his son- Logan imagined Shira would suck up quite a bit.

Shira could force herself to be fake nice to Rory if that's what she had to do in order to see Lucas. But Rory would see right through Shira. How would Rory handle that?

Maybe the answer was to convince Rory to move to London.

"How long are they in the hospital for? What're you gonna do once they're both out? Ooh, ooh! Are you moving back to the States?"

"Rory'll be released this weekend. Lucas will be in for a couple more weeks. As for me -" 

"Do you think you and Rory will get married?"
"You're jumping ahead, Honor. My current plan is to not leave her side."

"Oh! That's so romantic in a stalker kind of way!"

"Thank you. Just the kind of feedback a guy hopes to get from his sister."

"Oh, I have the stalker tendencies too. I figure we get it from Mom and it's how she got Dad to marry her."

"I'm learning so much from this conversation." Logan let out a wry chuckle. "How pissed was dad?"

"When he realized you'd taken off?"

"Yeah."

"Somewhere between Fiji-yacht and California."

"Hm. He put on a show?"

"What do you think? It's your own fault. You humor him for years, making like a good little soldier and then you go AWOL. He wasn't expecting that from you. Ten years ago, yes. But not now."

"Well, I was trying. And I didn't have a reason to go against him."

"Now you do."

Logan knew it wasn't really a question.

"Now I do," he confirmed.

"You know you'd still be his precious son, even if you aren't his clone."

"Yeah. I just... if he's pissed about the change in course, I don't want him taking it out on Rory."

"Oh..." Honor sighed. "I was about to say 'I'm sure he wouldn't do that' but then I remembered we don't lie to each other."

"No, we don't." Logan let out a breath. "So, how're the wedding-less guests?"

"Confused! Nobody knows what the hell is going on! It's obvious something is wrong but we're under a directive not to say anything. So I've just been offering people Xanax."

"Honor, please don't get busted for drug peddling at the Ritz."

"Ha! Just checking to see if you were paying attention. I actually gave a couple to Colin. Boy is très névrotique."

"Yes, he is." Logan sighed, a slight smile on his lips. He figured that was all the news worth hearing. "Honor?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being you for starters. For caring."
"Oh, Logan. Always. Hug Rory for me. Tell her I'm pissed she didn't figure out a way to let know sooner but hug her anyway. Kiss my nephew for me. Send pictures. ASAP. And Logan?"

"Yeah?"

"I know you're probably worried. God knows I was, being the spawn of Mitchum and Shira. But I think you're going to be a terrific dad and Rory's going to be an amazing mom. Just you wait. I have a feeling it's all gonna work out."

"Thanks."

"Any time. And don't forget to send those baby pictures! I promise not to post any online. That would be tacky with the whole cancelled wedding thing."

Logan laughed.

"I'm not even sure I'd care if you did."
After his call with Honor, Logan hung back in his hotel room. Not usually one to hesitate in confronting matters that needed to be addressed head-on, he felt he needed to absorb and process the conversation he'd had with his sister. While most of what she'd said had been positive and reassuring, he still found himself left slightly off-balance by what her report from London.

First, there was Shira. Logan now knew, unequivocally, that his mother's opinion of Rory, was, much like her face following a Botox injection, frozen in time. The why's of the situation -if they ever mattered -certainly didn't matter now. Shira would hopefully have to learn how to accept Rory as her daughter-in-law one day. But, at the very least, under the present circumstances, Rory was her grandson's mother. Surely Shira would comprehend the need for her to be respectful to Rory?

Logan honestly didn't know if Rory being Lucas's mother would be enough to inspire good behavior on Shira's part. During the nearly three years Rory and he had been together, they'd managed to minimize the "in-law" time. In recognition of his mother's and grandfather's dislike and disapproval of Rory, and Mitchum's often critical eye, Rory had been all too willing to steer clear of them. In retrospect, that seemed to have been a mistake. Allowed to persist over time, the rift had grown to psychologically epic proportions. At least for Rory.

As for him, after that fateful Huntzberger family "shanghai," he'd never again found himself in a position where he had to defend Rory to his parents. Yes, there were a couple of times where he could've said something but -for various reasons - hadn't.

He'd been all ready to confront Mitchum following Rory's disastrous internship at the Stamford Gazette. But Rory had begged him not to because she didn't want to cause a rift between him and Mitchum.

The following year Logan could've said something when Mitchum name-dropped Rory in his interview with the Wall Street Journal. That time it had been Rory who had wanted to confront Mitchum while Logan had taken a more pragmatic view.

More recently, Logan knew, Rory had been left disconcerted by their Mitchum encounter at The Dexter House last spring. Logan saw on her face how the flippant tone Mitchum had taken in response to her Naomi Shropshire book proposal had only further fed her insecurities. Not prepared for the encounter himself, Logan had done absolutely nothing to help the situation.

Fast forward and here they were.

Did Rory think Logan wouldn't defend her if it came down to it? He always would've defended her, if he had to. After the disastrous dinner, he and Rory had made a tacit, joint decision to be wusses, and avoid future Huntzberger showdowns. Rory understanding that she was Logan's to defend was
especially important now since she and Lucas were his family. They were everything to him. Mitchum and Shira were just his parents.

If he and Rory hadn't avoided those encounters back then, maybe they'd have an easier time of it now. Rory wouldn't have demonized his parents in her head. Or, if she still regarded them as complete assholes- which he had to acknowledge was fair as they had pretty much always been assholes to her -at least she could've learned how to deal with them on her own terms.

As for him, he definitely wished he'd done some things differently. Being more demonstrably supportive of Rory, both for her benefit as well as for his parents to see. But he'd never been one to court family drama and Rory's tendency to lay low to avoid confrontations with his family had suited him fine back then.

So what was the answer? Would he have to court Huntzberger family drama to prove something? Would defending Rory to Mitchum and Shira prove that he was serious about her, about their family? He wasn't an idiot. He knew that any chance he had at making this work depended on his ability to show Rory they could be together and remain true to themselves.

It was so cliched he grimaced. His life was a damn after-school special.

All of a sudden, his cell phone buzzed. Pulling it from his jacket pocket, he smiled at seeing who it was.

"Finn! Who ever said you were good for nothing? Perfect timing."

"My mum for one. Colin's last stepmum for another."

"Never out of 'your mother' jokes, huh?"

"Never out of your mother, Colin. Period."

"Haha. Funny. By that I mean it's not funny."

"Regressed to 'your mother' jokes since I left? Why can I barely hear Colin?"

"That's because Finn refuses to put his phone on speaker!"

"I told you: it degrades the sound quality. Logan, you know who else has excellent timing?"

"Who?"

"Logan Jr. The boy's timing was impeccable."

Logan chuckled. "Yes, it was."

"I haven't met him yet but he's already my favorite nephew."

"I'll let him know."

"As for his father, you really know how to mess up a party," snarked Finn.

Logan snorted. "Sub-party not helping?"

"Our fun consists of clandestine meetings with Honor and Josh."

"We're hiding in corners to avoid the Dark Lord and Endora. I had to keep Colin sober or he'd buy
"the hotel."

"And you wanna guess how Finn did that?"

"You got me. Breathalyzer-triggered electrodes?"

"No, but that's brilliant!" breathed Finn. "Do they have those? I want one. For myself."

"He drank everything, Logan. Everything. I have had nothing to take the edge off. Now your sister thinks I'm neurotic."

"Honor said there's nothing wrong with you that reincarnation couldn't cure," said Finn.

"She didn't say that."

"Oh, right. I said that."

Logan laughed at his friends' antics. It would, however, be nice to actually be able to hear them.
"Can you switch the phone to speaker now?"

"Will you put the damn phone on speaker Finn?! How am I supposed to hear what Logan's saying? Not to mention I don't like hovering so close to you. I might catch something."

"You know you're the reason they put warning labels on everything," griped Finn.

"And everyone who's ever loved you was wrong. Will you just hit the speaker button?"

Logan heard silence and then a beep.

"Separate calls next time. I feel like an old married couple." Colin's voice came in noticeably louder.

"Listen, thanks for keeping things quiet." Logan knew it didn't need to be said which was exactly why he felt that he needed to say it.

"I've kept your secrets for 15 years -"

"For me it's more like twenty -" interrupted Colin.

"Why would I -we - start narc ing on you now? Just when the secrets are getting good?"

"Touché. Where's Robert?"

"His panties are in a ruffle. Still got a thing for Rory. Better watch him. Second son, you know. Might be fancying himself Logan Jr.'s future stepfather."

Logan rolled his eyes. He was reasonably certain Rory had finally come around to his way of thinking over the decade she'd known Robert and had accepted that he was -in fact - kind of a jerk. At least he hoped she had.

"So you're there for the long haul?"

"Yep. While the baby's still in the hospital I'll definitely be staying. I'm getting an apartment."

"An apartment?" asked Colin.

"You really are settling in, aren't you? I guess the wedding's off then?" Finn observed.
"Does the bride know?"

Logan grinned at the dry humor in Colin's voice. "She knows. Talked to her last night. I doubt you'll be seeing her again."

"Her loss." Finn managed to sound slightly regretful. But Logan wasn't sure if the regret was in recognition of the fact Odette would not be marrying Logan? Or if it was because she would not be seeing Finn and Colin again?

"If it's any consolation we only gave the marriage one year. Two tops."

Silent, Logan frowned as he heard Colin continue.

"She's high maintenance, Logan. Like a Porsche Boxster. But not nearly as much fun."

"Thanks. I guess."

"How’s Rory? Logan Jr.?"

"Logan Jr.'s name is Lucas, Finn. He's doing well. He needs a little help with breathing. They're monitoring him. Giving him medications. But considering how it could've gone, we're really lucky."

"Rory?"

"She's doing well, too." He paused, thinking about Rory. "Worried about the baby but other than that, she's good. Very good."

"Now that Rory's a mum, you'll have to watch out that she becomes more like Lorelai."

Logan considered. Notwithstanding the fact that she disliked him, Logan had the utmost respect for Lorelai. "I don't think that would be bad thing."

"As long as you're not on the receiving end. She'll be a protective mama bear. Mark my words."

"Yeah, Finn. Remember how she yelled at us after Logan's accident?"

Rory yelled at Colin and Finn? Logan had absolutely no memory of that. "What are you talking about?"

"After Costa Rica. You were high on Demerol. Rory laid into us for not having your back during the jump."

"That's right! I blacked it out! Love yelling like that. She scared me."

"Honor thinks she shamed your dad into visiting you at the hospital. She said she talked to your dad and he insisted he wasn't going. She tells Rory about him refusing to come and next thing she knows your dad's at the hospital."

"Really?" Although Logan hadn't thought about the base jumping accident in Costa Rica in years, he still held on to the memory of his father's hospital visit as evidence Mitchum held some affection for him. It had never occurred to him that Rory could've been responsible for his father coming to see him.

"Who knows? So who does Logan Jr. take after? Snarky retorts like you? Or...?"

"Snarky retorts like Rory?" Colin snickered.
"I never noticed that," admitted a seemingly perplexed-sounding Finn. "No wonder you two are perfect together."

"How could you not notice that? You really do have the attention span of a lightning bolt."

"Guys? No snarky retorts yet. Some exaggerated sighing. A little eye roll action. He's got Rory's eyes." Logan chuckled. "You do raise a good point. It's gonna be interesting watching - or hearing - him learn how to talk."

"With you and Rory as parents, Logan Jr. will probably be able to debate himself once he talks."

Logan chuckled at Finn's observation. Yes, hearing Lucas's first words would be something. Maybe it would be some bizarre Roryism.

"You two back together yet?" Colin finally asked the million dollar question.

Logan let out a sigh.

"Well, we're together on the same continent and we're often in the same room." Logan replied dryly. "I've told her I want us to get married."

"You've done that before. Did she come up with a different answer from before?"

Logan grinned. "She didn't flat-out say no."

"Congratulations. That's progress. But I take it she didn't exactly say yes?"

"Love keeps you on your toes."

Logan laughed. "Yes, she does."

"So how're you gonna get Rory to agree to marry you?"

"Good question. I should probably do things differently, considering what didn't work in the past."

"Knocking her up was different."

"Thanks for that, Colin."

"Any time. You know, maybe to get Rory to say yes, you should consider WWMSD."

"Ah, Colin's right. What Would -"

"-Maxwell Smart Do? Well, that's easy. In the appropriately titled, 'The Impossible Mission' Maxwell Smart goes undercover as a trumpet player with Herb Talbot's Tijuana Tin – "

"Named Logan."

"You're kidding," interrupted Logan. "How do you remember that?"

"Lasting effects of a misspent youth. As well as several other decades."

"It's the last five minutes of the episode. As the villains pound on the doors of the room Max and Agent 99 have barricaded themselves in, Max says 'If we could get out of this trap, I'd marry you.' Agent 99 immediately suggests they try the old double door deception trick. It works and they escape. Later, Max asks 99 why she only thought of a way out after he'd proposed. She replied that
she had more to live for after his proposal."

"Thanks for the 'Get Smart' recap, Colin. But how are you suggesting I use this? Barricade us in the hospital until she agrees to marry me?"

"Maybe you could hire someone to beat you up? If she fears you're in danger, she might go all protective mama bear again."

"Or you could knock her up again. One you can write off as an accident but two seems intentional. You could probably seal the deal at that point."

"Seriously? These are the best you got? I need smarter friends," Logan laughed.

"Jokes aside, Logan. The decision's Rory's to make."

"I liked your knocking her up suggestion better, Finn."

"Sorry, mate. You can still give it a go."

"Logan, she just needs time to get used to the idea."

"Yeah, I know. Everything you're saying - it's all stuff I tell myself. I know it's all true. Still can't help but feel impatient. Everything I want is right here. Close but still not quite..." Logan broke off. He knew he didn't need to finish the sentence.

After a brief silence, Colin picked up the conversational thread and set out in a new, more fun direction.

"So, when will you be ready for guests?"

"Yes, is Superman ready for Batman and Robin?"

"Finn, why do I always have to be Robin?"

"Are you serious? With all the whining and the worrying? You were born to be Robin. Robert can be Alfred. He's got the diction for it."

"Yes. And he's peripheral."

"Probably better to wait until Lucas is out of the hospital. Right now, everything revolves around hospital visits. I don't want the responsibility of having to babysit you two in a hospital."

"You could just leave us at your new apartment."

"Even worse. I could always bring you to the hospital and ask Emily to keep an eye on you."

"Emily?"

"Rory's grandmother?"

"Yeah."

"I think we'll wait."

"Let us know, Logan. We'll be there."

"Thanks. It'll be good to have you two around."
"Should we bring Robert?"

"Like I said, it'll be good to have you two around."
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Friday, May 19, 2017, 9:45 am EST

The phone calls with Honor, and Finn and Colin had set Logan's departure from the hotel back a good forty-five minutes. He shot Rory a text to let her know he'd be late. He didn't want to risk her thinking for a second that he might be a no-show.

By the time he'd stopped at a coffee shop and picked up coffees (decaf for Rory) and croissants, it was quarter to ten -well after his original targeted hospital arrival time. As he approached the door to Rory's room, he noted the ginger-haired male nurse from the previous day - Sean - at the nurses station. Logan nodded a greeting to the man as he passed. Coming to a halt in front of Rory's door, Logan noted the door was slightly open. He knocked, entering at Rory's "come in."

"Morning, Ace."

"Logan."

Logan leaned over to drop a chaste kiss on Rory's cheek.

"Real coffee?"

"Decaf, Ace. Can't have Lucas tap dancing in his crib."

"Please? And you don't know. Maybe he'll be the next Alfonso Ribeiro. If he starts tapping now, before he walks, he's got a good shot of being the youngest Tony award winner ever."

"Ace, if he's got just an eighth of your skill, he won't have a chance in hell."

"That's just mean."

"Two months, Ace. That's how long I was limping after the tango club."

"You're such an exaggerator. Speaking of which, I talked to my mom, grandma and Luke this morning about your claims of mistreatment."

"What? They said I was exaggerating? I swear, Ace. It's been like a telenova around here. Your mom's staring daggers at me while Emily's just waiting for an opportunity to feed my balls to a killer whale."

"Yeah, well I talked to them and explained it was a misunderstanding. Neither of us was at fault and we are starting fresh and I need them to do the same."

"What'd they say?"

"And you ending the engagement helped."
"I'm sure it did. What did they say, Ace?"

"Mom said you're now slightly ahead of the smallpox guy while grandma said she'd reserve judgment. Luke said it seemed like you want to do the right thing."

"Good man." Logan smiled at Rory. "Speaking of Gilmore, where is everybody?"

"You kidding? I get second billing around here. They went down to see Lucas."

"You didn't go?"

Rory smiled. "Figured I'd wait for you and we could go down together."

"Thanks. I appreciate that. Sorry I'm late."

"It's fine. Good you were able to talk to Honor and the guys."

"They send their love. I have a feeling we'll probably be seeing them all soon."

"Wow! Really?"

"Really. Anyway, I wanted to show you something."

Logan started to remove something from his jacket pocket.

"Let's walk around while we talk. I need to get used to not being in a bed."

Logan helped Rory as she gingerly slid out of the bed. Rory had explained how she had had a Caesarian so there were stitches running across her stomach. After a few minutes they were outside the room walking along the hospital corridor.

"What did you want to talk about?"

"42 North Main." Logan handed Rory a brochure on the apartment complex.

"Why didn't you tell me this is what you wanted to talk about before we left the room?"

"What difference would it have made?"

"I didn't grab a pen and paper for a list."

"A pro-con list?"

"Do not mock!"

"I'm not! I miss your lists. How about you rattle them off and I'll keep a running tally?"

"Okay." Rory opened the brochure. "Looks modern and clean. It's five minutes away. The hardwoods will allow me to pick up my stress-tapping."

"Pro. Pro. Con."

"Three bedrooms. Plenty of space for Gilmore."

"Pro?"

Rory laughed. "Let's call it neutral. No secret passageway but you'll be nearby."
"Pro."

"Yeah. We can all have a slumber party."

"All? Con."


"We getting a dog?"

"Paul Anka. My fur-bro."

"Ah."

"You'll need to pick up fast food menus from the neighborhood."

"Please. We can go out and eat. I'll have food delivered so the kitchens are stocked."

"I'm thinking more for mom and Luke. Says here there's an athletic room."

"Yeah and you just had a baby. You interested in going to the gym?"

"No. But I can keep you company while you work out." Smiling, Rory turned to face Logan.

"Ace, you're killing me."

"Sorry."

Suddenly the sound of ladies' heels clicking at a fast clip caught their attention. Looking up the corridor towards the elevator bank the identity of the new arrival was soon apparent.

"Aw, jeez," muttered Logan. "No warning, Rory?"

Rory laughed. "Sorry. She texted she might come but didn't confirm."

"Right."

"What the hell?! Is that Huntzberger?! Didn't you ruin Rory's life enough? First, you blow up her graduation. Then you sweet-talk her into some creepy transatlantic affair. Next you knock her up - destroying her uterus in the process! Way to go there, Blondie!"

"Hey! My uterus is just fine!"

"Now she's got a stomach full of staples. And she'll probably tear her gut open sneezing for the rest of her life!"

Logan groaned. "Please tell me there's a genie lamp we can stick her back into."

Rory shook her head, smiling. "Sorry, Huntzberger. No can do."

Logan turned to face the visitor striding quickly towards them. "Nice to see you, too, Paris."

"And you! Gilmore! Those Puffs were right! Being your friend is like having 24/7 cage-side access to the monkey habitat! When're we gonna start flinging some shit around?!"

"Think you already have." Logan met her eyes. "This is a hospital. And aren't you a doctor? I can't imagine what qualities you have that make up for your behavior in public."
"Nice, very nice," nodded Paris, staring at Logan. "What the hell is the 21st century Hubbell Gardiner doing here, anyway? Christ, Rory! Do I need to bring you to a cabaret so you can belt out the "The Way We Were" and just get it out of your system already?"

"Paris!"

"Interesting metaphor. Last time I checked I wasn't the one who dropped my family to go Hollywood," smirked Logan. "How is Michael Bay these days?"

"Oh, low-blow, Peter Pan! Did you know I know Savate? One fouette whip kick to your gonads with my five-inch Ferragamos could end you or neuter you. Either way, thank Rory for Lucas 'cause he's definitely your only child."

"I'm impressed. Here I thought you'd never change and you have. You're actually more psychotic now than you were ten years ago. Congratulations."

"Well, I have to say you've really lived up to your potential. And by that I mean you haven't changed at all. Oh, your voice is a little deeper. Shoulders a little broader. But you're the same entitled publotard you always were."

"I've been called worse by better."

Suddenly Paris grabbed Rory's hand. "Rory, please tell me you two aren't back together! There's not enough brown paper bags in the State of Connecticut to hold all the vomit I'd have to throw up!"

"My God! Stop! Back off! Back to your corners! Both of you! I've been a mom like three - no four - days. I can't believe my first real mom act is telling the two of you to shut up!"

Paris and Logan exchanged guilty looks before each mumbled an apology.

"Sorry, Ace."

"Sorry, Rory. Something about him just makes me want to eviscerate him."

"Okay," acknowledged Rory, nodding. "I accept your apologies. Now, Paris, Logan and I are not together. He came to see Lucas. You found us together because we're parents together. That's all."

That's not all.

"So I'm not going to start hearing Peaches and Herb in my head the second we cut to a commercial break?"

"Not unless it's playing for you." Rory shifted her gaze to Logan. "Would you mind if I talked with Paris?"

"Why are you even here? Why aren't you at Yale New Haven? I wouldn't let my cat birth a litter here."

"Paris, that's crazy. You don't have a cat. Come," she held an arm out to her friend. "You obviously need to be walked." Rory, hooking her arm through Paris's, started to guide her to the opposite end of the floor.

"Ace, I'll head down to the cafeteria for a bit. Text me when you're ready for me to come back so we can go see junior." Logan started to walk away from the two women. Pausing, he turned back, a smile on his lips. "Paris, I hope the rest of your day is as pleasant as you are!"
"You!" Paris violently jerked herself away from Rory to twist around and point at Logan. "You need to start wearing speedos, Huntzberger! Pronto!"

As he continued to walk away from them, Logan caught a snippet of their conversation.

"So what's going on with you and Doyle?"

"That segue was about as smooth as Caitlyn Jenner's legs. Doyle and I are on a trial recoupling. Which I do not recommend for you and Richard Burton back there. Unless you're 100% certain something different is gonna happen. And do I really have to remind you of Einstein's definition of insanity?"

Pot meet kettle. Paris Geller was the last person on the planet that ought to be lecturing people on the definition of insanity.

A half hour later found Logan sitting downstairs in the cafeteria reading the Wall Street Journal. Awaiting word from Rory that it was safe to return to the sixth floor, he found himself glancing frequently at his cell phone. It was during one of these casual looks that -out of the corner of his eye- he caught sight of someone approaching him.

A flash on his phone gave him the heads up a second too late.

Hey Paris left. She might try to find you.

Logan closed his eyes briefly. Standing, he mentally thanked Rory. She was right in her observation that she was moving at half speed. A few minutes earlier that message might've actually been helpful.

"Paris," Logan nodded. "It was good of you to come."

"What're you doing here, anyway? Shouldn't you be following the lesson of your adopted motherland?"

"What're you talking about?"

"I'm talking about Brexit, baby. Nigel Farage? Isolationism?"

Logan sighed. What now? "And what am I supposed to do, Paris? Go somewhere and create my own currency?"

"Please. As if a pound of your fluffy baby-man flesh could qualify as currency. No, I'm talking about Lexit. As in 'Logan-exit'. Rear left if you lack imagination and need full direction."

"And what if I don't?"

"Well, then you better get used to me. I lived through my drama with Doyle. I'm not about to let Rory go through the same bullshit with you. Hang on to your fedora, Archie, 'cause Cousin Maude's here!"

"Fedora? I'm not 90, Paris. I might be buried in one someday, if Lucas inherits the Gilmore sense of humor. But you won't catch me walking around wearing something like that."

"Hey, you said it; I didn't. Better watch yourself Gatsby, or you might find yourself a floater."

"Paris, I appreciate that you're such a good friend and protector to Rory. Believe me. Your tenacity and unfettered rage are the exact personality traits I'd look for in a guard dog."
"Watch it, Whitey."

"-but you don't have to threaten me. I'm not here to hurt Rory. It's the last thing I want."

"Sure. And when people promise to have and to hold until death do they part, splitting up is the last thing they're thinking of. But shit happens. You somehow wound up having a baby with your ex-girlfriend ten years after you broke up with her. You don't need to explain your intentions to me. I doubt you know them yourself. This isn't a coincidence, Huntzberger. 'Until you make the unconscious conscious-'"

"-it will direct your life and you will call it fate.' Never had you pegged for a disciple of Jung, Paris."

"Yeah, well. I never had you pegged as a moron and I never thought we'd have a president governing by tweets. I guess the takeaway is there's still room in the world for surprises. So maybe there's room for one more."

Logan looked at Paris expectantly. "Lay it on me, Paris. Restraint isn't a good look on you."

"Man up, Huntzberger. That's all I'm going to say. You're all brass and bravado when you're jumping off cliffs or piloting puddle-jumpers. Try it on for size with the other stuff."

"Why does everyone see me as the only one responsible here? Rory agreed to our arrangement with her eyes wide open."

"Yeah. Did you ever ask yourself why? Why she would agree to such a thing?"

Suddenly Logan snorted. "'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.'"


"Are you comparing Rory -or me - to Woody Allen?"

"Hey, if the emotionally stunted narcissism fits, Huntzberger..."

With that Paris stomped away, leaving Logan staring after her.
Kangaroo Care

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

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_Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Friday, May 19, 2017, 10:30 am EST_

After Paris left, Logan returned to the maternity ward. Still ruminating on Paris's parting shot, he wondered to what extent Paris had hit the nail on the head. Was it less fate and birth control fail and more unconscious desires that brought he and Rory to the point where they now found themselves? Regardless of whether they married or not, or whether they committed to each other or not, they would forever be tied together by the child they shared.

Rory's door was half open. Peering inside, he saw a large bouquet of lilies as well as a huge fruit basket. Rory stood over the room's vacant bed where she appeared to be puzzling over a giant box labeled 'the Roald Dahl Collection'.

"Somebody send Lucas the complete works of Roald Dahl?"

"I hope not. If he starts collecting books now I can't imagine where I'll store them all by the time he's ten."

Logan internally bristled at Rory's use of "I" instead of "we" but kept his face devoid of his irritation. He knew it would take time. Everything with Rory usually did. He would have to be patient.

"I wouldn't mind having new copies of 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' and 'Matilda' to read—to him, of course. But the box is light. I think it's a stuffed animal."

"Who sent it?"

Rory grabbed a small card laying on the end table next to the lilies.

"Take a look."

Logan glanced at the card.

To Rory, the mother of our grandson:

We are so grateful for this miracle you are generously sharing with us. We happily welcome Lucas, and you, to the Huntzberger family.

Love,

Mitchum and Shira

Logan squinted as he examined the card. Definitely his mother's handiwork. Definitely some none-too-subtle attempts at nuanced barbs in there. The words 'generously sharing' and 'happily' were underlined. Logan figured the 'generously sharing' was in there to highlight the fact that the
notification about the baby had come late. The 'happily' was probably genuine about Lucas but the commas separating 'and you' were intended to make Rory question the Huntzbergers sincerity about her. Logan figured Rory saw through the faux niceties.

"It was nice of them to send gifts," he observed, his voice neutral.

"Yes, but did you actually read the card?"

Logan sighed. Yes, she had seen through the faux niceties.

"My mother's attempt at sarcasm. Once you've spent any time with her-" Logan noticed Rory looked positively green at his words "you'll come to realize she's not nearly as clever as she thinks she is. You'll talk rings around her."

"I don't want to 'talk rings around her.' I don't want a relationship with Lucas's grandmother defined by mutual dislike and mistrust."

Logan's eyes bored into Rory's. "Well, Ace, maybe Dr. Phil isn't such a crazy idea after all."

As they spoke, Rory had continued to open the box.

"Charlie Bucket Teddy Bear." Rory lifted the bear out of the box. "Cute. I like his yellow sweatshirt. Special collectors edition. The Fantastic Mr. Fox. Oh my God! He's got a tailcoat, a little vest and an ascot. Reminds me of the outfits you guys wore on our last outing."

"Guess that's fitting. Maybe we should get Lucas a matching outfit."

"That would be adorable!" Rory pulled the second stuffed animal out of the box. "Well, they may not be the nicest people but your parents have excellent taste in stuffed animals, Huntzberger."

"I'm not sure that's the best message to pass on but I get what you mean."

Logan took a seat on one of the chairs while Rory plopped herself down on her bed, the two stuffed animals next to her.

"Did you have a nice visit with Paris?" he asked.

"Did you?"

"Don't you know it." Logan chuckled.

"Next time I'll try to give you more lead time."

"Thanks. So you ready to go see junior?"

"Yeah. Let me just grab my sweater."

A short while later, Logan was standing over Lucas in the NICU nursery. Gently caressing his son's foot, he found himself whispering to the baby.

"Hey, Lucas. How's that name working for you? Getting used to it?"

Logan smiled as the baby stretched his arms out.

"I know some folks think you look like me, but I have to say the more I see you, the more I think you look like your mom."
The smile stayed with him as he watched his son yawn. Logan looked up as he saw Rory approach. By the smile she wore he could tell the doctor had relayed good news.

"What'd the doctor say?"

"Our little man is doing so well we can hold him. And I'm gonna try to feed him."

"Really?" Logan turned from Rory back to the baby. "Good job, kid. Make your mom proud."

Nicole, Lucas's primary nurse, walked up behind Rory.

"I'm gonna switch this light off, so it's a little darker in this corner. If there's too much going on around him, he may get distracted."

"If he's anything like his father, you got that right."

"I'm not sure anything could distract me from that, Ace."

Rory turned to glance at Logan. A slight flush colored her cheeks. "Hush."

"Rory, have a seat."

Logan watched as Nicole helped Rory get settled onto a chair adjacent to Lucas' isolette. He didn't want to leave for anything in the world, but he couldn't help but recognize that he and Rory were in a rather odd place at the moment. After a brief internal debate, the angel on his shoulder won. He'd hate it if she said 'no', but he felt it was her call to make.

"Am I staying put, Ace?"

"What?"

"Am I staying? Do you want me to leave?"

"No. I mean you can stay," replied Rory, obviously bemused. "I didn't kick you out of the room then. Doesn't make sense to kick you out now."

The new parents exchanged smiles as they watched the nurse secure Lucas's little blue hat before lifting him from his incubator.

"So I'm going to hand him to you, Rory. You need to unbutton your gown and your top. You can keep it on, but it needs to be open. Obviously. Then drape it around his back."

Rory bit her lip and glanced up at Logan.

"Reconsidering?"

"What?"

"Me. Staying put."

"No. Why? Are you?"

"Not a chance. Wild horses, Ace. Wild horses."

"Okay then. Let's do this."
Rory made quick work of removing the hospital gown and her sweater, and unbuttoning her blouse. The nurse laid the baby in Rory's arms. Rory bit her lip.

"So, this is called kangaroo care." Nicole grabbed a few pamphlets from a shelf and handed them to Logan. "That's it, Rory. Hold him upright against your bare chest. Then when he starts rooting around on your skin, guide him to your nipple."

"He's so light."

"I'm sure he'll pack it on now, Ace."

Rory glanced up at Logan who winked at her, prompting from her a slightly embarrassed chuckle.

"You're incorrigible."

"I try."

Logan couldn't believe how happy he was in that moment. Rory. Lucas. This was what life was supposed to be.

Perfect.

Rory heard a sound and glanced over Lucas, towards Logan, who looked like he was trying very hard to stifle a laugh.

"Don't even think it," she scolded him.

"Whatever you think I was thinking, I can promise you I wasn't thinking."

"I don't even know what you just said, Huntzberger, and I still don't believe you. Besides if you don't know what I think you're thinking, how can you be so sure that's not what you're thinking?"

Logan nearly laughed aloud at the confused expression on the nurse's face.

"Good. Hold him like that. Now hold your shirt over his back to help keep him warm." Nicole leaned over to help place Rory's shirt under her arm, against the baby's back. "Don't worry about the wires. They're fine as long as no one moves suddenly." The nurse looked between Rory and Logan. "Oh, I forgot the screen. Do you want me to pull out the privacy screen?"

"I think we're good. I'm behind the isolette and Logan's blocking me."

"Let me get it. Just in case."

Nicole disappeared for a couple of minutes, returning with a privacy screen she strategically positioned in front of them.

"So I'm gonna leave you for a bit. Logan, come get me or wave if you need me."

"Will do," replied Logan.

Nicole stepped away, leaving the family alone. Logan kept his eyes on Rory and Lucas. Rory's eyes didn't stray from her son.

"How does it feel?"

"Strange. Better than the pump. That's for sure."
After a few minutes, Logan decided to give Rory a break from him staring at her naked breast. Instead, he started looking through the pamphlets the nurse had given him.

"This kangaroo care is supposed to be really good." He read aloud to her. "Doctors and researchers have suggested that skin-to-skin contact can improve babies' recovery time and help them leave the NICU sooner."

They sat quietly. Lucas fed while Rory watched him. Logan alternated between watching Lucas, watching Rory, and trying to read the brochures. Finally it occurred to him that this really was a perfect moment. Logan rifled under his hospital gown to pull his cell phone from his jacket inner pocket. Rory made a face when she saw his phone.

"You're taking a picture? Now?"

"Well, I have had requests," he joked.

"Come on. You had all day yesterday. You remember now? When there's a chance for a gratuitous boob shot?"

"Being strategic, Ace."

"Hold on." She glared at Logan. "Wait until he's done. Your sister's one thing but I don't want a nip pic going to the guys!"

"What the hell, Rory?! It still bothers me you went with Robert to Finn's party! I'm not about to send him a picture of your breast!"

"I'd hope not." Rory sullenly replied. "And no cursing around the baby."

"Come on. He's too young to pick up bad words."

"Yeah, but I need to start training you for when he's older."

Logan found himself smiling at the idea of Rory 'training' him. Their eyes held until Lucas made a slight cry, breaking their connection. Rory looked down at their son. She guided his mouth back to her nipple.

"So...are you gonna take that picture?"

"I'd like to, Rory. As long as you're okay with it. It's for me. I promise. Just for me. To replace the one I took in New Hampshire. Which," he grinned, "now that I think of it, Lucas was in that one too."

"Yep, he certainly was."

Logan took the photo and then put his phone away.

"He seems to be taking to it."

"Yeah."

"Kid's smart."

"He's precocious."

"My hair, your brains."
"Pretty sure he's going on instinct, Huntzberger."

They sat in a comfortable silence as Lucas suckled on Rory's breast. They both had their eyes on the baby. Finally Rory looked up. Logan watched her, capturing her eyes. This time he could see a hint of something.

"What's going on in that head of yours, Ace?"

Rory sighed. Logan had a feeling this would not be good.

"What about the dynastic plan, Logan?"

"Rory, it's just -" Logan stopped, realizing it was way more important to listen than it was to talk at that moment. "What about it?"

"What do you want? From me? From him?"

"Nothing. Nothing more than this, Rory. You. Me. Lucas."

Logan watched as Rory averted her eyes as she continued.

"Logan, I believe on some level you really believe that. I do. But...you and me. Our lives don't mesh."

"Rory, don't say that."

"And for him -" Rory cleared her throat as tears started to well in her eyes. "Look at him, Logan. Don't you want him to have whatever he wants? Have a chance to be whatever he wants?"

"Yes, Ace. I'm with you on that. One hundred percent."

"How can he? As a Huntzberger?"

"We can make it work, Rory. I know we can." Logan reached out and with his thumb gently swiped a tear from her cheek. "Come on, Ace. Don't we owe it to him to try?" He grinned at her. "We're the parents. We can agree to keep the psychotic levels at a minimum. Especially when he starts to date."

"Shush. I don't even want to think of him dating."

"So don't worry about it. We got a few years yet."

"But what's gonna happen next? Are you moving back to the States? I like London but with Lucas... I don't want to move there, Logan. I want him to know my grandmother and she's not getting any younger. Plus I was counting on having my mom nearby for a while -at least until I get the hang of things..."

"I'm already on it. I can work out of New York part-time."

"You'd be able to do that?"

"Not overnight but I'm pretty sure I can make it happen."

"Where would you live?"

"We could get a place in New York. Or Connecticut. Or both."
"We?"
"We, Ace."

"What about my book?"
"What about it?"

"Is your family gonna have a problem with it?"
"Are they in it?"
"No."

"Am I in it?"
"No."

"Why not?"

"Oh, my God. Call Him Mr. Vain. How about because it ends with my graduation from Chilton? Though I suppose I could add you in as an arrogant time-traveler traversing my life in his ego-powered hot air balloon."

"Very funny. Well, if I'm not in it, and they're not in it, why would they care?"

"I don't know. You tell me. I've learned it's never safe to make assumptions about your family."

Their conversation came to an abrupt halt when the nurse suddenly rejoined them.

"How's he doing?" asked Nicole.

"Asleep." Rory gazed at the baby while Logan gazed at Rory.

"Let's switch him to the other breast. He'll probably wake when we move him. Then he can feed for a few more minutes. You want to make sure you maintain comparable milk production in both breasts."

Nicole's expert hands took Lucas from Rory and switched the baby to her other breast. The jostling did wake him who promptly started feeding on the second breast.

"Logan, are you gonna hold him? You'll want to remove your gown. Are you wearing a button down shirt or a pullover?"

Startled, Logan felt his eyes glaze over as he attempted to answer the nurse's questions.

"I'm not sure. I don't think I was planning on it. Not to sound pervy or anything but I was really enjoying just watching."

"I don't think there's anything 'pervy' about watching. But you should certainly hold him. The mother might have a slight advantage but kangaroo care is recommended for both parents. It's an excellent way to bond."

"You heard the nurse, Huntzberger." Logan heard the smile in Rory's voice. Glancing at her he confirmed her smile. "Take off your shirt."
Grinning, Logan removed the hospital gown. Next he slid out of his sports jacket which he rolled up and tucked on the chair behind him. Finally, he unbuttoned his shirt.

"Good thing you don't wear an undershirt." Rory continued to bite back a laugh.

"Isn't it?"

"Rory, did Lucas stop feeding?" asked Nicole.

"Yeah. He stopped."

"Logan, you sit. I'll take him from Rory and hand him to you."

"Okay."

Rory and Logan were quiet as Nicole navigated around them and finally placed the baby in Logan's arms.

"Careful, Huntzberger. You don't want to cut him on those sharp pecs of yours."

"I thought you liked my six pack, Ace."

"I do. Doesn't mean it's not dangerous." Rory mumbled her next comment. "Probably makes it more dangerous."

Logan smiled watching his son. "So should I be burping him or something?"

"Breastfed babies typically don't need to be burped as often as bottle-fed babies. If he seems uncomfortable, or he cries, give him a couple of gentle pats." Nicole watched Lucas settle against Logan's chest. "He actually seems fine. I'm going to leave you guys. Wave if you need me." With that Nicole discreetly left the threesome alone.

His son unexpectedly in his arms, Logan focused on Lucas. The baby was on the smallish side. Logan had seen each of Honor's three children within the first day of their births. Each had been born at the nine month mark and each had weighed somewhere between seven and eight pounds.

Lucas definitely had the Huntzberger blonde hair, just as he definitely had Rory's big blue eyes. Which were now closed. Logan marveled at the infant's smooth, soft skin. The baby stirred a bit but he seemed to be asleep.

"Hey," whispered Rory. "Where's your phone?"

"Left inner pocket. Jacket's on the chair behind me."

Logan watched Rory as she buttoned up her top. She leaned over, reaching behind him to grab his jacket from the chair. Extracting his cell phone from his jacket pocket, she looked at him expectantly.

"Code is 0-5-1-5."

"That's Lucas's birthday."

"Yeah. Not a coincidence. I just changed it."

"Oh." Rory stood and moving a few feet away from Logan and Lucas, held the phone out in front of her to snap the picture.
Logan thought he heard her utter something under her breath.

"Did you just say something about ovaries exploding?"

"No," she replied a bit too emphatically. "Anyone ever tell you you have big ears?"

"No. But I have been told other things are big."

"Oh my God. You're so wrong. He's four days old."

"Guess you're just gonna have to train me, Ace."

Logan gave Rory the biggest grin in his repertoire and was delighted to see the smile returned in full force.

"Yeah, I guess so, Huntzberger."
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph’s Hospital, Friday, May 19, 2017, 1:00 pm EST

Hours later Logan found himself in the elevator heading down to the hospital's ground level. He was leaving the hospital to find lunch for himself and Rory. The visit with Lucas had gone incredibly well. According to the nurse, the baby had not had any breathing episodes since Wednesday. If he continued to do as well as he was doing, he might be released from the hospital earlier than originally forecast.

Making his way past Maggie at the front desk, he nodded to the hospital staffer, giving her a smile. Deciding it was finally time to send the promised photo to London, Logan pulled his cell phone out from his jacket pocket.

But not before studying each picture. Rory had demonstrated herself to be quite the photographer. She'd taken three pictures of him holding Lucas. Each photo was taken from a different angle, all of them were good. They'd gotten Nicole to take a few photographs of the three of them together, Rory fully covered. He loved those pictures. They looked so happy. He and Rory at any rate. Lucas looked asleep. Peaceful. Lucas had definitely inherited Logan's ability to sleep through noise. Rory could be a world-champ sleeper, but she tended to wake more easily.

Selecting one of the photos of him alone holding Lucas - angled so that you could make out a bit of each of their profiles - he put together a group text to his sister, his mother, his dad, Finn, and Colin. If Robert cared, the ass could look over Colin or Finn's shoulder.

Accompanying the picture, Logan typed "Lucas and his dad get acquainted. Mom pulled a Princess Kate, acting as photographer."

Smiling as he hit send, he watched the phone as he exited the hospital and stepped out onto the hospital's exterior walkway. He wasn't usually one for staring at his phone to wait for messages but then it wasn't every day he introduced his son to his family. He didn't have long to wait.

Colin: Nice, Huntzberger. Thankfully he seems to take after Rory.

Finn: Logan Jr. looks quite tuckered. Party ways already?

Honor: Oh my God! He's so beautiful! We're flying out ASAP.

Dad: Cute. A heads up would've been good. You should've heard your mother's scream. You'd have thought Louis Vuitton was going out of business.

Logan was not expecting his phone to actually ring. Frowning he tapped the answer key. He'd keep it brief. He didn't want anything marring what had been shaping up to be a perfect day.

"Hi Mom."
"Logan! The baby's so cute. Of course, I believed it when your father told me the news but that baby looks so much like you did as a baby there's not a question in my mind that he's a Huntzberger!"

"Mom, you could've just looked at the DNA test. There should never have been a question in your mind."

"Now, Logan, don't be naive. You can't always trust everything that comes out of a lab. There's mislabeling. Or cross-contamination. Incompetent technicians. Or unscrupulous ones who can be bribed."

"Mom, I'm not interested in hearing you badmouth my son's mother. Nor am I interested in hearing about everything you learned today on Forensic Files. So is there something I can do for you?"

"Logan, I'm not badmouthing Rory but you have to admit the whole thing is suspect. You two weren't dating. You have one liaison."

"We definitely had more than one liaison. Is that what you're fishing for? And I'm thrilled things turned out the way they have. Just sorry it didn't happen sooner. Is there anything else?"

"Well, your father and I are planning on coming home. Just as soon as the whole crisis messaging is figured out. You know cancelling the wedding is a big deal. There are board members and shareholders to consider. Not to mention competitors who will happily exploit flighty, indecisive behavior on your part."

"'Flighty, indecisive behavior'? I've never been more sure of anything in my life."

"You know the truth matters less than the picture that's painted. Besides you were days from marrying Odette. That you changed your mind on a dime -no matter how steadfast your resolve- is not to your credit, Logan."

"Okay. I get your point. Is there anything else?"

"That's it. But when your father calls you later you need to promise to keep an open mind."

"An 'open mind'? About what?"

"About the crisis messaging. Your father's team has been working day and night since we got the news. They say this is the only way to save face with the last minute cancellation, not to mention you cheating on Odette, and Lucas's illegitimacy."

"Mom! Stop. Please!"

Logan let out a loud, frustrated sigh. He couldn't believe how quickly the absolute happiness of earlier in the day was being replaced by the same old Huntzberger drama and nonsense.

"Fine, Logan, I'll stop. But the sooner you face reality the better. Odette is not some little nothing. Her family's very wealthy and very influential. Especially in Europe. I wish you'd reconsider."

"Not a chance."

"Fine. You're not going to come off looking great in any case, but played wrong you could lose the respect of everyone."

"Everyone'? Don't you think you're being a little melodramatic? Cancelling my wedding upon finding out I have a son does not say a thing about my professional capabilities. The people I respect
know this."

"You'll be taking over HPG when your father retires, Logan. In a few short years. You can't underestimate how much something like this could leave a permanent blemish on your reputation."

"Whatever," replied Logan. He really wanted his mother to stop talking. "Mom, I was actually on my way to pick up lunch. Is there anything else we have to discuss now? Or can we postpone to later?"

"No, Logan. I said my piece. Just remember what I said when your father calls."

"I will do that."

"Thank you."

"Sure."

Logan ended the call. Crossing the street, he made his way to a deli not far from the hospital. If his mother was trying to get under his skin, she'd succeeded. He was left wondering what messaging the crisis team had cooked up and why his mother felt it necessary to advise him to keep an "open mind." Then there was her heads-up that she and Mitchum would soon be 'coming home'.

Not good. Definitely not good.

Later that afternoon, Logan left Rory alone in her room to rest and pump milk while he went downstairs to sit in the cafe and check messages. Luke and Lorelai had returned to Stars Hollow while Emily was spending time with friends or possibly "Daddy Jack." Logan wasn't ready to leave the hospital - he intended on spending more time with Rory and Lucas before he left for the day - but he did need to amuse himself for a while.

Given the tenor of his conversation with his mother, Logan figured his father would be calling him shortly. And -if the discussion with his mother was anything to go by- it was destined to be less than pleasant. While he didn't want his time with Rory or Lucas to be poisoned by Huntzberger crazy, he had been left somewhat concerned by the conversation with his mother. That concern -that worry - had been hanging over him since the call.

What the hell could the PR crisis team have possibly come up with?

For that reason, he decided it would be better to call his father preemptively. Logan would rather discover a problem now -when there was still a chance to fix it - as opposed to later when whatever window of opportunity that might've existed closed. Mitchum answered on the first ring.

"Logan. I take it you're calling because of the talk you had with your mother?"

"You tell me."

"No time for games, Logan."

"Agreed. No time for games. Yes. I spoke to Mom. She said you'd be calling me. I decided to call you. What's going on?"

"You know I've been working with your Uncle David and the crisis team..."

"Yeah. Mom said to keep an 'open mind' -whatever the hell that means."

"So you're positive things with Odette are irreparable?"
"Yes. She fucking blo-" Logan started to rail on Odette for blocking Rory on his phone but then dropped it; he didn't want to say anything about that yet. "The prenup would've blocked me from having a relationship with my son."

"You want a relationship with the boy?"

"Yes."

"But more than that. He's your heir?"

Logan knew that had Rory been in the room, hearing this conversation, she would've been horrified. It's just a word he told himself. A word that means different things to different people.

To the older generation of Huntzbergers it means the boy is everything. The continuation of a legacy in publishing. A week ago, in envisioning his future with Odette, Logan would've thought nothing of sharing that perspective of their- his and Odette's - hypothetical children, especially their hypothetical firstborn son.

But now?

Now things were different.

He was no longer talking about hypothetical children.

He was no longer talking about Odette's children.

Now the word simply meant that Lucas was Logan's son. Lucas and Rory were Logan's family. He'd share everything he had with them. They could be involved in HPG if they chose to, to whatever extent they wanted to.

In a startling moment of clarity Logan realized this was the real reason his parents never supported his relationship with Rory. They knew their line's tradition of firstborn heirs controlling HPG would come to a screeching halt. They knew Rory wouldn't allow her son - her children - to be railroaded into a life of HPG servitude.

Of course, Logan would expect Lucas - and any other children - to intern at HPG but he wouldn't force them into a long-term role they didn't want. Certainly not to the detriment of them being able to pursue something they really wanted to do. But with he and Rory as the parents, chances are their children would be cerebral. They'd probably be gifted writers. But they'd also be allowed to choose.

At least within reason he told himself.

As the parents, he and Rory would have to make those decisions together when it came down to it.

What if Lucas wanted to drop out of school?

Join a band?

Join a cult?

Join a competitor?

"Logan? You hear me?"

"Yeah, Dad. Lucas is definitely my heir."
"Okay, so here are the options. The first one would also work if there's a chance you might reconcile with Odette."

"There's not."

"We'd say the wedding was postponed to allow you time to address the paternity issue. While you and Odette remain committed to one another -"

"We don't."

"-the birth of a child resulting from a fling you had with an ex-girlfriend necessitates a pause on the wedding."

"Permanent pause. And come on. Describing my relationship with Rory as a 'fling'? Everyone back home who saw me propose would know that's bullshit."

"I forgot about your proposal."

Typical of his father. He wasn't in the room. He didn't witness it himself. Therefore it didn't happen.

"Anyway, is Odette on board with this? I can't imagine that she is."

"Odette sees the bigger picture."

Logan chuckled. "Sure she does. Saint Odette can do no wrong."

"That's uncalled for. Especially considering what you put her through."

"Is there more to this, Dad? Even if I were willing to play along, I doubt Odette would."

"Option two is similar but we focus more on the birth of the next Huntzberger heir, less on the last minute wedding cancellation. The baby's name will include Huntzberger I assume?"

Logan hesitated. It was going to be hard enough getting Rory acclimated to the idea that all manner of Huntzbergers will be fawning over her newborn as the next 'heir apparent' to the Huntzberger Publishing Group, but getting her to agree to add Huntzberger to the boy's name? He definitely had his work cut out for him.

"Yes."

"Excellent. Well, it sounds like option two it is. I'll have the team start drafting a birth announcement. Want me to send it to you before it goes in?"

Two words immediately came to Logan's mind: plausible deniability.

"No. Don't send it to me. Keep it simple. Stick with the facts. Anything about Rory - just pull it from Richard's obituary."

"Good idea. The larger piece can wait a couple of weeks."

Larger piece? A couple of weeks?

"Dad, Lucas was born early. Remember? He may still be in the hospital a couple of weeks from now."

"All the better. More of a human interest story. It'll dampen the curiosity about the wedding."
Logan rubbed his temple. He knew this was bad. How was he going to get Rory to understand the need for this? If he were honest with himself, he wasn't sure he understood the need for this.

But this is what it meant to be a Huntzberger. This is why Logan was still asking Rory Gilmore to marry him, ten years after the first time he asked. He knew she could become accustomed to nearly everything about the Huntzberger lifestyle - hadn't she the first time they were together?

But living life under a microscope?

Rory was writing a book about her life Logan reminded himself.

She was inviting her own microscope in, whether she realized it or not.

Logan forced himself to pay attention to his father.

"The wedding was scheduled for tomorrow. We've got a press release saying 'due to extenuating circumstances, the wedding has been postponed'. We'll know it's cancelled but we don't need to say that. Once the birth announcement hits, it'll be obvious. How about we get the announcement in on Sunday?"

"Dad, isn't this in poor taste?"

"Logan, that's a bit hypocritical coming from you. Frankly, the wedding is old news. The next Huntzberger heir is the news. It's all gonna come out anyway. We do it this way, we control the spin and we mitigate the damage. We sit on our hands and let someone else break the story, we have no control over it. Who knows? Maybe they'll focus on Rory. That she's a failed journalist who saw an opportunity to reignite her career by hitching her wagon to an old boyfriend?"

"That's ridiculous. Who's gonna believe that? She's writing a book. She's hardly the first journalist to make that career transition."

"It's not my argument. I'm just playing devil's advocate, Logan. You have to admit Rory's no innocent in this."

"What the hell's that supposed to mean?"

"She was seeing someone else. Did you know that? A Paul Ansel."

"Yes. I knew about Paul."

"You know she was almost arrested for attacking Gail Collins?"

"What?"

"You know how many food blogs have threads on how nuts Lorelai Gilmore of the Dragonfly Inn is?"

"What?"

"My point is Logan if we don't get ahead of this, competitors will dig. Because you're you and Odette Lamontagne is who she is, inquiring minds are gonna wanna know who the showstopper at the center of all this is. That could be Lucas. Or it could be Rory. But it's gonna be someone."

Logan sighed. Why couldn't anything ever be easy?

"Logan? You understand?"
"Yeah."

"You have some time to think about this but you really need to talk to Rory and get your story straight. The fact that Lucas is illegitimate doesn't matter to your mother and I but some of the board members and partners are of the old guard. If you and Rory have a future, they're gonna wanna hear that a wedding is in the works. You need to think about that. There'll come a point when you'll need them. Think about it, Logan."

"I am thinking about it, Dad."

"You'll have to make sure you're on the birth certificate. You got the test. That's good. You might need to sign a paternity form. You'll have to update your will. I can get the lawyers on that if you want."

"Sure. Have them start drafting changes and send it to me."

"Will do, Logan."

"Thanks."

After ending the call with his father, Logan stared out pensively before him.

Rory and he had managed to score themselves twenty four hours of a Lucas-filled happy bubble.

A happy bubble that seemed destined to pop.
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Friday, May 19, 2017, 5:00 pm EST

After ending the call with Mitchum, Logan hung back in the cafe, ordering himself a cup of tea. A few things were becoming glaringly apparent. First, the respite from his parents would soon be coming to an end. While the press release announcing the wedding was called off and the birth announcement were (relatively speaking) minor, whatever Mitchum had cooking for "a couple of weeks" from now would not be minor. As much as having his parents in Hartford would throw a wrench into things with Rory, he had to admit he'd have a better chance of influencing how things were going if they were nearby.

Second, while Logan might have won the battle (Odette), he'd definitely not yet won the war (Rory). He would have to curb the Huntzberger insanity levels if he was going to get Rory to even entertain much less agree to something beyond transatlantic coparenting.

Third, he could use some support on this side of the Atlantic. Without a second thought he texted Honor, Colin, and Finn:

Logan: Could use a little help here.

Honor: I told you we were coming ASAP. Tomorrow.

Colin: Maisie was released so we're ready to fly back whenever.

Finn: What should we do with our dates?

Logan: If you flew them out you should probably bring them back.

Colin: What should we do with Robert?

Finn: Yes. Do we bring Alfred?

Logan: One of you'll have to share a room with him.

Colin: We'll drop him off over the Atlantic.

A short while later Logan found himself back on the sixth floor, slowly approaching Rory's room - inadequately he knew -armed with a decaf. He could tell from the angle that the door was not quite shut. As he made his way closer, he could hear a man's voice. Although he hadn't intentionally been quiet, he could tell Rory and her guest were unaware of his presence outside her room. He held his hand up to knock when something held him back. He lowered his arm and listened instead.

"The focus is so on parent/child relationships, I'm half afraid, if I think too much, I'll want to rewrite the whole thing."
"Tell yourself you're not gonna do that. If you've got something new to say, just write a second book."

"Jess, I'll be happy if I finish one book."


"You'll finish it. Don't worry so much. You know what I think you should start thinking about?"

"What?"

"Scenes from the book for multi-media delivery."

"Multi-media delivery? What're you talking about?"

"The best of Lorelai and Rory. As a graphic novel series."

Outside the door, Logan managed to restrain a snort of laughter.

"You mean a comic book?"


"You think?"

"Yes, I do. Hear me out. One of Truncheon's author's wrote a book. Then he developed a graphic novel for both print and internet. It became big. Found a new audience that was not only internet savvy, but also interested in the whole thing. The whole milieu. Not just reading it but living it. Finally one fan - a video game and cosplay distributor - approached him to develop a game version."

"Are you suggesting I develop a Gilmore Girls Video Game? Who'd win? The player who tosses out the best quips?"

"Maybe. Or maybe you earn points on number, obscurity and complexity level of pop culture references."

Logan stifled another chortle. He heard Rory titter from within the room.

"I don't know, Jess. It's a bit weird. I like weird but this may be too weird. Who'd play it? Stoned college kids?"

"Yes, definitely college kids. You could hold a couple of meet-ups to promote it. Do promotional tours at colleges, gaming conventions. Maybe wineries. Nouveau art museums. Spas. Maybe the Dragonfly could sponsor a Gilmore Girls cosplay weekend. Have your mom and grandma there to do a meet and greet. Sign a few autographs. Target the independent movie houses. There's one in Stars Hollow, right?"

"Yeah. The Read, White, and Blue Theater. Why?"

"Have an amateur actors' night. Invite folks to come in and act out their favorite scenes. Don't just read what Lorelai says to Emily. Be Lorelai. Be Emily. Say it yourself."

Logan had to force himself not to laugh. If the pretentious knob came up with any more brilliant ideas, he might just piss his pants.
"So would this just be women? Or would it include men too? I'm not sure Mom and Grandma would be down with a whole Lorelai and Emily drag queen thing."

Oh my God, Ace. Logan finally could not hold back his snicker.

"Did you hear something? Is someone outside my door? Terri -the afternoon nurse -is supposed to come back."

"Nah, doesn't seem to be anyone out there. Rory, have you ever heard of EST?"

"Heard of it. Not really sure what it is."

"EST is a type of therapy that came into vogue in the seventies. Participants are challenged to be themselves rather than playing a role imposed on them by their past. It gets people past psychological roadblocks that might hinder their actualization."

"Okay. So what're you thinking?"

"There's a new reverse EST movement where people act through their traumas. What do you think of hosting a mother/daughter psychological healing weekend? Moms and daughters with toxic relationships come in, act through their aggressions using Lorelai and Rory's words. Or Lorelai and Emily's words. It's not about them, their words, so they can leave their personal baggage at home. This is just about the freedom and the expression."

"Is this another of Truncheon's authors?"

"Yep. One of our authors is a psychotherapist and cosplay enthusiast. I can put you in touch with him. Name's Dr. Danny."

"Is that his last name?"

"Can't remember his last name. He goes by Dr. Danny."

"Well, Jess, I have to admit I was only thinking about a book. I never gave any thought to a full...milieu."

"Promise me you'll think about it. This could be big."

"Oh, I'll definitely be thinking about it. How could I not?"

Finally getting his laughter under control, Logan knocked lightly on the wall adjacent to the open door. At Rory's "Come in," he pushed the door open all the way.

"Hey, Logan."

"Ace." He smiled at her before turning to Jess. "Hi. Not sure if you remember me-"

"Oh, I remember you." Jess's voice was hard as he stood. Logan noted he didn't offer his hand.

"Yeah, seems that you do." Deciding to ignore the poor man's Kerouac for the moment, Logan brought his eyes back to Rory. He handed her her cup. "Here's your coffee."

"Caffeinated?"

"Ace, we can't have Junior climbing out of his crib. He's small but wily."
Rory and Logan exchanged smiles. Out of the corner of his eye, Logan saw the second the lightbulb went off for Kerouac.

"So you're the dad?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"Or not," mumbled Jess.

"You say something?"

"Congratulations." Jess shifted his gaze to Rory. "Cause for more congratulations?"

"Yes," replied Logan.

"No," answered Rory.

Jess smiled sardonically as he sat back down. "Guess I got my answer."

Logan glared at Jess before turning an exasperated gaze at Rory, who, he saw, was giving him an equally frustrated look.

"So Jess," Logan grinned as he sat on the empty bed. "What're you up to these days? You live around here?"

"No, as a matter of fact. I'm still in Philly."

"Ah. Philly. A lot of history. Great music scene. And I hear it's still relatively affordable for struggling artists."

"And it's still relatively free of arrogant pricks."

Rory frowned while Jess gave Logan a lopsided smirk.

Logan returned the grin. Pretentious fuck.

"Good to know. Maybe I should buy the paper out there and remedy that."

"Logan!" Rory hissed at him.

"I'm trying to be nice, Ace. Old Friend Jess seems to think we have a problem."

"Oh, no. It's not a 'we' problem; it's definitely a 'you' problem," Jess shot back.

"Jess, I don't think -"

"No, Rory," Logan glanced at her. "It's all right. Every man's entitled to his opinion. So, how's the world of 'he said/she said', anyway?"

Jess turned a stony gaze in Logan's direction.

At Jess's continued silence, Logan elaborated. "Write any more books since last time we met?"

"Oh, I knew what you were asking. I was just thinking how to translate my answer into "Dick" so you'd understand."

"Jess!"
Logan chuckled. Kerouac was entertaining. He'd give him that.

"I'll take that as a 'no,'"

"You can take it anyway you like. I hear you wrote a book. Why don't you send it to me? I'll waste no time reading it."

Logan smirked. "So what are you doing these days, Jess?"

"I run a publishing company."

Amused, Logan chuckled again. "Yeah, so do I."

"Oh, I know what you do. We keep it simple at Truncheon; we only publish books and zines. Not quite the multinational franchise machine bent on dumbing down the masses that you got going on."

Logan shrugged dismissively. "Bit more complicated than that. I could explain it to you but I can't understand it for you. You out this way often to see your Uncle Luke and Aunt Lorelai?"

Rory's eyes widened visibly at Logan's question.

"I visit regularly enough. My mom, sister, and stepfather live a town over from Stars Hollow. I've been -"

"Jess has actually been helping me with the book. He's been my sounding board."

"I've probably seen Rory more in the past six months than I had in the past six years."

Logan reflexively shot a questioning look at Rory before turning back to Jess.

Game on. What the hell was Old Friend Jess doing hanging around a vulnerable, pregnant ex?

"Sounding board? That's terrific. You'll have to thank him in the acknowledgments, Ace. Special thanks to my cousin, Jess," Logan paused. "What's the last name, Jess? Danes?"

"No. It's Mariano," supplied Rory. "Jess, thank you so much for coming by. It was really good seeing you."

"Yeah, you too." Jess rose from his seat. "You should think about what we talked about. Leveraging the book for full story integration."

"I'll definitely think about it," nodded Rory.

Logan nearly laughed aloud. Yeah, he'd be thinking about it too. Probably need brain bleach to get rid of some of the visuals.

"Good seeing you again, Cousin Jess."

Jess glared at Logan silently before finally putting on his leather jacket and leaving the room.

As soon as Jess was out of the room, Rory turned her fuming gaze on Logan.

"What the hell was that? You wanna pee on my leg too? I have no words. I was joking about you being a time traveling jackass in a hot air balloon but maybe the joke's on me? The two of you regressed ten years right before my eyes!"
"Rory, I was fully prepared to be nice. But it was obvious Cousin Jess would like there to be something going on between the two of you-

"Please. There's nothing going on between me and Jess! We dated when we were seventeen! That's half a lifetime ago!"

"Rory. Believe me. I'm a guy. I know when another guy's sniffing around my girl."

"Don't call me that!"

"Fine. My Baby Mama."

"Oh my God. Please don't start."

"Rory, maybe you're not ready to claim me as your guy, but you're definitely my one and only girl. The only one who's ever mattered. The only one I could ever imagine spending forever with and seeing it as fun and full of possibilities, not a prison sentence."

"Well, there's one for the wedding vows." Rory snapped. Watching her, Logan thought some of what he'd said at least had penetrated her stubborn skull. Or maybe not he reconsidered at hearing her next words. "Ever think maybe you see it that way because Vegas was fun? I mean there was no commitment. No rules. It wasn't like I kept you from seeing others or-"

"Please. Being monogamous with you is way more fun than Vegas, Ace. I caught onto that quickly."

He grinned. "Why do you think I proposed?"

Logan's smile widened as he saw the blush creep across Rory's cheeks.

"Now, that you're quiet, can I ask you something, Ace?"

"What?"

"You're not seriously thinking of staging EST weekends to promote psychological healing for mothers and daughters with toxic relationships, are you?"

"You were listening at the door! I knew I heard a noise!"

"It wasn't on purpose, Ace. I was just waiting for the right moment to knock but once the visuals of Lorelai and Emily drag queens started, I was immobile."

"Oh, my God! I know. I got that in my head and it just wouldn't go away!"

Logan shrugged. "I'd apologize but I'm pretty sure I'd do it again if I had the chance. I don't think I've laughed so hard in years."

Rory sighed. "I'm happy it was so amusing for you."

"Yeah, well. I needed a good laugh," he smirked. "So how is the book coming?"

"It's coming. I've got eight chapters written and the rest outlined."

"You working with an editor?"

"Just what you heard. I've been getting feedback from Jess."

"Come on! You can't be serious."
"Why not?"

"Isn't he in the book?"

"Yeah."

"So he shouldn't be editing it."

"He's only been giving me feedback on writing style and flow." Rory pointed out. "And I told you; it ends at Chilton. It's not like he can do a search/replace and change your name to 'Blonde Dick at Yale' if that's what you're concerned about."

"Funny. Listen, why don't you let me help you? I can give you feedback. And, unlike Cousin Jess, I'm not in the book - as you keep reminding me. I could also help you find an agent and a publisher."

"What?" Startled, Rory's eyes went to his. "No."

"Why not? You're accepting his help. Why won't you accept mine?"

"Because I'd made relying on you too much of a crutch over the past couple of years. And you weren't even mine to rely on."

"And now I am. I know you don't need me but I believe in you, Ace. I always have. Just tell me what I can do to help." Logan sighed. "Think of it this way. I should've been here the past eight months to help and wasn't. I'm here now. Late to the party but still wanting to help."

At Rory's contemplative look, Logan continued.

"You need a publisher that's looking to establish the new Nora Ephron. You need a company that's gonna support a new author. You'd need a book tour. A multi-book deal. You should probably get a literary agent first and have them pursue the deals. You should have a few to choose from."

"Wow! You've given this some thought."

"You sound surprised, Ace."

"No. I'm not."

"Admit it. You really were only with me for my looks." Logan smiled.

"No!" Finally Rory cracked a grin. "You also smell good. And you look really good in pants."

"I look good in pants?" nodded Logan. "Good thing. Anyway, Ace, this happens to be what I do for a living. Admittedly not with books. But close enough." He shrugged. "I also know when to stand back and let the experts in. That's what I suggest you do."

"Well, now that you mention it, I did start putting together a list of literary agents I thought might be a good fit."

"Terrific! You don't even need my help!"

"I know a few of them. Maybe you could check out the list and let me know if you know any of the others?"

"Consider it done."
"I was also thinking I should play up old contacts and try to get an excerpt published in The Atlantic or The New Yorker. Once it's complete, of course."

"I could definitely help with -"

"No way, Huntzberger. No HPG pubs."

"Ace, I'm not the Godfather. I can't tell someone to publish something that makes no sense for the brand. I'm just saying don't knock HPG from the list because it's HPG. Please? I can help you get in a couple of doors. That's all. It'll be on you to sell it."

"I'll think about it. Speaking of HPG, hear anything from your dad?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact. As we speak, there's a press release coming out announcing the wedding's been postponed 'due to extenuating circumstances'."

"Postponed? Not cancelled?"

"Ace, it's cancelled. Saying it's postponed lets you bow out without being on the hook for details. Say it's cancelled and then you gotta explain."

"So they're just buying time?"

"They're still strategizing on the next step." Not a lie. Logan smiled. "So you're out of here tomorrow."

"Yep."

"Perfect timing. Looks like we'll be having guests our first night in the new place."

"Let me guess. Colin, Finn, and Robert."

"Colin and Finn, definitely. Honor and Josh are flying back too."

"What about Robert?"

"What about Robert? He's being a jerk. He may not make it across the Atlantic."

"As in he may get voted off the plane?"

"Bound to happen sooner or later, Ace."
A short while later, at Rory's request, Logan headed down to the gift shop to pick her up a new pair of earphones. After Cousin Jess's welcome departure, they'd gotten into a conversation about her book and from there it had taken a turn to her nocturnal practices. Logan hadn't realized how frequently she had to wake up during the night to pump milk. To help her get through it, she listened to music. But her earphones had stopped working the night before and she'd forgotten all about it until now.

Earphones in hand, Logan was exiting the shop when he noticed Emily, Lorelai, Luke and Cousin Jess clustered just inside the hospital's entrance. As he observed the group, he saw Emily glance over at him. As he continued to watch the Gilmore-Danes family reunion, he noticed Emily say goodbye to the group and start to make her way towards him.

Curiosity catching hold of him, he stood frozen, waiting for Emily's approach.

"Hello Logan." Emily could never be described as a warm woman. She operated under varying shades from freezing to chill to moderately tepid. Logan sense it was this last one that he was currently on the receiving end of.

"Emily," he nodded, his lips pulled into a tight smile.

"You know there's nothing going on between them."

"What?" That was a surprising conversation-starter.

"Rory and Jess. They dated when they were teenagers. He was a greasy little hoodlum in those days. Thank goodness he seems to have cleaned up since then. I mean that literally. He seems to shower now." Emily rolled her eyes dismissively. "I don't think he did so back then. In any case, they've known each other since they were fifteen or sixteen. Nothing's ever happened between them aside from a few months when Rory was seventeen."

"So you're saying if nothing happened in all that time, it's not going to?"

"That's just my opinion," she shrugged. "It does seem different compared to other people."

Logan read that as a not-too-subtle commentary on his and Rory's relationship. He grinned to acknowledge her observation.

"Yes, I would agree with that. It's definitely different with other people."

Emily bestowed one of her best sardonic smiles upon him.
"Logan, let's cut to the chase, shall we?"

Logan bit his lip to keep from chuckling. No one compared to this woman. His mother could only dream.

Emily Gilmore, I salute you.

"I'm all ears, Emily."

"What is going on with you and Rory?"

"I don't have an answer for that. Mostly because I don't know."

"But you still love her?"

"Yes, I do. I don't think I ever stopped."

"Then what is all this? Why aren't you together?"

"Our lives were separate," he shrugged. "I guess neither of us thought merging them -after so many years -was a possibility."

"Do you still feel that way?"

"Do I still feel that way?" Logan stared off into the distance, somewhat in shock that he was having this conversation with Rory's grandmother. "I don't think it's a question now of whether or not it's possible. Now it's a matter of how to make it happen. I have no intention of walking away from them."

"Would you marry her?"

Logan snorted.

"Emily, it's not that simple. Remember? I'm the guy who asked and got a 'no'. This has always been more about what Rory wants than what I want."

"So, what you're saying is, in spite of knowing my granddaughter's penchant for refusing your marriage proposals-" Logan winced. It actually felt like he'd been punched in the gut, "you still called off the wedding to the heiress."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why?" Logan repeated. "For lack of a better word, it would've been inappropriate."

"Inappropriate?" At Logan's nod, Emily continued. "Since you saw marriage to another woman as inappropriate, do I take that to mean your intention is to be with Rory?"

"Emily, Rory's always been my number one."

"Have you asked her to marry you since you came back?"

"Let's just say I've hinted heavily but I don't think she's ready to hear it." He shrugged. "She did just have a baby a few days ago. I can't push her, Emily, as much as I want us to be a family."
Emily let out a derisive snort.

"Life's too short for this kind of nonsense. The two of you will learn that one day. It's a good thing you're still young. Lorelai has pulled with one hand while pushing with the other for so long I despaired her ever marrying. I feared Rory would follow her mother's example right down to insisting she raise her child alone."

Suddenly Paris's words came back to him. Or, rather, Carl Jung's words.

Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.

"I can promise you, Emily, Rory's not raising Lucas alone. Even if I'm her platonic neighbor for the rest of our lives."

Emily shook her head, suddenly smiling. "I believe you, Logan. You're nothing at all like Rory's father. Christopher has always been passive. That's how Lorelai was able to run roughshod over him. That's probably what drew her to him to begin with. I can't see you staying away from your child."

"Yeah, that's not exactly my style."

"If anything, Rory's a bit like Christopher. She can be passive when her life goes off course. But when she's on track, she's got Lorelai's stubbornness to keep herself on track. I -"

"What?"

"I think motherhood will actually be good for her. She was a radiant mother-to-be. You should have seen her. Beautiful. Well, when she wasn't sick."

"You have no idea how sorry I am that I missed that." Logan shook his head sadly, suddenly overcome with a sense of loss for all the moments denied him. "It was a misunderstanding."

"Yes, I know. Rory explained." Abruptly, Emily changed the topics. "So what are your plans?"

"Right now our plan is to focus on Lucas. We'll figure things out with us when he's out of the hospital."

"I actually meant 'how long before you return to London?' But I find your answer much more interesting. So you and Rory are an 'us'?"

"I didn't say that. We agreed we'd take things slowly."

"You did it again." Emily practically chortled with glee. "Logan, you and Rory can say whatever you want to Lorelai - believe me, I know my daughter. I don't blame you. Less said, the better," Emily rolled her eyes as she spat out the words. "Just don't think you can pull the wool over my eyes. You just said 'us' and 'we.' I know exactly what that means."

Logan sighed. If Emily Gilmore was his self-proclaimed confidant, he might as well make the most of it. Without a second thought, he changed the subject to one he felt a more immediate need to understand. "That Rory is like Lorelai - not wanting to be tied down. Do you have any advice on how to handle that?"

"Don't tie her down, Logan. My granddaughter is very smart. She can do quite well at whatever she sets her mind to - she always has. But she doesn't always know what will make her happy. I think part of the problem is she and Lorelai were always so close, and Lorelai tends to overwhelm. Rory needs to work things out at her own speed."
"I've always supported Rory in whatever she's wanted to do."

"Well, that's a step in the right direction."

It hadn't been an easy conversation. No exchange with Emily Gilmore had ever been an easy one. But he couldn't help but feel grateful that he finally seemed to have an ally among the Gilmores. An ally that wasn't lying in a crib.

"Thank you, Emily."

Thoughtful, Emily's eyes met Logan's. "What can I say? I seem to share my granddaughter's soft spot when it comes to you, Logan. But you better remember this: Do not hurt Rory. Do not hurt Lucas. Lorelai and I rarely see eye-to-eye. But if you hurt Rory or Lucas, you'd better go into witness protection because Lorelai and I will not stand for it."

"Emily, I swear..." He smiled, his vision suddenly slightly blurred. "They're my family. They're all I want."

"Okay. I'm giving you a chance to prove yourself Logan. Don't blow it."

Emily started to walk back toward the front doors. Logan glanced up and saw that Cousin Jess had left, leaving only Lorelai and Luke there talking.

"You know, Logan. There is a lovely Tiffany's not that far from here."

Upon hearing Emily's voice, Logan realized the older woman had hung back and was now paused, facing him.

"It might be time for a nice gesture. Just a thought."

Logan nodded. It was an oversight on his part. His mind immediately settled on the perfect thing.

"Oh, and Logan?"

"Yes, Emily?"

"I won't be here tomorrow. I'm going to check on things in Nantucket. I'll be back on Sunday."

"Okay. I'll keep an eye on things for you," he joked. At Emily's cool gaze, he wiped the humor from his face.

"Tomorrow, make sure you wait for Luke and Lorelai to leave before you leave the hospital."

Inwardly Logan chuckled. He was enjoying being back on Emily's good side though he sure as hell didn't know how what he'd done to get himself there. While he could easily see Emily Gilmore categorically choosing him over Poor Man's Kerouac before the slam dunk twoffer of Vegas and Odette, he wasn't convinced just not being Cousin Jess was enough in the current climate.

"What? Why?"

"You'll see. Just remember."

"I will do that. Thank you, Emily."

"Logan, take care of my granddaughter and my great-grandson. That's the only thanks I'll ever need."
A little over an hour later, Logan returned to Rory's hospital room. Stepping inside, he made himself comfortable sitting next to Rory, on the edge of her bed.

"I got something for you, Ace."

"I know it's not earbuds."

"Lorelai get them to you?"

"Yes, she did. Along with my dinner. So what the heck happened to you?"

"They gone?"

"Yes. I sent my mom off with a list of stuff to pack for tomorrow. So where'd you go?"

Logan grabbed a box from his interior jacket pocket. After setting it down on the table, he took out a second one.

"Not-so-little blue boxes? You bought me jewelry from Tiffany? Logan," she shook her head emphatically. "You didn't have to do that!"

"I know I didn't have to. But I wanted to. Please open your gift. This one first." He tapped the slightly bigger box.

Without another word, Rory untied the bow on the first box. Lifting the top she opened the jewelry box and peered inside.

"Oh, it's a beautiful necklace, Logan. But you know I don't need expensive jewelry."

"I know. But can I tell you why I bought you that necklace?"

"Sure."

"Lucas was born May 15. That - an emerald - is his birthstone. Once you leave the hospital I know you're going to miss him. I thought having his birthstone might help you miss him less."

"Oh, crap." Rory started to tear up. "Huntzberger, I'm still a hormonal tsunami. Please don't say things that are gonna make me cry."

"Ace, I'm sorry. I didn't know Tiffany emeralds would have that effect on you. Obviously I didn't talk to the right sales person."

Rory used the back of her hand to wipe the tears from her cheeks. "Okay, obviously the first box was a pretty good gift. Oh, God. Dare I open the second box?"

"Please. I can't wait to go back to the store and report on this."

"You're ridiculous." Suddenly laughing through her tears, Rory untied the bow from the second box. Lifting the box lid, she snapped open the jewelry box. "A matching bracelet?"

"I like the necklace and I know typically that's how moms wear their childrens' birthstones but I've seen Lucas get a little handsy with you. I'm afraid that a gold chain is no match for that kid. So maybe you switch to the bracelet when you're holding him."
A fresh stream of tears proceeded to course down Rory's face.

"Come on, Ace. You're gonna give me a complex. I'm gonna have to go back to the store and tell them how the gifts left you inconsolable."

Choked up, Rory shook her head. After a few moments, she cleared her throat and took a breath.

"Oh my God! I don't remember you being this thoughtful with gifts."

"Really? I did get you a Birkin Bag."

"Sorry, no comparison."

"So you like them?"

"My May gemstone jewelry that I can have with me always, even when I can't have my baby with me? Yes. I love them."

"I'm glad."

"One thing, Huntzberger. Did Honor help you pick this out?"

"I'm hurt, Ace."

"Did she?"

"No. Picked it out all by myself."

"Wow. I'm seriously impressed."

"I guess I sucked at gift giving when we were together?"

Rory shrugged. "Nope. You were always good. This is just exceptionally sweet and thoughtful. That's in spite of it being from Tiffany's and probably costing around $12 thousand dollars."

Logan nearly laughed aloud. For someone who didn't care about jewelry Rory was spot on with her price estimates.

"So I set the bar high?" Logan chuckled. "Nowhere to go but down? Great."

"It is great. Before Logan could register what was happening, Rory threw her arms around him and held him tight in a fierce hug. Wrapping his arms around her, he hugged her back, just as tightly. He felt her chest and back spasming as she continued to cry.

"Rory, Rory." He pushed her from him so he could look at her face. He slid his hand along her cheek to tuck a few stray hairs behind her ear. "Why are you crying? It's all good, Ace. All good. When Lucas is out of the hospital we'll get him his own birthstone jewelry to wear. Maybe some emerald baby cufflinks to keep his diapers from falling off."

As Rory started to laugh, Logan knew his words had gotten the desired result. He smiled.

"Oh my God, Huntzberger. If that's what you think keep diapers on I'm never going to be able to leave you alone with him."

"I'll learn, Rory. I can be taught."
"Yes, you can. And you will."
Logan returned to his hotel Friday night feeling immensely satisfied with how things were going with both Rory and Lucas. He knew ultimately the devil lay in the details but he knew he couldn’t sweat the details just then. He was making progress with Rory. He had a son he couldn't be more over the moon about. Yes, his parents would soon be arriving stateside but, as he kept reminding himself, it would be better for him to be able to keep an eye on them in real-time than for him to have to wait on hearing about their shenanigans and then reacting after the fact.

Finally Saturday, it was the day Rory would be released from the hospital. While he'd been delighted with how much time they'd been able to spend together in just two days, her being in the hospital - often surrounded by Gilmores- did present some challenges. He was looking forward to being able to spend quiet time alone with Rory in a non-sterile environment. To that end, he'd hooked up with Honor's interior designer to work magic on the two apartments. When the designer asked Logan to define magic, he'd replied "Harry Potter" for his unit and "Penn and Teller" for the Gilmores. He wanted his apartment to feel like home. Literally. He was considering buying it and keeping it as his place in Hartford. He figured it couldn't hurt if it was inviting. The Gilmore apartment would be functional but decidedly less tempting.

Pulling out his cell phone as he strode from the sixth floor elevator bank, he sent a quick text to the designer requesting status photos. Pausing before Rory's door, he dropped his phone back in his jacket pocket. He realized Rory was not alone as slightly elevated voices filtered out through the cracked door.

"Okay. Enough about the house. I still think you're taking a risk."

"Noted. Let me worry about that."

"One last thing."

"Shoot."

"You have to cut that boy loose." Logan felt his heart jettison up to his chest. Was Lorelai referring to him? "And for the record, I can't believe we're having this conversation. Again. Maybe I should just record a sound clip you can use as a ringtone."

"Funny. And it's not the same thing. Jess and I aren't dating. He's just been giving me feedback on the book."

"Call it what you want. Does he know that's all it is? Luke and I ran into him last night. He seemed a little wigged out at finding out Logan was Lucas's daddy. And, I'm guessing, at the fact that you seem to have an open door policy when it comes to Logan."
"I wish.

"I don't have an open door policy with Logan. And I thought we were just friends. If Jess thinks - or wants - something more, that's news to me."

"Yeah, well. Call me 1010 Wins. All news, all the time."

"Is Luke mad?"

"No. Luke's not mad. He says Jess assured him months ago he was over you. But you're pretty unforgettable, kid."

"Ha! Hardly! I mean...Yeah, we spent some time together. With me pregnant with someone else's baby and having zero interest in dating."

"Maybe to Jess you're the one that got away. He looks back and realizes he messed up."

"Logan wasn't too thrilled with him coming by yesterday. Or with him helping me with the book."

"Looking at it from his perspective, I can't say that I blame him. But this is all up to you. You need to figure out boundaries. For Jess. And for Logan."

"Hi there! I'm Ashley Harris." Suddenly Logan found himself under attack by a smurf. "I'm the social worker assigned to Rory and Lucas Gilmore."

"Ah. Hi. Logan Huntzberger, Lucas's father." Smiling, he offered the woman his free hand.

"Oh! The baby daddy! That's great! You're right on time." The young woman accepted his hand and returned his smile.

"On time for what?"

"Since Rory's being released today, we need to drill down on all the paperwork!"

"Paperwork?" Logan smiled. Between the exchange he overheard and this, it was shaping up to be another good day.

"Yes! Like the birth certificate! Then, of course, since you two aren't married, there's a paternity statement. Everything needs to be signed and sent to the State Department of Health Office of Vital Records."

"Ah. Then I am right on time, aren't I?"

"Yeah! Did you knock yet?"

"No. Why -"

"Oh, I'll do it. I can see you're holding a coffee. Wouldn't want it to spill. I've seen how Rory is about her coffee."

Ashley knocked on the door. At Rory's "come in," the social worker pushed the door open all the way.

Rory, obviously dressed in anticipation of her release, sat on the edge of her bed. Logan was amused to note she wore the mis-matched red/green combo of lucky outfit accessorized with the emerald necklace. Lorelai, sitting across from Rory on the vacant bed, glanced over her shoulder to see who
was at the door.

"Good morning, Rory!" The social worker called out in her sing-song voice. "How are you this beautiful day?"

"Good. I'm good, Ashley."

"Looking good, Ace. Your coffee."

Logan dodged past Ashley to make his way over to Rory and hand her her coffee.

"Thanks." Rory's eyes settled on Logan. He braced himself for the question he knew was coming. "Is this regular?"

"Decaf."

Rory scowled. "Logan! I can have a little caffeine you know."

"Just thinking of Lucas. You're gonna have him stress tapping, Ace."

Rory and Lorelai had obviously spent some time that morning packing and consolidating Rory's things. Only one chair was not being used for organizational purposes. Logan left it for Ashley and instead opted to lean against the wall at the front of the room. From that vantage point, he could easily see Rory's face. Lorelai's too he realized. That could be helpful as well.

"Just so you know, I'm having a small regular today." Rory glanced back towards the woman standing in the doorway. "Ashley, I don't know if you met my mother, Lorelai Gilmore?"

"I don't think so. Hi Lorelai. What a pleasure it is to meet you! I'm so sorry Lucas is in the NICU! Usually I get to meet the babies! You're all so beautiful -Dad included - I can only imagine how gorgeous little Lucas is!"

"Yes, he is a looker. Thank you." Lorelai responded for all of them. Logan smothered a laugh.

"Is he your first grandchild?"

"Yes, he is," nodded Lorelai, smiling. "As far as I know. Hey, speaking of unknown children, you don't happen to have a long-lost twin named Lulu, do you? Short light brown hair? Third grade teacher? Pig child? Dilettante husband?"

"Nooooo." Ashley shook her head, eyes wide. "That would've been so cool! But I only have a brother. People do say we look alike but we're not twins. He's a little over a year older than me. They say we're Irish twins. We're not Irish though. Or twins. Like I said."

Rory sipped her coffee. As Logan watched, he saw Rory's eyes close and her lips stretch into a smile. Suddenly she reopened her eyes. Catching him staring at her, she gave him a curious look before turning her attention back to the social worker.

"So Ashley, I have to do paperwork before I get out of here?"

"Yes. Just the regular stuff. Birth certificate. Paternity form. I have it all on this clipboard. We can just fill it out and you guys sign. Do you want the full spiel? You're only my third unmarried parents. Not that it's unusual or there's anything wrong with it. I've only been doing this a couple of months. Oh my God, I didn't offend you did I?"

"No, no. Not at all." Logan watched as Rory smiled at the girl attempting to put her at ease. "You're
"Hey, this is a first time for us." Logan made eye contact with Rory. She gave a subtle half shrug/half nod. He was pleased. He wanted the spiel. "If you wanna practice the spiel, Ashley, please go right ahead."

"Okay. Good. Thanks." Ashley stepped fully into the room and carefully shut the door behind her. She made her way over to the open seat.

"So paternity is the legal identification of the father of a child. Once paternity is established, the acknowledged father will gain legal rights to his child, as well as responsibilities for supporting the child."

Ashley paused for breath looking back and forth between the two parents.

"Okay," encouraged Rory.

"If a mother is not married at the time a child is born and has not been married at any time between conception and the birth of the child...?" Ashley dangled the sentence as though it were a question.

"Nope. Not married as far as I can remember."

"Oh?" Ashley looked a little rattled.

"I'm kidding, Ashley. No marriages."

"I didn't mean to imply anything. I'm still getting used to saying all this stuff. It's a bit intrusive. I feel so awkward. I'm sorry."

"You're doing fine," Rory reassured her.

"So if the mother, like you, doesn't have a husband, no father will be named on the birth certificate unless both parents complete an Acknowledgement of Paternity form." Ashley lifted the clipboard. "Which I have here. Or unless ordered by the court. But you two seem to get along so I don't see a judge needing to be involved."

"No, no judge..." agreed Logan.

"The Acknowledgement of Paternity form is a sworn statement affirming that the named father is the child's biological father. You can complete the form now or you could do it later but if you do it later, there's a fee. If you complete it in the hospital, it's free!" Ashley looked back and forth between Rory and Logan. "I stuck my foot in my mouth again, didn't I?! I didn't mean to imply that you seem concerned about saving money. I know you're related to the woman who originally funded the maternity wing!"

"She was my great-grandmother."

"Oh, that's so interesting! And you were named for her?"

"Actually Rory's named for me," offered Lorelai. "Remember me? The other Lorelai you met a minute ago?"

"Oh, that's right!" Ashley giggled. "I'm sorry! I did forget. I think that's so cool. I've only ever seen juniors with boys, not girls. Anyway, once the form is completed and processed, the father's name will be included on the child's birth certificate. And that's the spiel. Any questions?"
At Ashley's final words, Logan saw a guarded look come over Rory. He braced himself when he realized she was going to speak.

"I have a question."

At Rory's serious tone, Lorelai and Ashley both focused their attention on her.

"The birth certificate will be a public record, right?"

"Well, technically. It'll be maintained by the Office of Vital Records, but it's not like just anyone can request a copy. Well, not until Lucas turns 100. But you won't care then."

"Oh." Rory seemed somewhat relieved. "I thought the information could be requested."

"Well, it can be requested. But it's on a need-to-know basis and usually with your permission. So it would be you, your relatives, your lawyers, your community department of health..."

"Oh."

Logan internally breathed a sigh of relief.

"See Ace? No reason to freak out."

"Incorporated genealogical societies..."

"What? You mean like the Daughters of the American Revolution?"

"Oh, I guess they could qualify. I don't usually get asked that."

"No."

"Rory."

"We didn't talk about this, Logan."

"What's to talk about? Parents' names go on the birth certificate. We're the parents. Our names go on the birth certificate. Both our names."

"You don't know what the implications are. You don't know what it means..."

"No. I know exactly what it means. Thanks to Ashley here who did an excellent job of explaining."

"Thank you!"

"Logan! Putting your name on Lucas's birth certificate is as good as taking a full-page ad in the paper. We'll be an expose on TMZ!"

"Rory. I'm flattered you've got me up there with George Clooney but I'm a publisher who wrote a couple of books. I'm not trailed by paparazzi. The European papers may catch on and cover it - because of Odette- but who cares? It'll blow over!"

"Oh, no! You're fighting now!"

"We're not fighting, Ashley. Logan and I are just having a discussion."

"Sounds like a fight to me, hon."
"Mom!"

"Okay, so...um...you two need to agree on how you're gonna fill out the forms. If you don't agree, then you'll have to go to court and have a judge decide."

"Rory, we already had a DNA test." Logan shrugged. He wasn't angry or surprised. He understood where the freak-out was coming from. "If TMZ wants to know our business, Ace, they'll figure it out, regardless of what's on the birth certificate."

"Um, I'm sorry to interrupt your fight. The State really doesn't like blanks on the form if it can be avoided. Especially for the father's identity. I know it seems all big brother but it's to protect the baby."

Logan heard Rory mumble what sounded like, "I'm trying to protect the baby."

"Ace, this doesn't change anything. Whatever happens between us, you're the custodial parent. It's not like I can breastfeed him."

"Cute." Rory made a face while Lorelai snorted.

Logan swung around to look at Ashley. "I'm setting up a trust fund for him, and adding him to my will and life insurance. All of which will go smoother if I'm listed on the birth certificate."

"Oh, yes! That's all good! But I still need you two to agree on what to put on the form." Ashley smiled nervously.

Rory let out an irritated sigh. "Fine," she gritted the word out. "Logan's name can go on the birth certificate."

Logan let out an silent sigh of relief. One hurdle down. One more to go.

"Okay! That's great!" Ashley was back to her chipper smurf self. "So I just need the two of you to sign the paternity form which, like I said, will be filed at the state's Vital Records Office. This, along with the birth certificate, legally confirms that Lucas Richard Gilmore is your son."

Time for hurdle number two.

"About that. Rory, what about Huntzberger?"

"What about Huntzberger?"

"Adding Huntzberger to his name?"

"No! No!"

"Rory."

"No!"

"Rory, come on! Can we at least talk about it?"

Rory remained silent as she glared at him, not even attempting to hide her annoyance. Logan caught the social worker throw what looked like a wistful glance at the door. He nearly laughed aloud.

"Rory? Logan? I have a few other visits this morning. You do have a couple of hours left to settle this stuff. Why don't I leave you two to talk in private?"
"I don't have to leave, too, do I?"

Rory and Logan both glared at Lorelai.

"Fine," huffed Lorelai. "I'll go see Lucas and ask him which name he prefers. If this discussion is still going on when I come back, I'm bringing Luke and popcorn."

"Mom! Out!"

Rory and Logan remained silent while the two women took their leave. Left alone, Rory stared angrily at Logan while he quickly ran a mental inventory of his options.

"Ace, we know he's my son. Eventually everyone will know, regardless of his last name." Rory's wince was not lost on Logan. "So let's not confuse the kid and just let him be a Huntzberger."

"I can't imagine anything more confusing than being a Huntzberger! Besides, he can't be a Huntzberger because he's a Gilmore."

"Huntzberger."

"Gilmore."

"Huntzberger."

"Gilmore."

"Why am I getting a sense of deja vu?"

"Flashback to the last time you acted like a jerk?"

"Let's compromise. We'll hyphenate it. I'll just have to get him a pair of boxing gloves when he starts school."

"Oh, you're being ridiculous! Plenty of people have hyphenated last names! No one's gonna beat him up for having a hyphenated last name!"

Logan smirked. "So hyphenated it is?"

Rory rolled her eyes. "Fine." She let out an abrupt sigh. "You're so annoying when you do that."

"Do what?"

"Win arguments."

"I didn't win, Ace. We compromised."

Rory's face looked more pensive than angry at this point.

"Hey, what're you so worried about, Ace?"

He watched as she forced her lips to curl upward.

"That's the worst fake smile I've ever seen." Logan pushed off from the wall and was soon standing over Rory. "Mind if I sit?" At Rory's non-committal head shake, he sat on the bed next to her.

Taking her left hand in his right, he brought it up to his lips and laid a kiss on her knuckles. "Listen, I know Lucas wasn't planned, but he's the best thing that's ever happened to me. Aside, of course,
from meeting his mother."

"Your sweet talk skills show a marked improvement, Huntzberger."

"Maybe it's because I'm talking from the heart."

"Logan -"

"Ace. Please. Close your eyes." Logan watched as Rory complied. "Just try to think of it this way. Don't think of him as a Huntzberger. Or the Huntzberger heir. He's just your really cute son who looks a little like his dad whose name is Logan Huntzberger."

Rory's eyes shot open.

"Logan, how can I just forget all the rest of it? I saw what you went through. Being the 'heir.' The chances you took! Every stupid thing you did to rebel! You could've died! Costa Rica! Sinking the yacht! The drinking! Even the giant cheese wheel! What if he gets run over by the giant cheese wheel?! I can't watch Lucas go through all that! I won't!"

"Rory, how many times do I have to say this before you'll believe me? We're the parents. We alone will be responsible for the levels of insanity Lucas will be subjected to. Just us."

Still holding her hand, Logan gently caressed her wrist with his thumb. Rory, he knew, was particularly sensitive to the touch in that spot. He wasn't surprised when her eyes closed again and the frown was replaced by a more peaceful expression.

"Ace, I gotta hand it to you: you do keep me on my toes."

Rory smiled. "Yeah, I guess I do."

"At first it was a shock. I'll admit it. But I gotta say I'm happy -no thrilled - to have a son with you."

"You're serious?" He watched as Rory's smile widened.

"You have no idea." Taking advantage of her momentarily letting her guard down, Logan leaned in to lay a kiss on her cheek. Bringing his lips downward, he nuzzled his way along her neck. Sensing her shiver, he smiled to himself. "I love you, Rory Gilmore. I'm pretty sure I've always loved you. Now we have a kid to love. He's gonna be an amazing kid. Hell, he already is. I'm excited. I wanna get to know him. I wanna do the fun dad and family things I only ever saw on tv. I think it's all gonna be great."

"But Logan -" Eyes open she turned to face him. He was forced to pull away from his spot on her neck. Suddenly, their lips, their eyes were separated by a few short inches. This was the closest they'd been since their son's conception. Logan felt a hardwired pulsing just under his skin when this near to Rory. He suspected she felt it as well.

"No buts, Ace. No buts. I know you just want to protect him. I do too. But you don't have to protect him from me. I promise."
When You're On, You're On

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Saturday, May 20, 2017, 10:00 am EST

An hour after her first visit Ashley the social worker returned to complete Lucas's paperwork. Logan and Rory were able to assure the woman that the parents of the loftily-named Lucas Richard Gilmore-Huntzberger were not fighting and were in agreement on all matters associated with the paperwork. In addition, Ashley had not offended them in any way. In fact, they were delighted with her services.

Logan could tell dealing with the social worker had taken its toll on Rory. She sat perched on her bed, while he now sat across from her on the lone empty chair.

"How about I get us a small coffee to share?"

"Regular?"

"Yeah."

"Please. I wonder when mom and Luke are coming back? Look at all this stuff we have to load into the cars."

"You text Lorelai?"

"Yeah, but her phone's off. I figured they'd be back by now."

"I'm sure they didn't forget you're getting sprung, Ace. But, if they did, I'll have Frank come up and help me get this stuff into the car."

"Frank?" Rory's tone was one of surprise.

Logan quirked a questioning brow at Rory.

"Yes, Frank."

"Frank-your-driver-from-Yale-Frank?"

"Yeah. That Frank. I still have the account. Don't use it often but it's good to have in a pinch. Like when you find out your ex just made you a father and you suddenly need to ditch your wedding and fly commercial in the middle of the night."

"I guess that doesn't happen often enough for the company to use in their advertising."

"Probably not."

"So you flew commercial...Did you go for the Chex Mix or the Stroopwafel?"
"First class, Ace. Macallan neat." Logan smiled. "And Chex Mix."

"Ah," Rory replied absently. Logan thought she suddenly seemed a bit preoccupied. He watched as she waved Mr. Fox around.

"You okay, Ace?"

"Yeah, I'm okay." Her electric blue eyes pierced him. "So we talked about his last name but you never said a word about his first name. It was originally going to be Richard Lucas but I reversed the order after hearing my grandmother say 'Little Richard' one too many times."

Logan chuckled. "Understandable."

"Yeah, so." Rory tittered nervously. "Anyway... are you okay with it?"

"I'm fine with it. Luke's your step-father. When he wasn't threatening to beat the crap out of me, he was nice. More important, I know he's always been there for you and Lorelai. And your grandfather was an excellent man. I have no complaints, Ace."

Rory expelled a sigh of relief.

"Good. I know your family doesn't do juniors, but -"

"But you figured with my arrogant, swelled head I'd be the one to start?"

"No," she smiled."I just wanted to make sure you didn't mind."

"I don't mind, Ace," he smiled. "You're one to talk anyway. Lorelai the Third."

"Yeah, I know that's unusual. Ashley calling me a junior was weird. Thing is, if I'd had a girl, I'm pretty sure I would've named her Lorelai. Half the time Mom says it was feminism. The other times she credits Demerol. When I was thinking about it, I decided I'd do it out of tradition. To ensure there's always a 'Reigning Lorelai.'"

Reigning Lorelai?

A thought occurred to Logan. After a brief mental debate, the shoulder devil won.

"You know, Ace, I wouldn't want to stand in the way of a Gilmore tradition."

Rory sucked in a breath. "What?"

"I'm just making the offer. Lucas is pretty damn cute. If you want a girl, I'm on board. I'm already your baby daddy. You don't want to rack up a whole bunch of us. Father's Day could get expensive."

"Ha ha."

Logan smiled at her.

"I have a related question for you."

Rory's mouth dropped open.

"No, Ace. Related to the name thing. Not to the Baby Lorelai idea."
"Oh." She seemed to breathe again. "What?"

"I know you're not on the best terms with him, but I gotta say I'm surprised Christopher's not here."

Rory nodded in a deliberate way. As though she'd been expecting the question and had practiced how she'd respond.

"We texted. He cleared his schedule for next month - when Lucas was supposed to arrive. He's in Australia on business. It's been raining there and the airports are a mess. He finally said he could fly back on Thursday. But everything was going so much better then, I told him to wait until I got out. He'll probably pop up this weekend. Or Monday."

"Ah. He okay with the name?"

"I think so. GG - my half-sister - insists she'll name a kid after him. Of course, she's fifteen so we're all hoping it's a longterm goal but you never know."

- ~ -

It was after eleven when everything had finally been taken care of, and Rory's 'posse' was ready to make a move. Lorelai managed to commandeer a second wheelchair for Logan Jr. who supported, precariously balanced on his teddy bear lap, Charlie Bucket, the Fantastic Mr. Fox, Ducky Delight, and an assortment of flower arrangements. Balloon strings had also been tied around his wrists and arms. While Luke pushed Rory's chair, Logan pushed Logan Jr.'s, and Lorelai carried Rory's suitcase as well as several totes loaded with gifts.

"So what's the plan?" asked Luke.

"We get settled into the apartment. Have lunch. Lane and Zack might stop by. Then Logan and I are coming back here to spend the rest of the day with Lucas."

"Oh. Okay. Maybe Luke and I will head back to Stars Hollow after lunch?"

Logan could detect a hint of worry in Lorelai's inflection.

"Mom..."

"Rory'll be fine, Lorelai." Logan would make sure of it.

"I know. I'm still her mom. She's just out of the hospital. I can worry. It's in the rule book. You'll figure that out soon enough."

"Of that I have no doubt."

Finally the elevator opened onto the ground level. The group made their way to the main doors.

"Since the Jeep's loaded with Rory's stuff from the house, I'll bring the truck around and we can load this stuff onto the back."

"Luke, I don't think Lucas's stuffed animals should ride in the back.," Lorelai's face echoed her disapproval. "They'll get all dirty and germy and gross and ick."

"Fine. Then I guess the six-foot bear's riding shotgun." Lifting Logan Jr., Luke tucked him under one arm and shoved the other animals and flowers onto the chair before starting to make his way to his truck, trailed by a parade of colorful 'New Mommy' balloons.
"My man's a real man!" shouted Lorelai after him.

Luke scowled over his shoulder.

"I'll get the rest of Noah's Ark in a minute."

"I can fit Rory's stuff on my backseat. We can stack it." Lorelai glanced over at Logan. "I'll go get the Jeep. You'll stay here?" Logan nodded, a slightly puzzled look on his face. Lorelai spun on her heels and trailed after her husband.

"Was your mom really concerned I was going to take off and leave you?" Standing behind her wheelchair, Logan spoke into the air above Rory's head.

"Man, just because I'm in a wheelchair, why is everyone talking over me?"

Logan bent over, bringing his face right up to Rory's.

"Because you're sitting in a wheelchair, Ace. Everyone's taller than you and that's why we're talking over you."

"Well, I wanna stand." Rory started to rise before quickly settling back down in the chair.

"What's wrong?"

"Got up too fast and felt dizzy."

"G forces, Ace. You're gonna be a terrible patient. Way worse than me," Logan pulled out his cell."Hey Frank. I'm ready. Right out in front. See you in a few." Logan replaced his phone to his pocket. "Hey, you might as well just sit and wait. Your mom's coming around with her car."

"Oh... I'm not sure I can ride with my mother."

"What? Why not?"

"Her Jeep's a little high. Maybe it'll be okay but I'm not looking forward to the climb."

"Ah."

Emily's words from the day before reverberated in Logan's mind.

"Tomorrow, make sure you wait for Luke and Lorelai to leave before you leave the hospital."

Smart woman.

"I thought I mentioned it. Maybe I told Grandma?"

Logan owed Emily another round of 'thanks' apparently. But then her other words echoed in his head.

"Logan, take care of my granddaughter and my great-grandson. That's the only thanks I'll ever need."

"Well, it's not quite the decked out stretch I had at Yale but you're welcome to ride in my car, Ace."

"You sure? I don't want to put you out."

"Ace! Come on! Mi limo es su limo."
"No. I just was thinking in case you needed to stop somewhere."

"No. No stops. Just home."

"Okay, then. I'll ride in your car. Thanks."

After a few minutes, Lorelai brought her Jeep around to the curb near the front of the hospital entrance. Luke pulled his truck up behind the Jeep. He jumped out and grabbed the remaining stuffed animals to stow in his truck. Lorelai leaped down, quickly making her way over to where Rory sat with Logan leaning on a concrete bollard.

"Hey, you ready?" Lorelai grabbed the suitcase and set it down in her Jeep, followed by the gift bags.

"Mom, I'm gonna ride with Logan."

"Oh? You sure?" Logan thought he did a fair job of reading Lorelai. She tended to have a pretty animated face. It wasn't like trying to decipher tea leaves. Logan thought he detected surprise and disappointment.

"I'm just not feeling the stretch."

"Oh!" Lorelai frowned at her Jeep. "I wish I had thought of that. I could've driven your car."

"Mom, it's not a big deal. Logan's got the limo. And Frank. You remember Frank? You met Frank."

"Frank? Who's Frank?"

As if on cue, Frank pulled the limo alongside the curb, in front of Lorelai's Jeep. Stepping out of the vehicle, Frank made his way around to the passenger side of the vehicle.

"Frank, it's so good to see you! How's your wife? And your son?"

Logan steadied Rory as she stood - much slower this time.

"Slow, Ace. Remember. G forces."

"I'm good, Logan."

"Hello Miss Rory. Everyone's good. We had a little girl in '09."

"Congratulations on your 8 year old!"

"Thank you. Congratulations to you too."

"Thank you. He's five days old today."

"I heard. It's a good time."

"Yeah, I'm starting to get that."

Frank made his way to the passenger side rear door and held it open for Rory. In the sudden conversation lull, Lorelai's voice rang out like an alarm.

"Rory!"

Startled, both Logan and Rory swiveled their heads around to meet her mother's gaze.
"Sorry. Didn't mean to yell. Just I'd been trying to get your attention. Then it was quiet all of a sudden."

"Oh. Sorry. Guess I'm distracted."

"No problem. Luke and I are gonna get going. And we don't have to worry about ordering food. Sookie's coming and she's bringing lunch."

"That's great," smiled Rory.

"Yeah," agreed Logan.

"So we'll meet you there. We just need to know where 'there' is."

"The address is 42 North Main, Lorelai. Units 23 and 24. Both top floor. There should be someone at the front desk. In case you get there ahead of us, just give them your name. They'll give you the keys."

"Got it. Thanks, Logan."

With that Lorelai smiled thinly at each of them before tracking back to her Jeep.

Logan helped Rory settle into the limo.

"You good, Ace?"

"Yep."

Logan walked around to the rear driver side where Frank stood holding the door open. About to take his place beside Rory, something fast-moving caught his eye and then came to a halt in front of him. It was Lorelai.

"Hey, you mind if I talk to my daughter for a few minutes?" Before Logan had a chance to answer, Lorelai scooted inside the limo, pulling the door shut behind her.

"Not at all." Logan answered into the air before turning to Frank. "Frank, why don't you get in the car? I'm sure this won't take long."

"Yes, sir." Frank settled into the driver's seat.

Logan stepped back onto the curb. Within seconds the limo pulled away, with a thoughtful Logan gazing after it. He had to force himself not to text Rory to ask what was going on with Lorelai. He figured it wasn't a planned trip and that they'd be back soon. This belief was soon confirmed by the sound of Luke's frustrated voice carrying in the otherwise still of the parking lot.

"I don't believe this! What the hell is she up to now?!"

Logan was right in his assumption that the Lorelais' road trip would be a brief one. The limo turned out of the parking lot and then, Logan deduced, made a lap around the hospital complex before returning to its spot ahead of the parked Jeep. Lorelai shot out of the limo, ran to her Jeep, and hopped in without saying a word. Logan observed this all, in silence, from his place leaning against the bollard. Straightening, he made his way back to the limo and climbed into the back of the car. After confirming with Frank they were ready to go, he settled onto the bench seat, angled so he was facing Rory.

"Everything all right?"
"Yeah. Fine." She gave him a nervous smile.

"Something up with Lorelai?"

"Nope. All's good."

"Ace..."

"She just had something she wanted to tell me."

"Something she didn't want me to hear."

"It was private. Yeah. But please don't worry about it. It's nothing. New topic."

"Okay."

"What're you thinking?"

"I'm thinking I must've done something right in a past life."

"You did something naughty in New Hampshire is what you did."

"Touche. You?"

"I'm thinking how nice it is to see Frank again. It was sweet of you to bring him back."

"Sweet?" Perplexed, Logan chuckled. "I like the man too. But please don't tell me you've been pining for Frank all these years?"

"No," she laughed. "But I did get to know him a bit over the years. I wondered about him."

"And now you don't have to wonder anymore?"

"Yeah."

"Well, you may not like this then but I don't think I'm gonna keep him indefinitely."

"What? Why? You buying a car?"

"I think that probably makes the most sense."

"Miss your Porsche?"

"Please. You know I hardly drive in London."

"Yeah I know. I have to admit I would've thought you'd have cultivated an Autobahn habit by now."

"I think I grew out of my fast cars phase."

"God I hope so." Her words were said softly but the underlying implication made him smile. "So what're you thinking of buying?"

"Family car. SUV. Maybe a Land Rover. Or a Mercedes."

"Oh?" She sounded surprised.

paraphernalia. A mini-fridge to store your..." He stopped.

"My...?" Rory obviously knew what he was trying to say and found his verbal stumble amusing.

"Your milk."

"Technically, it's his milk."

"Right. His milk." Logan nodded. "Surprised?"

"No. You've always been good like that. When you're on, you're on."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome. Speaking of which, I didn't give it much thought until now but I'm really looking forward to being somewhere other than the hospital. Or a hotel. And you have no idea how relieved I am that we're gonna be minutes away, not all the way down in Stars Hollow."

"Good. I'm glad, Ace."

"Yeah. Me too."
Within minutes, Frank was pulling up to 42 North Main. The building was a ten story, attractive mixed-modern structure. The lower four floors were traditional red brick, with the ground level housing retail shops, restaurants and a coffee shop. The upper part of the building facade was white brick, accented with metal and glass.

As Rory glanced out the rear window to see what the neighborhood offered, Logan watched Rory.

"A baby boutique. That's convenient. An Italian restaurant. Have you had their coffee?" Rory pointed to the coffee shop.

"Not yet, Ace. We can try it out together."

"Okay."

Frank's voice suddenly sounded over the intercom.

"Do you want to dropped off out front? Or should I pull into the garage?"

"Garage. By the elevator bank."

"Certainly."

Frank turned the car into the driveway that led into the garage. Curious about the apartments, Rory had started quizzing Logan at some point during the ride. Though he had answered a few questions, he mostly just fielded them with non-answers, offering no details. Finally he told her, "You're just gonna have to see it yourself, Ace."

Within minutes of the limousine entering the garage, the two were out of the car. Juggling his suitcase in his right hand, and Rory's laptop bag slung over his right shoulder, Logan's left hand was gently guiding Rory.

"Frank, we're good for now. The plan is to head back to the hospital in an hour or so. I'll text you fifteen minutes out."

"Very good, Sir."

"Lunch, Logan." Rory looked at Logan expectantly.

"Lunch?"

Rolling her eyes slightly, Rory bent to look at Frank inside the vehicle.
Frank, if you want to stop by for lunch we'll have a whole spread."

"Thank you, Miss. I'll be all right."

As Frank pulled away, Logan led Rory towards the elevator bank. Glancing at her, Logan saw her eyes were watery.

"What's wrong, Ace?"

"Nothing. Nothing's wrong. It was just really good to see Frank."

Pausing, Logan grabbed a handkerchief from his pocket. "Ace?"

"Thank you. I guess it's the hormones."

"Let's get you inside."

Logan shepherded Rory inside the elevator before waving a card in front of a card reader and hitting the button for the tenth floor.

"Top floor?"

"Gotta have roof access. Otherwise, what's the point?"

"Of course."

"You hear from Lorelai?"

"Didn't look. Good idea."

Rory pulled her cell phone out of her handbag.

"She and Luke are already here and they've unloaded all the stuff into the apartment. She says the apartment is very nice. It was already decorated with flowers?"

Logan shrugged. He honestly didn't know what the designer had done. "I may've had some brought in."

"She calls it Martha Stewart meets the color black."

"Since it's temporary, and was done in a day, there was some mixing and matching with what was available."

"I'm sure it's fine. You know Lorelai."

"Yep, I do." Logan watched Rory as her eyes closed. No better time than the present. "Speaking of Lorelai...You ever gonna tell me what that joyride back there was all about?"

Rory's eyes shot open. Her lips tightened as she seemed to balance the merits of coming clean versus not coming clean. Logan had to hand it to her: she was literally saved by the bell as the elevator stopped on their floor.

"Ace, your luck is holding. Saved by the bell."

"Did I ever tell you I watched that show as a kid?"

"Don't remember. But why would you admit that? That show was terrible." Logan guided her from
the elevator down one side of the corridor.

"We going to Casa Gilmore? Or can I see your place first?"

"We're going to my place first. This way I can drop off my suitcase. Wanna tour?"

"Love one."

"Trying to make me forget about my question?"

"Depends."

"On what? Whether or not it's working?" He grinned.

"You think you know me so well..."

"That's because I do know you so well."

Their voices must have carried in the quiet of the corridor. Or else someone waiting on their arrival had been standing at the door with an ear pressed against it, Logan thought sourly.

"Rory?"

"Hey mom! We'll be right in. Logan's dropping off his suitcase and we're gonna do a quick tour of his place."

"Okay. What time is Lane getting here? Sookie'll be here in a few minutes."

"Same!" Rory replied.

Just then Logan's cell pulsed. Pulling it out, he read the message quickly before turning back to Rory.

"And it looks like Colin and Finn will be joining us for lunch."

"You're kidding!"

"They just landed."

"Oh."

"Tell your mom. We should move lunch to my place. More silverware. More seating."

Rory turned back to Lorelai who stood several yards away in the doorway of the other apartment.

"Mom, give us a couple of minutes! We're gonna do lunch at Logan's! He has more silverware!"

"Sookie's bringing everything we need!"

"More seats, Ace."

"There's more seats, too!"

With that Logan and Rory turned back to the door of Unit 24.

"Good number, Huntzberger."

"Good show."
"Exactly."

Logan unlocked the door and pushed it open.

"Come on."

Rory followed Logan into the apartment. Once inside, Logan set his suitcase and Rory's laptop bag down in the foyer. Turning around to face Rory, Logan caught her look of amazement.

"How on earth did you get this place to look like this?"

"You know. Money talks."

The apartment's foyer was big, with a coat closet and a mysterious set of pocket doors located on the right side. The apartment floor was a dark hardwood. Mirrors, framed photographs, and other decorative pieces were placed with precision along the wall.

"What's behind the pocket doors?"

"Bonus room."

Rory walked over to the doors and slid them open. Seeing what was inside, her mouth hung open in surprise.

"Is that your pool table from Yale?"

"Yeah. It was sitting in storage, so..."

"And what's that?" Rory gestured to a spiral staircase in a corner of the room.

"Goes up to the roof."

"What's on the roof?"


"Nice, Huntzberger."

"Elevator goes up there too. In case you were wondering."

"Yeah. I don't think me climbing that holding the baby is a good idea."

Logan agreed. He was beyond pleased at the hypothetical picture Rory casually tossed off of her and Lucas there - at his apartment - enjoying the rooftop.

"Come on. Let me show you the rest of the place."

They left the pool room and returned to the foyer. Turning right they continued along the corridor where they soon encountered a smaller hallway.

"What's down this way?"

"Guest rooms. Guest bath."

"I wanna see."

Logan noted that the two guest rooms were tastefully if somewhat minimally decorated. The
bathroom was as well. He had to admit the designer he'd pulled in had actually earned his outrageous fee. He assumed the man as well as his contractors hadn't slept in two days, given the number of things that needed to be done to get the apartments in move-in condition.

Back on the main corridor, they made their way to the kitchen. Located in the center of the apartment, the kitchen's open design allowed light to come in via the large dining room windows. Dark wood cabinets stood in contrast to slate countertops and grey pendant lights. The island separated the kitchen from the dining room, with rustic barstools placed on the outer side, within the dining room. The dining room table was a good size, with seating for eight. Logan smiled as he noticed several framed photos on a wood shelving unit in the corner of the dining room. He wondered how long it would take Rory to notice them.

"Nice kitchen. What's on the right?"

"My room."

"I have to see." Rory slipped into his room. "No sofa?"

"I don't have a full floor like in London."

Leaving his room, the two stepped back into the dining room, which opened out to the living room. The living room had a sectional sofa that could seat six comfortably or seven in an uncomfortably close fashion. He could recall a debate he and Rory had had one time about the best way to seat a seventh person, considering the corner cushion's lack of legroom.

"It's a little like the London townhouse."

"Yeah. I figured a lot of time was spent on choosing stuff for that place -"

"I remember. You were still adding 'final' touches two years ago."

"I told the designer to aim for that but make it less British. More modern. Maybe a few older-looking pieces as accents."

"I like it! If it's nicer than Casa Gilmore, I may hang out here more than over there."

"That's my plan." Logan smiled.

Rory turned around to meet his gaze.

"It is?"

Logan's grin widened. "You know I'd never pass up an opportunity to hang out with you."

Logan noted Rory -probably wisely- chose to ignore that comment. Instead, she continued to look around the apartment.

"So, does this place have anything next door doesn't?"


"Well, it's great. You outdid yourself."

"I didn't forget, Ace."
"Forget what?"

"I asked you about your morning drive with Lorelai."

Rory grimaced. "It's gonna annoy you."

"Me? I'm unflappable."

"Oh, you'll flap. You'll be Zelda Fitzgerald."

Logan had been trying to not lose his shit over the incident but the more time had passed without an explanation, the more concerned he'd become. Now that he'd asked her and she was pointedly doing everything she could to avoid answering, it was quickly escalating in his mind as something to be worried about.

"Is it about Lucas?"

"Oh my God, no!" Rory looked horrified at the thought. "No! I didn't mean for you to think that! No! No!" Rory frowned. "It's just that Jess -"

Logan felt heat prickle at his neck. As he interrupted her, his words were stony.

"Cousin Jess?"

Rory rolled her eyes. "Yes. Cousin Jess. May I continue?"

Logan nodded. "Please."

"Jess is still in Connecticut. He called Luke and said he wanted to stop by on his way back to Philadelphia. Luke told him I was already out of the hospital and gave him this address. My mom is afraid he's gonna stop by. She wanted me to call him and tell him-"

Rory's words fell off. This was the first time Rory stumbled in her recounting. Logan internally cheered. If he was reading between the lines correctly, this was boding quite well for him.

"Tell him...?" He prompted.

"Tell him not to come because I just had a baby and playing referee between a couple of idiots is the last thing I need."

Not exactly the brushoff he'd been hoping to hear. But, considering it originated with Lorelai, he probably shouldn't have been surprised.

"Lorelai's words or yours?"

"Her words were way more harsh."

"So what did you do?"

"What do you think? I called him."

Finally. An explanation for the hijacked limo.

"So he's not coming?"

"I didn't actually talk to him. I left a voicemail. Said I didn't think his stopping by was a good idea
since we'd be heading back to the hospital for the rest of the day."

"That's all you said?" Logan grimaced. He would've much rather she told Kerouac to take a hike because she already had a man -two including their son- in her life and there was no room for one more. Especially a cousin. Apparently his eyes belied his thoughts.

"Logan, there's nothing going on between Jess and me! It's not like I have to break up with him!"

"Not that, Ace. What about us?!

"What about us?"

"You should have told Cousin Jess, 'thanks-but-no-thanks' because you've already got a man in your life!"

"Newsflash: The only man in my life – in any official capacity – is my son!"

Logan gave Rory a frustrated glare, before rubbing his temple.

"I wonder if they delivered the scotch."

"Oh, great! True to form! You don't like how something's going? Yeah, pour yourself a drink!"

Rory's eyes were suddenly as fiery as her tone. "Fine example to set for our son."

Rory's words floored him; he found his anger eradicated all at once. Sighing, he raised his head, leveling his gaze to meet hers.

"You're absolutely right. I'm sorry."

Rory drew in her eyebrows in confusion.

"What the hell just happened?"

"Come on, Ace," he chuckled. "We dated for years. I know that's not the first time I conceded that you were right."

"No, not the first." She nodded. "But definitely the easiest."

"I don't want to fight with you. Let me give you the rest of the tour. Our lunch guests will be here soon."

They made their way around the remainder of the dining room and living room. Logan offered small talk responses to Rory's small talk questions. If she noticed the photographs, she didn't say anything about them.

"Come on. It's not New York but it's still a pretty nice view."

Rory allowed Logan to pull her out onto the balcony.

"Yeah, it is nice." Rory closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Only ten stories but it works."

"I love May. The air feels nice. It's a beautiful day."

"Yes, it is." Logan agreed as his eyes never left her face. He was happy to be with her; he was
always happy to be with her - but the hot and cold thing was getting old. "I have to ask you something, Rory."

"Calling me Rory." She opened her eyes. "Must be serious."

"It is. Do you love me?"

"Logan -"

"Rory."

Logan watched as she let out a deep sigh. "Yes," she replied simply, a small smile playing at her lips but not quite making it up to her eyes. "But you already knew that."

"Just double-checking. Okay. So you love me. I love you. We have a son who deserves a continuous stream of love from both his parents. So why are you so resistant against the idea of us being together?"

Rory offered him a crooked smile before replying. "I'm no good at being noble, but it doesn't take much to see our problems don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world."

Logan laughed. "Your Bogart is terrible. And your quote is off-point."

"What? How's that off-point?"

"The backdrop to "Casablanca" was World War II. Last time I checked, we weren't quite there."

"No..."

The smile left his face with his next words.

"The only war going on around here is the one between your heart and your head. As for our problems," he leaned in towards her, "admittedly we have a few logistical things to work out, but they're far from unsurmountable."

Drawing away from Logan, Rory stepped closer to the balcony rail and glanced down at the street below. Without looking back at him, she spoke.

"Logan, has it ever occurred to you that if we were meant to be, we'd already be together?"

"No." Logan closed the distance between them. Standing behind her, he gently wrapped his arms around her waist. Leaning in, he dropped a kiss on the right side of her neck. "Ace, I think we're right where we're supposed to be. We just took the long way home."

Rory inhaled quickly; for some reason, she seemed startled by his comment.

"What? Something I said?"

"No. Yes. Just reminded me of something my dad said." He listened as she took a deep breath. Pulling herself out of his embrace, she turned around to face him. "You know something? We'll have to talk about this later. Right now, we need to go grab Mom and Luke. Have about ten of our nearest and dearest over for lunch. Then we gotta kick them all out so we can get back to the hospital."

He knew she was deflecting. But he also knew she was one hundred percent right. It wasn't the right time for that discussion.
"Yes, Mom."

"That is so much better than Baby Mama."
Lunch with Friends, Part I

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Author's Note: Google "Maldiscontent" and "Inside the Monkey Habitat" for the floorplan and seating arrangement. We have a lot of guests stopping by; it might help to see where everyone's sitting.

_Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Saturday, May 20, 2017, 11:45 am EST_

After taking a quick tour of the Gilmore apartment, Logan and Rory, accompanied by Lorelai and Luke, settled in at Logan's apartment to await their guests. Logan found himself amused at Rory seemingly quick and painless slipping into hostess mode. Seeing what she regarded as a "ridiculous" amount of flowers in the Gilmore's apartment - between the ones Logan's interior designer had placed and the ones brought from the hospital - Rory had insisted everyone grab a flower arrangement to bring over to Logan's. Once back at Logan's she walked around the apartment, deliberating on the precise placement of each arrangement. Logan noted with sardonic amusement that Rory had carried the flowers from his parents over herself.

"Wow. Fancy." Lorelai had commented as she first entered the apartment. Dropping her flowers on the table in the foyer, Lorelai proceeded to walk straight to the dining room, Luke close on her heels.

Although it had been a decade since he'd spent any time with them together - and even then it was always in small doses - Logan thought he sensed a tension between Rory and Lorelai. The two had disappeared for a few minutes while at the Gilmore apartment. Since the group's arrival at his apartment, Logan would've sworn he'd caught Lorelai's eyes on Rory a couple of times when she thought no one was watching. As for Rory, she seemed to deliberately be keeping distance between herself and Lorelai.

Logan watched as Lorelai and Luke, done surveying the dining area, made a beeline for the living room. Rory continued her walk-through at a much slower pace.

"Logan, now that I've seen the other apartment, this one seems..." Her voice trailed off as she walked to a corner shelving unit in the living room. "How did I not notice these before?" Rory posed the rhetorical question to the air as she lowered the Huntzberger flower arrangement onto the dining room table. As Logan watched, she picked up a framed photograph of herself and Logan from their Yale days.

Logan figured he knew what she was thinking. But still he asked.

"Seems what, Ace?"

"It seems not temporary." Rory turned to glance at Logan over her shoulder.

"You got me. I told the designer to think permanent for this place."

"What? Why?"
"Why? Why do you think? Whatever happens between us, Rory," Logan spoke in a low tone, "I'm going to be by this way a lot over the next eighteen years."

Turning back to the shelf, Rory nodded without a word. She replaced the framed picture to its spot. Logan watched as Rory's gaze fell on another photograph: this one a snapshot of her taken in London over the Christmas holidays two years earlier, a few months after Richard's death.

Finally Logan and Rory rounded the corner into the living room where Lorelai and Luke were taking in the view from the balcony.

"Nice view." Lorelai observed.

"Yeah," agreed Logan. "Between the balconies and the rooftops, the place is pretty good for stargazing."

Rory smiled. "And dining al fresco."

"Luke, Lorelai. Can I get you something to drink?"

"You have stuff in the fridge?" Rory was obviously surprised.

"I know how to be a good host, Ace. No food yet but I do have water, club soda, beer, and wine."

"I'll have a beer."

"I'll have a glass of white."

"Ace? Club soda?"

"Yeah."

"Everyone, make yourselves comfortable. I'll be right back."

Logan left the Gilmores in the living room and walked around to the kitchen. Intent on getting the drinks together, it took a minute before he realized someone had followed him.

"Logan? Could I talk to you a minute?"

Glancing up from the counter, Logan met the eyes of the woman standing before him. Glancing out to the living room balcony, Logan saw that Rory appeared to be talking on her cell. Whatever Lorelai wanted to discuss with him, it seemed that she was being very strategic about the timing.

"Sure, Lorelai. What's up?"

"So...Rory says she told you about our little limo discussion."

"She did." Logan nodded. Maybe it was time for his 'play-nice-with-Cousin-Jess' lecture from Lorelai. Casting his gaze over at Lorelai, he thought she looked confused about something. Did she not believe that Rory had told him about their discussion? Logan watched as Lorelai pointedly decided not to make eye contact with him; instead her eyes traveled from him to the light fixtures above his head to the cabinets behind him until they finally settled on the flower arrangement Luke had set down on the peninsula countertop.

Logan, meanwhile, removed two white wines from the refrigerator and held them out for Lorelai's inspection. "Sauvignon Blanc or Pinot Grigio?"
Logan replaced the Sauvignon Blanc to the refrigerator and grabbed a corkscrew to open the Pinot Grigio. He poured a taste of wine in Lorelai's glass and gestured for her to try the wine.

"Logan, it's not like I'm gonna send it back. You might as well pour the full glass."

"You got it."

Logan filled the wine glass and handed it to Lorelai. Accepting the glass, Lorelai took a sip.

"Good."

"Glad you like it."

Expecting more of a discussion related to the limo talk, Logan shot Lorelai a expectant glance, hoping to prompt a more detailed explanation. Finally, Lorelai took the hint and elaborated.

"So you're okay with her plans?"

'Plans'? What 'plans'? Plans with 'Cousin Jess'?

"The house?" Lorelai's eyes narrowed as she met his gaze. "She didn't tell you, did she?"

House? Logan shook his head. Taking a tumbler from the cabinet, he poured himself the scotch neat that was long overdue.

"Rory didn't tell me about plans or about a house. Care to enlighten me?"

Lorelai let out an exaggerated sigh of exasperation. "This. This is exactly why I told her she needed to tell you. And soon. Trying to keep secrets that everyone knows never works. I just figured Sookie or Lane or Zach would be the one to blow it. I didn't think it would be me that spilled the beans."

Refocusing her gaze on Logan, her next words were directed at him. "If she didn't tell you about her plans to buy a house, what did she say we talked about in the limo?"

"Cousin Jess."

"Oh, that."

"Yeah, that." By Lorelai's tone, Logan inferred that the 'Cousin Jess' conversation was minor in comparison to the 'plans to buy a house' discussion. Logan nodded as he downed a mouthful of scotch. "The house, Lorelai?"

Lorelai sighed and settled her gaze on Logan. Logan could see the wheels turning in her head. This was obviously the cause of the current tension between Rory and Lorelai. Apparently Lorelai had been pushing Rory to tell him about her plans and - for whatever reason - Rory had dug in his heels.

"Rory was in the middle of buying a house in Stars Hollow when she was admitted to the hospital."

Okay.

Downing another mouthful of scotch, Logan absorbed Lorelai's reveal and wasted no time in deconstructing it. The fact that Rory had been looking to buy a house in Stars Hollow, while interesting, was in no way shocking. Logan would've been more surprised by Rory picking up and moving away, spiriting Lucas off to some unknown place. Or by Rory deciding to stay with Luke and Lorelai and sharing her childhood room with their son. That Rory would decide to settle in Stars
Hollow while Lucas was an infant - and she was under the impression she would be raising him on her own - was in no way a surprise.

No, the most interesting part of this revelation was the fact that Rory seemed steadfastly intent on not telling him about it. Even, apparently, against Lorelai's advice. Why?

He, on the other hand, had made no secret of his own intentions. Not about the apartment; nor about anything else.

Logan's eyes met Lorelai's.

"Logan, you weren't here. The assumption was - right or wrong - you didn't want to be. Rory was getting ready to raise Lucas alone."

"I get that, Lorelai. Believe me. I'm not surprised - or angry - that Rory was looking to put down roots in Stars Hollow." Setting his glass down, Logan lowered his eyes. Splaying and flexing his fingers, he concentrated on his hand as he considered the bombshell Lorelai had accidentally dropped. "What I don't get is why she didn't tell me?"

"You'd have to ask her."

"I will. Believe me."

"Logan, I'm sorry I dropped this on you. I thought you and Rory had talked. And I really didn't mean to make you angry."

"I'm not angry, Lorelai." Though not loud, Logan's words came out sharper than he'd intended. "I'm sorry. I'm frustrated. I'm telling Rory everything. I figure I owe it to them. I was foolishly thinking she was operating on a similar game plan."

Lifting his gaze, Logan's eyes met the blue ones so similar to Rory's.

"Lorelai, can I ask you something?"

"You can ask. I'll decide if I want to answer."

"What do you want to see happen?"

"What I want isn't important."

"Please, Lorelai," chuckled Logan. "You and I both know that's not true."

"Fine. I want my daughter and grandson to be happy, healthy, and safe. If that means living in London - because it's what Rory wants - I can accept that."

"But...?"

"But Rory is Rory. She likes lists and order. She needs time to get used to curveballs. The baby was a surprise. The baby coming early was a surprise. You not being around was a surprise. You being around is a surprise. And then there's Lucas. He's doing great now but it was scary for a while. Without you, her decision was to stay here. With people who love and support her. Now -"

"And now, what? You think because I'm in the picture I'll spirit her and Lucas away to London?" Logan snorted. Incredible. "I don't know where you get these ideas. I know they're not coming from Rory. I'd never do that to her. She knows that. Even if I wanted her with me. You know you don't need to protect her." He took another swig of his scotch. "She knows how to protect herself. Believe
me."

Sighing, Logan's eyes turned downward; staring at the floor, he momentarily lost himself in his thoughts. Looking up, he was startled to see Lorelai still standing there.

Could there possibly be more?

"We done?"

"Yeah. Done."

Calmer, Logan resolved to back-burner the frustration he felt for the time being.

"Thanks for letting me know." He forced a smile. "About the house."

"Yeah, well. Kind of an accident." Lorelai was still obviously worried. "Why don't I bring the drinks out? You look like you could use a minute."

"Sure," he shrugged while setting the glasses on the tray for Lorelai to bring out to the living room.

AN: Thank you for reading. Lunch is going to be broken into three separate chapters. I will try to get all three posted this weekend. As this is told via Logan's POV, readers will not always be aware of behind-the-scenes conversations among other characters. Please bear in mind - despite his talent for eavesdropping at key moments - Logan is not omniscient. There will be headscratching "I wonder why..?" moments.
Chapter Notes

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Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Saturday, May 20, 2017, 12:10 pm EST

Logan's resolve to back-burner his frustration with Rory was helped by the knowledge that guests would soon be arriving for lunch. If he had a chance to talk to Colin and Finn, maybe they'd have some theories on why Rory would want to keep the house a secret. Prior to the conversation with Lorelai and her unexpected revelations, Logan had thought his most pressing concern was 'Cousin Jess'. Now that no longer seemed to be the case. In some ways, he was relieved. In other ways, he wasn't.

Lorelai's reaction to Rory sharing the 'Cousin Jess' portion of the limo talk seemed to support Rory's assertion that there was nothing going on between them. Rory was reticent to talk about 'Cousin Jess' because she thought doing so might mistakenly elevate something she regarded as not meriting attention.

On the other hand, Logan felt that Lorelai's concern at Rory keeping the house a secret raised a red flag.

"Sookie's here!"

Watching Lorelai sail past him on her way to the apartment door, Logan followed. He assumed Sookie would be accompanied by one of the doormen. Arriving at the apartment door a second behind Lorelai, Logan confirmed that a doorman had helped Sookie bring lunch up with the use of a luggage cart. Although he'd only met a few of the building staff, Logan recognized the doorman; he was pretty sure the man's name was either John or Jim.

"You have trouble finding the place, Sookie? You said you were two minutes away. That was like fifteen minutes ago." Lorelai relieved Sookie of one of the bags she was carrying. "What's in here?"

"Fresh iced tea and lemon wedges. I did something to my driving app! It refused to orient north! I didn't realize at first and I kept going the wrong way. Then when I figured out what was wrong, I had to keep twisting the phone every time I turned. This building is so nice! I parked out front and John came out to help me with the food. Hi again, Logan. I like your place."

"Hi Sookie. Thank you. Can I help you with that bag?"

Sookie handed Logan the remaining shoulder bag. "The ramekins have crème brûlée with espresso." Sookie leaned close to Logan and added in a whisper. "I know Rory's been jonesing for caffeine."
"Sookie!" Rory stepped past Logan in the foyer to greet Sookie. "Thank you so much for bringing lunch!"

"My pleasure, hon."

"Where would you like the food trays?" asked John the doorman.

"How about the dining room? On the peninsula?" suggested Rory. "I thought we could fix plates there and eat in the living room. Sound good, Logan?"

"Sounds perfect."

The group made a procession to the dining room. Following Rory's instructions, the doorman unloaded the food trays from the cart onto the countertop. Done, he turned to Logan.

"I'll be heading back down, Mr. Huntzberger."

"Thanks, John. Hold on. I'll walk you out." Logan followed the doorman to the foyer.

"Logan! What about plates?"

"All set, Ace. See by the sink."

"Oh, I brought disposables since Lorelai and I didn't know what you had."

The last thing Logan heard as he made his way to the door was Rory's reply.

"We've got a dishwasher, Sookie. Might as well use the real plates."

_We've got a dishwasher._

Logan chuckled silently to himself. Finn was right. Rory was good at keeping him on his toes. Arriving at the door, Logan had just pulled out his wallet to tip the doorman when a couple of new voices could be heard coming from the elevator.

"Hey, Logan!"

"Good thing we saw you. We didn't know which door it was."

"Hi Lane, Zack." Logan called out to the departing doorman. "Two more guests, John. They're coming in from the airport so keep the cart handy."

"Yes, Sir."

Turning his attention to the newly arriving guests, Logan smiled at Lane and offered Zack his hand, which Zack stared at before accepting. "There's only two apartments on this floor and we got both of them."

"Oh? That's cool." Lane replied.

"Guess he doesn't like neighbors." Logan heard Zack whisper to his wife.

"Come on," said Logan. "Rory'll probably give you a tour later but Sookie just got here with lunch."

"Sookie made lunch? Score!" exclaimed Zack. "Can this count as a date night, Lane?"

"What? No!" Lane huffed, obviously miffed. Logan bit his lip to keep from laughing.
Logan led the two newest guests to the dining room, where Sookie, Lorelai, and Rory were unpacking the lunch trays.

"Rory!"

"Lane!"

Logan watched as the two women hugged.

"You look so good, Rory."

"Thanks."

"How're you feeling?"

"Good. Better."

"How're things going with - " Logan couldn't hear the rest of Lane's question as Sookie's voice suddenly echoed throughout the dining room.

"Okay, so we have rotini with chicken marsala ragout, vegetable croquettes, and four different kinds of salad. We have macaroni. Antipasto. This is a four bean. This is mixed greens with vinaigrette. We have a pitcher of fresh iced tea. That tray has French bread and homemade sweet butter."

"Thanks, Sookie. You went above and beyond!" Lorelai wasted no time in dishing out food.

"Anyone not want the ragout? I thought so."

"Oh, well. You've been so busy with the annex! And Rory was busy too! This is the least I could do."

"No, Mom's right, Sookie. This is fantastic. Thank you."

"Hon, I'm just doing my job. Not that feeding you is my job but preparing food is. Throwing this together was no trouble at all. If it was, well, your mom and I would have a big problem! So dig in, everybody!"

"Let's sit in the living room. I'm gonna open the balcony doors so we get the breeze. Logan, set out glasses for the iced tea."

Noting with ironic pleasure how natural Rory's directive sounded, Logan did as instructed, setting glasses down next to the iced tea. By the time he fixed himself a plate and made his way into the living room, all the spots on the sofa had been taken. Rory, he saw, was sandwiched between her mother to her right and Lane to her left. Logan settled on the leather wingback chair closest to the door. He figured Colin and Finn would be arriving soon. Besides, sitting across from the group gave him an unimpeded view of everyone.

Since Rory wasn't acting any differently towards him, Logan could only assume she didn't know Lorelai had told him about the house. He figured if Rory knew he knew, things would get weird. Or weirder.

"Sookie, you do a fabulous spread."

"Thanks, Lane."

"You know the boys' just had their tenth birthday and we ordered giant heroes from Gil's shop -"
"He gave us the band discount!"

"I'm looking forward to them developing more adult culinary tastes. These as leftovers would've been so much better than the monster hero!"

"The monster hero rocks, Lane!"

"Maybe by the time they're interested in girls?" suggested Sookie. "Girls usually have more refined tastes when it comes to food."

"Ah, ah, ah." Clearing his throat, Luke gestured with his head to Lorelai and Rory.

"Well, yeah. Everyone knows that doesn't apply to them."

"Thanks Sookie." Lorelai leaned forward to look at her friend.

"Yeah, Luke." Rory griped. "Besides I have been making an effort."

"That's right," agreed Lorelai. "Rory hasn't had a ho-ho in months."

"Yeah! Just say no no to the ho-ho!" Rory sighed. "What I really miss are the pop tarts."

Not that he'd lived with his sister at any point in the past ten years, but Logan had spent enough time with Honor to know she didn't give up junk food during any of her pregnancies. If anything, she used being pregnant as an excuse to eat more chocolate and ice cream. Logan figured it seemed as good an opportunity as any to jump into the conversation.

"I get the no alcohol and letting up on the caffeine, Ace. But why deny yourself pop tarts?"

Rory leaned forward to meet Logan's gaze. "Because I somehow wound up with the most judgey OB/GYN known to womankind. Not to mention Paris has taken to face-timing me to see what I'm eating." Logan almost laughed at the forlorn look on Rory's face. "I don't want to think about that. This food is so good, Sookie." She turned to look at Sookie. "Thank you again. So Lane, Zack. What did we miss this week?"

"It's only been five days," argued Luke.


"The theater released its summer movie schedule." Lane said as she bit into a croquette. "Mm. These are so good."

"Anything interesting coming up?" asked Rory.


"Oh? We know anything about it?"

"He's very hush-hush whenever anyone asks." Sookie took a forkful of the ragout. "No one thinks the ragout is too salty? Manny made it. He seems a little salt-happy lately."

"Yeah," agreed Lane. "I asked him about it and he said he couldn't say anything because his lawyer told him not to."

"That is weird. Even for Kirk." Lorelai leaned forward to make eye contact with Sookie. "Maybe one too many shakes on the salt."
"Thank you! I'm not crazy!"

"Other movies include 'Das Boot.'" Lane nudged her husband. "What else, Zack?"

"Oh, uh -"


"That girl sure does love her German cinema," commented Lorelai.

"Okay, so 'Weekend at Bernie's' -" Zack laid his plate down on the coffee table and proceeded to use his fingers to run through the list of movies.

"That was my suggestion!"


"Moronically brilliant. You just don't get it."

"I get it. It's asinine."

"'The Handmaid's Tale,' 'Heidi' -"

"That was Kirk's suggestion." Lorelai nodded. "I think he's looking forward to dressing Petal in lederhosen."

"I think he's looking forward to dressing up like Heidi if you ask me." Logan almost spit out his food at Sookie's comment.

"- and 'Breakfast at Tiffany's.'" Zack made then what Logan coined in his head, his 'workin'-hard-thinking' face. "That's all I remember."

"'Breakfast at Tiffany's!' I always thought that movie was so romantic!" Sookie sang out. "Audrey Hepburn was so glamorous! It was filmed during that brief period when New York was both edgy and clean! Before that bastard Don-"

"Sookie! Chill!"

"Right, right." Sookie took a deep breath before continuing brightly. "So, did Tiffany's really serve breakfast back then? Anybody know?"

"Pretty sure no," replied Rory. "She eats a croissant while staring through the store window in the movie, right? The book was different."

"Oh? I don't remember the book."

"Of course you don't." Lorelai consoled her friend. "Because there's a movie."

"Truman Capote said Holly Golightly was basically an American geisha." Geisha? Logan's ears perked up at Rory's words. He focused on her profile as she spoke. "She has this 'fairytale-on-the-outside-but-ugly-under-the-surface' existence, living off of men she grants favors to. The movie lost that social commentary completely. Instead focusing on a concocted love story between Holly and her neighbor."

"But so glamorous!" Sookie sighed.
"I thought you loved that movie!" Lorelai turned to face her daughter.

"I did. When I was younger. Then I realized how unrealistic it was. The love story with the neighbor doesn't even happen in the book! The book is better. Definitely more realistic."

Logan decided he was not letting that pass without sharing his own opinion.

"Come on, Ace."

"What?" Rory's head shot around to look at him.

"Holly's wealthy lover dumps her because he's afraid his family will get caught up in the scandal after Holly's arrested for unknowingly relaying drug-ring messages to a jailed mobster. After she miscarries their baby, she dodges her trial by fleeing to South America where she hooks up with a married man and is never heard from again. You call that realistic?!"

"Ooh! You forgot the part where ten years later Mr. Yunioshi claims a likeness of Holly is being revered as a deity by an East Angolian tribe!" added Lane.

"Thank you, Lane." He glanced at Lane before returning his focus to Rory. "In the movie, she falls in love with her neighbor and he helps her find her lost cat. I rest my case."

"Fine. Maybe it's not more realistic in a literal sense. But, to the extent that happily ever after is for fairy tales. I think the sad ending without the love story's more realistic."

"Only you think that way, Ace."

"Not true. There's a lot of people who prefer the book over the movie. Lane?"

"Book. Book Holly is pretty kick-ass."

"Mom?"

"The movie has 'Moon River.' Besides the book is really just a novella."

"Sookie?"

"Oh, hon, I love that tiara she wears!" Sookie continued in a whisper. "And to be honest, I don't think I ever read the book!"

Rory and Logan's somewhat heated debate came to an unceremonious end when Lorelai suddenly introduced a new topic.

"So Logan, I don't know if you know this but Rory is Sookie's son Davey's godmother."

"I actually did know that. I remember Rory going to the christening."

"Oh, yeah," smiled Sookie. "That's right. You were around back then."

"Yes, I was. So you have two kids, Sookie?"

"Three. Davey's the oldest. He's thirteen. Martha is eleven. And then there's our little surprise - A-A-ACHOO!" Sookie's turned her face away from the group as she sneezed. "- who's nine. Are those peonies on the table? I think I'm developing a flower allergy. It's from my sojourn in the Catskills last year. Too much woods and pollen. I'm never going back there."
As they ate, Rory and Lorelai shared photographs of Lucas with their guests, as well as the update on the baby's condition and anticipated timing of his release from the hospital.

"That's great that you think he'll be getting out soon. Which reminds me. What's the word on the oasis?"

Logan happened to be looking at Rory when Lane posed the question to her. He caught Rory's non-verbal response, which consisted of a slight widening of the eyes and a subtle shake of the head.

"Oh, nothing-" she demurred.

*Oasis?*

"What's the oasis?" asked Logan.

"Oops," Lane made a face. "Sorry."

Rory frowned and then began to busily pick at her food. To better avoid meeting his gaze Logan assumed.

"Ace? What's the oasis?"

Rory didn't respond. Suddenly someone else provided an answer.

"It's a house." Lorelai's gaze met Logan's full on. "It's right around the corner from Luke and I."

"Ah," nodded Logan. *A house. The house.* "A house. And what's so special about this house?"

Why was Rory so determined not to tell him about this?

"Oh, Rory!" Lane excitedly interrupted. "I can't believe I forgot to tell you this! Zack and I saw Taylor this morning at Doose's. You won't believe this! He thinks Lucas is being named after him!"

Lane's comment drew Rory's attention away from her fascination with the croquettes. Her eyes shot open as she spun around to look at her friend.

"What?!

"What she said!" Lorelai agreed.

"Why? And what exactly does he think I'm -we're - naming our son?"

*Nice save, Ace."

"Taylor Doose Gilmore."

"Taylor Doose Gilmore?!"

"Taylor Doose Gilmore." Logan repeated. "Ace, something I should know?"

"Ew! No!"

"You might want to take note that not everyone in Stars Hollow is home all the time if you get my meaning."

Luke's comment was a bit oblique but Logan thought he understood.
"You're saying Taylor's nuts?"

"Certifiable."

"Luke!" Lorelai turned to her husband. "That's harsh. The people of Stars Hollow are just quirky."

"I've lived there my entire life. Most of the town's quirky. Taylor's crazy."

"He's just eccentric." Lorelai glanced over at Sookie for a supporting opinion. "Sookie?"

"Well, he does a great job as selectman," asserted Sookie. "God knows Jackson – that's my husband -" Sookie glanced at Logan, "sucked at it. Maybe you need to be crazy to do well in politics."

"Isn't Taylor mayor now?" asked Rory. "How can he be both mayor and selectman?"

"He's secretly identical twins?" suggested Lane.

"I'm not really sure what he is," Lorelai admitted. "I can't remember the last time we had an election. Maybe he declared himself Czar? Or Czarina?"

"Not that I don't have the utmost respect for Taylor Doose, Ace, but why does he think our son should be named after him?"

"I don't know." Rory, perplexed, looked at her mother. "Mom?"

"Well, hon, Taylor sees you as a surrogate daughter. I guess. You are his ice cream queen, after all. He doesn't have any kids of his own –"

"Ever since my accidental censorship campaign..."

What?

"You gotta understand: this is how Taylor is whenever he gets an idea in his head." Luke shrugged. "This is typical Taylor."

"What is? Typical Taylor?" Logan looked back and forth between Rory, Luke, and Lorelai. It was Lorelai who spoke.

"He nags you until he's browbeaten you into submission. He's not done until you've forgotten your name, where you live, your favorite color. Even what kind of music you like. Eventually you're just a shell of yourself. On the floor, huddled, drooling, and rocking back and forth humming Kool and the Gang."

"Logan, Don't worry about Taylor. Unless he's got something to hold over you, you're fine." Luke's eyes settled on Rory who looked uncertain. "Does he have something to hold over you?"

"The oasis."

"Oh, wait! I know what that is! Isn't that the house where that creepy guy lived?" asked Zack.

"Taylor owns the oasis?" Lorelai seemed surprised. "I thought Dwight still owned it."

"No. Dwight's wife made him sell it," answered Rory. "She hated the house ever since she found out that's where he moved. Taylor's owned it for years."

"This guy Dwight was able to move without his wife knowing where he went?" Logan asked.
"Only for about a month," Rory answered.

"Yeah," added Lorelai. "Then when she found him, boy was she pissed."

"Right."

"Don't ask questions," advised Luke. "The answers'll just make your head explode."

"You and Lorelai were friends with this guy?"

"No!" Lorelai sounded indignant. "We just watered his plants."

"Don't forget the lawn!" Rory reminded her mother. "He had some awesome board games, though."


"I still can't believe Taylor owns the oasis. I had no idea." Lorelai shook her head.

"That guy really wants to own the whole town?" Logan directed his question to Rory.

"What guy? Dwight? He was really pretty happy with just the oasis—"

Logan shook his head.

"You mean Taylor," observed Luke. "Yeah. Taylor wants to own the whole town. And just wait. He'll name it Taylorville. Before you know it, we'll all be wearing cardigans."

"Well, Kirk wants everyone in town to see him naked." Lorelai observed as she tasted the bean salad. "Bean salad's really good, Sookie."

"I made the bean salad. Thank you! Remember when he was trying to be a photographer? And he included nude self-portraits in his work portfolio?"

"Ew! Please! Not while I'm eating! And that concave chest. He's like one of those pictures where you see different things depending on the angle. Sometimes, when I see his bare chest, it's like I'm staring down a ski slope."

"Whoa! What are you talking about?" asked Luke. "How many times have you seen Kirk's bare chest?"

"Oh, my God! It's not intentional, Luke! EW! I don't keep count! I just know it happens way more than it should!"

"Miss Patty's practically molested the whole town," said Rory. "At least the males."

"Ace, I think I'm gonna have to insist on full perimeter security cameras."

"What?" Since the oasis had first come up in the conversation, Rory had been studiously avoiding meeting his eyes. Finally, she swung around to look at him.

"For your house," Logan grinned at her. "Consider it a housewarming, Rory."

As he watched, Logan saw Rory visibly relax. He felt a wave of gratitude wash over him when he saw her smile at him.

He didn't know if the tension that had been emanating from her was on account of her being nervous
about his reaction to her buying a house? Or whether she was worried about him finding out that she'd been keeping a rather big secret? While still piqued, he couldn't help but acknowledge that it had only been a few days. They had only been back in each others' lives a few days. Getting used to the new reality would take some time. For both of them.

Since he'd been ignorant of the pregnancy and unaware of their son's existence prior to Wednesday, Logan had no plans in place. He had no time to form assumptions on how life would proceed in regards to Lucas. His life's plans were based on resigning himself to a suitable marriage. Since those wedding plans no longer made sense, he had wasted no time in casting them off.

Rory, in the meantime, had spent the past seven months mentally, physically, and logistically preparing herself to raise their son without him. Because someone - Odette, he reminded himself - had sought deliberately to keep them apart. Realistically, Rory deciding to buy a house near Luke and Lorelai was the most sensible thing in the world.

As for why Rory didn't tell him about her plan to buy the house, he'd have to ask her. But he had to admit his overtures regarding her, regarding them, and his hopes for the future, hadn't exactly been subtle.

Maybe she didn't know how to tell him?

"Logan, I don't think security cameras are necessary. Stars Hollow is totally safe. It's just -"

"Ace. Come on."

"Fine. Security cameras."

"Contracted to a company I choose. Not Kirk and Taylor's Color Me Crazy Security Company."

"Ha-ha."

"I think that's a reasonable request, given what I'm hearing."

"It's actually been a while since Kirk ventured into the security business."

Lane looked over at Logan. He appreciated her attempt to put him at ease. He grinned at her. All of a sudden a loud series of chimes echoed around them.

"Oh, my God! What's that noise?" Rory's eyes sought Logan's.

"Doorbell."

"Wow. Chimey."

"We can change it." Logan stood. "That must be Colin and Finn."

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AN: Thank you for reading. You'd have to read the "Breakfast at Tiffany" write-up on my Live Journal to fully appreciate the "book vs movie" subtext. It's not necessary though. Next up: Our last two guests arrive.
Lunch with Friends, Part III

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Author's Note: Google "Maldiscontent" and "Inside the Monkey Habitat" for story "extras."

Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Saturday, May 20, 2017, 12:40 pm EST

Upon opening the apartment door, Logan's eyes, nose, and lungs were met by a cloud of billowing smoke. As predicted the latest arrivals were Colin and Finn. Logan noted with amusement that, while Colin was diligently puffing on a cigar, Finn was twice as diligently puffing on two cigars. John the doorman had returned, this time the well-used luggage cart was actually transporting luggage. Balanced precariously on a suitcase was a very large, very ornate crystal vase holding a couple dozen white roses adorned with dangling chandelier crystals and hanging miniature mirrored disco balls. He thought it looked familiar. He vaguely recalled saying something to the effect, "No, mom. That's too over-the-top. Even for you" when asked his opinion about the flowers. He sighed. "Congratulations. Daddy!" Grabbing the two fat cigars with his left hand, Finn held his right out to Logan, who quickly accepted.

"Ah. Thank you, Finn. That will never not be disturbing."

Turning to his other friend, Logan offered his hand to Colin. "Colin."

"Congratulations, Logan."

"Where'd you get the flowers?"

“I picked them up at the hotel.” Finn gestured. “Would you believe they were giving them away for free?”

“They were giving them away for free because the wedding was cancelled.”

Logan winced at Colin’s comment. And there was confirmation of his suspicions. Probably best to keep the cancelled wedding flowers out of the apartments.

“Finn. Why are you smoking two cigars? This is why people talk about you when you're not around.”

"One of them is yours." He puffed again. "And I hope I give them better things to talk about."

"Why are you smoking my cigar?”

"Because it takes over an hour and we know you're on a tight schedule.”

"They're Gurkhas, Logan." Colin held the cigar out to show it to Logan. "We had to hunt them down on the black market."
"Yes," concurred Finn as he continued to work at juggling the two extra-fat cigars in one hand. "I'll have you know we spent upwards of fifteen minutes scouring the seedy underbelly of Piccadilly Circus."

"Piccadilly Circus doesn't have a seedy underbelly." Logan pointed out.

"My God. Has no one ever taught you it's the thought that counts?" Finn closed his eyes and inhaled. "Smell that."

"Each wrapper's aged fifteen years," Colin informed Logan. "The binder and filler are aged for twelve."

"Not to mention the filler's infused with Louis XIII cognac. Only the best for you, mate."

Logan chuckled. "Thank you for getting me the best cigars. And thank you for doing such a good job smoking mine." Logan made eye contact with the doorman. "Come on. Let's unload the bags."

Logan pushed the apartment door open fully. John, pulling the baggage cart, followed Logan. Finn and Colin started to trail after them.

"Whoa, there. Groucho. Uncle Miltie. You can't smoke in the apartment."

"You're gonna leave us waiting in the hallway?"

"Like a couple of groupies?"

"Yes. People are eating in there. Just wait here a sec. I'll be right back."

Logan led John into the apartment, turning left at the hallway that branched off to the two guest rooms. At Logan's instruction, the doorman dropped off Colin and Finn's luggage. Logan, meanwhile, grabbed the flower arrangement. The two men then made their way back out to the external hallway.

"Thanks." After tipping the departing doorman, Logan made eye contact with his two furiously puffing friends. "You know it was ridiculous of you to bring this here." Logan's voice was hard as he gestured with his head at the centerpiece. Belatedly he realized he should've given it to the doorman to toss.

"I told him it was an idiotic thing to do." Colin scowled at Finn. "You're not pretty enough to be this stupid."

"I thought someone might enjoy it." Finn quirked his eyebrows and made a face.

All of a sudden, it clicked in Logan's head. Maybe there was something behind Finn's seemingly foolish act. If anyone could find amusement in the garish floral albatross his mother had selected for the wedding, it would be Rory. Pulling the apartment door shut, Logan started to walk towards the elevator.

"What? You really not inviting us in?" asked an indignant Finn.

"No. You can come in but we're smoking the stogies upstairs." Logan threw a backwards glance over his shoulder. "On the roof. Where there's ashtrays. And where no one's trying to eat. Besides. No one's up there so we can talk."

As Logan stepped into the elevator, Finn and Colin followed. After Logan swiped his card, the doors
shut and the elevator started to rise.

"Good thinking, Logan." Colin nodded solemnly. "Finn. You can give Logan his cigar now."

"Here." Finn removed one of the cigars from his mouth and handed it to Logan, who found himself immediately being forced to juggle the World's Tackiest Flower Arrangement in one hand and the World's Fattest Cigar in the other.

"Thank you." Logan inhaled. "This is good." He silently prayed they'd make it to the roof before the elevator sprinklers were set off.

"Told you," replied Colin. "You're doing well with that. Maybe if you and Rory one day...you can be the one who carries the flowers."

Once the elevator stopped, Logan led his friends out onto the rooftop patio. Glancing around, he took in the space. He hadn’t yet had an opportunity to see what the design team had managed to accomplish on the roof. What they'd managed to accomplish was impressive. A pool table, chaise lounges, gas grille, and all weather television above the bar. He laid the flower arrangement down on one of the tables.

“Nice.” Colin glanced around the rooftop. “I could picture Finn living here.”

"It is nicer than some of our lesser hotel chains."

"How'd you lose Robert?"

"We told him we were going to Minnesota," answered Colin.

"Why would you two go to Minnesota?"

"Why would anyone?" Finn shrugged.

"Good point." Logan took a puff. "Let's smoke to Robert. He has no enemies but is intensely disliked by his friends."

"To Robert." Finn agreed. "His mother should've thrown him away and kept the stork."

"To Robert." Colin lifted his cigar. "Even his parrot won't speak to him."

"How were things in London when you left?"

"We left the Dark Lord and Endora at the hotel with your sister and her Sherpa." Finn smirked.

"Why do you gotta be so hard on Josh?" Logan shook his head, laughing. "What else? The guests?"

"Everyone took off."

"Press release postponing the wedding came out," offered Colin.

"What did it say?"

"Absolutely nothing. Which is probably why that company of yours makes no money."

"Ouch. Nice, Finn. What about the birth announcement? Know anything about that?"

"Not a thing," replied Finn.
"What's going on here?" asked Colin.

"Yeah. How're things with Rory?" asked Finn.

"Rory." Logan nodded, a tight grin on his face. “Rory's buying a house in Stars Hollow."

"That lovely enclave? I hope the house has plenty of uncle rooms."

"'Uncle' rooms? Planning on an extended visit?"

"It would serve my filmmaker credibility well to observe the new Ingmar Bergman in action," replied Finn.

"Maybe your pig can date his pig," said Colin.

"You don't have a pig," Logan looked at Finn then Colin.

"Logan, I could have a pig delivered in less time than it would take to have a pizza delivered."

Knowing Finn he was probably right. Logan took another inhale. "She didn't tell me about the house."

"Ah." Finn looked thoughtful at the revelation. "How'd you find out?"

"Lorelai. Not on purpose. She thought I already knew."

"What did Rory say when you asked her about it?" asked Colin.

"Haven't had a chance yet. Just found out. About thirty minutes before you got here."

"Ah." replied Finn. "Why do you think she kept it a secret?"

"I wish I knew."

"The list was probably not in your favor." Colin offered this opinion rather matter-of-factly.

Eyes squinted, Logan swung around to look at Colin. "What?"

"You know Rory. She probably made a list. It might've been close, but if there was one more reason to keep it quiet…"

"Probably didn’t want you taking over," Finn commented with a dismissive wave of his hand.

Logan turned to Finn. Could that be it? Could it be as simple as that?

Thoughtfully, Logan inhaled another puff of his cigar. "And Old Friend Jess has returned."

"The loser from Philly?" Colin could always be counted upon to not mince words.

Logan hesitated momentarily before answering with an affirmative. "Yeah. The one from Philly. He's got some art house printing press. And apparently that qualifies him to edit Rory's book."

"He's editing her book?"

"He's giving her feedback." Logan inhaled. "I don't like it. She says there's nothing between them – and I believe her. At least, on her side. But, him? He's been hanging around the past six months."
"Because nothing quite says 'available' like being pregnant with another guy's kid."

"Exactly."

"You're not worried about him. Are you, Logan?"

Logan shrugged.

"Sounds like a modest little person."

"Yes," agreed Finn. "And with much to be modest about."

Logan caught Finn and Colin exchanging a glance. In the brief moment of silence, a new voice suddenly echoed across the rooftop.

"Gentlemen! Is that a cigar in your mouth or are you just happy to see me?"

"Rory, love. I don't think I can answer that honestly."

"What? Why not?"

"Logan's been hitting the gym. While I've been hitting the gin." Finn laid his cigar down in an ashtray as Rory approached from the stairwell door. He embraced her as she finally came to a stop before them. "How are you? Bit busy. I hear."

"Yes. Definitely busy."

"You look beautiful. As always."

"Finn, I look like I've been scrubbed on a washboard, twisted and wrung, and then hung out to dry."

"Oh, no. Your skin makes me cry."

"Now that's just creepy."

"Well, I still think your complexion is lovely. I recommend you keep up with your beauty regiment."

"Okay. I will stick with three and a half hours of sleep and being too exhausted to exfoliate. Colin. It's good to see you."

Still smiling, Rory pulled away from Finn to hug Colin, who'd also laid his cigar in an ashtray at Rory's approach.

"Rory. Finn's right. You look great," commented Colin. "Oh. And, while admittedly it might be construed to be a bit phallic - us basking in the oral delights of seven and a half inch cigars in our mouths -"

"Seven and a half? Mine was eight and a half. Logan's was at least nine." Finn winked at Rory as he returned to puffing on his Gurkha.

Rory, still grinning, looked back and forth between the two of them. Logan didn't take his eyes from Rory.

"I don't know what you're talking about. There's nothing phallic about that. At all."

"You tell 'em, Ace."
"We're only doing it to celebrate you and Logan's new status as parents and Lucas's arrival." Colin picked up his cigar and resumed smoking.

"Where's mine?"

"Are you kidding?"

"You want one, love?" Finn glared at Colin. "See? I knew we should've let that gypsy have her way with you. I'm sorry love. We only got the three. But we can pick up more. Provided Colin can be persuaded again to give up his virtue."

"Finn. We'll have to venture into the seedy underbelly of New Haven after lunch."

"While New Haven does have a seedy underbelly, I don't think you're gonna find your $1,500 cigars there," mused Logan.

"You spent that much money on those big smelly things?"

"No."

"Yes."

Colin and Finn answered simultaneously.

"I've spent more on bigger smellier things, love."

"Ew. Some things are best left unsaid."

"You know, Rory," Colin held his cigar and looked at it affectionately. "Stuffing a fat stogie into the mouth of a new father has been a bromantic oral tradition since the days of Ricky Ricardo and Fred Mertz."

"And there's another one."

"Love, despite the titillation and fascination of the American press," Finn paused then to clear his throat loudly and throw a playful glare at Logan, "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

"Hm." Logan sputtered in laughter at Rory's response; she seemed unconvinced. "You guys should put those out and come downstairs. We have a ton of food. Rory's eyes met Logan's. "And you. You left a plate of food."

"Sorry for the sub-party, Ace. The guys were already lit upon arrival. Figured it'd be better to come up here for a few than smoke inside with folks trying to eat."

"Well, you should all come down. My mom wants to know how old you were when you started walking."

"Me?" asked Finn.

"No. Logan. I think we're betting on whether Lucas will walk before his first birthday."

"Logan was eighteen," answered Colin. "I remember it like it was yesterday."

"You sure?" posed Finn. "Maybe it was yesterday."

"Cute. I'd actually believe that of you before I'd believe it of Logan. I've seen firsthand your aversion
"Thanks for the vote of confidence, Ace."

"Anytime, Huntzberger."

"Logan was probably running at less than a year just to get away from the Dark Lord and Endora." A slightly uncomfortable pall fell over the group at the mention of Logan's parents. Finn wasted no time before jumping into a new topic. Hardly a safer topic thought Logan. "You see the flowers I brought you, love?" Finn pointed to the World's Tackiest Flower Arrangement.

Colin snickered. "He stole them from the hotel. You should know. They were for the wedding."

"Ew. Finn. Poor taste."

"The flowers? Or giving them to you?"

"Giving them to me!"

As Logan watched Rory took a longer look at the World's Tackiest Flower Arrangement. Making a face, she laughed. "You know something? You're right. Those flowers are pretty bad. With the white roses and the crystals and the tiny mirrored balls. It's Celine Dion, Liberace, and 1970s John Travolta reincarnated as a floral arrangement. Tell me it wasn't Shi-"

"It was Endora. Of course."

"Of course."

"See, Logan? Love appreciates the memento in the spirit in which it was given."

"Were you guys gonna dress like John Travolta?"

"No. Give me a little credit, Ace."

"Did you like your chocolates, love?"

"I did. Thank you."

"Did Logan Jr. like his five foot bear?"

"Logan Jr. is a five foot bear."

"What?"

"I named the bear Logan Jr. The baby's name is Lucas Richard."

"Yes, Mother," nodded Finn.

Rory shot significant looks first to Finn; then to Logan. Seeing her glare, Logan shook his head, smiling.

"Don't look at me. He's calling me 'Daddy'."

"Oh. Yeah. That's worse."

"Tell me about it."
"So you guys know the baby's still in the hospital? I'm afraid it's just family who can visit right now."

"Yes, we understand Logan Jr. - uh - Lucas Richard is making his audience wait. We're prepared to wait."

"So, you two are sticking around?"

"Yeah," answered Colin simply. "Of course."

"Wouldn't dream of leaving now, love."

"Thank you." Rory smiled. "So what happened to Robert?"

"Does it matter?" posited Finn. "Let's just enjoy it while we can."

"Yes. Some cause happiness wherever they go. Others, whenever they go." Colin agreed.

"I'm texting him and telling him to come."

"Don't you dare!"

"No!"

"Ace!"

"Fine. I'll wait. But I am gonna text him."

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AN: Thanks for reading. OMG. Freudian slip. I had Finn returning to "pulling" on his Gurkha. LMAO. "Puffing." The word is "puffing."
Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Saturday, May 20, 2017, 1:15 pm EST

"Come on, Ace. Frank's meeting us in the front of the building."

Standing with Colin and Finn in the foyer of Unit 24, Logan met his friends' eyes before turning his glance to Rory. He watched as Rory hurried towards them from the dining area.

"Coming. Can't find my sweater."

"Your stepdad hung it up," offered Colin. He pointed to the hooks outside the pool room.

"Oh. Hm. He is getting more fastidious as he gets older. Mom's right."

The three men watched as Rory grabbed her sweater from the hook and put it on.

"Colin. Finn." Rory looked at the two men, as she lifted her hair up from underneath her sweater. "You guys'll be here when we get back?"

"Where would we go, love?"

"Yeah. Between the case of scotch that was delivered and all this food, there's really no reason for us to leave this apartment."

"Possibly ever."

"Well, not ever. Maybe for a couple of weeks."

Rory smiled. "Okay. See you guys later."

"Later."

"Kiss Lo-," At Rory's evil eye, Finn amended his statement. "Kiss Lucas for us."

Smiling, Rory nodded. Waving to their two friends as she walked, Rory made her way to the elevator. Logan gave Colin and Finn what he hoped was a sufficient non-verbal 'Behave' warning before he turned around and followed Rory to the elevator.

"What now, Buttercup?" Logan cringed at Finn's question to Colin and further shuddered internally as he heard the door to his apartment close. He prayed they would be on good behavior. Over the time he and Rory had left in Hartford - however long Lucas had remaining in the NICU - Logan had been counting on using that time to prove to Rory his place could be their place. He'd spared no expense on the design of the apartment.
If Colin and Finn destroyed the place before he'd even had a chance to make good on trying the strategy, he'd kill them.

Maybe he should get Robert out there. As irritating as Robert could be, he served as a calming force to Colin. A fact which annoyed Finn no end. As he needed sobriety to best needle Robert, Finn tended to drink at a slightly slower pace with Robert around.

"When are Luke and Lorelai coming back?"

"Tonight. Late. They'll go with us tomorrow morning. I think mom might hang out a bit tomorrow but Luke was gonna head back to Stars Hollow. There's a lot of construction stuff going on now and she wants Luke to check in on at the annex."

"Ah. The annex. Where is it?"

"Right in the center of town. By Doose's. And the diner."

As the elevator doors opened, Logan and Rory stepped out to the building's lobby. Walking beside her, Logan placed a gentle guiding hand on her back as they made their way from the elevator bank to the main building entrance. Logan observed Rory as she took in the luxurious decor.

"This place is really nice. Like a modern European hotel."

"Good eye, Ace. The company is European. They have a thing for details." Logan glanced toward the front desk. "Speaking of details..."

John the doorman from earlier stood with another uniformed doorman.

"John. This is Ms. Gilmore."

"From Unit 25. Nice to meet you Ms. Gilmore."

"Nice to meet you."

"This is Peter." John introduced Logan and Rory to the other doorman.

"Hi Peter. Logan Huntzberger. Rory Gilmore. We've got the two penthouse units and rooftop."

"A pleasure to meet you both."

"Ms. Gilmore and I are going out for the afternoon. John, you have my cell. I need you to check in on my guests -"

"What kind of trouble are you expecting them to get into?"

"You'd be surprised, Ace. I probably shouldn't have had a full case of scotch delivered." Logan had been pulling his wallet out of his pocket. "Remind them they can watch television. All the porn they want. No deliveries but food. No live animals. Especially pigs. ID any new arrivals to 24. No ladies lacking last names. Or lacking articles of clothing."

"Yes, sir." John nodded as he accepted the hundred dollar bill.

"Thank you." Peter smiled at the tip. "I have some magazines in my car that might keep them busy."

"Perfect. If they start tossing watermelons over the balcony, feel free to bust out the magazines."
A short while later, Logan and Rory settled into the limo for the drive to the hospital.

Since finding out about the oasis - nearly an hour and a half earlier - Logan's mind had oscillated on whether or not he ought to regard the revelation as a big deal.

Several times he'd reminded himself that he and Rory had only been back in each other's lives a few days. Yes, they now shared a child. Yes, they'd now be tied to each other for the next eighteen years - despite themselves, despite 'Vegas,' despite 'no strings attached.' But their relationship was still far from defined.

As for the Oasis...

It continued to bother him. His concerns about the house obviously wouldn't be going away on their own. He didn't want it marring their visit with Lucas. They would have to talk about it. Sooner. Not later.

Time to man up.

"So, Rory. You feel like telling me about the Oasis?"

Rory glanced at him silently, a tight smile on her lips.

Watching her, Logan attempted to read her. Was she weighing her options? Turning away from him, Rory stared forward, looking blindly at the partition that separated them from Frank. When she finally spoke, her words came out slowly at first but gradually increased in speed.

"The Oasis. It's right around the corner from Mom and Luke's. A two-story Colonial with a finished basement and partial attic. Four bedrooms but lots of space. It has a huge yard and really nice garden out front. The inside's tacky as hell but I figured I'd have work done on any place I bought so why shy away from tiki bars and rattan furniture when everything else is perfect?"

Tiki bars? Rattan furniture?

"Taylor Doose - who you've met - owns it. He's been renting it 'as is' since he bought it from Dwight. It has good bones as they say. I love that it's got a huge yard. There's a big tree for a swing. A few of them, actually. There's just a ton of space for a little boy to run around."

Done speaking, Rory shifted her gaze to Logan. Logan noted she was deliberately keeping her face impassive. Definitely on the defensive.

"I just always liked the house. And you have to understand. I was planning on being here. For a while at least. I didn't hear from you. I thought it was just gonna be Lucas and me."

As Logan watched, he noticed Rory's eyes starting to well up.

"I was counting on a year of Lorelai training to help me get used to it. You know?"

"Used to what, Ace?"

"To being a mom."

"You don't need any training, Ace. You know how to take care of people." Grabbing a handkerchief from his jacket's interior pocket, he offered it to her. "Remember how you took care of me? After Costa Rica?"

"Logan, it's not the same thing," she replied, accepting his proffered handkerchief which she
promptly used to swipe at the errant tears that continued to form and fall. "Aside from the first day- when you were unconscious- you could always say what it was that was bothering you. I'm bored.' 'My leg itches.' 'Paris is staring at me.'" She laughed. "But Lucas...Lucas is a mystery. And he's gonna be a mystery for a while."

"I don't think he'll nearly be the mystery you think he'll be."

"No? Why do you say that?"

"Here's why: We established he seems to share some of my proclivities, right?"

"I did call him your mini-me the other day, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did." Sighing Logan studied Rory's face. "That being said, I think the kid adores you. He's thrilled just to be in your arms. He's smart, too. Smart enough to know he should trust you. He'll be wrapped around your finger in no time. You have nothing to worry about, Ace."

"I'm not so sure about that." She shook her head at Logan's assertion. "It'll probably be the other way around. I'll be totally wrapped around his finger. God. What if I spoil him? I need my mom and Luke around to make sure I don't spoil him."

"You're not gonna spoil him." At Rory's pointed look, Logan felt a wave of equal parts happiness and irritation; her words were unsaid, but he knew exactly what she was thinking. "I won't spoil him either. We'll figure it out. Chores for his allowance."

"Anyway, being there I'd have built-in babysitters. I was still gonna have to find a nanny so I can write during the day." Rory sniffled. "This whole thing -the idea of doing it alone- it's freaked me out a bit. But knowing I'd be there. With Mom and Luke around. Has made it less scary."

The car came a halt in front of St. Joseph's hospital building. Logan hit the intercom.

"Frank. We're gonna sit a couple of minutes."

"Very good, sir."

Logan sat back. "I get all that. I do." Logan sighed heavily. "But why didn't you tell me?"

"I just -" Rory swallowed. "I was afraid you'd try to talk me out of it. You'd see it as something permanent. Something that wouldn't work with your vision." Rory dabbed her face again with the handkerchief. "Here I am. Crying again. I'm sorry. I am. It was so close -"

"What was?"

"My pro/con list. I wanted to tell you. I know we have to be honest. And you've been just -really on about everything since you got here. Believe me. I know that and I'm grateful. But I wanted to stick with the plan to buy the Oasis and I didn't want you to talk me out of it. And I didn't want to fight. The whole thing had been on track. If the inspector hadn't broken his arm tripping over Petal. If Taylor hadn't decided to go spend a week traveling with his crazy composer friend Nat. If Lucas hadn't made his early play for emancipation. I would've had the closing already. The house would've been mine. It would've all been fait accompli."

Logan sighed, a sardonic smile on his face. Colin and Finn were both right. What were the odds? Unexpectedly, he had a tag-team of Rory whispering savants. Who could've known?

There was a second surprise associated with the revelation: As with the matter of Rory failing to
give him the heads up on the baby, Logan found that he understood this too.

Rory was right. If she'd told him right off the bat, he would've taken the perspective that her buying a house on her own was a chess move that put his queen at risk. He would've pushed her to drop the plans. He would've pushed her instead to get a place with him. Or agree to allow him to buy her a place. Even if it was in Stars Hollow. Even if it was the same damn house.

As long as he was the one to buy it.

Rory buying it without him shut him out of the process.

Not that her buying a house in which to raise their son was in any way unreasonable. He knew it was the most sensible thing in the world. Again, he didn't expect them to be homeless without him. He didn't expect Rory and Lucas to crowd into her childhood bedroom.

But, he reminded himself, he'd bought the Hartford apartment without a second thought. And certainly not with a word to Rory until it was a done deal. Now, he was convinced he ought to buy the Gilmore's apartment too. Zack hit the nail on the head. Ironically, Logan noted the man turned out to be 100% smarter than he looked. Why have neighbors if you didn't have to? They could combine the two units and have ample space to meet all their needs. Nursery. Nanny room. Guest bedrooms. Home offices.

How was what he'd done any different from what Rory was looking to do? There were absolutely no guarantees with them and she needed to live somewhere. Lucas needed to live somewhere. He needed somewhere to stay when in Connecticut. And, while visiting them in Stars Hollow, he certainly wasn't looking to stay with Luke and Lorelai. Nor was he looking forward to getting a guest room at the Dragonfly.

His mind came back to the Oasis.

"You keeping the name?"

"What?"

"The Oasis?"

"I've always liked it. But I'm open to suggestions."

It was on his lips to ask "Do I get a key?" but he bit back the question. Too soon. Too much continued to exist between them. Besides their most recent talks about keys had been based on impossible dreams, and relinquished hopes, and, despite how different things now stood, memories of those conversations still held a bittersweet taste that stung.

"You all set? You need any money?"

Rory shook her head dismissively. "No. My grandfather left me money. And, if that wasn't enough - and it is - both my grandmother and my dad are feverishly putting together trust funds for Lucas that I'm to be the trustee on. So I can always embezzle from him if I find myself unable to sustain my suburban mom lifestyle."

"Planning on building a Hummel empire?"

"Don't forget Swarovski." Sniffling, Rory continued to dab at her eyes. "I have to remember to carry crumpled tissues. Moms always carry crumpled tissues."
"I don't remember my mom carrying crumpled tissues."

"Your nanny?"

"Touché." Rory would definitely be a different kind of mom from Shira. Logan found himself oddly envious of his son. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For being my son's mother. The kid's gonna thank me some day. Believe me."

Logan watched as Rory blushed. His words seemed to have left her uncharacteristically speechless. He opted to direct the topic back to something safe.

"So, Ace. Is there a reason the tissues have to be crumpled? We could just buy you a packet of fresh, uncrumpled tissues."

"It's a mom thing," she nodded. "I don't really understand. I've seen Lane in action with the tissues. Sookie. I remember my mom. It's just how it has to be, Huntzberger. We can buy an uncrumpled package of tissues, but then we gotta do something to crumple them up and make them look used even if they're not. Speaking of 'used,' I'm sorry but I'm going to use your handkerchief in a way that will leave you really not wanting it back."

Grinning, Logan shot her a wink. "You sure?"

Rory chuckled at his risqué joke. "I am." Rory then blew her nose -loudly and decisively. And repeatedly. Finally done, she held it up. "See? You want it back?"

"No. That can be your mom tissue for the day."

Nodding she laughed. "Uh-huh. I thought so. Okay."

"Hey. Did I mention there's a laundry service at the building? They pick up and deliver."

"But there's machines," intoned Rory. She sounded slightly worried. "Off the foyer. By the coat closet."

"Yes. There's machines. Hey, knock yourself out if you want to do it yourself."

"I do. I had this mom daydream earlier when we were walking around my apartment. Lucas was home from the hospital. I'd just laid him down to sleep. And I was putting laundry in the wash. It was all his dirty baby clothes. So. Filthy with spittle but still with that fresh baby smell. Then I was going to sit in my office and write while I waited for the cycle to finish."

A simple yet enticingly tranquil vision of domesticity. Logan was half afraid to ask but he desperately wanted to know: where was he during Rory's daydream of the not-so-distant future?

"Can I ask you a question about this window into the future?"

"Sure. What? Where were you?"

"Ah. Am I that predictable?"

"Hm. You have a tendency to stay on point. You were in the next door apartment on the phone for work. But I knew you'd be by later."
Logan smiled. *Not bad.*

"Oh now. What's that smile for?"

"I like your daydream, Ace." Logan shrugged. "I'm pretty sure I could do better. But at least I was there."

Rory smiled wryly. "Oh. You were there all right. So I've totally ruined another handkerchief. I'm not feeding him until three but I'm sure he misses us. So let's go."

"Let's go."

---

AN: Thank you for reading. Suggestions for Stars Hollow related hijinks welcomed. Check my profile for a picture of Baby Lucas.
Fifteen minutes later, Rory and Logan were hygienically scrubbed with the hospital soap, attired in sterile hospital gowns, and standing over their sleeping newborn.

"He looks like you when he sleeps."

Logan’s eyebrow went up at Rory’s observation; he regarded her claim as dubious. She might see him in Lucas but he saw a lot of Rory in their son’s features. But, then again, Lucas's most prominent Rory feature, those big blue eyes, weren't visible while he slept.

"Maybe it's just the sleep factor, Ace. You've seen me sleep. It's not like you've seen yourself sleep."

"I don't watch you sleep, Huntzberger. What do you take me for?"

Logan chuckled. "I said nothing about watching me sleep. But now I'm thinking the lady doth protest too much." Smirking he looked up from the baby and fixed his eyes on hers. "You still have the Yale Naked Collection, don't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Ah, I think you do. It was a perfect New England storm. A digital camera with lightning fast shutter speeds. A newly discovered appreciation for candid photos. A lapsed sense of propriety and personal boundaries."

Rory laughed. "That was fun. I do still have them. Somewhere. On a jump drive."

"And the Jump. You still have those?"

"Of course. I have the article too. Somewhere."

The two stood staring at one another for a few seconds that stretched to a moment and then another moment. Finally it was Logan who pulled his eyes from Rory’s and redirected their attention to the one they were there for, the one who brought them together.

"Have you thought about how our story is now his story?"

"Yeah. I have realized that, actually. It’s one hell of a story."

"Definitely got some highs and lows."

"That's one way to put it." Still focusing her eyes on Lucas, Rory slowly shook her head. "When I think about how I treated Paul... That's the guy I was dat - “
"I know who he is, Rory." Logan interrupted her. He really didn’t feel the need to be reminded of Paul. Ever. But especially not at this moment, which was otherwise perfect, just the three of them.

"He didn't deserve what I did to him." She looked up then, at Logan over Lucas.

"Yeah, well." Logan's eyes bore into Rory's. "Maybe you’re right. Or maybe he had it coming."

"No! He was the nicest guy in the world. Really. He was so sweet and--"

"Rory! You ever think maybe I don’t want to hear about the virtues of your other boyfriends?"

Rory shot a curious look at him. Watching her, Logan could tell she didn’t get it. It would never not bother him – at least a little bit - to think of her with other guys. Whether they were together or not. Now she belonged to them. To Lucas and to him. So he definitely didn’t care to be reminded of ‘Paul.’

"Sorry. I didn’t mean to hit a sore spot – “

"Rory, it’s fine. I just…” Logan let that sentence falter. “I’d just rather focus on the future. Not on the past. A month ago I might’ve been right there with you. Feeling sorry about my less than stellar ability to remain faithful to Odette. But now, all I can think about is what she did. What she stole from me. And from you. And from him. She doesn’t matter. The past doesn’t matter.”

Rory watched him with those crystal blue eyes. "You know who I got the biggest lecture from?"

"Who?"

"You won’t believe it."

"Oh? Damn, Ace,” he smiled. “Now I have to guess." Given what Rory was saying, Logan surmised it hadn’t been Lorelai. Although they were in their thirties, Logan was certain that Rory, in describing being on the receiving end of a lecture from Lorelai, wouldn’t preface the narrative with ‘guess what happened.’ A sudden thought flashed in his mind. In an instant, he knew who it was. "Okay. I got it."

"Go for it."

"Paris."

"Yep. Paris." As she nodded, her lips slightly curved upward. Rory's eyes didn't stray from his. "I’d say 'good guess,' but I'm thinking it’s not much of a guess. You probably got a dose yourself?"

"That obvious? It's a bit of blur, but I seem to recall being compared to Archie Bunker, the Great Gatsby, Nigel Farage, and Woody Allen all in one conversation."

Rory smiled. "Wow. Paris was in rare form that day. I was compared to Wallis Simpson, the Kardashians, and the home-wrecking nanny."

"Which one?"

"Any. Take your pick. I'm pretty sure Paris didn't care."

"She also quoted Jung to me."

"Yeah. I got that too." Rory’s glance shifted from Logan to Lucas.
“What did you think?” Logan followed Rory’s lead, also turning to watch the baby.

"About what?"

"Jung. 'Until you make the unconscious conscious, it will direct your life and you will call it fate.'"

"I haven't really had time to think about it. Kinda busy here."

"Yeah, I get that."

"I will say it's not easy when you want different things for different reasons."

"Agreed." Logan waited a beat before continuing. "List no help?"

"Some things are beyond neutral attempts at pragmatism."

"Like having a baby with your ex?"

"Like having a baby with your ex."

Pulling his eyes away from Lucas, Logan looked at Rory. As he watched, she saw her lips open and then close. What was she about to say that she decided against?

"Ace?” Rory’s eyes shot up to his. “Your lips are moving but I don’t hear anything.”

"Ha. I'm debating whether or not to say something."

"Obviously. You realize now you have to tell me."

"Yeah. I know. It’s not about fate. It’s more about luck. I’m wondering if you would’ve spotted me in Hamburg if I hadn’t been wearing a bright red dress?"

"Interesting question. Lucky outfit? Or fateful outfit? Why Rory Gilmore, are you telling me you think Paris and Jung are right?"

"No.” Rory shook her head emphatically. “I’m not saying that. I know you think Paris is right.” Rory responded, smiling. Glancing back at the sleeping baby, Rory directed her next words to him. “Lucas, how am I gonna tell Aunt Paris your daddy actually thinks she’s right about something?”

“Wait. How do you know that?”

“What you said this morning.” Rory brought her eyes back to Logan’s. “About us being right where we're supposed to be.”

“Oh, yeah. I did say that this morning. Didn’t I?”

“Yeah, you did. Did you mean it?”

“Yeah. I meant it.”

“And what if I don’t believe it?”

“I’d say I’m not surprised. If this were easy, you wouldn’t be you. Something would be off,” he laughed. His eyes were smiling when he continued. “It’s okay. I know how to be patient.” Logan glanced down at Lucas. With a humorous tone, he spoke to his son. “Right, Lucas? Daddy’s been waiting for Mommy for years.”
“Cute.”

"Why'd you change anyway?"

"It may be lucky but it's not for breastfeeding."

As they both returned their gazes to Lucas, the baby stretched his arms and legs. His tiny fisted hands flitted over his cheeks. Logan noted, amused, that the infant seemed impatient in his quick, jerky movements. Baby Lucas almost seemed anxious to get on with it. Whatever 'it' was.

*That is definitely more me,* Logan smiled inwardly.

Logan found himself hit by one of those moments of overwhelming clarity and wonder. While it still felt unreal – on some level – that he was a father and that he had a child, at the same time, Logan recognized it as the most real, concrete, and irreversibly true thing about him. Where he lived, what he did, how he spent his days were all variables. The status could change. Even with Rory. Although he desperately wanted it to be different, whether or not she was in his life was still fluid. True, Rory would always be his son’s mother, but that offered no guarantee to Logan that she’d be in *his* life. Or that he’d always hold a place in her heart.

But Lucas was his son. Living the reality for four days, Logan was still amazed that this tiny little person was his son. His and Rory’s son.

That was something that would *never* change.

And, as much as he hated agreeing with Paris Geller – and he really needed to make sure Rory never, ever let Paris know he’d agreed with her - he had to admit Jung’s theory worked for him.

Still staring at the baby, Logan finally spoke. "We should've known it wouldn't work."

"What?"

"Vegas. No strings attached didn't work back then. Vegas didn’t work now."

“What about that saying? You can’t gauge future performance by past performance?”

“Yeah. That’s about mutual funds,” he shrugged. Looking up from Lucas, Logan saw that Rory’s gaze was fixed on him. “Besides, I seem to remember someone telling me it was a sucker's maxim.”

"Yeah, I did say that, didn’t I? “

“Sure did.”

"You know something? I think my mother might agree."

"With sucker's maxim?"

"No. With Paris. Jung. You. When I finally told her – about Vegas - she called you the guy I can't quit.”

It wasn’t lost on Logan that Rory said ‘can’t.’ She could’ve said ‘couldn’t’. ‘Can’t’ may have been Lorelai’s word choice *then* but it was Rory’s word *now.* She could’ve used a past tense variation but she hadn’t.

"Hm. Can’t. Don't want to. Fine line, Ace. And now there's Lucas.”
"Yeah. Now there's Lucas." She smiled as she continued to look at their son. "He's really cute. And I mean that objectively. He's going to be beating them away with a stick."

Sighing, Logan grimaced. The reality check of being a Huntzberger.

"News flash: He's not gonna be hurting for company. Even if he looked like a toad. Which he doesn't. He is pretty damn cute. We done good, Ace."

Logan watched as Rory continued to stare at Lucas. She didn’t reply at first but he knew she understood what he meant just by the tightness that appeared around her brows. Her features suddenly marred by worry, Rory’s next words confirmed to Logan that she fully comprehended what he was saying.

"How are we gonna protect him?"

"We can't. Not every second. Best we can do is raise him to have discriminating taste in friends."

Although Logan had only been in Hartford for three days, most of his time awake had been spent at his son's side. So he’d gotten accustomed to the constant background noise associated with the NICU. While most of the NICU’s tiny residents spent the majority of their time peacefully asleep, the unit definitely wasn't quiet. There was a constant hum of monitors buzzing and beeping. Logan, like Rory, had gotten used to ignoring the sounds for the most part.

The sudden blare of a new, loud and persistent alarm immediately set Logan's antennae up. Puzzled he looked at the woman across from him.

"Rory? What is that? What’s wrong?"

Rory, eyes wide, a slightly heart-stricken look on her face, moved from where she stood at the side of Lucas’s isolette to the lower end of the bed. Positioned there, using an index finger on each foot, she started to gently tapping Lucas on the soles of his feet.

"Rory? What's happening?" Looking at Lucas’s monitor, Logan noticed a red light flicking on the screen. "What's the red light mean?"

Lucas's Saturday attending nurse, a sunny older blonde woman who'd introduced herself as Kim when Rory and Logan had first come in, was making her way over to them at a fast clip.

"It's bradycardia." Rory continued to flick the baby’s feet. "He's breathing too slow."

"What do you do for him?"

"He's been doing really well. According to his chart he hasn't had an episode since Thursday night."

"What?" asked Logan. "What episode?"

"Preemies sometimes don't breathe regularly. Interrupted breathing- apnea- can cause bradycardia, which is a slow heart rate. That's your A's and B's: apnea and bradycardia."

"What do you do for him?"

"He's getting medicine for it. And what his mom did is exactly what a medical professional would
do. Patting him or touching the soles of his feet to remind him to breathe."

Logan looked over at Rory. A new heart swell of admiration and respect came over him. "You’ve done that before?"

Silently she nodded. "The first time it happened when I was here, I watched the nurse do it. But I did it myself the second time. That was … Wednesday."

"When you called me?"

Again Rory nodded without a word. "They were talking about ventilation machines and trachea tubes and," Rory broke off mid-thought, suddenly her eyes filled with tears.

"He's okay, Ace. He's more than okay. He's doing great. And you're not alone anymore. I'm here now." Logan reached inside the baby’s bed, where Rory had a hand gently splayed on Lucas. Logan covered her hand with his own.

"I know." Despite the tears coursing down her cheeks, she smiled at him. "I know."

The couple fell silent as Kim quietly and efficiently checked all of Lucas’s wires and monitors. After a few minutes, with a parting smile, she left. “He’s good. Wave if you need me.”

“Thanks, Kim.” Rory returned the woman’s smile before turning back to look at Lucas.

From where he stood, Logan’s view captured both Rory and Lucas. He felt his eyes water. He acknowledged a profound sense of happiness. More than that, it felt right. This was right. This was really all he would ever need.

"You know something, Ace?"

“What?” She looked over at him.

“I think we’re gonna be excellent parents!” He winked at her.

Rory laughed at Logan’s nod to their early relationship.

"You think so?"

"I do,” he replied, suddenly serious. “We make a good team, Rory. We always have."

“I guess that’s true.”

They continued to lock eyes as Lucas shifted and stretched below their joined hands.

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AN: Thank you for reading.
The next morning, Logan was still shaken and feeling residual worry about Lucas after witnessing his episode the previous afternoon. Tapping on the door of Rory's apartment at seven thirty, he was not surprised when a wide awake and dressed Rory answered the door.

"Hey."

"Morning, Ace. What time do you wanna head out?"

"I'm ready now. I just need coffee."

Logan deduced he wasn't the only parent requiring some reassurance that morning.

"We can try the coffee downstairs. I'll text Frank." With that Logan pulled his phone from his pocket and at Rory's confirmation sent a text to the driver.

"Sounds like a plan. How'd the rest of your night go?"

After Lucas's episode, the new parents wound up staying at the NICU much longer than their original intention. They even managed to get in some 'kangaroo' time with Lucas. When they finally got back to 42 North Main, Colin and Finn were on surprisingly good behavior. The duo had found "Across the Universe," the musical homage to the Beatles, playing on cable. Finn, of course, found it necessary to join in on vocals on each song he knew, or thought he knew. Aside from the frequent and prolonged crime perpetrated against musical genius, the evening was uneventful. Logan and Rory were quiet for the most part. Logan found his thoughts repeatedly returning to Lucas and he figured Rory's mind was similarly preoccupied. After they had talked with Lucas's nurse one last time before bed, Logan walked Rory down the hall to her apartment. With a light kiss on her cheek he said goodnight.

"Uneventful. Right after I left you, I went to bed."

"Oh," she nodded. "So... You ready to go now?"

"Frank'll be here in fifteen."

"Okay. I'll just let my mom know."

Twenty-five minutes later Rory and Logan were being deposited at the Seymour Street entrance of the hospital.

"Frank, I'll text fifteen minutes out. Figure not before five or six."

"Very good, sir."
Logan's hand resting lightly on the small of Rory's back, the couple made their way inside the building. Since it was the weekend, the omnipresent Maggie was apparently off. Instead it was the same attendant as the day before, an older man named Cleighton. Logan met the man's eyes as he pushed the sign-in book towards them. As Rory signed them both in, Logan felt his cell phone pulse. Pulling it out, the message provoked within him a pungent mix of dread and resignation. It didn't elicit surprise. If anything he was surprised that he hadn't heard something sooner.

_In Hartford. Will be at hospital at ten._

Logan glanced at his watch. They had about two hours before his parents would arrive. He texted a reply to Mitchum.

_Honor and Josh?_

His father's response was immediate.

_Honor is coming. Josh may go home to kids._

At least his sister would be there to help Logan handle his parents. Looking up, Logan tucked his phone back inside his jacket pocket. He quickly realized that Rory, done with the sign-in sheet, was avidly watching him.

"News?" she asked.

"Yeah. Sorry to do this to you but the Huntzbergers' arrival is imminent."

Rory smiled tightly. "Knew it was too good to last."

"Yeah." Logan, his hand back on Rory's back, gently guided her towards the elevator bank.

"Who and when?"

"My parents and Honor. Probably not Josh."

"When?"

"A couple of hours."

"It was gonna happen eventually. They are his grandparents."

As they closed the distance to the elevators, Logan and Rory fell silent. Reading the emotions at play on Rory's face, Logan silently vowed that he would do whatever he could - whatever was necessary - to make her feel at ease when his parents arrived. He had to show her that he had her back. He always would. She came first.

"Rory," Logan took her hand in his. "It'll be okay. I'm here. They're not gonna say anything. They wouldn't dare."

Facing away from him, Rory sighed. Finally turning back to him, she met his eyes. "I hope you're right. I'm not exactly up for a battle. I hate feeling this way."

"I know you do. I promise you we'll figure it out. We'll find a way to make it better."

It wasn't intentional but Logan caught himself quoting a Beatles song from the night before. Regardless of it being accidental, Rory picked up on his reference and smiled, amused.
"Hey, Jude..." she sang.

"Yeah. Exactly. But it's not just you."

"Oh?" Rory's face was still smiling, but Logan could see through the facade. "So you'll perform with me?"

"Damn right I will. And you've got Lucas, too, now Ace. Two knights. Just for you."

Logan tightened his grip on Rory's hand in an effort to reassure her.

"Yeah, but maybe the Beatles got it right."

"What? How?"

"Maybe it is on my shoulder. To deal with Mitchum and Shira. I mean how else would it work? You gonna fight my battles for me? For how long? Forever?"

"God, Rory! We went through all this in New Hampshire! I know you don't need me to fight your battles! You can take care of yourself. But they're my crazy parents and you just got out of the hospital. You talked to the Gilmores on my behalf. Let me return the favor."

"Okay. But seeing your dad always sets me on edge. And I haven't seen your mom in years."

"Well, you saw my dad last year. And, thanks to botox, Shira looks basically the same. And I'll be there, Ace. I promise. They're not gonna treat you like they did back then. I won't let them. So let's go see our son and warn him that his paternal grandparents are coming to visit."

"Oh, my poor baby! I didn't even think of them going in to see him."

"Of course they'll wanna see him, Ace. And I'll go in with them and make sure it's quick."

"Well, let's go up." Rory hit the up button for the elevator. "Instead of feeding him now, maybe I'll pump while you're in with them and then I'll try feeding him at noon. How long you think they'll stay?"

"Why don't I just kick them out after twenty minutes?"

Rory smiled. Definitely more genuine this time. "I like how you think."

"I told you, Rory." Logan returned her grin.

"What?"

"Excellent parents."

Logan and Rory cleaned up and made their way into the NICU nursery as quickly as they could. Although they treasured the time with their son, knowing the Huntzbergers were due to arrive any minute definitely weighed heavily on their minds, unfortunately effecting their ability to fully enjoy the time.

"We'll do kangaroo time this afternoon. Once everyone's gone." As Logan watched, Rory caressed Lucas's leg.

"Definitely."
Logan noted she seemed relieved at his concurrence. As he watched her, she let out a loud sigh. What was she thinking would happen?

"You okay, Ace?" At his question, Rory's eyes shot up to meet his across the isolette.

"Yeah. I'm fine. I just wasn't sure what you'd do once your family got here? If you needed to go with them or something?"

"Rory, my family is already here. In this room."

Rory's eyes became watery as she continued to look at him.

"Oh..."

"Yeah. Oh. We'll let my folks get their visit in, but I have no intention of altering my schedule for them. Got it?" He brought his hand down to cover hers on Lucas's leg.

"Got it." Rory smiled but her eyes continued to silently voice unspoken worries.

"What about your mom? Lorelai still coming?"

"Yeah. When I texted her your parents would be here at ten, she replied something about calling in back-up."

"What's that mean?"

"I think she was gonna tell Luke to come back."

"Ah."

A little before ten found Logan and Rory waiting in the NICU lounge outside the nursery.

Logan, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, fingers steepled, was studying Rory, who sat diagonally from him. He could see tension visible in her face. Her eyes gave her away. It struck him once again how -moving forward - he could do everything he could to protect her from his parents. He could devote every waking hour to allaying her fears and doubts. But no matter what he did from then on, he couldn't erase the past. It was on the tip of his tongue to try to say something to reassure her when a booming voice stopped him. Not removing his gaze from her, he saw her eyes widen.

"Logan! Rory!"

Logan rose to his feet. As he watched her, he saw Rory, on autopilot, also stand and turn to face the new arrival. Positioning himself next to her, he grabbed her hand.

"Mr. Huntzberger. Hello."

"Rory, I think it's about time you called me Mitchum. Don't you?"

As Logan watched, his father held his hand out to Rory. Her lips were tight as she dropped Logan's hand to accept Mitchum's.

"Uh -okay. Mitchum."

“So, Rory, how are you? Logan tells us the newest Huntzberger didn't give you the easiest time.”
"I'm fine. I just had a bit of high blood pressure."

"How's my grandson?"

"He's good. He was born a few weeks early. But he's fine."

"More than fine. He's perfect." Logan sought Rory's eye but she kept her gaze steady on his father. He took her hand again.

"That's good to hear."

"Yeah." Rory's nervousness was apparent. Logan was reminded of the accidental run-in at the Dexter House the year before. "Where's Mrs. Huntzberger?"

Logan, anxious to put Rory more at ease, tightened his grip on her hand. He figured she'd probably welcome attention being deflected away from her so he decided to take the reigns on the small talk.

"Yeah, Dad. Where's Mom? And Honor?"

"You know your mother, Logan. She had a couple of stops she just had to make. She'll be along shortly. Honor's with her."

Before Logan had a chance to respond to that, his father directed his focus back to Rory.

"So, Rory. I'm sorry things didn't work out with Conde Nast. I bumped into Jim Nelson a few months ago. Said your meeting went well but he never heard back from you." Mitchum made a face as though he were trying to recall the details of the conversation. "A feature on lines, I think?"

Logan knew the look was bullshit. His father knew exactly what was what. And he knew exactly what he was saying. Logan doubted Mitchum even knew Jim Nelson from a hole in the wall. Logan glared at his father. What was he up to? Why the hell would he even bring that up?

"Dad, I don't think -"

"No, Logan." Logan felt Rory squeeze his hand. "It's fine. At the time, I was still trying to get a foot in the door. But, to be honest, I didn't feel much of an affinity for writing a story on FOMO."

"FOMO?" repeated Mitchum. "What's that?"

"Fear of missing out," shrugged Rory. "It's not anything new. Anyway, under the circumstances, I would've needed a career change regardless."

"Yeah," agreed Mitchum. "I hear from Logan you're working on a book now. "

"I am. But I wasn't talking about that. I went to work for my mother at her inn. Because I needed health insurance."

"Oh, of course. Speaking of your mother, you don't ever go by Lorelai, do you?"

"Nope. That's my mother."

"Right," nodded Mitchum. "You should let Logan help with the book. His book on participatory journalism and the new media is on the curriculum for most journalism grad programs these days."

"Rory doesn't need my help." Logan turned slightly to meet Rory's eye. "She's got it covered."
"You're probably right." Mitchum offered Rory a half-hearted grin. "So, Logan... I spoke to Charlie Brent Friday. After you and I talked. Said he was gonna email you your updated will sometime today. Remember to check."

"Good." Logan pulled out his phone and powered it up.

"You have a will?" Rory shot a curious look at Logan.

"Of course, Ace," he shrugged, smiling at her. Was she worried? "It's the responsible thing to do. Nothing's gonna happen to me. Just. You know. In case."

"Rory, you ought to have a will in place, too. As Logan said. It's the responsible thing. Whatever Richard left you, you'll want to place in a trust for Lucas, I'm sure."

Rory's gaze switched from Mitchum to Logan. Logan could see the wheels turning in her head. She was wondering if Logan had told Mitchum about Richard leaving her an inheritance. Truth of the matter was, if Mitchum Huntzberger wanted to know something, he didn't need to wait to be told.

"Oh, before I forget. Logan, did you see the birth announcement?"

Damn. Between the long night at the hospital on Saturday and anticipating his parents' arrival on Sunday, the birth announcement had completely slipped Logan's mind. Not that he could've done anything about it. But he should've mentioned it to Rory at some point. To give her the head's up.

"Birth announcement?" A startled Rory set her gaze directly on Logan. "Logan?"

"Logan, you didn't tell her?"

Logan fixed his eyes on the mother of his child. "I'm sorry, Ace. I meant to. But between yesterday and last night and this morning...I forgot."

"Here. I'll just pull it up." Mitchum took his phone out of his jacket pocket and, after a few swipes, held it up in front of him. "We decided the best strategy for deflecting attention from the cancelled wedding was to focus on Lucas's birth." Smiling, Mitchum held the phone out to Rory and Logan. "Why don't I just let you read it."

Leaning in close to Rory, Logan read the birth announcement along with Rory.

Lucas Richard Gilmore-Huntzberger, the newest heir to the Huntzberger Publishing Group (HPG), was born on May 15, 2017 at St. Joseph's Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut. This is the first child of Logan Elias Huntzberger, 35, the Managing Director of HPG's International Operations and current HPG heir, and Lorelai "Rory" Leigh Gilmore, 32, a journalist and writer. He was born at the Lorelai Gilmore Maternity Wing of St. Joseph's Hospital, which was originally founded by his maternal great-great grandmother. Lucas is welcomed by paternal grandparents Mitchum and Shira Huntzberger of Hartford, Connecticut and Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts and maternal grandparents Christopher Hayden of Hartford and Lorelai Gilmore of Stars Hollow, Connecticut.

Although she kept her expression impassive, Logan definitely sensed a shudder wrack through Rory at the point when they read the word 'heir' in the write-up.

"So what do you think?"

"I think it's fine, Dad."

"Rory?"
"Like Logan said, Mr. Huntz-"

"Ah. I thought we were going with Mitchum?"

"Mitchum. It's fine. It's just the facts, right?"

Logan looked over at Rory. Seeing her face he realized that while her words might sound neutral, the look on her face gave her away: she most definitely did not think it 'fine'.

Logan felt something catch in his throat.

Ten minutes in and he was already failing her.

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AN: As Bette Davis was famously misquoted, “Fasten your seatbelts. It’s gonna be a bumpy ride.”
"Ror-y! Lo-gan!"

Logan's head shot around at the sound of his sister's singsong voice. He watched as his mother and sister stepped out from the elevator. Glancing at Rory he was relieved to see Honor's greeting had put a smile on her face. While they never had had much of an opportunity to become close, Honor and Rory had always at least gotten along. He was happy to see that hadn't changed.

"Honor, Mrs. Huntzberger." Still smiling, it was apparent proximity to his mother brought forth feelings of unease. The warring emotions of pleasure at seeing Honor and anxiety at seeing Shira were clearly evident on Rory's face.

Honor, he saw, was determined have none of that "awkward bullshit" as she called it. Logan silently said a prayer of thanks for his sister. She wrapped her arms around Rory.

"You look beautiful, Rory! Absolutely beautiful! It's hard to believe you gave birth when? Less than a week ago?!!"

"Yeah. Monday."

Logan observed as Honor pulled away from the embrace but continued to hold Rory's hands in her own. She was trying to steady her. God, he loved his sister.

"You could never tell. Mom? Doesn't Rory look beautiful?"

At Honor's question, Logan turned to look at his mother for the first time. Dressed all in shades of white, she wore her typically tight, fake-looking smile. Her gaze oscillated between Honor and Rory.

Was she purposely avoiding looking in his direction?

"Why, Honor, you shouldn't make Rory self-conscious about her looks. She was always a pretty girl."

How his mother could utter a compliment and still manage to make it sound censorious Logan would never understand. It was a talent. After a slight pause, Shira continued.

"But no woman is going to look her best a week after giving birth."

Honor frowned at their mother before shooting Logan a quick glance that spoke volumes.

"Mom, I'm gonna have to disagree." Honor smiled at Rory, whose hands she still held. "Rory, you
"Thank you, Honor. That's very nice of you to say but I know exactly how I look. With the pumping, I'm barely getting any sleep -"

"You're breast-feeding? I must give you the name of my lactation consultant. She's wonderful. I was so happy after I found her. It made all the difference. She lets me drink!"

"Alcohol?"

"Coffee! Alcohol! You name it! Within reason. Of course. But my obgyn didn't want me to eat or drink anything fun! I was so miserable!"

"I know!"

"What's your number? I'll send you her info."

Logan nearly laughed aloud seeing how quickly Rory pulled out her cell phone and handed it to his sister to provide the lactation consultant's phone number.

"Do you need to go shopping? Bergdorf Kids is almost as much fun as regular Bergdorf's!"

"Actually I do need to get some stuff. Since he arrived early, I didn't have as much time in the end."

"Perfect! I'm so glad I'm here! I'm terrific at shopping -just ask Josh! - and I just went through this phase. Haven's going on four months."

"Logan told me Lucas has a cousin close in age."

"Yes! They'll be able to be little terrors together! Since my older two are close in age -Harper's five and Joshua is close to four - I was afraid I'd feel obligated to have a playmate for Haven but I think I'm done. I feel done. So thank you, Rory. You did me a big favor. Having the fourth baby Huntzberger."

"Well, it was definitely not part of the decision-making process, but I'm glad it worked out."

Logan smiled at Rory's reply. She had a deft way of handling Honor's over-the-top enthusiasm.

"Oh, it did! It did! It did!"

"You see Dad when you came in?"

Mitchum had gone downstairs ten minutes earlier with the expressed excuse of grabbing a cup of coffee.

Immediately upon his departure, Rory had turned to Logan and asked if he knew anything about the birth announcement. So much for plausible deniability. Logan confirmed he knew 'something' was in the works. Though he admitted he suspected the nature of the content and tone of the write-up, at least he was able to honestly say he never saw it and hadn't contributed so much as a syllable to it. He'd attempted to allay her worries once more with the reasoning that ultimately they were the parents and they'd call the shots. Although Rory heard Logan out, his words of reason seemed to do little good. Rory maintained a stubborn blind spot when it came to realistically assessing just how much influence Mitchum and Shira would wield on Lucas's future. Being Logan’s girlfriend during college –seeing him go through what he went through – was what was burned in her memory. It was what she saw playing before her like a film reel when she closed her eyes and tried to envision her
Logan’s grandfather, Elias, though still around during Logan’s college years and definitely holding some sway, ultimately was not the power broker his father had been at the time.

Just as Logan would be the one in charge, twenty years out, when it would be time for Lucas to attend college.

Until Rory saw it, she wouldn’t believe it. That worried look on her brow would remain fixed.

"Your father stepped out to get some air and make a few calls. There's a lot still hanging in the balance, Logan."

Sneaking a peek at Honor, Logan smothered a chuckle at seeing his sister mouth-pantomime their mother's melodramatic pronouncement.

"Well, I'm asking because only two visitors can go in at a time to see the baby. Parents not included. Mom, I could go in with Honor and you could wait for Dad. Or you could come now with me and Honor. Which is it?"

Of course, she could go in both times, once with Honor and once with Mitchum, but Logan didn't offer that as an option. Watching his mother, Logan noted how uncomfortable she looked.

"And Rory?" she asked.

If she said she'd wait for his father, was she concerned she'd be left alone in the lounge with Rory?

"Rory was gonna -"

"Oh, I'm coming in too!"

Surprised, Logan glanced over at Rory. Earlier he had assumed he'd accompany his family in to see Lucas while Rory played possum. She'd never been fond of spending time with his parents. She seemed to have seconded that idea, saying she would pump milk while he played host. But that was obviously no longer the game plan.

Finally, settling on a course of action, Shira smiled. "I'll wait for your father. We've been married for over forty years. If there's one thing I've learned, it's the little things that count. You know. Seemingly small decisions that ultimately make all the difference. We should definitely be together when we meet our new grandson."

Logan was certain there was a veiled insult in there somewhere, but he was beyond caring about his mother's little fits of passive-aggressiveness.

"Works for me." Logan nodded before turning his attention to Honor. "You ready? There's a whole clean-up process to keep things sterile." He gestured towards the washing station adjacent to the Neonatal Nursery entrance.

Smirking at Logan and Rory, Honor nodded and proceeded towards the sanitization area.

"I think I got this, little brother. Remember? Mom? Three times over? Three stays in the maternity ward?"

Shira took a seat in the waiting area and pulled a magazine out of her over-sized, over-priced tote.

As the couple followed slowly behind Honor, Logan gently laid an arm over Rory's shoulders. He
used the opportunity to bring his lips to her temple. He wasn't surprised when she leaned in to whisper to him.

"I changed my mind about going in."

"Yeah, I noticed. Why?"

"I'm not even sure I could explain. I just feel I should be there."

"With Honor, too?"

"No. Not with Honor," she scoffed. "But it'll seem less weird if I go in both times."

"Ah. I get it. Is this a psychotic family interpretation of 'The Art of War'?"

Amused, Rory chuckled. "Yeah. Keep your friends close and your in-laws closer." The humor quickly faded. They both knew it was a joke that had long ago run its course. Rory sighed. "I guess I'll add Sun Tzu to the nursery library 'must have' list along with 'The Happiest Baby on the Block' and 'The Womanly Art of Breastfeeding.'"

The visits with Lucas were suitably quick and quiet, although it was a challenge to both Honor and Shira to keep their initial screeching at the first baby sighting under control. Since Lucas managed to remain asleep the entire time his Huntzberger relatives gaped over him - again Logan silently admired his son's nascent native intelligence - there was little in the way of over-the-isolette small talk.

The discussion during Honor's visit was mostly about shopping for baby gear.

The talk during Mitchum and Shira's visit likewise focused on the baby. His father mentioned to his mother how he'd shown both Logan and Rory the birth announcement. Logan assumed there was some underlying meaning behind the mention but he didn't know. Granted he'd gotten better at reading his parents over the years, forecasting the placement of their battle lines and the extent of their "crazy" would never be something he excelled at for the simple reason that it was exhausting.

Logan figured he'd have plenty of time to catch up with Honor now that she was back in Connecticut. Possibly on a tentatively planned baby-gear shopping outing later in the week. As for his parents, the less said the better. Nonetheless, he assumed there'd be a Huntzberger family dinner down the road as well.

By eleven thirty, the five of them -Logan, Rory, Honor, and his parents - were seated at a table in the café area on the hospital's ground level. Honor and his parents - following the meet and greet with Lucas - had expressed a desire to sit somewhere for a while and talk. Since it hardly seemed appropriate -nor desirable - to sit in the waiting room outside the NICU, Honor had suggested they go for coffee. By unspoken agreement, Logan and Rory had both agreed to the request, but only for Honor's sake.

Shira suggested they step out to the coffee shop located across from the hospital and maybe get lunch while they were out but Rory had nixed that idea before Logan had had a chance to. Neither Rory nor Logan was interested in leaving the hospital for a lengthy lunch. The compromise was to grab coffee at the Au Bon Pain in the hospital and then to sit in the café seating area adjacent to the Au Bon Pain. While he hadn't selected his seat deliberately, Logan found that from his vantage point at the table he could see the information desk at the hospital entrance; so he would be able to see Lorelai and Luke when -or if - they eventually did arrive.
Logan had no idea what had happened to Luke and Lorelai. Rory had obviously expected them earlier, but they hadn't shown up while the group was at the NICU Nursery; now it was an hour and half later and they still hadn't shown up. He knew Rory had snuck in a few texts with Lorelai so he trusted she knew what the plans were for their estimated time of arrival. That she hadn’t said anything, he interpreted to mean she just didn’t feel like mentioning it in front of his parents. Earlier, it had seemed likely that both families would converge at St. Joseph’s at the same time; now, it seemed likely that the Huntzbergers would leave before the Gilmore’s’ arrival. Since that would probably expedite his parents’ visit – while a meeting between the two families would prolong their visit - he was hoping Lorelai and Luke would continue to take their time and the two families would miss one another.

"Rory, we got you a little something." With this pronouncement Honor turned to Shira. "Mom?"

"So impatient, Honor! You haven't changed a bit when it comes to giving or receiving gifts!"

"No, I haven't. I readily admit it. I love getting gifts. I love giving gifts. I love helping other people pick out gifts. I do more than my share to keep the American economy going."

“International economy is more like it,” joked Logan.

"Yes, you do. Thankfully your habits are Josh's to support." Mitchum said with a smirk. "Now, I've just got your mother to worry about." Mitchum winked at Honor and Logan, letting the two in on the joke made at their mother's expense.

"Very funny, Mitchum. I'm not as much into gifts as Honor is."

"Maybe." As Logan watched Mitchum caught Rory's eye and grinned at her. "Maybe it's just because you prefer to cut out the middle man."

Logan smiled. Under the table, he squeezed Rory's hand. Seeing their newest grandchild seemed to have put his parents in an uncommonly good mood.

As they all watched, Shira pulled a set of white boxes tied with light green ribbons from her tote. One was long and narrow while the second was square and slightly thicker. Logan guessed necklace and earring set.

"Rory," smiled Shira. "Honor, Mitchum and I -"

"Josh too!" interrupted Honor.

"Josh too!" interrupted Honor.

"Yes, of course. Josh too. We just picked you up a little something."

Obviously stunned, Rory’s lips twisted into a tight smile. Turning her head, her gaze took in Shira, Mitchum, and Honor, in turn, before settling on Logan. He could sense the anxiety emanating from her. With no small amount of amazement, he realized that even a gift from his parents was enough to set Rory's nerves on edge.

"Thank you, but you didn't have to buy me anything."

"Why don't you open it before you thank us, Rory" suggested Shira, tight smile still in place.

Rory pulled her hand from Logan’s and accepted the gift boxes from Shira. Focusing her attention on the smaller of the two boxes, she untied the ribbons, unwrapped the paper, and opened the box. Earrings.
"Don't you just love them?! They're Van Cleef and Arpels!"

No matter that she was a year off from forty, Honor Huntzberger was still the most excitable jewelry squealer Logan had ever heard. He figured she channeled all the repressed screeching from seeing the baby into her screech for the jewelry. Amused, he wondered if his two nieces would rival their mother in jewelry squealing when they were old enough.

"Yes, I recognize the Alhambra motif." Rory nodded, nonchalantly.

Rory, obviously relieved, smiled at Honor and at his mother. She stole a glance at Logan and he returned her grin. Under the table, his hand was still resting on her thigh. He gave it a gentle squeeze. This was definitely not going badly. Not badly at all.

"Oh, you do? Rory, you're such a surprise sometimes!"

"Oh?"

"I don't think anyone knew what to do with onyx until Arpels and Van Cleef."

"Mom, I've seen tons of antique estate pieces with onyx."

"I'm not talking about cheap-looking costume pieces, Honor. I'm just saying Arpels and Van Cleef perfected the look."

"It is perfect. Thank you."

Logan watched as the three most important women in his life talked jewelry. At least they had one thing they could relate on. He wasn't a hundred percent clear on what an "Alhambra" was but he figured it was the ubiquitous motif found on every single piece of jewelry produced by Van Cleef and Arpels. No, he wasn't a metrosexual when it came to couture jewelry. He was in publishing and high-end retailers-especially watches and jewelry-continued to be a staple in print media advertising. Unless, she'd changed a great deal since becoming pregnant, he guessed that was how Rory knew about the Alhambra.

"Second box Rory!" Honor was practically foaming at the mouth.

Without another word, Rory pulled off the ribbon and unwrapped the long narrow box. Matching necklace.

"Honor, Mr. -"

"Ah-" Of course, his father was still insisting Rory call him Mitchum, no matter how awkward it was since his mother had not made a similar request.

"Mitchum, Mrs. Huntzberger. Thank you. They're lovely. I don't know what I did to deserve them-believe me I'd much rather you shower gifts on Lucas. The Roald Dahl stuffed animals were gorgeous. I'm sure he'll treasure them when he's older."

"Who?" Shira obviously had no idea who Roald Dahl was.

"Roald Dahl, Mom," offered Logan. "Author. He wrote 'Matilda'. 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory'. 'James and the Giant Peach'."

"Oh."

"Ah, I might've helped with picking that out too," explained Honor.
"Oh! Well, thank you. All of you. They're adorable. I just hope we can hold onto them until he's old enough for us to read the stories to him!"

"Don't be silly," replied Shira. "We'll just buy new ones if something happens to those."

Honor, seated next to him, muttered under her breath. "Limited edition, mother."

"Well thank you for Charlie Bucket and for the Fantastic Mr. Fox. I actually want to get Lucas a matching outfit to Mr. Fox. I'm not sure when he'd wear it. It's just too adorable."

“Right?” agreed Honor. “The little tailcoat and ascot?! So cute! I know! I'll throw a Roald Dahl themed birthday party for Joshua. Then we can dress all the kids in costumes!"

Bemused, Logan was realizing again the power of shopping when it came to female bonding. He hoped Rory and Honor would go baby gear shopping that week like had been discussed earlier. Drilling it home exactly how much Honor was on her side – on their side – would be an exercise better off accomplished sooner rather than later.

“Thank you again for the lovely jewelry."

"We figured after what you went through, a gift was well-deserved." Honor smiled. "I know my brother's been busy with everything else so we figured we'd step in."

"We couldn't trust Logan to think of it without someone to remind him."

"Personally, I do find reminders helpful when it comes to jewelry," opined Mitchum. "Fortunately my lovely wife adds reminders to my day calendar."

"Mitchum. Don't be silly. I do not."

"Logan actually got me this." Rory held up the emerald necklace.

"Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed Honor. "Tiffany's. Not bad."

“Nice,” said Mitchum.

"Emerald? With your eyes? You should've gotten her sapphire, Logan."


"Exactly," nodded Rory.

"Oh." Shira smiled her best 'saving face' smile. "You kids are just too smart."

"Well done, little brother."

"Thank you."

"You must open your second gift, Rory." His mother pulled a third box out from her bag.

Logan watched as his sister's eyes widened in obvious confusion. He saw her mouth 'second gift?' before turning back to Shira.

"Second gift, Mom? We were only in the store fifteen minutes. How did you manage to buy something else without me seeing?"
"Honor, don't be silly. You know about the second gift."

"I would've thought the necklace and earrings counted as two already."

Rory, quite reasonably, was obviously wary of this ‘second gift’. If Honor didn’t know about the gift, there had to be a reason his mother had kept it a secret.

"Now you're being silly. We couldn't give you an Arpels and Van Cleef Alhambra necklace and not the matching earrings! Whatever would you wear with it? The set all counts as one gift even if it was in two boxes. So this," smiled Shira, "is the second gift."

Logan watched as his mother handed Rory a third white-wrapped box with light green ribbon. His unease at the whole strange display ratcheted up a notch. He didn't hear ticking coming from inside the box but he still couldn't quite subdue the feeling that whatever was in the box would cause an explosion.

Rory finally pulled off the decorative ribbons and unwrapped the box. Logan could feel tension pulsating off her in waves. Under the table, he gave her thigh a gentle squeeze just to remind her that she wasn't alone. He watched as Rory pulled a watch from the box.

"Ah. A matching Alhambra watch."

"No, dear. The watch is mother-of-pearl. It's not to match the necklace and earrings set. It's just a little second gift. It seemed you might need some help in keeping track of time."

Boom. There it was. Logan grimaced.

Puzzling over Shira's words, Rory glanced at the woman. "'Keeping track of time'??" She repeated.

"Yes. I guess eight months passed in a blink of an eye. One would think that would be plenty of time in which to let a person know they were going to be a father. But apparently not."

Logan heard his sister suck in her breath. Shooting a quick look at Mitchum, Logan deduced his father did not know about the watch. Nor about his mother's premeditated speech. This sly passive-aggressive bullshit wasn't Mitchum. It was Shira. Through and through.

"Mom, what the hell?!!" Logan was so angry, he actually found it hard to get the words out.

Rory, meanwhile, was quick to get over her shock. The stunned look on her face was replaced by one of stony resolve. And anger. Snapping the watch box shut, Rory pushed the box back towards Shira.

"Keep it. It's probably for the best I don't clock-watch when you're in the room."

Without another word, or a backwards glance, Rory stood and walked away from the table.

Torn between going after Rory and dealing with Shira, Logan quickly came to the conclusion that he needed to deal with his mother. Besides, letting Honor go after Rory would, he hope, give them an opportunity to become friends. Let Rory see Honor was an ally. After a silent communication passed between brother and sister, Honor grabbed both her bag and Rory’s and went after her.

Logan, his eyes following his sister, watched as Honor caught up with Rory by the elevator bank. He assumed they were going back up to the NICU. Bringing his gaze back to his mother, he sat glaring silently at her; he was so angry, he found himself speechless. It literally felt as though his head was going to explode.
What would it take to make this bullshit end?

"Mom! What the hell is wrong with you?!"

AN: Sorry for the longer times between updates. The longer this fic gets, the more I find I have to go back and reread past chapters. I will say this: A few more chapters and we'll be hitting an important milestone and we'll also be doing some time jumps. Thank you for reading, kudos, and comments. If you like ITMH, please check out WITS, my low-stress AYITL continuation.
"Mom! What the hell is wrong with you?!"

Incensed, Logan stared angrily at his mother sitting across from him. Mitchum’s gaze, at once both curious and pensive, shifted between his son and his wife.

"I have to admit I'm with Logan on this one, Shira. Was that absolutely necessary?"

"Mitchum, you know as well as I do that it was necessary." Her brittle smile in place, Shira looked at Mitchum as she spoke before directing her eyes, as well as her next words, to her son. "Logan, how could I not say something? What Rory did was unconscionable. Not telling you for months that you were going to be a father? More than unconscionable; it's unforgivable."

"So you're upset on my account?! You're laying this bullshit -what you just dumped on Rory- on me?!!" Logan shook his head with a frustrated snort. "Great. That's just great."

"Not to mention all the time and money that went into the wedding. It was the event of the season. There were many influential people invited:" 

"You're upset about your cancelled wedding? There was a ton of insurance! How about I reimburse you and Dad and Lamontagne for whatever isn't covered?"

"Logan, you're missing the point."

"So enlighten me!" Logan’s raised voice echoed in the expansive space of the floor's open design and multi-story ceilings.

"Keep your voice down," hissed Shira. "There's also the scandal. Your reputation has been tarnished, Logan. Wait until your first test at HPG - after your father steps down. When you need the backing of the board and the shareholders. You may not have the easiest time getting their support."

"There's no scandal! You're being ridiculous! And if there is a scandal, who the hell cares? Any publicity is good publicity, right?" Logan shot a quick look at Mitchum. "My image is no different than it was before. I'm the millionaire playboy, remember? Whether the stories are true or not, there’s always gossip pairing me with someone. Before the engagement. After the engagement. How's this any different?"

"But Logan...you're not seeing the big picture. How could she not say anything? All those months? Your father - and Mitchum," Shira paused to glare at her husband. "I'd appreciate you backing me up on this." She returned her measured gaze to her son. "Your father and I have discussed it. We can only conclude she decided not to tell you and only changed her mind when the baby was born prematurely." Shira shrugged. "Maybe she was afraid of karma."
Logan sighed heavily. *Draining. Incredibly draining.* "If anyone should be afraid of karma, it's you and Dad."

"Logan, you need to think about this." Reaching across the table, Shira placed her hand on Logan's arm. Without saying a word, he fixed his eyes on her hand. "What she did. It's not the act of a stable person. I mean it's a small world, our world. Connecticut. Martha's Vineyard. Nantucket. We'd eventually hear that Rory Gilmore had a baby and I would've known within seconds of seeing him that he's a Huntzberger. So, what was the point of not saying anything but to hurt you? And us?"

All of a sudden, Logan felt exhausted. Talking to his mother often felt like the intellectual equivalent of using his head as a battering ram. Rory was upstairs. Lucas was upstairs. Even Honor was upstairs. There were no fewer than three other people in that building he'd rather be with a million times over. His desire to leave that table outweighing every other consideration, Logan decided to just come clean about the blocked phone.

"Rory tried to tell me. After she learned about the baby she sent me a dozen messages asking me to call her. And I didn't." Logan sighed; extricating his arm out from his mother's grasp, he brought his hand up to run his fingers through his hair. He continued to stare blankly at the table. "Because I'm the idiot who lets other people mess with his phone. Okay? You happy now?"

Shira, a bewildered look on her face, turned away from Logan to exchange a look with Mitchum before bringing her attention back to her son.

It was Mitchum who spoke.

"Logan. Enough with the guessing games. What the hell are you talking about?"

Lifting his gaze from the table, Logan brought his eyes back up to his mother, then his father before settling his sightless gaze back on the table in front of him.

"Somebody blocked Rory on my cell. That's why I didn't know about Lucas until now. She sent me a bunch of messages asking me to call her. She tried to get me over here so I could actually..." Overcome with emotion, Logan paused to clear his throat. "So I could be here to help her. See her. And him. Feel him kick. Go to the doctor with her. All that stuff. Not to mention just to be here to support them. Considering how things were before and during the birth, I'm sure I could've done something to make it less stressful for her. But I wasn't given the chance. Because I'm an idiot."

With that he brought his gaze back up to his parents.

"Logan. I'm sorry, son."

"That's what happened? That's why you didn't know?" The truth seemed to have a strange impact on his mother; Logan thought Shira looked uncharacteristically somber at the blocked phone reveal.

"Yeah. That's exactly what happened. So the next time you feel like unleashing vitriol on the person responsible for this mess, Mom, just blame me. *But don't ever speak to Rory like that again.*" Logan pointedly kept his eyes glued to his mother as he spoke. He wanted there to be no misunderstanding at who this directive was aimed at. Finally, tearing his gaze away from his parents, he thought he recognized a figure walking in the distance of the open lobby. "I'd ask you to consider the fact that Rory and I are already pretty torn up over it. So you might want to just consider avoiding the topic altogether."

Before Shira had an opportunity to reply, a new voice suddenly rang out.

"Is this a party? Subjecting more lucky people to your hostess skills, Shira?"
"Emily!" Caught off-guard by the appearance of Rory's grandmother, Shira’s greeting was far from eloquent. "You're here!"

"Yes. Yes, I am. And isn't it marvelous how, at your age, you can still state the obvious with such a childlike sense of wonder?"

At Emily Gilmore's arrival at the table, both Logan and Mitchum stood.

"Emily," Logan nodded in greeting.

"Logan. Mitchum." Emily bestowed her most haughty smile.

"Hi Emily," Mitchum attempted to steady the awkwardness. "You came over at rather an odd moment."

"Oh, did I? My daughter had to take a phone call so she and I were standing right over there."

"My mother bought Rory a watch."

"A watch? What kind of watch?" Though she directed her words to Logan, Emily focused her gaze on Shira. "Notwithstanding your mother's often questionable taste, I have a hard time envisioning my granddaughter being that upset over a gift. No matter how awful."

"It was a lovely Arpels and Van Cleef Alhambra Vintage Watch with a white mother-of-pearl dial, black satin strap, and white gold for the buckle and crown," offered Shira with a tense smile.

Emily gave Shira a look similar to one Logan had seen Honor give her dog upon discovering him blissfully drinking from the toilet bowl. It was not a good look. Though he kept his expression neutral, Logan found himself thoroughly enjoying his mother being subjected to the Emily treatment.
"First, it's Van Cleef and Arpels. How you can own so much of it and not even know the proper name is beyond me. Second, I know my granddaughter. She's not into expensive jewelry. If she liked the watch, she would've said so. If she didn't, she would've pretended she did because she is polite. Why would receiving a Van Cleef and Arpels watch upset her?"

"It was what my mother said when she gave Rory the watch."

Emily turned her head to meet Logan’s eyes.

"What did she say?"

Logan sighed. Not that he would mince words - even if he wanted to - there really was no way to sugarcoat Shira's little speech. It pained him just to repeat it.

"She said Rory needed a watch because how else could she allow eight months to pass without letting me know about the baby."

Logan witnessed Emily’s mask briefly falter. In that fraction of a second, her eyes reflected the hurt she felt on Rory's behalf.

"Isn't that interesting? I thought we'd established Rory tried to get in touch with you? To let you know about the baby? But there was a misunderstanding?"

"She did. And there was."

"Well, it wasn't good enough, Emily. Obviously. It's ridiculous for a family like ours to find out about the next heir in this way. We're laughingstocks. Not to mention we're out a substantial amount of money on the wedding. Then there's everything Logan has missed out on. Seeing his own child being born. These are not things a family recovers from easily."

As Logan watched his mother, he officially dubbed her in his mind The Most Awful Human Alive. She was using his own painful admission at missing out on Rory's pregnancy and Lucas's birth as a justification for gifting Rory with the snarky watch.

"Logan, did you have insurance on the wedding?"

"Yes."

"Do you feel embarrassed? Do you perceive yourself a laughingstock?"

"No. With the exception of the past half hour, I'm actually pretty happy these days."

"Do you feel Rory deliberately kept you in the dark about the baby?"

Similar to his admission to his parents, at Emily's line of inquiry, Logan found himself choking up at his emotions. Silently he shook his head. Emily must have saw something in his eyes. Or maybe it was the fact that he couldn't even verbally respond to her question. Her gaze as she looked at him softened briefly before the cold mask dropped once more and she returned her focus to Shira and Mitchum.

"Honestly, Shira, do you never tire of being the smallest, most petty creature in the room?"

"Emily, this isn't personal."

"Shira." With the one word, Logan watched his father essentially muzzle his mother. Mitchum settled his gaze on Rory's grandmother. "Emily. Logan just explained to us the reason why he didn't
know about the baby until last week. Lacking that detail, the issue of timing - why the late notification? - was a serious head scratcher that put Rory’s actions into question. But,” Mitchum gestured with a hand, “now that it’s been explained, we understand. It’s a tragic loss but no one here is to blame.”

In a flash, the reasons for Logan’s reticence at sharing the truth about the blocked contact with his parents flooded back to him. Although he remained 95% certain it was Odette who blocked Rory, he hadn’t forgotten that Rory had thought Mitchum a likely candidate. For that matter, he’d only eliminated Shira as a suspect because he regarded her as lacking the technological proficiency necessary to execute the action.

"See Emily? There's no need to make this personal."

"Of course it’s personal. My great-grandson deserves a chance to be brought up in a family with both his parents there to love him. Don't you agree?"

"Well, of course. It's just this whole thing has caught us off-guard. As far as we knew, Logan and Rory hadn't seen each other in years. Then we learned last year that they were back in touch." Logan's head shot around to look at his mother. She knew? His father told her about seeing them at The Dexter House in London? "No contact, and then all of sudden news about a baby. You can't deny that Rory can be quirky at times."

"Please. You have monthly liposuction and weekly Botox. If they're not sucking it out, they're sticking it in. Everyone knows 'spa' is your euphemism for 'detox'. You carry on like you're descended from royalty yet your family tree can't be traced further than a 1950s Greyhound station in Duluth. Shall I go on?"

"No! I don't see why you feel the need to attack me."

"No, you don't. Do you? Maybe it's because I know my granddaughter is a sweet girl. She isn't on par with your level of viciousness and I feel the need to step in." Emily shot a look at Logan. "Although maybe someone else ought to be looking out for her."

"Hm. Whomever could you mean, Mom?"

Logan internally grimaced. Lorelai. Once again, Logan and Mitchum both rose to their feet.

"Lorelai! How's Rory?"

"Rory's fine, Mom." Lorelai’s response was clipped.

Logan offered Lorelai his seat, the one next to Emily, which she accepted. He moved over one spot, to the chair left vacant by Honor.

"Hello." Shira smiled. "I don't believe you and I have ever met. I'm Shira Huntzberger."

"Lorelai Gilmore."

"This is my husband- "

"Yeah. Mitchum," Lorelai half-heartedly waved to Mitchum at the other end of the table. “I've already had the pleasure."

"Hi, Lorelai,” nodded Mitchum. “Good to see you again."
"Is it? You're a lot quieter than I remember."

"Excuse me?" Confused, and slightly concerned, Shira glanced back and forth between Lorelai and her husband.

"Your husband. Mitchum. He's a lot quieter than I remember."

"Whatever makes you say that?" Shira let out a nervous titter before shooting expectant looks at both Mitchum and Logan, silently asking for an explanation. Finally Logan filled in the blanks.

"I was at the Martha's Vineyard house one time with Rory and her parents when Dad came by to get me. There were some meetings in London he wanted me to attend. He was vocal in his request that I leave."

"When was this?"


"Oh." Mystery solved, Shira was anxious to change the subject. She returned her tight-lipped smile to Lorelai. "Well, Lorelai, it's a pleasure to meet you. It's hard to believe we never met in all the years Logan and Rory dated. We should've had you over for dinner. I was remiss."

"Uh. Well, after the pleasure of meeting your husband, I'd describe it more as benignant."

Logan watched as his mother puzzled over Lorelai's reply. It was obvious she didn't know what benignant meant. She smiled uncomfortably.

“Yes, well…”

"As parents, Lorelai, we all have to step in once in a while." Mitchum just couldn't allow a criticism of him go unaddressed; he, after all, did know what ‘benignant’ meant. “I’m sure you must’ve had moments like that."

"Mitchum and I often had our hands full with Logan. He wasn't always the responsible person he is today."

Logan internally winced. Shira pretty much lined that one up for Lorelai. Three…two…one…

"Yeah, because knocking up my daughter while engaged to another woman is just so responsible.""Well, it's not like it happened without her consent." Shira lowered her voice. "And probably by her design."

That was a new insinuation. Logan’s eyes widened as they zeroed in on his mother’s.

"Mom! Are you-"

"Oh no you didn't! Logan. Allow me." Lorelai shot Logan a quick 'shut up' look before bringing her focus back to Shira. “Did I hear you right? She-Ra?"

"It’s Shira. I’m just saying let’s not be naive. There's no such thing as an accidental pregnancy nowadays."

"I'll have you know my daughter -"

"Your daughter -"
"Hey! Ladies," interrupted Mitchum. "We're in a hospital cafeteria. You two think you could settle down?"

"Lorelai, I can tell you from experience, you're just wasting your breath." Emily opined with a dramatic sigh. "I realized years ago that the human life span doesn't afford sufficient time to talk sense into Shira. The sooner we end this, the sooner they'll leave and we can go see Little Lucas.” Emily smiled at the Huntzbergers. “You do realize people just tolerate you? That if you didn’t come with all those fun little Huntzberger trappings, neither one of you would have a friend in the world?”

As Logan watched, he saw his mother's mouth gape open in surprise. His father, he saw, drew his lips down in a grim line. Overwhelmed by the absurdity of the situation he found himself in, Logan smothered a laugh.

"You agreeing with that, Logan?" Mitchum bit out the words harshly. "Need I remind you you're one of us?"

"Nonsense." Emily's gaze was full of warmth as it fell briefly on Logan. "Logan and Honor are delightful. Unlike you two, even if they were poor they'd have friends."

Momentarily speechless, Logan forced a response through his lips. “Thank you, Emily.”

“You're welcome.”

Logan’s mind fell back on his mother’s latest insinuation; that Rory had somehow gotten pregnant on purpose to “trap” him. It was beyond ridiculous for a multitude of reasons, not the least of which Rory’s perception that their relationship “trapped” her far more than it did him. But his mother’s latest psychotic rant about the pregnancy not being an accident did call to mind the debate about Jung. It made him want to say something to them—all of the in-laws—about it, too.

"I actually believe this wasn't an accident.” A pin dropping could’ve been heard at his words. Logan could sense Lorelai, to his left, shooting daggers at him. Emily's mask was solidly affixed. Logan ignored them, instead focusing on his parents. This message was primarily for their benefit, after all. "I don’t mean it that way. This wasn’t a set-up. I just believe it was supposed to happen. Rory and I were supposed to happen. We're off-schedule but we're happening." Logan pulled his eyes from his parents long enough to meet Lorelai's gaze before flicking his eyes to Emily. "Rory and I have a son now. We’re a family. Either you're on-board with that,” he looked pointedly at his mother as he delivered his final thought, “or you’re not. But we’re not gonna keep going down this road. So I suggest everyone get used to the idea.”

“Point taken, Logan.” Mitchum nodded and abruptly rose to his feet. “Shira, we need to get going. I have things I need to take care of. On London time.”

“Of course, Mitchum.”

Following a quick, abbreviated round of curt goodbyes, Logan watched as his parents made their way to the exit. It was with no small amusement he realized his discomfort at finding himself alone with Rory's mother and grandmother paled in comparison to the relief he felt at his parents' departure. Pulling out his phone he saw several texts from Honor—including one asking him to record Emily? Things seemed to have gone well in the NICU. Shaking his head in bemusement, he noted the most recent text indicated Rory was going to pump milk while Honor was busily bookmarking baby retail websites on Rory's tablet. Rory wanted to feed Lucas at one so she wanted Logan to return by that time. That gave him about thirty minutes. Since there didn't appear to be a pressing need for him to go upstairs at the moment, he took it as fate delivering an opportunity to him to improve things with Lorelai and Emily. Maybe.
"Well. That was interesting." In reaction to her observation, Logan’s gaze shot to Lorelai, still seated to his left.

"Yeah. My folks are nothing if not good for the occasional rubbernecking." At Lorelai’s puzzled look, Logan supplied the missing piece of his metaphor. “Train wreck. It was a train wreck.”

"Ah," she nodded. "I'm gonna get a coffee. Anybody want anything?"

"I'll have a coffee, Lorelai."

"Sure thing, Mom."

A few minutes later, Lorelai returned with three coffees and a small bag of mini donuts which she set on the table.

"Got you one, too, Logan."

"Thanks."

"So, how was your trip in, Mom?" Lorelai took a sip from her cup.

"Fine, Lorelai. It was an executive charter plane. Very nice. So much faster than the ferry and driving. I'm happy I discovered it." After sipping her coffee, Emily asked, "Is Luke coming?"

"He's overseeing some stuff at the annex for me. Plus April's coming in today."

"We'll have to settle on when you're all coming out to Nantucket."

"Well, the baby needs to be released first. And even after he's out, he'll have checkups so Rory and Logan probably won't be venturing far from Hartford for at least a month. Isn't that right, Logan?"

In mild shock at the ease with which Lorelai and Emily were including him in the Gilmores' summer plans, Logan nearly missed providing a timely response.

"Yeah. He's got at least a week in the hospital and then there'll be follow-ups." Logan took a mouthful of his coffee. "Thanks again for the coffee, Lorelai."

"No problem. So your parents haven't changed." Lorelai set a steady gaze on Logan. "Though today was my first time meeting your mother so maybe that's not fair of me to say."

"I wouldn't say that," Logan replied, smiling.

"Please. Shira's a human time capsule."

"Do you have a plan on how to deal with that?" Pausing, Lorelai looked meaningfully at Emily before turning back to Logan. "Parental disapproval can be tough on a couple."

"Why are you looking at me, Lorelai? I gave you and Luke my blessing years ago."

"I was thinking of Gran, actually."

"Oh. Yes. Your father's mother was a thorn in my side until the day she had that life-changing event in 2004."

"What happened to her in 2004?" asked Logan.
"She died."

"Mom!"

"What Lorelai? You're the only one in the family allowed to make jokes?" Emily fixed her gaze on her daughter. "That woman contributed to your father and I separating. That he was blind to what she put me through— that she could be venomous to me all that time, with Richard never seeing it." Emily shifted her gaze to Logan. "She gave Richard a letter the day before our wedding begging him not to marry me. Fifty years we were married. She poisoned forty of them. He finally defends me at a dinner and she drops dead the following week, leaving him devastated and me picking up the pieces." Emily rolled her eyes at the humorless irony. "Logan, don't be blind to it. And don't let Rory fight alone. Even if she thinks it's her battle. Believe me. It's important. To this day I remember each time Richard took my side. And those are the loudest 'I love you's' I ever received from him.”

AN: Whew. Now, tell me that wasn't fun? What do you all think happens in the next chapter? Do Logan and Rory fight? Or do Logan and Rory kiss? Thank you for reading/reviewing.
Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Sunday, May 21, 2017, 12:30 pm EST

Although he didn't have much time to ruminate on Emily's toxic mother-in-law, Logan found the revelation, as well as Emily's advice, oddly helpful. Emily Gilmore, like her daughter and granddaughter, was a very discerning judge of character. Unlike her daughter and granddaughter, most of Emily's life had been lived in his world. Emily was to the manor born as well as to the manner born. Like him. She was also verbally gifted, like Rory, but with a much more practiced cutting tone. Emily Gilmore knew the power of words in taking down an enemy. That she had experience in this regard, a Shira-like mother-in-law, and was willing to be candid about it, was definitely not something Logan saw coming. But he was grateful nonetheless that Emily had let him in on this Gilmore family secret.

This generational back-story was an illuminating piece of a decade-old puzzle. In a way it helped to explain why he and Rory could love one another like they did, create a new life from that love, and still have trouble making it to the finish line.

If Richard's mother died in 2004, Logan had to assume Rory had known the woman. She probably knew of the schism between her grandmother and her great-grandmother. Maybe she'd even witnessed battles between them first-hand.

Maybe Rory feared that he, like Richard, would choose to side with his mother over his wife.

If that was the case, she was wrong.

Logan knew who he'd side with when it came to the woman who birthed him and the one who breathed life into him.

Shira was disturbed that Rory was raised by a teenaged mother in a middle class household. She didn't approve that Rory was predisposed to work for a paycheck. His mother insisted on maintaining her lofty notions of "family responsibility." As if they were landed gentry, patrons upon which all those in the fiefdom depended for their well-being and livelihood.

The reality was, as the managing owner of HPG, the Huntzbers had a responsibility to their board, to their shareholders and to their staff. Shira, for all she'd been a member of the family for forty years, actually had limited exposure to the business. Yes, she helped Mitchum with social engagements - sometimes politically charged social engagements. But Mitchum rarely confided in her on business decisions. Mainly because she had no experience in the business and Mitchum assumed - probably rightly, Logan thought- she had little to offer.

With Rory, just the opposite was true. Rory knew the business and held a lot of opinions. If she could be persuaded, he had no doubts that she would quickly establish herself as a valued member of the HPG team. But Rory wanted to do her own thing. And Logan would respect that. Just as he'd always respected Rory's decisions. He'd never sought to impose his opinions on her; he'd never tried
to tell her who she should be, or what she should do, even when she did something he didn't agree with. Like dropping out of Yale. He hadn't done that in the past; he certainly wouldn't start doing it now.

As for Mitchum, Logan truly believed Mitchum had no issues with Rory. Save for one.

If there was one thing about Rory Mitchum disliked -or feared, really- it was that she was independent. She might not have the in-your-face edge her mother and grandmother seemed to have in spades, but Rory Gilmore was no pushover. Who knew that better than him? As Lucas's mother, she'd want her son to have the best life he could. A life of freedom. A life of choices.

A life that's not preordained.

A family crest without fine print.

That's what she wanted.

That's what she'd get.

That's what his son would get.

The Huntzbergers' old-fashioned adherence to the practice of primogeniture would be coming to an end in his generation. Realistically there was no rational reason for it continuing as long as it had. He had cousins -children of his father's brother and two sisters- who worked at HPG and who arguably might be as qualified as he was to run it. Despite the fact that it was his destiny to do so. For that matter, why Honor was never encouraged to have an interest in the company always struck him as ridiculous. Older than him by four years, his sister was no dummy. But it didn't matter. None of that mattered.

Because she, too, had been born into a preordained life.

Logan felt a sense of empowerment upon his return to the NICU. Despite the fact that the family get-together had devolved into an unmitigated train-wreck -as he'd described to Lorelai - in the end there were a few wins.

First, he had better insight into what he was up against with Rory. That knowledge would help him negotiate and hopefully resolve their issues.

Second, he'd had an opportunity to make it clear to both his parents in no uncertain terms which way the wind would blow from this day forward.

Third, apparently he'd likely be spending a part of the summer in Nantucket with Rory, Lucas, and the extended Gilmore family.

Though it had been a train wreck, he'd somehow managed to extricate himself from the wreckage.

Now he just needed to find out how Rory made it out.

"Hey. Huntzberger." Hearing Rory's greeting, Logan looked up with a smile. She was exiting the lactation room. Standing, he quickly closed the distance between them.

"You know Honor's still here. I'm technically not the only one who could respond to that name."

"I wouldn't call Honor that. Where is everyone?"

"My folks left. Our son's being doted on by his Auntie Honor and Gilmore Grandma's."
"Yeah. I'm not sure you wanna say that in front of my mom."

"I'll be careful. How're you?"

"I'm fine."

"Ace-"

"No. Really. I was upset. I still am. Not crying upset. Just kicking myself for not saying something more to your mother. Your sister was terrific."

"Well, she has a lot of Shira experience. What'd she say?"

"She pointed out while I could've told your mother to take her watch and shove it, my reply actually kept things classy."

"Honor's right. I told you my mother's not nearly as clever as she thinks she is. You can talk circles around her."

"Yeah," sighed Rory. "Honor also said I'd probably have another chance so... I can think about how I want to deal with her. Maybe practice snarky rebuttals in the mirror."

"Your grandmother could probably help with that."

"What?"

"Emily feasted on Shira after you left."

"No!"

"Oh, yeah. Chewed her up one side and down the other." Hands in his pockets, Logan found himself staring into those blue eyes. "Listen, Rory-"

"What?"

"I've gotta say something. And I need you to hear me out. You're not in this alone. We've got a little three-person team here. You. Me. Junior. Junior, admittedly, is not really gonna be much help at first. But he is cute. I think we can let him coast for a while. And we can teach him to fetch things once he's walking. Or even crawling. So we've got that to look forward to."

"Fetch things? Like balls? And frisbees?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of 'bring daddy the remote' but sure. If you think that other stuff would be fun."

"I'm gonna turn you in on child labor laws."

"Well, we don't have to worry about it yet. It'll be at least a year until he's walking. Eighteen if he takes after Uncle Finn. In the meantime, until Junior's ready to contribute to the team, you have me."

"I do, do I?"

"Yeah. You do. You know that, right? I said it before. I meant it. And I told them the same thing."

"Who?"
"My parents. Lorelai. Emily."

Watching her, Logan could tell she didn't know what to make of that. Finally her lips pulled into a smile. She'd decided to go with it. For now, at any rate. Logan returned the grin.

"So I have you, do I?"

"You better believe it."

"Do I have you in a house? Do I have you with a mouse?"

Logan crinkled his eyes studying Rory.

"So that's what happens when you and Honor spend time together?"

"Oh, it's not that bad. Not like my leaving you alone with Finn and Colin."

"That's in no way a comparison, Ace! A comparison would be you leaving me alone with Lane so she can tell me all your childhood secrets."

"Yeah, well, that's not gonna happen. Lane's too busy. She's got the store. The boys. The band. Zach. You wanna spend an afternoon with Paris? You know she and I went to high school together."

"I know. And no thank you. So aside from my childhood fascination with "Green Eggs and Ham" what other embarrassing secrets did my sister reveal?"

"That was the only one, I think."

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"Ace. In a boat. Logan brought his left arm up around her back. "With a goat." His right arm snaked around her to meet his left. "In the rain. In the dark. On a train. In a car. In a tree. In a box. With a fox. In a house. With a mouse. Here. There. Everywhere."

"Huh. You have it memorized too."

Logan, smiling, lifted an eyebrow in confirmation.

As he tightened his arms around her, Logan felt Rory stiffen.

"What're you doing?"

"I'd think it's obvious. I'm hugging my Baby Mama."

"I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not?"

"Because."

"'Because'? That all you got, Ace?"

"No. I got more. How about because I won't allow it?"
Logan moved his arms downward from her back to encircling her waist.

"Yeah? What're you gonna do?"

Rory's eyes closed and she leaned into him, her arms circling around his chest and back. Logan smiled as a pleased sounding groan escaped from her throat.

"I'll scream."

"Oh you will? Hm. You don't look like you're ready to scream."

"Hm-mm."

Logan's smile widened as Rory burrowed her face into his chest.

"You smell good."

"Just soap and deodorant, Ace."

"It smells good on you."

"I need to leave you alone with my sister more often."

"Ha-ha. I don't know what you're talking about."

"I know. You're tired. You hate being in my arms. It's a hardship. You're just biding your time. Building your strength to scream."

"Well. Maybe talking to Honor did make me realize how nice it is that you're here."

"Nice? That's kinda lackluster as far as adjectives go."

"What do you want me to say? I'm thrilled'? 'I'm amazed'? In retrospect, it's near-miraculous'? That but for my phone's battery being dead on Wednesday and my mom using her own phone to call you, not mine, I realized you could just as easily still be in London, far away...from us. And given the choice of being here without you, still, or having you with me, with us, I think I prefer it this way?"

Smiling anew, Logan kissed the top of her head.

"No, I wouldn't expect you to say all that. I know how stingy you are with adjectives."

Logan tightened his embrace.

He needed this to work.

Later that afternoon Auntie Honor and the Gilmore Grandma's, done with their doting-on-Lucas session, had finally returned to the lounge area outside the NICU. Honor, ready to return to her own family, was saying her goodbye's and preparing to finally depart from the hospital.

All things considered, Logan had to concede that the morning and afternoon hadn't gone too badly. It had actually gone well. At least, after his parents had left.

"It was so good to see you Emily!" Honor leaned forward to hug the older woman. "Living on the coast is certainly agreeing with you."

"Thank you, Honor," smiled Emily. "It was delightful. You must stop by next time you're out that
way."

"That may be sooner rather than later. It is almost June. Time for the Huntzbergers' Martha Vineyard decampment."

"Oh. Yes. Of course." A sudden frown spread across Emily's features.

"Don't worry," laughed Honor. "I'll just bring Josh and the kids."

"Lovely. I look forward to it."

"Lorelai," Honor turned to Lorelai, who stood to Emily's left. "It was a pleasure."

"Yes. It was." Lorelai agreed, nodding with a slight smile.

From where he stood, Logan recognized Lorelai's expression to be a mix of bemusement and disbelief. Apparently Honor saw through the look as well.

"You're giving me that 'how're you their spawn?' look." Honor observed, with a laugh.

"No. No, I'm not." Lorelai shook her head, denying Honor's jestful accusation. Logan, and Rory he noted, watched silently in amusement. Lorelai reconsidered. "I'm sorry. Do you get that a lot?"

"Enough to recognize it." Honor explained. "It doesn't offend me. I take it as a compliment."

Finally Honor turned her attention to saying goodbye to Logan and Rory, who stood side by side to the right of Lorelai and Emily.

"Little Brother!" Honor squealed teasingly -and loudly- as she wrapped her brother in a hug.

"Honor," Logan shook his head with a laugh. "Come on."

"You'll always be Little Brother to me. Even if you and Rory have ten kids!"

"Ten? Let's see you go for ten."

"Rory!" Honor turned her attention to Rory, enveloping her in an equally enthusiastic embrace.

"Whoa!" Rory let loose an obviously genuine laugh; Logan bestowed a subtle smile of 'thanks' to Honor. "Ten kids? Why am I getting pulled into this?"

"Sorry, Rory!" Honor chuckled as she broke off her goodbye hug. "You're right. Ten?! What was I thinking?!!" Honor transferred her focus back to her brother who was now looking at his cell phone smiling. "What? What is it? What could possibly come through on that phone of yours to make you smile like that?"

Logan's grin widened. His eyes met those of his sister momentarily before he turned his head looking for Rory.

"My will." Logan held his cell phone out for Honor to see.

"Your will..?" repeated Rory.

"Yeah," nodded Logan. "Recent changes."

Leaning in towards Logan's cell phone, Honor read from the document on Logan's cell phone.
"Bequeathed to my son, Lucas Richard Gilmore-Huntzberger'... I suppose that's sweet. In a morbid kind of way," chuckled Honor.

Logan made a face at his sister. Rory, meanwhile, with a low, "Let me see," grabbed Logan's phone to read the document.

"Oh, what's that, Honor? Time to go?"

"Very funny." Honor leaned in to give Logan a final hug goodbye.

"Rory. You have my number. You have my lactation consultant's number. And you and I have a date this week for Bergdorf's."

"Yes. We do." Logan noted that while Rory had been laughing and joking with them a moment earlier, her smile no longer seemed to make it to her eyes. "It was really good seeing you, Honor."

Honor, still basking in the 'new auntie' glow, was oblivious.

"I'm happy you feel that way 'cause you'll be seeing me a lot. Oh! It's gonna be fabulous when Lucas is out of the hospital. We'll have a play date right away! Hopefully before we leave for Martha's Vineyard. I'll leave Harper and Joshua with Josh. I'll bring Haven over and we can put the two of them in side-by-side Snoos and we can put on Lifetime as we drink Chardonnay. Oh! I can tell you more stories about my brother!"

Not a chance.

"Whoa, there. I think someone's gonna be walking home in a minute," joked Logan.

"Please," huffed Honor. "I'll send Frank back unscathed. Enjoy the rest of your day. Call me if you need anything. Rory, you and I will definitely talk to firm up Bergdorf's."

"Sounds great."

With a charming smile and final exuberant wave to her brother and the three Gilmore ladies, Honor took her leave of the group. In the absence of his sister's bubbly personality, a sudden quiet descended over the group. Rory still seemed a bit off, Logan thought. He was wondering if he ought to say something to her when Lorelai broke the silence.

"Mom, we should get going too."

"Yes, Lorelai."

At her mother and grandmother's mention of leaving, Rory's interest in the discussion was piqued.

"Grandma, are you going back to Nantucket right away?"

"No, Rory," replied Emily, with a slight shake of her head. "I'll be staying in Hartford for a few days."

"Great. So I'll see you again before you go."

"Yes. Definitely. I'm going with your mother now to see the apartment."

"Mom? Are you gonna stick around? Or are you going to Stars Hollow now?"

"Sorry, kid. I have to get to the annex. Luke needs a break since April's coming in."
"Right. I guess I won't see her."

"You might. I don't know what her schedule is. She's leaving for New Mexico to see Anna. Just not sure when."

Listening to Rory's conversations with both her grandmother and her mother, it occurred to Logan that it might be nice to arrange a dinner for Rory now that she was out of the hospital. With Emily and Rory's step-sister in town for a few days, this might be a good week. Rory also mentioned Christopher was due to return from Australia on Monday. Once Lucas was out of the hospital, he imagined planning dinners out would become a bit more complicated. It might be nice to plan a family dinner before the baby was released.

Some time later, the visitors gone, only Logan and Rory remained. Standing over Lucas's isolette in the NICU nursery, the new parents were happy to have an opportunity to spend quality time with their surprisingly wide-awake infant.

"Hey, Junior," Logan stroked the baby's foot. "Smart move."

"What?" Rory glanced up.

"Staying asleep the entire time Grandma and Grandpa Huntzberger were here," Logan replied with a smirk.

"Oh! That!" chuckled Rory. "It was serendipitous. I'm glad he was awake for Honor. Did you hear her oohing and aahing over his eyes?"

"Yeah. I heard." Logan smiled at Rory. "I think she would've found something to ooh and aah over even if he'd never opened his eyes."

"Yeah, probably." Rory returned his smile. As Logan watched her, he saw the lighthearted look on her face gradually give way to a more serious look and she returned her gaze to their son. Whatever that something was from before was obviously still bothering her.

"Ace?" Logan's hand moved from Lucas's foot to Rory's hand. Startled, her hand flinched. That was not good. "Rory? Hey? What's wrong?"

Rory, very noticeably upset, raised her blue eyes to his brown eyes.

"I have to ask you something."

"Sure, Ace. Anything. Ask away."

"It's about your will."

"My will? What about it?"

"You have his name as 'Lucas Richard Gilmore-Huntzberger'."

Logan pulled his eyes from Rory and glanced down at the infant. Lifting his eyes back to hers, he answered.

"That's his name. Isn't it?"

"Yes, it is. But your dad said this morning that you and he talked about the will on Friday. And then he talked to the lawyer on Friday."
"Yeah? I'm still not tracking, Ace."

"You and I talked with the social worker about Lucas's name on Saturday. We only decided his name on Saturday. You told your dad he'd be named Huntzberger before you and I even talked about it."

Logan averted his eyes from Rory's steady gaze and, sighing, looked at his son. Technically, she was right.

"So? It was aspirational, Ace. Legal documents can always be revised. Lawyers love getting paid. Of course I wanted Lucas to share my name. He's my son."

"It doesn't feel aspirational, Logan. It feels manipulative. I wish you'd just told me Mitchum was pushing to have Huntzberger in his name."

Logan sighed again.

"Yes, my dad wanted Lucas to have Huntzberger in his name. We're not married. Though this stuff seems to matter less and less these days, technically he's illegitimate. Having Huntzberger in his name cuts through all that."

"Why didn't you mention any of this on Saturday?"

"Why would I? The two things don't have anything to do with each other. He asked me the baby's name. I told him the name I was hoping for knowing it might not work out and the lawyers might have to change the will."

"Is that why you were pushing for the name? Because of Mitchum?"

"No! It had nothing to do with Mitchum! I'm Lucas's father and I wanted him to have my name! My name. Which, yeah, coincidentally is the same as my father's. Why's that so crazy?"

"And the announcement?"

"What about the announcement?"

"All that stuff? About the next Huntzberger heir being born?"

"Well, technically the next Huntzberger heir has been born. As for the announcement, it's like I told you. I didn't write it. I didn't even see it. I told my dad to stick to the facts. I suggested he take a look at Richard's obituary. Which is probably why they thought to include mention of the hospital wing. And that's it. Extent of my involvement."

"But you knew it was coming out today?"

"Yes. I did. I'm sorry I forgot to mention it. The stuff with Lucas yesterday and then hearing from my dad this morning sidetracked me."

"Logan! God! I need you to tell me these things! I need you to be honest with me!"

"I am being honest with you. One hundred percent honest."

"I asked you to promise to always let me know what they were up to."

"Yes, you did. And I promised. And I'm gonna keep that promise. We're a three person team here, Ace."
"You say we're a team. I don't feel like I'm on a team, Logan. I can't keep being blindsided. I can't live being afraid all the time that the ground is gonna shift under me."

"Of course not. And you won't be blindsided. I'm not looking to keep things from you, Rory."

"Yeah. Well. I didn't know about his name on the will. I didn't know about the birth announcement. Everybody's throwing around that word 'heir.' I know it means something different to the Huntzbergers. I'm trying not to freak out but I'm so worried for his sake. What if mommy loses? Then what?"

"Rory. There's no winners or losers. We're all on the same side." Logan raised a hand to Rory's cheek. "Ace? Nothing bad is gonna happen."

"It's not?" She twisted her head; he removed his hand. "I don't know what's gonna happen. And I feel like you do. But you're not saying."

"No, Ace. It's not like that. There's just stuff going on. Typical Huntzberger lunacy that I don't want you worrying about. I'll take care of it."

"Like you took care of Shira today?"

"Ouch."

"Yeah. Ouch. I took that hit. You can't protect me. Not all the time. Maybe not ever. And I'm not even sure what 'typical Huntzberger lunacy' is. Telling me not to worry won't work."

Unbidden, Logan's mind went back to Emily's tale of Richard and the first Lorelai.

"You're right." Logan sighed. "There are a few things going on. I regard them as typical and also," he met her eyes, "maybe I didn't want the deluge of Huntzberger crazy to fall immediately. Maybe I was hoping for a little more time."

"Time for what?"

Logan didn't answer but brought his eyes to hers. Watching her, his expression was serious.

"Time to work your masculine wiles on me?"

Thrilled to hear her joking, even if she was upset, Logan laughed. "Maybe."

"You think that requires a lot of effort on your part? I already gave birth to your child. I obviously have a weak spot for you. Of course now it extends to Lucas so it could be construed as weak spot for Huntzberger men."

Logan frowned.

"Mitchum not included."

"My uncle? Cousins?"

"Nope. None of them are included either."

"Thank God."

"So? 'Typical Huntzberger lunacy'?"
"My dad's crisis management team came up with the brilliant idea of focusing on Lucas to distract from the scandalous 'runaway-groom' aspect of the story."

"That's..."

"Ironically self-serving? Exploitative?"

"Yeah. But it's also smart. Brilliant even. And probably effective." Rory shrugged. "Of course, you weren't going to marry one woman practically the same day another woman gave birth to your child. It's amoral but rational."

"Thank you for that, Ace."

"No problem, Huntzberger." Rory fell silent as she watched Lucas stretch in his crib. "So the announcement. Having Huntzberger as part of his name. Is there more?"

"Yeah. There's more."

"What?" Rory looked up at him.

"There's an idea to do a feature."

"A feature? On what?"

Logan jerked his head slightly, gesturing toward Lucas.

"On him?"

"Yeah."

"He's a baby."

"Said it was crazy, Ace."

"Are they hoping to interview him?! This makes no sense! What'd you say to your dad?"

"Nothing yet."

"Are you gonna just let him do it?"

Logan didn't answer at first. Was he going to just let his father do it?

"Mitchum's argument for doing the piece is to -again- distract from other aspects of the story."

"What 'other aspects'? Runaway groom? Is there more?"

Logan, silent, just looked at Rory. He figured she'd catch on. And he saw in her eyes the second she got it.

"Me? I'm the 'other aspects'?"

"My dad figures the press - our competitors especially- will dig. Whatever they find, they'll use. Any blemish they find, they'll print. If we control the story, we control the spin."

"Blemish, huh? Oh, yeah! I definitely got a few of those!" As Logan looked on, Rory, her eyes somber, turned back to their son. "You believe that, Lucas? Mommy has one messy year and it winds up in the paper." She redirected her focus to Logan. "What would be in this article? Not on
him. The one on me?"

"Rory, I'm not gonna conjecture-"

"No, but Mitchum did. What did he say? What did he think competing publishers would print?"

"Focus on your career -"

"Lack thereof."

"Ace-"

"What else?"

"Did you have some kind of incident with Gail Collins?"

Rory groaned. "What else?"

"Are you at war with some food bloggers?"

"No! That's my mom!"

"Well, that's what he mentioned."

"Is there another option? Isn't there anything else?"

Logan, watching Rory, played around some ideas in his head. Mitchum hadn't mentioned it as an option, but, reading between the lines of his father's words, Logan knew there was at least one other option.

"You have some time to think about this but you really need to talk to Rory and get your story straight. The fact that Lucas is illegitimate doesn't matter to your mother and I but some of the board members and partners are of the old guard. If you and Rory have a future, they're gonna wanna hear that a wedding is in the works. You need to think about that. There'll come a point when you'll need them. Think about it, Logan."

Releasing a story that there was a new romance, that college sweethearts had rekindled their relationship ten years after saying goodbye - now that was a story.

But Logan knew he could never mention such a thing. If Rory had perceived the other stuff as potentially manipulative, this would definitely score as a manipulation bomb. Even he could see that.

Rory was as skittish as a doe. He was hopeful that he'd eventually be able to win her over. Him and Lucas.

It wasn't lost on Logan that hoping his infant son would somehow encourage Rory to settle down with him - with both of them - could probably be construed as manipulative too.

So far, things had been going well between him and Rory. He was heartened by how well it all was going. But it didn't take much to reopen old wounds. Especially with his mother and father there to help the process along.

He had to reassure her. If there was nothing else he could do, he had to do that.

"Rory..."
"Yeah?"

"I made a big mistake with you."

As he watched, her eyebrow lifted in question.

*Only one?* it said.

"You're right. I made a few. The biggest one was not waiting for you. Hell, I spent half our relationship waiting for you. Throwing it in at the finish line was stupid." Rory, silent, shifted her gaze to Lucas. "But that's not actually what I'm talking about. Remember after the internship? I wanted to go talk to my dad but you didn't want me to because you didn't want to come between us?"

"Yeah. I remember."

"I made the wrong call back then."

"But I didn't want that." Her eyes shot up to his. "I didn't want to be responsible-"

"That's just it, Ace. This thing with my parents. They're responsible. It's on them. It's always been on them. Whatever happens. It was true back then and it's even more true now. Listen," Logan paused as he placed a hand over hers on their son. "The ones who need to stick together are you, me, and the big guy over here."

Sighing, Rory averted her eyes. "How?"

"We just do. And I'll do my part by fixing this article."

"Okay. But how? If not my awesome career in journalism, then what? Feature on me as a modern day Hester Prynne? What?"

"How about a feature on you as an author? Your book?"

Rory's eyes lifted once more to meet his. "You think that would work?"

"It's worth a shot. I'll talk to my dad. See what he thinks." Logan smiled, trying to comfort her. "Hey, I have been known to work magic." Logan brought a hand up to her face, caressing her cheek.

Rory, startled by his touch, shivered. The slight movement wasn't lost on Logan.

"You okay, Ace?"

"Fine." Logan stroked her cheek, moving out toward her earlobe, which he gently rubbed. Seeing Rory's eyes close, he smiled to himself.

"So I'll talk to my dad. And I'll tell you everything."

Rory's eyes reopened. "You have to, Logan. Everything. I'm counting on you. We both are."

"I know, Ace. I won't let you two down."

Although she didn't say anything. Her eyes said it all.

*You better not.*
AN: Whew. It is soooo good to be back. Let's enjoy it while it lasts, shall we? Speaking of enjoying things while they last, how long before Logan finds himself challenged in keeping his promise to Rory? Thank you for reading.

09/20/2017
Hartford, Connecticut, Week of May 21, 2017

The Week

With Rory out of the hospital, life settled into a familiar if somewhat surreal routine. It shouldn't have seemed familiar but having adjacent apartments - not to mention having Colin and Finn around - soon made Logan feel like he and Rory were back at Yale living in the dorms. During their platonic friend phase, of course. However, the fact that they shared a son definitely added something to the experience.

Each day Frank drove them to the hospital. Once there the new parents - aside from periodic coffee and food breaks - would spend most of their time with Lucas. Rory would also pump milk while Logan would keep up with work. Rory's staples were removed on Monday. Christopher Hayden also finally made it to the hospital on Monday. Noting Christopher's utter lack of surprise at his being there, Logan could only surmise that Rory, or Lorelai, had given him the heads up that Logan was Lucas's father. Other visitors included Rory's step-sister April on Tuesday, as well as Colin and Finn on Thursday.

Lorelai and Luke, though they had pretty much moved back to Stars Hollow after giving up their hotel room, continued to come up each afternoon to visit Lucas. Surprisingly -to Logan, at any rate - Emily stuck around Hartford, staying not with Rory but with her not-boyfriend, Jack Smith. Jack even came to the hospital once, on Tuesday, although he did not visit the newborn. A nice enough guy, Logan was not surprised to learn Jack knew his parents.

So it was on Tuesday night that a party of six - Logan and Rory, Luke and Lorelai, and Jack and Emily- dined out at the Hartford Capital Grille. Typical of the steakhouse chain, the restaurant's décor was dominated by burgundy walls, pop art paintings, mahogany finishes, dark leather seats, and glowing Tiffany style lighting. Playing with the idea of throwing a 'welcome home' dinner for Rory, Logan used the opportunity to discretely survey the restaurant's private dining rooms.

Monday: The Art of Smelling

Most nights, however, the group went their separate ways upon leaving the hospital. On Monday night, Lorelai and Luke came back to Rory's apartment for dinner (take-out, of course). Still feeling out his place in the Gilmore universe -and more importantly - in Rory's world -Logan had hesitated in the hallway. Debating whether to join them in Rory's apartment or to go to his own apartment where Finn and Colin were holed up, the decision was made for him when Finn suddenly swung open his apartment door and spilled out into the hallway.

"Lovely?" repeated Luke, looking between Finn and his wife. "Lorelai, who's this guy and why's he calling you 'lovely'?

"What? Are you saying I'm not 'lovely'?" Lorelai asked, feigning insult. "Why're you jealous? He called you 'fine sir.'"

Momentarily distracted by Luke and Lorelai's back-and-forth, Logan finally noticed Rory attempting to make eye contact with him. Focusing on her lips, he read 'Smell?'

_Oh, yeah._ He knew there was something he was purposefully blacking out.

"Smell, Finn?" asked Logan. "Did you say you smelled me?"

It was Colin who answered.

"Finn's decided he needs to strengthen his olfactory senses."

"I'm tired of wasting my time on sub-par tequila."

"He's been taking B-12 and zinc and has been practicing."

"Practicing?" repeated Rory, staring at Finn.

"This can't be good, Ace. Don't -"

"How do you practice smelling?"

"-go there."

"I'm glad you asked that, love," replied Finn. "A person can train their nose by choosing smells one's fond of, then taking a minute each day to go through and smell each one individually to stimulate the receptors inside the nose." Closing his eyes, Finn sniffed the air in the hallway to demonstrate. "Some even believe visualizing smells can help improve the sense of smell."

"He's been getting into bed at night with Logan and sniffing him."

Disgusted, Logan looked at Colin, then Finn. An equally horrified Rory frowned.


"Don't give him ideas, hon."

"In any case, I have found that a shallow sniff is key." Finn proceeded to sniff several more times.

"You heard us, Finn. You heard our voices. You did not smell Logan," argued Rory. "You can't go around shallow sniffing people; you'll get yourself arrested. And if you two are this bored during the day, we should definitely get Robert out here."

"No!" Finn squawked.

"Oh, one of us has plenty to do," nodded Colin. "The other has nothing on his big boy calendar until November."

"I can't help that they only bring me out for the special occasions."

"Special? Like what?" Rory cut her gaze to Finn; Logan stifled a laugh at Rory's look of irritated
incredulity. He'd called it the Rory Look when they were younger. "Ribbon cuttings? Yacht christenings?"

"Logan," Lorelai finally settled the matter of dinner. "Why don't you join us for dinner?"


"Or in our beds!" Lorelai added brightly.

Logan shot a look at Rory. Her face was in lockdown. He had no clue whether she wanted him to join them for dinner or not.

"Thank you," he smiled at Rory's parents. "I'd like that."

"Well, duh. We said no shallow sniffing. What's not to like?"

Though it took Luke and Lorelai's pitying him for having inappropriate friends with borderline psychotic tendencies, Logan welcomed the thawing of the Gilmores. He appreciated their including him. As he turned to walk Rory to her apartment, he placed a hand on her elbow. At his touch, she lifted her eyes to meet his. She gave him a wry smile.

Reality check. He might be making progress with the in-laws, but Logan knew he still had an uphill battle ahead of him to prove to Rory that he was on her team and her team alone.

Tuesday: The Huntzberger Update

Logan called the Huntzberger house on Tuesday only to be told by his mother that his father had returned to London and wouldn't be back until Thursday -Friday at the latest. Shira suggested a Huntzberger family dinner for Friday night. As much as he disliked family dinners, Logan decided it would be better to talk to his father then -in person- rather than try to chase him down in another time zone via phone. Not to mention overcoming the difficulties associated with trying to gauge his father's true feelings without being able to observe Mitchum's physical tells.

So, unfortunately -or fortunately- after finally opening up to Rory about Mitchum's Lucas-focused feature idea, all-things-Huntzberger drew to a halt. While Logan welcomed the quiet, he was under no delusion that it was anything other than a temporary ceasefire. He also knew it came at a cost; with things at a standstill, there was no opportunity for a "boombox moment" with Rory.

During the brief call with his mother, it seemed that Shira might've had more she wanted to say -on what Logan didn't know and couldn't begin to guess. So he shut that down. He just needed to talk to his father about the article; he wasn't in the mood for any of Shira's petty bullshit. He had to hand it to his mother. He was surprised by her continuing ability to...surprise. For all her less-than-clever insults and myopic adherence to her precious societal conventions, Shira, apparently, could only be trusted to behave appropriately within the confines of their world. Outside her world, away from the watchful eyes of those who mattered, Shira was unpredictable. The hospital cafeteria must've been too close to the edge where peasants dwell; she hadn't felt the need to rein it in.

Shira behaved better in her sandbox. But Rory didn't like that sandbox; she liked her own (middle-class) sandbox. The one where the peasants dwelled. That might make protecting her more of a challenge.

Tuesday: Calling Paris
With Lorelai's help Logan had managed to organize the surprise dinner for Rory. Even though Rory had had a baby shower, Lorelai - to her credit - hadn't tried to talk him out of it. To the contrary, she told him she thought it was a sweet idea. She agreed with Logan's assumption that it would be easier pulling a surprise dinner off before Lucas was released from the hospital. Lorelai offered to handle inviting the Stars Hollow based guests, while Logan handled everyone else. Aside from Honor and - thankfully - Paris, everyone RSVP'd 'yes.' Hours after, days after, Logan still couldn't believe the outcome of his call to Paris.

"What are doing that for? And a steakhouse? Giving her a baby wasn't enough? Now you gotta give her clogged arteries and high cholesterol?"

"No, Paris. It's just a 'we're happy you're home' celebration. And Capital Grille has salad on the menu. No one has to eat steak."

"A 'happy you're home' celebration? Huh. That's actually kind of sweet. Doyle never did that for me. But then we were married. It wasn't the Baby Mama/Love Child thing you two got going on."

"Well, you and Doyle could still go through with the divorce and have a third kid."

"Nope. These ovaries are closed for business. Anyway, Doyle and I can't make it Thursday but you and Rory'll have to come by one day. I have some baby stuff for Lucas. Do me a favor and remind her. I've already mentioned it. Twice. But Rory seems to be one of those women who has New Mother Brain. I have to admit I never believed it was a thing but Rory's usually so meticulous. It's the only reason I can think of why she hasn't gotten back to me."

"Sure, Paris. Rory's been out of the hospital four days. She was just saying how much she's looking forward to a five-hour road trip to see you."

"Hmm. You know something, mini-Hemsworth? You don't always have to be such a wiseass."

Logan replied the only way he could under the circumstances. Reminding himself that Paris was a close friend of Rory's, he bit his tongue. Hard. If there was a chance in hell of him getting somewhere with Rory, winning Paris over - or at least getting her to hate him less - had to be a part of his game plan.

"You're right, Paris. I'm sorry."

"Okay. You know it's probably all the steroids and bulking products you use. That stuff has a tendency to cause aggressive behavior. I had this one patient -"

"Yes. I'm obviously very aggressive," he mumbled under his breath as Paris continued to speak.

"So you'll come over and pick up the stuff?"

Tuning back in, Logan realized Paris had concluded her diatribe and was waiting for him to say something.

"Yeah. Sounds good." He figured that was an innocuous enough response; now he just needed to piece together what the hell she was talking about.

"Now, you need to know that it's upstairs. So someone's gonna have to bring it downstairs."

Logan deduced they were back to talking about the baby stuff Paris had for Rory.

"Why can't you and Doyle bring it downstairs before we get there?"
"Oh, yeah! You'd just love that, wouldn't you? Doyle and I are only recently reconciled. I'm trying to not give my kids the same kinda mommy-daddy freakshow I grew up with! And here! You just want us to carry the stuff down the stairs?!!"

"Relax, Paris. I didn't mean to offend you." Or trigger your obvious mental instability, he thought. A simple solution occurred to him. "I'll send Colin and Finn to get it."

"Nice going, Daddy-O! I can't explain the Snoo instructions -much less the car seat!- to those two idiots! You might as well plop him on a Greyhound bus and kiss him goodbye if that kid's surviving infancy depends on those two morons' ability to relay safety instructions!"

In the end, there was nothing to do but resign himself to the inevitable: Logan would be going on a road trip with Colin and Finn to Paris and Doyle's house.

He didn't think it could happen but Friday's Huntzberger family dinner had actually been dislodged from its top spot of The Worst Thing He Had To Do That Week.

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**Wednesday: The New Car**

Wednesday was the day Logan finally made good on his promise to buy a new car. It was late afternoon- after the early hospital visit but before the post-dinner trip. Colin and Finn accompanied him to the dealer. He figured getting the two of them out of the apartment was a worthwhile endeavor. Along the lines of tiring out a rambunctious child. Or exercising a high-energy puppy. Rory stayed behind to work on her book. Arriving back at the apartment, Logan texted her from the sidewalk in front of the building's main entrance.

Logan: Hey, look outside.

Rory: Forget your keys? Do I need to let down my hair?

Logan: Nah. If I ever forget my keys, we'll just catapult Finn up the side of the building.

Logan glanced up from where he stood a few yards from the coffee shop. Ten stories up he saw the distant blur that was Rory walk out onto balcony of her apartment and look down. He tried to interpret her facial expressions and body movements but she was too far away.

"She's gonna hate it, Logan."

"It's fine, Colin."

"Mother likes things simple."

Logan glared at Finn.

"You know she's gonna punch you one of these days, right?"

"Says you." Finn paused for effect. "Daddy."

Shuddering, Logan shook his head. Finn and Colin. He asked them to come out for support. They did provide a support system -albeit a slightly demented one. And they did keep things interesting. But Logan periodically found himself wondering whether things might move more quickly with Rory if he didn't have 'Dumb and Dumber' with him 24/7. Lost in his thoughts Logan started at the sound of a voice.
"So, what is this?"

Suddenly Rory was there. The temperature had warmed during their time visiting Lucas so she’d changed upon their return from the hospital. She now wore a floral print summer dress. Her hair was pulled back in a loose bun with a few tendrils framing her face. She looked beautiful.

She also looked annoyed. Damn if his Rory whisperers hadn't called it again.

"This is our new car, Ace."

"Our new car?"

"Think of it as Lucas's new car."

"Logan, he's barely a week old. He doesn't need a Mercedes."

"I disagree, Ace."

"You tell him Love! I was pushing for the Land Rover."

Logan smothered a chuckle as Rory glanced over her shoulder to briefly redirect her irritation at Finn.

"Logan, I have a perfectly good car. It's a hybrid and -"

"This one's a hybrid! It's just bigger! You - we - are gonna need the extra space."

"Rory, I think you should just go with the Mercedes. They're very safe and excel in crash tests. Even though your car scores well, based on size alone, comparatively, it's not as safe as this vehicle. You have to consider the size of other vehicles on the road. Plus driving in New England winters the all wheel drive is excellent for snow. Logan is right about the space. Strollers. Toys. Play yards. They all need to fit in the car."

The look on Rory's face as she stared at Colin was priceless. Logan could tell she was silently amazed that Colin knew anything about play yards.

"You looked at the crash ratings, Colin?"

"I did."

Frowning, Rory's gaze fell on the car. It was a new/old debate. Logan knew Rory didn't really worry about money even when she was underemployed and pretending to worry about money. He also knew part of the reason she didn't worry was because she was used to keeping her living expenses comparatively low. It was how she'd been raised. Even with a couple of trust funds and an inheritance, she'd grown up with Jeeps and Toyotas. Not Mercedes or Land Rovers.

"Ace, you knew I was getting a new car."

"Yeah. I know. I just didn't realize you'd be getting a $100,000 car."

"It didn't cost $100,000."

"Love, you're a mum now. You have to think of Lucas."

"Yeah," she sighed, a faraway look in her eye. "You're right. I do have to think of Lucas."
"Right. And no self-respecting child wants to be seen in a Toyota."

"Oh my God! You're insane!"

"Thanks a lot, Finn." Logan shot a look at Colin. "Do me a favor. Get him out of here."

"Gladly," replied Colin. "Come on," he waved to Finn. "It's time for 'Judge Judy'."

Logan and Rory were silent as Colin and Finn made their way towards the building entrance. They followed the two men with their eyes before their gazes fell back to one another.

"Rory, it's a safe, family car. I don't think I can be faulted for getting a Mercedes. Colin says Connecticut has the highest Mercedes to household ratio in the country."

Rory let out a disbelieving snort.

"It was half the price of the Land Rover."

"Is it really a hybrid?"

"Yes, it's really a hybrid."

"What about luxury features?"

"Nothing crazy. Just safety features and stuff you'd need to keep kids -or old college friends- occupied during long trips."

As Logan watched Rory swung open the rear passenger door and glanced around the car's interior. Since he was watching her so intently, he didn't miss the nearly imperceptible tilt of her head.

"I saw that."

Confused her eyes shot over to meet his.

"What?"

"You shallow sniffed."

"I did not!"

"I'm pretty sure you did. You know, Ace," his eyes fixed on hers, "we could stash some old books in the back."

Surprised, Rory laughed aloud. Logan's grin grew. Unlike the nervous giggle she often hid behind, he knew this laugh was genuine.

"Though I haven't seen a car with a built-in bookcase, I'm pretty sure it could be done."

"I can't believe you remember that. After all this time."

Logan returned her smile. But the look in his eyes spoke to the underlying seriousness of his next words.

"I remember lots of things, Rory. Probably every thing."

Logan could tell his truthful admission pushed her beyond her comfort zone of them. When she smiled again, this time her eyes were slightly guarded.
"I just love new car smell." Rory inhaled deeply. "Who doesn't? Does it have satellite radio?"

"Yep. And heated seats. Fridge. TV. GPS. Parking assist. So...we good?"

"Yep." Closing the rear passenger door, she nodded at him, a slight smile on her lips. "We're good."

Thursday: The Old Lost Cufflink Ruse

The big night finally arrived. Thursday. It was Logan's job to get Rory to the restaurant. He figured trying to convince her to go to the Capital Grille for dinner two days after dining there with her family was probably a losing battle. So he pretended he'd lost a cufflink during their earlier outing. After turning the car into the parking lot, Logan pulled into a spot and switched off the ignition. With a practiced casual air, he glanced at Rory.

"You coming?"

Puzzled, she returned his gaze. "No..." she replied, a questioning lilt in her voice.

"Come on, Ace. I don't want to leave you alone in the parking lot."

"Why not? I don't need to come in with you. You're perfectly capable of finding your cufflink. Besides, I don't want to waste a second of this new car smell." To punctuate her claim, she shallow-sniffed.

"Ah-ha. Okay. How about you come in with me and we get a drink at the bar? I thought that lactation consultant my sister turned you on to said you should drink?"

Rory laughed. "Wow, you really do have selective hearing. She didn't say I should drink. She said I could drink. Big difference."

"I stand corrected. So what do you say?"

Suddenly something shifted in the air between them. Logan sensed it. He was pretty sure Rory did too. As sunset approached, dancing shadows of the surrounding trees flickered in the car. Logan's eyes rested on Rory as he waited for her answer. When she didn't respond immediately he wondered what was going on in her head. Her features, in profile as she stared out the front windshield, gave nothing away. Abruptly she turned to meet his gaze.

"Is this a date?"

Oh, hell.

He hadn't seen that coming. Suddenly this celebratory dinner seemed like a really dumb, inconveniently timed idea. He felt something tighten, low in his stomach. He needed a second to catch his breath. And to figure out the right answer to her question.

What the hell was the right answer?

"Do you want it to be a date?"

"You can't answer my question with a question."
All of a sudden, Logan recognized where he was. How could he not? It was familiar terrain.

He was right between *Rock* and *Hard Place*.

If he said 'yes' he'd risk the comfort level they'd managed to build over the past week. If she wasn't ready, she'd tell him immediately. And possibly shut down. But, if she was ready, that would be...perfect.

*When -in his life - was anything perfect?*

If he said 'no,' but she was ready, she'd feel rejected. If he said 'no,' and she wasn't ready, she'd take comfort in the idea that they're both not ready, and she might use it as an excuse to retreat and go back to talking bullshit about "co-parenting."

Debating the pros and cons of how to proceed, Logan finally came to a resolution. He picked up Rory's hand and held it firmly between both of his. Rory's eyes followed the movements of his hands before traveling back up to his eyes.

"The next time I ask you out on a date, Rory Gilmore, I will have the perfect date planned. Since I didn't have a chance to do that tonight, this is just a Connecticut Baby Daddy taking his beautiful Baby Mama out for a glass of wine because he wants her to know how extremely grateful he is to have a beautiful albeit likely diabolical son with her and also how extremely grateful he is to have her in his life."

As Logan spoke he'd kept his eyes on Rory. Though she continued to hold his hand, at the end of his little speech she'd once again shifted her gaze away from him to stare out the front of the car. When she finally turned back to face him, he saw tears coursing down her cheeks. As he watched, he heard her take an unsteady breath.

"Ace, Ace. I did not say that to make you cry. Please, Rory." Freeing a hand, Logan pulled his handkerchief out from his jacket pocket. He dabbed the tears on her cheeks. "I'm running out of handkerchiefs, Ace. I'm gonna have to borrow from Finn and Colin and I *really* don't want to do that."

Rory laughed. "I don't blame you. Who knows where they've been?"

"Exactly."

"You could buy some."

"True. Easier said than done. Little busy these days."

"Right." Rory took the handkerchief from Logan and finished wiping away her tears. "Why do you keep insisting Lucas is diabolical?"

"What he did today for one."

"But you were so proud of him! What did you say? 'That's -',

"'That's my boy!' Yeah," Logan nodded. "Well, I was. And I still am. He's a smart kid. He's gonna keep us on our toes. You're the one who him called wily."

"He is wily. It just took me by surprise. His scooching around to find my breast."

"A little explorer. Our very own Magellan."
Rory laughed at Logan's comment.
"You know - what he did - is actually normal newborn behavior."

"And that's exactly what he is."

"Yeah." Suddenly she was smiling. Tears gone. "He is. It just surprised me. He's getting bigger. And stronger."

Logan, suddenly ridiculously happy, smiled.

"So am I buying you that drink? Got the black Amex. We can go top shelf."

"With an offer like that, Huntzberger, how could I possibly refuse?"

"That's my girl." Logan brought her hand up to his lips and dropped a featherlight kiss.

Rory narrowed her eyes as she once more gifted him with the Rory Look. He wasn't disappointed. He'd expected that reaction to his slightly condescending term-of-endearment.

"You know I actually love that look."

"I know. I figure that's why you goad me."

"Probably. Let's go."

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_Thursday: For She's the Jolly Good Mommy_

Logan had taken Rory's hand in his when he'd helped her out of the car. He continued to hold her hand as they made their way from the parking lot to the restaurant. Once the couple walked into the restaurant, the hostess, a twenty-something blonde wearing a black skirt and white fitted blouse, was quick to greet them.

"Table for two?"

"Actually, I called earlier. We dined here two nights ago. I lost a cufflink. I spoke with the manager, Dave. He said he'd look for it."

"Oh, Dave! Dave! Right! I know all about this! All about this!" Eyes wide, the woman rifled through some papers on her podium.

As Rory shot a curious look at the hostess, Logan said a silent prayer of thanks that the woman hadn't said more. Her skills at subtlety were non-existent. He was fairly certain she had it in her to ruin the surprise.

"So, the good news is Dave found your watch!"

"Cufflink," corrected Rory.

"Oh, right! Did I say watch?"

"Yeah, you did. And he hates watches." Rory gestured to Logan. "We both do."

"Why would you hate watches?"
Rory shrugged. "We just do."

Logan wasn't sure when it had started, but it seemed that they were halfway into a bit. He decided to play along.

"The whole paying attention to the passage of time thing." He grinned at Rory before turning to the hostess. "It just seems over-rated."

"Yeah," agreed Rory. "Like if we all agreed -all of a sudden - that we weren't gonna wear watches, and we weren't going to look at clocks, really what would change?"

"You might miss the first few minutes of 'The Late Show, Ace.'"

"Uh-huh. I have an internal clock."

"And it runs like clockwork?"

"Exactly."

The hostess had just been standing there, immobilized, silently listening to their banter.

"Uh, anyway...So Dave put your watch in the lost and found." The woman gestured to a room located to her left. She continued in a stage whisper. "It's in the Board Room. Right over there."

Rory glanced at the door and then back at Logan. Seeing her face, he stifled a smirk. The cat was so out of the bag.

"Door's closed."

"So? Just open it. The only thing in there is your watch. I swear."

"Riiight." Logan bit back his laughter at Rory's obvious skepticism.

With a chuckled "Thank you," Logan led Rory away from the hostess's podium.

"Huntzberger?"

"Yeah, Ace?"

"Is a psychotic knife-wielding clown gonna jump me if I go in that room?"

"Don't know what you're talking about."

Rory stopped them in their tracks. She gave Logan the Rory Look.

"You're slamming me with that look today!" he laughed.

"Well?" she replied with no small amount of impatience.

Recognizing that the jig was up, Logan couldn't waste a golden opportunity.

"Since Paris and Doyle couldn't make it, I'm gonna say the answer to your question is 'no'."

Rory chuckled. "Ah! Paris probably didn't want to come cause she knew I'd expect her to bring the stroller and the crib. And she doesn't want to because she and Doyle would have to go upstairs to get them."
Logan really didn't want to go back down the path -or stairs - to CrazyLand.

"Okay, so here's the deal." Logan guided Rory to a spot along the wall near the still-closed door of the Board Room. "There's a room full of people looking to surprise you. You think you can play along?"

"Of course I can play along. I'm the Queen of Playing Along."

"Good to know, Queen."

Pausing, Logan tucked several stray hairs behind Rory's ear. Making the most of their proximity -and of what he saw in Rory's eyes - Logan leaned down and kissed her full on the lips. He held back from deepening the kiss. Once initiated, kissing Rory was hard thing to pull back from. There had always been a connection between them. Like an electrical current that buzzed along, dormant until there was something to conduct it. Like a kiss. Or a touch.

*Or Lucas* he found himself thinking.

It was Rory who broke the kiss before it got too heated.

"Uh, don't we have someplace to be?"

"Yeah."

"Don't sulk. Next time just tell my mom 'no.'"

From her comment, Logan surmised Rory thought the party was Lorelai's idea. He'd just let her think that. It didn't matter. In the meantime, he couldn't help but see the implied possibility in Rory's words. *Next time...* now, that was an offer he couldn't refuse. He wouldn't refuse. He smiled at her.

"You ready, Ace?"

"Ready!"

Walking to the door, Rory pushed it open to chorus of voices.

"Surprise!"

Rory's blue eyes were wide as she took in the restaurant's private dining room. Logan, looking around, smiled. Lorelai had proven herself a very capable ally. Not only had she delivered on the guests, but balloons and flowers decorated the perimeter of the room.

"Oh, wow! Thank you!" Rory threw her arms around Logan. Waving across the room to Lorelai, she called out to her mother. "Thanks mom! Thanks Luke!"

"Now, remember how we practiced?" Hearing Finn, Logan shot a look at his friend.

"Hey, is that Gigi?" called out Rory.

"Rory! I just flew in this afternoon."

Logan watched as Rory went over to greet her half-sister.

"Lana! Dad! Hi! Grandma! Jack!"

"One...two...three...*For she's a jolly good mommy, For she's a jolly good mommy, For she's a jolly..."
"good mommy, which nobody can deny..."

"Wait. Those aren't the real lyrics, are they?" asked Jackson.

"No." It was Lane who answered. "It's 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow.' And did you know that's actually the second most popular song in the English language? After 'Happy Birthday to You'?

"You ever notice it's the same tune as 'The Bear Went Over the Mountain'?" asked April.

Zach proceeded to alternate humming lines from 'For He's a Jolly Good Fellow' and 'The Bear Went Over the Mountain'.

"Whoa! I never noticed that!" Zach seemed pretty freaked out by April's revelation. "And Lane and I actually sang the bear song to the boys. How'd I never pick up on that?"

Sookie's husband Jackson was similarly shocked by the revelation. "Why do they do that?! I hate when they do that! It's like the songs are leading double lives!"

"Yeah!"

"Calm down, Jackson."

"You too, Zach. There's plenty of songs that lead double lives. We just call it plagiarism now."

"Oh. Right."

"Hey, thank you for coming."

"Of course, Logan," answered Sookie. "Wouldn't miss it for the world. You know next month we're having our soft opening at the Dragonfly annex. You and Rory, of course, have to come. And you should bring your two friends. What're their names again? The squirrelly one? And the tone deaf guy who won't stop singing?"

"That's actually what we call them, Sookie."

"Really?!"

"No. They're Colin and Finn."

"Oh! Well we have a 30-Something Gang in Stars Hollow. All single. Half of them are female."

"Good to know. Is there a date for the opening?"

"Saturday June 24. Will Lucas be out of the hospital by then?"

"Definitely. He's pretty attached to his mom. Now that she's out, I think he's angling for an early release."

"Oh, that's so sweet."

"Logan?"

Hearing Emily from across the table, Logan made his way to the other side of the table.

"Emily. Jack. Good to see you again."

"I heard you tell Sookie you and Rory are going to the Dragonfly opening in June."
"It depends on Rory and Lucas but I don't see why we wouldn't."

"So you're not planning on returning to London?"

Logan nearly laughed aloud. These days he gave little thought to his former life in London.

"Emily, nothing's official but I'm kinda having a hard time seeing myself moving back to London full time. We'll see."

"Hm. Well, if you think you'll be around I wanted to invite you and Rory and Little Lucas to Nantucket for July 4 week. It's far enough away, being away from Lucas's doctors for a few days shouldn't be an issue. Hopefully Luke and Lorelai can make it that week. There's fireworks and all kinds of family events scheduled."

"You have to join us Logan. I promised this lovely lady a lobster bake and since she keeps inviting more people, I'm realizing I'll be the one in hot water if I don't get some help!"

"Oh, Jack!" Logan's eyes nearly fell out of his head at seeing Emily flirting with not-boyfriend Jack.

"Jack, Emily. I'll definitely see what I can do. That's by far the second best offer I've had today."

"Second?" asked Emily.

"First came from your granddaughter."

"Well. We certainly can't compete with Rory."

Hearing her voice, Logan zeroed in on where Rory stood talking with Luke and Lorelai, her father, sister, and a woman he assumed was Chris's girlfriend, Lana.

"It's really nice. It's got that new car smell. A refrigerator, which is great for the baby. GPS and it talks you through parallel parking like a patient drivers ed teacher. Oh, and I'm 60% sure he was joking but Logan offered to have a bookcase installed in the back."

Logan was smiling at Rory's words when she happened to glance over and catch him watching her. She returned the smile and gestured for him to join her. He nodded to Emily and Jack before making his way to Rory.

"I wasn't joking, Ace. Just say the word, and we can have that new car smelling like old books in no time."

So far it had been a really good week.

AN: Time is starting to move now. I hope this chapter format wasn't overwhelming. Thank you for reading. The idea of Finn getting into bed with Logan was inspired by Ch. 7 of Dollsome's "Revival Remix: The Rory and Logan are Married! AU." Next up is Huntzberger Family Dinner. Who thinks Logan's week is about to get real sucky, real fast?
As he rang the doorbell of his parents' West Hartford home, Logan remembered he still had a key to the house. Somewhere. Probably in a drawer back in London. He wondered if it would be less anxiety-inducing if he just let himself in. He doubted it. There was something metaphorical about the way both he and Honor's natural resting state with their parents was at arm's length. Even though they both had keys - and he knew Honor had one as well - they'd never use them.

Their parents, on the other hand, had no qualms whatsoever about stepping over boundaries when it came to their children.

"Mr. Huntzberger."

Logan nodded politely to the maid. Though he recognized her, he wasn't sure of her name. Shelly?

"Your mother is in the living room."

"Thank you."

Logan started to make his way down the hall, 'Shelly' a few steps behind. Shira had spent much of the prior year redecorating. Since she hadn't removed any of the marble that covered the floor, the walls and the pillars, it looked pretty much the same. A new table. Different vases. Repositioned artwork. Rory had been to the house once but she'd seen it for what it was: it was a museum not a home. The ringing of the doorbell interrupted his thoughts. Halting, he turned back towards the entrance.

"Hi Shelly! Is my -" Glancing past the maid, Honor spotted him immediately. "Little Brother! You're here!" Her pleased acknowledgement quickly morphed into puzzled confusion. "How the heck did you get here ahead of us? Did you rush over? Don't tell me you're actually looking forward to dinner?!"

Smiling, he backtracked to the entrance.

"Don't you know it. Wouldn't miss it for the world." Logan pulled Honor into a bear hug, which she happily reciprocated. "Can't fault a guy for being happy to see his sister."

"Wow. I could get used to you being back in the States. If you were here all the time, I might even be able to skip my second therapy session."

"Ah, always looking out for your own self-interest. A true Huntzberger."

"See? You pointing out stuff like that already makes you a better therapist than my current one!"
"All right." Finally separating from his sister he held out a hand to his brother-in-law. "Josh, my man. Sorry to leave you holding the bag in London."

Josh shrugged, a sardonic grin on his face. "Par for the course."

Logan barked out a laugh. Josh could be surprisingly funny. "Truer words have never been spoken."

"Well, jokes aside," Josh looked at his wife, "you'd do the same for Honor. So..."

Logan nodded. "More true words." Throwing an arm around his sister, he sandwiched himself between the married couple. In a low voice, he posed a question to his sister. "You know anything about this?"

"Not much. Dad got in last night. Rene's still pissed. Odette got her stuff out. Mom's still hoping you'll work things out..."

"What? What things?"

"With Odette."

"You're kidding."

Surprise! He had to hand it to Emily; she had Shira's number. When his mother had her mind made up about something, it was very hard to poke through.

"Wish I were. The Botox must be seeping into her brain."

"There you two are! Three. Hello Josh." Shira bestowed a saccharine smile on her son-in-law. "Don't dawdle. Come. Honestly. It seems like the doorbell rang a half hour ago. Here I am, nursing my martini, waiting for my guests. It doesn't look right for a woman of my status to be drinking alone."

"Never stopped you before." Hearing Honor's mumbled words, Logan choked back a laugh. His sister had definitely gotten more brave in the past ten years. Financial independence and a happy marriage looked good on her.

"You all right, Logan?" While she may have ignored Honor's comment, their mother was apparently hyper-focused on him.

"Fine, mom." Logan offered his sister a cheeky smile, which she returned.

"Your father is upstairs. He'll be down shortly."

"Great."

Honor and Josh settled themselves on the sofa furthest from the dining room, while Logan perched himself on the edge of the other sofa. Shira sat in her usual spot, on one of the wingback chairs perpendicular from the fireplace.

"Isn't this nice? We haven't had a family dinner at home in forever." Shira set her gaze on each of them but it seemed to Logan that she was purposely averting her eyes when she looked at him.

"Yes. It's very nice," agreed Honor.

Just when he was wondering if he'd imagined it, Honor shot him a 'what the hell?' look. Something was definitely up with Shira.
"Logan. Honor. Josh. Good to see you kids." And here was Mitchum. If there was one thing that could be said about his father, the man knew how to make an entrance. Impeccably attired in a thousand dollar suit, Logan knew his father would be dressed like that for dinner, regardless of whether or not he'd left the house that day. As Mitchum leaned in to drop a kiss on Honor's cheek, Logan and Josh both stood to shake his hand. "Everyone drinking? Martinis okay?"

"Sounds good." Logan agreed while his sister and brother-in-law nodded.

"So Logan," Mitchum's eyes bore into his. "How's fatherhood?"

Expecting his father to say something about HPG, Logan was mildly surprised that his first words were about Lucas.

"It's good. Very good. I emailed some new pictures earlier. Don't know if you had a chance to see them yet."

"No," his father shook his head. "Not yet."

"No," seconded Shira. "I haven't been on the computer."

"I saw them, Logan! He's still beautiful!"

"Well, his mother and I said 'no' to his shaving his head and the face piercings," joked Logan. "Good looking kid," grinned Mitchum. "Takes after his grand-dad."

"I'll be sure to tell Chris Hayden you said so."

To anyone else, Logan's comment would be taken as good-natured jibe. But Logan knew it would rub Mitchum the wrong way. He wasn't sure why he deliberately baited his father. He'd probably attribute it to the strange undercurrent in the room. He felt like he needed to push buttons to solicit a reaction.

"Has Christopher met the baby?" Shira's gaze was fixated on the stem of her martini glass.

"Yes. He came by on Monday."

"Francine?"

"No. Rory doesn't really have a relationship with her."

"What a shame. A grandparent not being included in their grandchild's life."

Okay. That editorial was a bit on the nose.

"Did you see Emily this week? And Rory's mother?"

Glancing at his mother, Logan could tell Shira was trying to be nonchalant. It wasn't working. He saw the cracks in her veneer.

"Rory's family comes to the hospital pretty much every day."

"Oh? I heard Jack Smith was there."

Definitely a hint of accusation that time. Shira was upset that Jack Smith was welcomed at the hospital, while she was not?
"Jack's friends with Emily. He brought her to the hospital. He didn't see the baby."

"Oh!"

**Why did I say yes to a martini?**

Logan stood and walked over to the beverage cart. "I'm having a scotch. Anyone?" Pouring himself a fresh drink, Logan took a sip before returning to his seat. "So? What's going on? You're not exactly being subtle. You wanna see my son?" Logan let out a harsh chuckle. "You're gonna have to be respectful towards his mother. There is no way I'm putting her in the cross hairs with you again. Not after that watch stunt you pulled."

Shira threw Mitchum a 'see? I told you' look. Logan set his glass down -loudly -on the coffee table.

"Well? What is it?"

"Don't you think you're being a little paranoid?" Shira smiled, finally meeting his gaze.

"No, I don't. But let's ask Honor." Logan caught his sister's eye. "Honor. Do you think I'm being paranoid?"

"Isn't paranoid when a person's unreasonably worried about something they have no reason to be worried about?"

"Yeah."

"No. I don't think that's it."

"Thank you. Now. What's going on?"

"Rory Gilmore is not capable of raising the Huntzberger heir."

And there it was. Logan swore he could feel his eye twitching.

"Lucas is eleven days old. His mother holds him and feeds him. He seems pretty content. What exactly is he missing out on?"

"Of course now it's fine. He's just a baby. When you and Honor were babies you spent most of your time with nannies. I'm talking about when he's older. Rory was not raised to have a role in society. She has no understanding of *noblesse oblige*. Or family responsibilities. If she did, that child would know all his grandparents."

"First. *Noblesse oblige*? Last time I checked we weren't members of the French aristocracy."

"You know what I mean, Logan."

Logan could only stare at his mother. Hearing his father say his name, he turned his gaze to Mitchum.

"Logan, you know I don't care about a lot of this stuff. But your mother raises a valid point. Now. Hear me out." Logan focused on his father's animated hand movements. "Someday Rory will inherit millions from Emily. Maybe even from her father -if he doesn't run the company into the ground. Does she know how to handle that kind of money?"

"Oh please, Mitchum. That girl can't even handle keeping herself employed."
Logan felt like he had to lift his jaw up from the floor. Incredible. Of all the things to attack? Rory's career?

"That's what you want to sink your claws into, mom? Seriously?"

Shira made a face at Logan's words. "And I might as well say this now. I do not understand the strange closeness between Rory and her mother."

"Excuse me?"

"Logan. Don't pretend you don't understand me."

"I'm not pretending, Mom. I don't understand you."

"It just seems that they're very close."

Logan let out a heavy sigh. "Yes, they're close. Just because you and Honor...are not as close because Honor can't stand you "doesn't mean Rory and Lorelai are on the short list for "Grey Gardens 2."

"You said it; I didn't."

Stealing a glance at Honor, he saw his sister's expression was determined. Catching her eye, Logan saw his sister's lips furl into a smile. Meeting Josh's gaze, Logan detected a similar look of encouragement.

Par for the course.

"Okay, I see the kid gloves are off. Yes, Rory was raised by a single mom and she was an only child. Yes, Lorelai was young when she had her. Yes, they've always been close. End of story." It was also the end of his drink. Rising to his feet, he made his way to the cart to pour another scotch.

"How was Rory going to provide for Lucas?"

"She doesn't need to provide for Lucas. He has a father." Sipping his scotch, Logan remained by the cart.

"A father she was all too willing to shut out of his life."

"No. She was going to tell me. She tried to tell me. To hell with this. We're not discussing it again." Logan reclaimed his seat.

"Logan, you have to see -with her very different upbringing - Rory isn't equipped to prepare a child for the responsibilities associated with being a Huntzberger."

"For crissakes, Mom. I'm sure Grandma and Grandpa said the same thing about you."

"Logan." Mitchum shook his head. "Don't be disrespectful."

"It's the truth, isn't it?"

"No, you know what the truth is?" Shira's voice rose sharply. "The truth is this girl's had you wrapped around her finger for twelve years. When I think of how close you were to marrying Odette, I could cry!"

"That makes two of us!"
"Logan. You think this is funny?"

"No. I don't actually."

"What do you think is next, Logan? You think your little family is gonna run off into the sunset?"

"I don't know what's next. A lot of things are still up in the air. And that's mostly on account of you."

"Logan. Listen to me. There's still a chance. Odette -"

"No! You listen! I don't want to hear another word about Odette! That bi - " Logan paused. When he continued, his voice was calm. "Odette blocked Rory on my phone. Odette's the reason I missed the pregnancy. Missed Lucas's birth. You know this. We talked about this."

Suddenly, the room filled with a pregnant silence. Logan sensed something was coming.

"Logan," his mother's voice was cool this time. Detached. "It wasn't Odette who blocked Rory on your phone. It was me."

Rising angrily, Logan spun around to glare at his mother in disbelief.

"What?!" Stunned, Logan could barely get the words out. "Why would you do that?! When?"

"Sit down. Please. Let me explain."

"Logan," his father nodded. "Sit. Hear your mother out."

Still in shock, Logan collapsed back onto the sofa, his eyes glued to his mother. It wasn't lost on him that she was finally able to look him in the eye.

What the fuck?

"You, your father, and I were having lunch at the Dexter House. It was late last summer. You saw a colleague you needed to speak with so you ran off. Your father and I were left there and he told me about the last time he saw you there. It was months earlier and you were with Rory. Instead of planning your wedding, and focusing on your fiancee, and your future, you were spending all your time with the girl who broke your heart. You left your phone on the table. So I blocked her."

Logan's face was grim. He'd totally underestimated his mother. Not that she wasn't capable of doing something so underhanded. But that she had the technical prowess to actually do it. Shock quickly gave way to rage. Logan shot up.

"I don't fucking believe this! How do you even know how to do that?!"

"Good heavens Logan! Carly Fiorina is a dear friend. As is Melinda Gates. Why would you think me a technophobe?"

"I don't know! Because apparently I'm an idiot!" Logan started to make his way down the hallway.

"Logan? Where are you going?"

"Does it matter? I've got to get outta here. Honor, Josh. I'll see you Sunday. Dad, I'll be in touch."

"Mom!" Logan heard Honor's voice as he strode toward the entry. "How can you not see what you did was wrong?!"
"Honor, don't be silly. I had nothing to do with Rory not contacting your brother. If he wasn't responding to her phone calls, she should've sent him a letter. Or better yet. Her lawyer should've sent a letter. I can't help it if the girl has no common sense."

Logan was nearly at the front door when his father caught up to him.

"Logan! Wait up!"

Turning around, Logan scowled at his father.

"What about you? Mom places you at the scene. You in on this?"

"No. I didn't know about this until your mother told me. I remember the lunch. The talk your mother and I had. I left the table right after you. Somebody - I think it was Charlie Whittier - pulled me away."

Nodding furiously, Logan let out an unamused chuckle.

"Here I was thinking it was Odette. I'd apologize if we were on speaking terms."

"Logan, Logan. Listen to me." Logan held his father's gaze. "Your mother thought she was doing the right thing. Given your history, neither of us saw Rory as long term. Put yourself in our shoes. Here, we think you're finally settling down with Odette. Then we find out you're playing house with Rory. Your mother was afraid you were throwing away a chance at happiness on an affair. We both were. Normally, we wouldn't have bat an eye. But this wasn't just an affair. It was Rory Gilmore. We both know to you she's the one that got away. You're flaunting her at family restaurants. And the timing, Logan! You kept pushing the wedding. Once I knew the score, I told Rene to get Odette to move."

"Yeah, but it's not the same thing."

"No, it's not. But we both acted in what we thought were your best interests. Your mother blocked Rory. Yes! But she thought you'd notice right away. She thought you'd try to call Rory later that day. Or the next. Rational or not, your mother assumed you'd know she did it and you'd confront her immediately. Probably before she left London."

"But Dad..." Suddenly exhausted, Logan rubbed his temple. "Rory and I -. We stopped speaking. Stopped calling. Texting. I wasn't contacting her. She wasn't contacting me."

"And your mother had no way of knowing that. Just like she had no way of knowing what she did would come back to haunt us. She didn't do it to keep you away from your son. You have to realize that was a very unfortunate, but very unintentional, consequence."

"I'll take that under advisement."

"Good. So, what's your status with HPG?"

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want you to make any hasty decisions about HPG. You're on leave. How much time did you take?"

'Hasty decisions?' Did his father fear this was the straw that broke the camel's back?

"Three weeks."
"Roll it into a month or two of paternity leave. I'll expect you to call into the strategic development sessions. Other than that you decide what you need to do. At some point, we should talk about relocating you to the East Coast."

"What? Just like that?"

"Logan, I may be many things. Not all of them good. But one thing I am is your and Honor's father. I've always traveled. But I never left you on another continent to fend for yourselves have I?"

"No."

"And I wouldn't expect you to do that either."

"I figured you'd tell me to move them."

"Leaving me to hear about it from your mother?"

Bringing up Shira raised Logan's hackles again.

"Dad-"

"I know. I know. Just remember: Your mother did what she did because she loves you. She remembers how Rory hurt you. We both do."

"Point taken." Logan shrugged. "I don't even know what to tell Rory. This is unreal."

"You should tell Rory the truth. Keeping her in the dark does her no favors. Now. Your mother is one thing. HPG -and your responsibility to keeping the company going -is another. HPG employs thousands all over the world. For companies like ours, insecurity -questions about who's in charge -brings sharks to the surface."

Mitchum paused; Logan, silent, continued to watch his father, expectantly.

"I don't say this a lot. Maybe I don't say it enough. But you're doing a fantastic job. You're smart. And let's not forget: it's in your blood."

Logan, still angry, couldn't help but be bemused. It had probably been five years since he'd last received a compliment from his father. Even if Mitchum did manage to toss a stroke of his own ego into the mix.

"Dad, where's this going?"

"Logan, I'm not getting any younger. I'd like to retire some day. Your mother and I tend to focus on different aspects but it's all tied into the same reality: Lucas is a Huntzberger. You gotta allow him to be one. I asked Charlie Brent to draw up a custody agreement."

"What?"

"Whatever you're hoping for with Rory, eventually, right now you two are not married. I think your mother would feel more comfortable if she knows she's legally entitled to see her grandson. Might calm her nerves."

"But a custody agreement? A custody agreement would entitle me to see Lucas. Not you. All mom's gotta do is stop being insane when it comes to Rory. Then she'll see her grandson."

"And I think it's time we started to talk about that feature article."
"The feature? Yeah, about that. Make sure I get a few minutes with the reporter. I want to be sure they have the full story of how my mother blocked my phone so I didn't even know I was going to be a father until after he was born."

The two men stood staring at one another.

"Fine. We'll drop the article. But not the custody agreement. Really, it's for your own good."

Logically, even Logan could concede it made sense. Emotionally, it seemed like just one more Huntzberger roadblock thrown out in front of him and Rory.

"I'll read it. I'm not agreeing to signing anything. Especially unread."

"Wouldn't expect you to." Mitchum smiled. "Too smart for that."

Yeah, right. If I were really smart, I'd walk out that door and not look back.

AN: Thoughts Re: Shira's action? Logan's reaction? Mitchum's priorities? This is why they say "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Unintended consequences can be a bitch. ITMH is full steam ahead while WITS is on hiatus. I want to "plotify" WITS so I need time to think (and research London). Thank you for reading!

10/14/2017
"So how was dinner with Endora and the Dark Lord?"

Logan, frowning, glanced into the rearview mirror to meet Finn's eyes. The fact that he didn't say a word wasn't lost on either of his two friends.

"That good, huh?" asked Colin. "What happened?"

"What happened..." Logan repeated those words before letting out a humorless chuckle. "I'll tell you what happened. The reason I didn't know about Lucas until last week was because somebody blocked Rory on my phone."

"What?"

"The Dark Lord?"

Logan shook his head. "Shira. She confessed last night." Speeding up, Logan checked the sideview mirror before changing lanes. "Rory and I bumped into my dad at the Dexter House last spring. Months later I'm there with my parents. I step away from the table. Mitchum tells Shira about seeing me there with Rory. He leaves to go talk to someone. Shira picks up my phone and blocks Rory. She did it to teach me a lesson. Figured the next time I went to call Rory, I'd see her number was blocked and -I don't know - I'd somehow know she was the one who did it and I'd confront her. Her plan was to let me know what a philandering fuck-up I was."

"That's unbelievable."

"Yeah."

"What did Mother say when you told her?"

Logan remained silent. The million dollar question. What the hell would Rory say if- no, when - he told her? He had to tell her. He knew that. He would tell her. Christ, even Mitchum said he had to tell her.

The truth shall set you free.

More like the truth will set Rory fleeing for freedom. Again. Away from him. Again.

And him? He'd be left with words. Meaningless words. A custody agreement and a shelf full of "co-parenting" books.

And Lucas a small voice reminded him. A smile played at his lips. Lucas...
"Logan?"

"You didn't tell Rory?"

At his silence, his friends had their answer.

"Mate, you have to tell her. What does she think happened?"

"She knows someone blocked her on my phone." Logan sighed as he changed lanes again. "I thought it was Odette."

"So Rory thinks it was Odette? Because of your suspicions and no proof? And since last night you haven't told her the truth?"

With all his worrying and neuroses, becoming a lawyer was a no-brainer for Colin. Besides, someone had to keep on top of the trade laws to make sure Andrew McCrea didn't slip up. The senior McCrea liked to do as he pleased as much as Mitchum did, legalities be damned.

"Not exactly. Rory thought it was Mitchum."

"This just gets better," muttered Colin.

"Living vicariously through you is very stressful, Logan." Finn sighed. "I'm exhausted and it's only...uh...daylight."

"No kidding."

"I have an idea." A suspiciously brightened Finn suddenly sang out. "As long as we're going to the city, we should stop in and visit my friend the farmer."

"You mean your dealer." Colin shook his head. "Not a good idea. I don't like it at all."

"The man built his own hydroponic farm from the ground up, Colin. I think that warrants a bit more respect than you're giving him. So he chooses to grow marijuana. Doesn't negate the fact that he's actually quite brilliant."

Logan exhaled loudly. He'd probably live to regret it but after the night he'd had, the crap he needed to figure out and the only distraction to look forward to an afternoon with Paris Geller, visiting Finn's farmer friend sounded like a grand idea.

"Where's your 'farmer' live?"

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_Geller-McMaster Residence, Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, New York, 4:30 PM_

"What the hell happened to you? You were supposed to get here over two hours ago."


"I'm not afraid of anything, Paris. We didn't do anything wrong."

"We?"

Paris swung open the door to her brownstone. For the first time, she saw the other two men crowded
"You brought your fan club, Larry." She nodded at Colin. "Curly." At Finn. "I think of you two regularly. Whenever I peruse the 'Indictments' and 'Deaths' sections of the alumni news."

"Thank you. We don't think of you at all."

"How's that munchkin you adopted?"

"Munchkin?"

"I think Colin's referring to Doyle, Paris."

"How dare you call my husband a munchkin." Paris glared at the offending Colin. "He's taller than that. Anyway, he's fine. He took the kids to the zoo with Terence, our marriage counselor."

"And how's business? Scare any babies back into the womb lately?"

"Please. At least I made something of myself. You're Australia's most pointless export since INXS."

"I take offense at that! Personally I think you missed your calling. You'd do quite well as the new Dr. Kevorkian." One of Finn's eyebrows danced upward as he gave Colin a meaningful look.

"Good point, Finn," nodded Colin. "She wouldn't even have to assist. She could just inspire. After a dose of her bedside manner, her patients would be highly motivated to off themselves."

"Exactly!"

"Enough, already!" Logan rolled his eyes. Was this what Rory had to deal with when it was him and Paris? "So, Paris... where's the crib and stuff?"

"This way."

As Paris stepped into the house, the three men followed her inside.

_Nice place_, thought Logan. He'd never been to the Paris-Doyle marital home. It was obvious a family lived there. An insane family but a family nonetheless. He felt a pang of envy.

Paris pointed to the staircase. "This place is five stories. Once you get to the top floor, the door all the way to the right is a storage room. Some of the stuff's in that room. The rest is in the attic. There's a rope pull to get the steps to the attic to drop down. It's not a full height attic. You'll have to crawl."

"Goody!" replied Colin. "Hear that, Finn? There's a rope at the end of this!"

"And crawling. Don't forget the crawling. Too bad Robert's not here. He likes to crawl."

"Like a good part of your life hasn't been spent on your knees!"

"I'd say the best part of my life has been spent on my knees!" quipped Finn.

"Ew. Dear God." Paris shuddered. "Spare me the details of your debauchery-filled lives."

Logan and Paris hung back as Colin and Finn slowly made their way up the stairs.

"So how's the manning up going, Huntzberger?"

Grimacing, Logan's eyes cut to meet Paris's.
"That good, huh?"

The two followed behind Colin and Finn. Logan found he didn't have it in him to run up stairs, no matter how badly he wanted to put distance between himself and Paris.

"Don't you dare hurt her."

"I'm not planning on hurting her."

"You didn't 'plan' on getting her pregnant, either. Did you?"

Sighing, Logan shook his head. "No."

"Last week, Doyle and I watched 'Star Wars' with the kids. 'Common Sense Media' says they're still a little young, but I figure, hey, they live in New York. They see stranger stuff at the park. Besides now that Doyle's a screenwriter, it's only a matter of time before they're watching his movies. Might as well get them started on the good stuff. I can't be the only one trying to keep him honest."

"Is there a point to this, Paris?"

"The point is this, Huntzberger: 'Do or do not. There is no try'. The tao of Yoda. You comprende?"

"Yes. I understand."

"Thank God. I wouldn't give your friends a second thought but I'd hope you - at least- would be as smart as a pre-schooler."

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**Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main , 9:30 PM**

Hours later Logan knocked on Rory's door. They hadn't talked at all during the day, their communication limited to a few texts. He hated every minute of his day - even the stop at Finn's farmer had been a bust. The man had apparently moved to Colorado -presumably to go legit -without informing Finn. It hadn't occurred to Finn to try calling the farmer until after they'd wasted an hour driving around the farmer's former neighborhood waiting for Finn to recognize the house by sight or smell. As much of a crap-pile the day had been, Logan was grateful that it had kept him busy. As it was, it hadn't kept him busy enough.

Too much time to dwell on his problems, but not enough time to solve them.

"Hey Ace."

"Hey. Finally. You. Didn't see you at all last night. Got a glimpse for all of five minutes this morning. Not avoiding me, are you Huntzberger?"

Rory was smiling. Was there a chance she actually believed what she was saying? Was he avoiding her?

Yes.

"Hell, no." Smirking, he dropped a light kiss on her lips. "How'd it go at the hospital? Junior behave?"

"Yes. It went fine. We both missed you though."

"I missed the two of you too. Definitely preferable company to Colin, Finn, and Paris."
"Aw, flatterer."

At Rory’s gesture that he come in, Logan made his way inside her apartment. With the exception of the bonus room that provided access to the roof, Rory’s unit was the mirror image of his apartment. Following her lead, he walked through the apartment to the living room at the front. Glancing out at the night sky, he took a seat on the sofa. Rory perched next to him, one leg folded under the other.

"How was the visit with Paris?"

"'How was the visit with Paris?' she asks. You know you're a sadist."

"What? Why?"

"Why? You're kidding, right? You sent me on a six hour round-trip drive to New York with Colin and Finn."

"Your two best friends."

"Notwithstanding, they can be a handful on car rides. Hungry. Thirsty. Need a bathroom. Need to smell western Connecticut. Then with the traffic, it just became so incredibly long."

"A hero's journey."

Logan barked out a laugh. "Hardly. I think Old Joe would've tossed Finn out at New Haven."

"I kinda hope Joseph Campbell would be a little more zen than that. Anyway, so what happened? Colin and Finn were fine on the ride to New Hampshire."

"Of course they were fine on the ride to New Hampshire. They were also shit-faced and high. And Paris wasn't there."

"Oh. Now, that would've been something. Paris in the rumble seat. So, you tell her you agree with her Jung theory?"

"What do you think?"

"Yeah, I figured." A big smile suddenly spread across her face. Rubbing her hands together like a little kid, she nodded excitedly. "Okay, so what'd we get? Tell me about Paris's booty."

"Paris's booty? There's something very wrong with you."

"Ah, come on! Tell me what we got!"

"It's Christmas in July to you, isn't it?"

"No! I know it's only May. You know how much I love a good deal! And it's from Paris so it's all but guaranteed to be top-of-the-line baby gear, even if it is a few years old. She had two of everything so some of it's barely used. By recycling and not buying new we're keeping perfectly good baby gear from winding up in a landfill somewhere. And the only reason Paris and Doyle even still had all that stuff is because they could never find anyone willing to go upstairs to get it. So I figure we scored big time!"

"So no one on the eastern seaboard was willing to spend an afternoon of their life going up and down Paris's stairs until me, Colin and Finn arrived on her doorstep?"

"Pretty much."
"You saying we're suckers?"

Rory didn't respond. She just smiled benignly. Logan, Colin, and Finn had sacrificed their knees so they could reuse the Geller-McMaster baby gear. The three of them would've happily kicked in five - ten - thousand a piece if it would've spared them spending their day the way they had. But they all loved Rory and old habits were hard to break. And she wanted to do it this way.

"You know something, Ace?"

"What?"

"I think it was worth every minute of the pain and aggravation. But if we do wind up in the hospital getting knee surgery, promise me you'll sic the male nurses on Finn. Colin already had his share. And I..."

"You what?"

"I kinda got spoiled by the caregiver I had the last time I was in the hospital."

"Oh, you did? Did you?"

"You bet."

"You got yourself a deal, Huntzberger."

"Thank you."

Rory smiled. "So...?"

"Right," nodded Logan. "We got something called a SNOO Smart Sleeper -"

"Ooh! They're backordered for months! That's great! But why would she even have that? Her kids are too old. It just came out."

"Apparently the doctor who invented it is -as Paris put it -a blatant, unrepentant sales whore. He's trying to get her to promote stuff so he gives her freebies. We're supposed to put Lucas in it, read the 1000-page instruction manual, and report back on how he sleeps."

"Sounds good. What else? Car seat? Stroller?"

"Yes. And yes. Some other stuff too. Books. DVDs."

"Cool. Was Doyle there?"

"Doyle was at the zoo with the kids and Terence, their marriage counselor."

"Terence? Terence their marriage counselor? You're kidding!" Rory, an amazed look on her face, chuckled.

"Why's that surprise you? I would've put money on those two having a team of marriage counselors."

"Paris had a life coach during college named Terence. I guess you never meet him?"

Small favors. "No, Ace."
"Anyway, I always thought he was a bit creepy but he worked wonders for Paris. If you'd known her at Chilton, you'd have seen that she actually mellowed quite a bit at Yale."

"I'll take your word for it."

"Terence went to jail for writing fake scripts. But then he got out. Oh, but then he might've been brought up on charges for credit card fraud. I honestly lost track. I wonder if it's the same Terence?"

"I have no idea. So, the stuff's all down in the storage room. Just call the doormen. They'll bring it up whenever you're ready."

"Great. Though the car seat needs to go in the car because we have to bring it to the hospital. For Lucas to be released he has to be able to breathe okay in the car seat. So we bring the car seat in and put him in it, and the doctors will monitor his breathing. And they also have someone on staff who'll make sure we know how to assemble the car seat and install it properly in the car."

"Speaking of, does the doctor still think he'll be out this week?"

"Yeah," she nodded happily.

Rory had apparently exhausted everything she'd wanted to ask about Logan's day and everything she'd wanted to say about the baby gear; she fell silent. As Logan watched her face, he saw the gradual transition from light-hearted to serious. And he figured he knew what was coming.

Please don't.

"Logan?"

"Yeah, Ace?"

"How'd the family dinner go? I talked to Honor earlier - you know - about the plans for tomorrow. I asked her about the dinner. She just said it went well."

Logan knew -logically- that he had to tell Rory the truth about what had happened with his parents. But he was still in shock over it. He was suffering from Huntzberger overload. He was fully aware of the fact that he was royally screwed; he just hadn't yet processed all the ways in which he was royally screwed.

Shira. Custody agreement.

"Dinner was fine."

"Did you talk to Mitchum about the article?"

Logan had to force back a sarcastic laugh. Here was a question he could actually answer honestly.

"Yeah, Ace. I did. No more article. Don't give it another thought."

"What?! That's it?! No article?!"

"That's it! No article."

"Thank God!" Rory threw her arms around him. "That's such good news! So the dinner was okay?"

"Yeah, Ace." Logan reciprocated her hug, breathing in the scent of her hair. If only him saying it could make it true. "The dinner was okay."
"I'm so glad! Sunday was horrible but maybe we turned a corner."

He held her tight.

"Maybe we did, Ace."

AN: Snap. Oh, Logan! Why? Next chap is LoRoLu. My hope is to finish ITMH by end of the year.
"We almost there?"

Glancing over at her, Logan saw that Rory wasn't looking at him. She was looking wistfully out the car window.

"Few more minutes. You know you could've sat in the back and watched tv."

"Ha-ha." At a buzzing sound, they both glanced at his phone where on the center console. "Honor texted you."

"Can you see what it says?"

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Rory grab the phone.

"She says she's running late. We should stop by the house after, not before. She'll meet us at Nordstrom Baby at 3." Rory made a face. "Now we have over an hour to kill. We could've stayed with Lucas longer."

"Ace, don't worry about it. How about we get a coffee?"

Rory's lips twisted into a smile.

"Okay."

Logan exited the highway. Within a few minutes they were pulling up to the drive-through window of a Starbucks. Slipping the gear shift into park, Logan turned to Rory.

"What do you want, Ace?"

The words barely out of his mouth, Logan was mildly surprised when Rory immediately unfastened her seatbelt, scooted across her seat, and leaned over him so she could speak directly to the barista.

"Could I please get a non-fat macchiato with a dollop of caramel syrup? But do you have low in sugar syrup? But not the kind with artificial sweeteners? Maybe made with Stevia or the other low-sugar sugar made from cane sugar but not having as much sugar as regular sugar?"

"You sure about that, Ace?" laughed Logan.

The male barista's eyes narrowed into slits. "We don't have that low-sugar sugar. Either as a syrup or as a sugar. We do have Stevia. But not in a syrup. Just the packets. And I'm pretty sure we're out. Our delivery comes in an hour if you want to wait."

"Damn. No. We can't wait."
"Why not just go with the real thing, Ace?"

"Why do you think? Cause I need to lose the baby weight!"

"Rory. You look terrific. And I'm not just saying that because it was my baby."

"Oh no. I tried on my favorite pair of jeans this morning. I couldn't zip them. I'm definitely carrying around too much junk in the trunk."

"'Junk in the trunk'? That sounds dirty."

"It's not dirty. It just means I need to lose weight."

"Where do you get this stuff?" Logan chuckled. "Urban Dictionary?"

"No," she laughed. "And don't laugh at me. That one I got from my mom."

"Ah, Lorelai..."

"Yes, Lorelai."

"So..." An uncomfortable voice interrupted their conversation. "Uh, you decide on that macchiato?"

Logan, still smiling, swung back to face the barista.

"Yes. Make it two. The works."

"No! Logan!"

"Ace, come on. You only live once. And you were caffeine-deprived for eight months. Let me get my Baby Mama a super-sized macchiato." Grinning, he quirked an eyebrow. "Please."


"Of course," he agreed, also smiling. Logan turned back to the barista. "Two venti macchiatos. Both with non-fat milk."

"Oh my God! That sounds so good!"

"You deserve it, Ace. The kid's got a mean toe kick. I can only imagine how it felt. You know. On the inside of your stomach."

"It wasn't pretty, Huntzberger. I'll tell you that much."

"Uh...That'll be $10.50."

"Ouch."

"Oh please."

Logan handed the young man a twenty. "Keep the change."

After a startled "thank you" from the barista, the two sat in silence waiting for their macchiatos. Playing back their conversation in his head, Logan couldn't help but smile. He loved that they could still have fun together. It had been a tough road, especially the past year, but they still knew how to make each other laugh.
As for the big bad, he knew he had to tell Rory about the latest round of Huntzberger crazy but he wanted them to be able to enjoy the day. He wanted to give her a perfect day. They'd already spent several hours with their son. Next Rory would be shopping for baby gear with Honor. Then they were going to visit with Honor and Josh and their kids in West Hartford.

Logan was really hoping a fun day in the company of the 'normal' Huntzbergers might counterbalance the truth about the dinner.

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was just thinking how much fun I was having. And I think I have an idea for more fun."

"What?"

"Patience, my young Padawan."

"Sir? Your macchiatos are ready."

Logan accepted the first drink and handed it to Rory. "Ace."

Taking the second drink, Logan turned back to the man in the window.

"Hey. Is there a toy store nearby?"

"Yeah. Up the road. Shopping plaza on left. About 2 miles."

"Perfect. Thanks." Coffee in one hand, Logan used his other to steer the car out of the parking lot.

"What do you say? We got an hour. How about we put a dent in the Amex?"

"Logan, he doesn't need toys."

"Every kid needs toys, Ace. Chances are Finn'll break whatever we come home with well before Lucas has a chance to play with it. Come on. How about we just take a look and if we see anything we like, we'll get it?"

"Okay. But nothing crazy. And I don't want to come home with tons of designer baby gear. Honor's not gonna."

"Honor's got all sorts of opinions on stuff. You'll have to debate the merits of designer baby gear with her. But, I have to say, considering your mom's latest obsession, I think you could reconsider the embargo."

"What? Why?"

"For all that she raised a daughter whose upbringing was reputedly austere, your mother seems awfully addicted to that Reese Witherspoon site."

"She is? How can you tell?"

"Totes Y'all? In every color?"

"Oh. It's not like it's GOOP."

"Riiight. Keep telling yourself that."

"Well, it's not! Hey, look!" Rory held her cell phone out to him. "Oh, never mind. You drive. Honor
sent me more baby links. Look at the baby jeans! Now, if I could get you to put on a pair of jeans, I could dress the two of you alike! That would be so cute! All those dimples and denim! Maybe for the Fourth of July in Nantucket."

"I wear jeans." He looked at her bemused.

Disbelieving, Rory looked at him. "When?"

"Maybe not recently. I'm usually dressed for work..."

"I don't remember you wearing jeans in college either."

"That can't be right."

"Yes, it is."

"So Lucas will be raised as a denim-wearer?"

"Baby Gap is at the top of the shopping list."

"And if I disagree?"

"Your opinion will be noted."

"But discarded?" Logan shook his head, chuckling. "You drive a hard bargain."

"Hey, this ain't no five and dime."

"I get that, Rory."

Rory let out a sigh. "You better."

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*Eastbound on Capitol Ave, West Hartford, 7:00 pm EST*

"So...We all set for Junior?"

"Yeah. Should be."

"You have fun? I hope it wasn't too much. I figured Honor'd make sure you got everything you could possibly need. You won't have to shop again. Maybe not ever."

"Yeah." Rory nodded without looking at him. She continued to gaze out the car window. "She's an excellent personal shopper."

Rory fell silent again. It had been like that since they'd left Honor and Josh's house. He'd try to start a conversation; she'd shut it down with monosyllabic responses.

"Their kids are cute."

"Very."

"Lucas'll fit right in with his cousins. You know. When he does stuff other than lie down and sleep."

Rory snickered half-heartedly. "Yeah."

"I had fun playing with them while you two were out shopping. Rolling around on the floor and
pelting my brother-in-law with stuffed animals. What's not to enjoy? And now I have the excuse that I need the practice." Again, Rory said nothing. "I'm sorry about Harper, Ace."

"She's five. She knew Uncle Logan was getting married. It's to her credit she's so smart."

"Yeah. She only met Odette once. Last year around the holidays. I'm surprised she remembered."

"It's okay, Logan. Your five year old niece called me Aunt Odette. She might've only met her once but she's a little girl and her head's full of princesses and brides. Honor told me she's into all things wedding-related. Even if she only met her once, she's thought about her because of the wedding."

"Still. I'm sorry."

"Stop. I wish that was the worst thing a member of your family's ever said to me."

"Got a point there."

Logan apologized for his niece because he thought maybe that was the reason Rory was acting so off. Things had been good between them earlier. Very good. She said the shopping with Honor went well. There certainly were enough packages in the SUV to support that claim.

Maybe it wasn't shopping with Honor; maybe it was something Honor had said. The night before he'd called his sister to tell her not to say anything about Shira and the phone or anything else about the disastrous Huntzberger dinner. Honor, though well-intentioned, definitely had a talent for not being able to keep secrets.

That's it. She knows. Honor told her. Even after I told her not to say anything.

Comparing Rory before shopping with Honor to Rory after shopping with Honor, Logan couldn't see any other explanation. That was it. It had to be. Would Rory tell him what was bothering her if he asked?

"Hey? Ace? What's going on in that head of yours? I can tell something's bothering you."

Rory finally turned her head. Instead of gazing out the passenger side window she was now looking straight ahead out the windshield. Glancing over, Logan took in her profile. The expression she wore was one he'd seen many times; she looked resolute.

"What did your mom serve on Friday?"

Rory bit the words out with determination. She definitely knew.

Sighing, Logan signaled before changing lanes and steering the vehicle onto the shoulder.

"What're you doing? Why are we stopping?"

"I'm pulling over because I don't want to drive off the side of the road while we're talking." Logan put the car in park before turning to face her. "Hey. Could you look at me? Please?"

Rory finally turned to him. Their eyes locked.

"I didn't stick around for dinner. My guess is Honor told you what happened. I'm sorry you heard it from her, not me. It wasn't that I wasn't gonna tell you. It's just that I'm still processing it. I wasn't ready to tell you. And I was being selfish. I wanted us to have a good day."

Without uttering a word, Rory's eyes continued to bore into Logan's.
"I'm sorry Ace." Logan heaved a sigh of frustration. "I wish Honor could've kept her mouth shut for once!"

"Don't blame Honor! It was a misunderstanding. She thought I knew more than I did. Because I told her you and I had talked. And I said that because stupid me thought we had talked. When you told me about the article."

"Right."

"But nothing else."

"Rory -"

"No. Was what you told me true? There's no more article? Honor didn't know a thing about it."

"It's absolutely true. She wouldn't have known about it because it was just me and my dad in the room at the time." Logan paused before continuing. "So...What exactly did Honor tell you?"

"She told me it was Shira who blocked me."

"Yeah. Shira got a hold of my phone. I left it on the table at dinner. She knew from my dad that you and I were in touch. She said she did it so I'd see you were blocked next time I went to call you. She thought I'd confront her about it and she'd tell me what a jerk I was."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Oh."

"When were you gonna tell me?"

"The only reason I didn't say anything was because I was trying to figure out how angry I was. And what I wanted to do about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean... You can't choose your family. But you can choose where you work."

"Oh... Honor said...You'd really leave HPG?"

"I don't know. Maybe. I'm not sure I want to. It's not even the money. I know it's nuts. All my complaining when I was younger. I've been there seven years. Paid my dues." Logan chuckled in self-deprecation. "I know you won't believe this but I'm actually not bad at what I do, Ace. I may even like it."

"I'd believe that in a heartbeat, Logan. I've seen you in action. I know." Rory bit her lip, deep in thought. "Do you really think that's the only choice?"

"I don't know." Logan exhaled; bringing his hand up, he tucked several strands of stray hair behind her ear. "I hope not. But you know those family crests. It's never easy. All that fine print."

"Did anything else happen?"

"Mitchum asked his lawyer to draft up a custody agreement."

"A custody agreement? Oh!" Logan could hear the surprise in her voice. And maybe a tiny bit of hurt. "We haven't -" She stopped. "Is that what you want?"
"Rory. You know what I want. If I got what I wanted, a custody agreement wouldn't be necessary."

"What about London?"

"Ah! The silver lining or the poisoned apple?"

"What do you mean?"

"My dad says he'll support my moving back to the east coast."

"That's great. Just like that?"

"Just like that."

"You suspicious?"

"Of course. They can't handle not calling the shots. So bring me back. Get a custody agreement. It's all to make sure they get time with their grandson."

Rory sighed. "Is that why he agreed to drop the article?"

"He agreed to drop the article because I told him I'd tell the reporter all about Shira's phone trick."

Rory laughed aloud. "I shouldn't laugh but including that in the article might actually make it an interesting read."

"Agreed."

A silence descended as each of them retreated into their own thoughts. The sound of rubber hitting the pavement created an oddly relaxing background noise. It was a comfortable quiet, not an awkward one. Yes, they had problems but it was theirs to share and resolve together. Logan couldn't help but acknowledge that there was something to be said for not keeping secrets. It was finally Rory who broke the silence.

"Logan. Aside from us getting married, you know having a custody agreement would be the smart thing to do. Lucas and I will be in Hartford for at least a month. After that, the plan was to buy the Oasis and settle in Stars Hollow for a few years. But I still haven't closed on the house, so I don't know."

The plan was to buy the Oasis and settle in Stars Hollow.

Past tense. Things could change. Now she didn't know.

He reminded himself of their track record. Maybe Rory was right and he was wrong. Maybe if they were supposed to be together, they'd already be there. That's what she said. He thought she was scared and stubborn. But maybe he was the one who was delusional.

It was with a forced grin he said his next words. "You ready for a team huddle?"

Rory returned his smile. "No Gatorade but I could dump the leftover macchiato over your head."

It was with a genuine smile Logan reached over the center console and pulled her in for a hug. "God, I love you."

"I love you, too." Logan's smile widened as he felt Rory's arms tighten around him.
Maybe this could work after all.

Logan kissed her cheek, and burrowed his face into the crook of her neck before releasing her.

"So? We continue to be 'those people' dealing with their personal shit on the side of the road? Or we drive to Hartford, wake up our son, and see if he has anything to contribute?"

"You don't think it's too late?"

"I'm pretty sure his schedule's clear, Ace. You okay with your schedule?"

"I took care of my boobs at your sister's so I'm good for now."

"Let's go. The NICU crew'll run out of gossip if the Gilmore-Huntzbergers are away for too long."

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**Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, 8:15 pm**

"Look. Asleep."

"You know he's only faking. His eyes'll open as soon as he realizes you're here."

"That's sweet but I think you're wrong."

Standing over the baby, they watched their son's chest rise and fall with his breaths.

"I can't blame Mitchum and Shira for not wanting to be excluded from his life."

"No. I can't either. But they can be blamed for just about everything else. I'm not gonna put you in a position where they treat you like crap and you feel like you have to suck it up. Cause you don't."

"So we didn't turn a corner, huh?"

Logan chuckled. "No. We did. They haven't. We're a team. We present a united front."

"You. Me. And Lucas."

"Team LoRoLu."

Rory laughed. "You're nuts."

"Hey, if I'm nuts, then sanity's over-rated. I think we've proven a little crazy is good."

"A little crazy is good." Rory's hand caressed Lucas's hand. "Wanna hear something else crazy?"

"Paris want her stuff back?"

"No. It does have to do with baby gear." Rory's eyes met Logan's. "I bought two of everything. Two. Except for the changing tables. I ordered four of those. And even that may not be enough according to your sister."

"Okay," he nodded. "Ace, I'm not worried about the credit card bill if that's what you're concerned about. I really don't think that's that crazy."

"No. It's not that. It's just I got two of everything for a reason. One for Hartford and one for Stars Hollow. I didn't buy things for your apartment."
"His apartment. Not their place. His. They were not together. They were separate.

"Oh. I can get whatever we - I - need. Don't worry about it. I'm not even sure I'm gonna go through with buying that place."

"No. I didn't not buy stuff for your apartment because I didn't think of it. I did. Think of it, that is. It was all I could think about while I was shopping with Honor. I didn't buy it because I figured we wouldn't need it."

*We wouldn't need it.* Logan felt his heart unclench.

"*We wouldn't?*"

"No. *We* wouldn't. I figure I bought enough. For wherever we are."

Logan laughed, his eyes watering.

"Okay. I get your point. We have enough. *For wherever we are.*"

"I mean the apartments are right next to each other. It's like it's one apartment. It didn't seem necessary to have doubles for right next door."

"I agree, Ace."

"And if Lucas and I are in Stars Hollow, I expect you'd stay with us."

"Yeah...?"

"And if you're done with London, then we don't need anything there."

"Makes sense."

"Just. One thing."

"Whatever you want, Rory."

"I want - . No, I need you to tell me everything. Even if you're still processing it. Even if you don't know what it means. It's like that first dinner when you took off. I thought we were done. I thought you'd reconsidered and split. When it comes to your parents, keeping things from me gives them the upper hand."

"Rory. That's not what I intended -"

"It doesn't matter what you intended. That's how it is."

Logan nodded. She was right.

"You're right. I'm sorry. I'll tell you everything. Anything. Even if I have no idea what it means."

"Maybe I can help you figure out what it means."

"Maybe." He sighed. "I told myself I was protecting you."

"You're not. You're trying to protect yourself. But it doesn't work that way."

"I know."
"And he's the one we need to protect."

"You're right. Again."

Logan and Rory fell silent once more. Practically speaking, they knew their hushed tones wouldn't disturb the infant's sleep. At the same time, being near him, watching him sleep so peacefully, was in its own way calming for them. They were both lulled into a meditative state as their eyes focused only on their son's sleeping form.

Eventually, Logan's gaze moved to Rory. It wasn't the first time and he was certain it wouldn't the last time that watching her would inspire within him an overwhelming surge of pride. He'd always been proud of her. She'd always been able to tackle anything she'd set her mind to. Motherhood was no different. No matter how much it wasn't planned, or included on any list.

"Rory?"

Rory brought her eyes away from their son. Meeting Logan's gaze, she waited for him to speak.

"I think you're gonna rock this mom thing."

Rory grinned. "You think?"

Logan's grin matched hers. "You better believe it, Ace."

AN: Whew! So glad they were able to get through that. This way they get to have the fun they deserve. And we get the fun we deserve. There'll be more drama but not between them. New Poll on FF Profile: Arguing SH residents for St. Jess to "fix." Interesting write-ins include Finn/Kirk and Elias/Trix. Thank you so much for the comments and kudos for ITMH. This has been a blast. I love what's coming up but I'll be sad when it's done. But then I get to focus on WITS. Then the post-college fic which I think will include a Connecticut-based cheese-rolling festival.
As Logan stood on line waiting to order at the hospital's Au Bon Pain, he pulled out his cell phone. After the initially disastrous but ultimately victorious conversation with Rory Sunday night, Logan felt that he had to call his sister. To scold/thank her. Logan chuckled quietly to himself. It was so typical of his relationship with Honor. She could be trusted with keeping secrets - especially from Mitchum and and Shira. But throw in a few hours of shopping with another female and all bets were off.

He figured it was good that he knew this now. Especially if they were becoming friends. Not that he had plans to keep anything from Rory. Not if he expected and hoped for her to be honest with him. It was a two-way street. It'd have to be if they had a chance in hell of working out.

"Hey."

"Logan! It was so good having you and Rory over! I can't wait until Lucas is with you! You're a natural! Harper and Joshua loved playing with you. Josh appreciated having a second adult. I'm not much for rolling around on the floor. You're all set! At least as far as playtime goes!"

"Thanks. It was fun. I don't know about being a natural - there's a lot to it. I'd hope I could manage the rolling around on the floor thing without anyone getting hurt." Logan paused, considering what to say about Rory and Honor's conversation. "Listen. Thanks for making the time for the shopping outing. I know Rory really appreciated it."

"Oh, I know. I already talked to her today."

Surprised, Logan made a face. "You did? When?"

"I left her a voicemail last night and she called me back this morning. I'll tell you what I told her. No one need ever thank me for going shopping! It's a vocation, not a hobby! I was happy to help. I still remember the shock of being a first-time mom. I just tried to share some hard-earned lessons."

"It was a big help. Thank you."

"So Rory was happy?"

"Seemed to be." He sighed. "Also, I told her everything."

"Of course you did. She said you two had talked."

"We have now."

"What do you mean? You hadn't talked before? Did I open my big mouth when I shouldn't have?"
"Listen. It doesn't matter. She knows everything now. You did me a favor. I wasn't planning on keeping anything from her. I just needed time to think."

"Logan! There's no time to think when you're married! Especially with our parents! Do you even know what 'In omnia paratus' means?"

"Of course I know what it means."

"So why the hell would you keep Rory in the dark on anything? You know how mom can be! She turned a beautiful vintage Van Cleef and Arpels watch into psychological warfare! Who does that?! Keeping things from Rory does her no favors! Don't you get it?"

"Yes. I get it. I thought I was protecting her."

"No. You were afraid of losing her."

"Honor –"

"Logan, listen to me. Only you can drive her away at this point. Yesterday, before things got real, we were just two girls chatting while they shopped. She's happy, Logan. She's really happy. Whatever you're doing is working."

Logan let out a breath as he stepped closer to the counter. Was Honor right? "You really think so?"

"Yeah. I really do."

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**Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Tuesday, May 30, 2017, 8:00 am EST**

When not otherwise occupied with Rory or Rory and Lucas, Logan spent every minute of his spare time Monday afternoon and evening considering Honor's words. Or actively ignoring Finn and Colin while trying to consider Honor's words. He kept telling himself there was no need to rush things with Rory. Neither of them was going anywhere. Their primary commitment was to their son. They'd be in each other's orbits for the foreseeable future. Rory's big reveal regarding her baby gear purchase quotas meant she expected they'd be together - as a family unit, at least - whether they were in Hartford or in Stars Hollow. Or in Nantucket. It had been Emily who had first mentioned the Fourth of July Nantucket outing but Rory's off-hand mention of it seemed to indicate she was on-board with the idea. Provided, of course, Logan agreed to wear jeans.

Stepping out into the hallway that connected their two apartments, Logan continued to ponder his possible strategies. He basically had two options.

The first option was to wait. Be patient and let things take their course. Rory could be notoriously pokey when left to her own devices. Insecurity fed her indecisiveness. Research and pro/con lists could be helpful in both making decisions and in delaying the making of decisions.

Option number two was to prod her along. Not in a pushy kind of way. Just to offer a little encouragement. Help make her more fully aware of what their life could be like. What their life would be like. No. Remind her what their life had been like and could be again. Only it would be better this time because now they had Lucas.

Stopping in front of Rory's entrance, Logan rapped gently on the door. They still hadn't changed the doorbells for either unit and Rory still hated the loud chimes. Within seconds she stood before him, beautiful as usual. She wore a deep blue wrap dress that matched her eyes. Her hair was piled on top of her head in a loose bun. She preferred wearing her hair up these days since Lucas could be
"Morning, Ace." He smiled.

"Good morning." She returned his grin.

"You ready to go?"

"Yep. Let me just grab my sweater."

A few moments later, Lucas's parents found themselves in the elevator on the way down to the garage.

"So...since Lucas is coming home on Friday, we have to decide on his outfit."

"Ah. The kid's getting his first whiff of the sweet smell of freedom -.

"Yes. And we need a special outfit since there will be thousands of photos -.

"And hundreds of well-wishers."

"Not quite. I know my mom and Luke will probably stop by. Grandma's waiting until the weekend. My dad's away until next week." She hesitated before voicing the unspoken question that was likely on both their minds. "What about Mitchum and Shira?"

Logan could hear the tension in her voice. "Still not talking to them."

"You're gonna have to eventually."

"Yeah. But not yet. We're entitled to some time."

Rory nodded. "Honor sounded like she was willing to wait."

"Make no mistake. Her patience will last one day. Two tops."

"Okay, so she might be by this weekend too. I really have to figure out what I want to put on him. My mom got him a special onesie for the occasion."

"What's it say? Number 1 Mom? Number 1 Grandma?"

"I wish." Rory shook her head. Logan chuckled at the rueful look on Rory's face.

"Now, come on, Ace. What could be that bad? What's it say?"

"What Happens in Vegas Doesn't Always Stay in Vegas."

Logan understood the look.

"Ouch."

"Yeah."

"Sorry to be the one to break the news, but your mom's twisted."

"I've known her 32 years. Pretty sure I caught on."

"So you're gonna put that on him?"
Rory leveled him with the Rory Look as they exited the elevator into the garage. *Guess not*, thought Logan.

Within minutes they were settling into the car.

"So what're the guys up to today?"

"Colin's gonna try to get some work done. Finn's plan was to order organic foods to sniff."

"Wow. That's the closest thing to a personal goal -not involving a redhead -I think I've ever heard from him. How long are they staying?"

"Long enough to meet Lucas."

"Which'll be Friday."

"Yeah. They'll probably take off this weekend. But don't worry. It won't be long before we'll be seeing them again."

"What? Why?"

"They finagled an invite to the new inn opening."

"Really? My mom never said a word."

"Not from your mom."

"Oh! Sookie!"

"Yes. Sookie. Who was very taken with them. I think she's planning on playing matchmaker. Colin, Finn and thirty something females. Sounds about right. Fifteen apiece."

"No! That's their age, not how many of them there are!" Rory laughed. "And they're not all female."

Logan shrugged at Rory's explanation of the Stars Hollow thirty-somethings. "Not sure that matters to Finn."

Rory fell into a quiet rumination until all of a sudden her face took on a thunderstruck expression. "Oh wow!"

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I realized it's just gonna be the three of us once they leave."

"Yeah," Logan turned briefly to grin at her as he pulled the car out onto the street. "Team LoRoLu. That a problem?"

"No. It's just gonna be weird. And what's with the Team LoRoLu?" She grinned at him. "You gonna have t-shirts made?"

"Not a bad idea, Ace. It would resolve the question of what we're wearing on Friday."

"Logan-"

"What?"

"Let me enjoy dressing him in cute stuff before we start with the tacky t-shirts. Please. In addition to
my mother's onesie, you should see the one Paris got him."

Logan submitted to a reflexive eye-roll. Should he ask?

"What's that one say?"

"'Mess with me, you mess with my godmother and you don't want to do that.'"

"Ah! Paris managed to find a psychotic message for my son to wear."

"Well. It's the sentiment that counts."

"Riiight. Possessive and vaguely sinister babysitter theme."

"We could just throw it on him when she comes to visit."

"How about we just throw it in the trash?"

Following Rory's glare at Logan for his commentary on Paris's onesie, the two fell into a somewhat comfortable silence for the remainder of the drive. As for Logan, his thoughts had returned to what had been preoccupying them before he'd met up with Rory that morning. He had his mind made up. They were not leaving the vehicle without this one thing being settled. Or, at least, on its way to being settled. Finally arriving at St. Joseph's, Logan pulled the SUV into a parking spot not too far from the main entrance. As Rory unbuckled her seatbelt and made a motion to get of the car, he stopped her.

"Hey. Hold on a sec."

Rory turned to him, a quizzical look on her face.

"What?"

Channeling the confident side of his persona, Logan's gaze was solemn as he fixed it on Rory. This was no joke. He wanted her to understand exactly how serious he was.

"Remember last week when I told you if I was going to ask you out on a date, it would be more than a drink at the local dive?"

Rory scoffed. "Entrees at the Capital Grille start at fifty dollars. I'd hardly call it a dive."

"Regardless. There wasn't any thought about it being a date, since, of course, it was all about getting you to the right place at the right time for your party."

"Oh, well. Can't win 'em all."

"But I have since remedied that non-date thing."

"You have?"

"Yes, I have. Rory Gilmore, would you do me the honor of allowing me to take you out to dinner on Thursday night?"

As Logan watched Rory's mouth gaped. As he waited, he held his breath. Rory's startled silence was finally replaced with an answer.

"Yes."
Gauging by her face, it didn't seem like the right time for any further conversation.

"Good. We can get out now."

"Okay."

Logan, observing Rory as they made their way towards the hospital entrance, noted her demeanor was on lockdown. She'd never been one to put her emotions on display. Not, for example, in the same way Honor was capable of showing emotion. Or, for that matter, Lorelai. Rory hiding her real feelings from him had definitely contributed to problems between them in the past.

He'd have to trust she was being thoughtful and reflective. Not regretful and worried.

He really didn't have time to worry about it in any case. He had three days to plan the perfect date.

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*New Haven, Connecticut, Thursday, June 1, 2017, 7:00 pm EST*

"Stop! You're fussing with it too much."

"Excuse me. I'm a mother now. I thought my days of getting into cars blindfolded were behind me."

Logan leaned into her. He sensed her start in surprise as his breathy whisper met her skin.

"Behind you? Stick with me, Ace. Your days of getting into cars blindfolded will never be behind you."

"Ha ha. I suppose you'll make sure there's always *something else exciting* behind me instead."

"You wouldn't be happy any other way."

"So you're not gonna tell me where we're going?"

"No. But you're welcome to count traffic stops and listen to the ambient sounds of police activity for clues."

"Hm. Okay."

The past three days had been spent in a continued frenzy of finalizing the apartments for Lucas's homecoming. Each apartment had a SNOO baby bed, a changing table, and a rocker in the master suite. The baby's clothes and toys and other gear were in his room at Rory's apartment. There were a ton of baby monitors located throughout both apartments. Getting all the last minute things ready had actually taken up much more of his time than Logan had anticipated. Not that he regretted a single second of it. He didn't. He just found himself with less time to debate the whole 'where to take Rory for their perfect date' question. But that turned out to not be a problem. When he finally did have a few minutes to think about it, his mind zeroed in on what he felt certain was the perfect plan.

Which brought them to where they were at present. Pulling into a restaurant parking lot thirty minutes from the 42 North Main apartment building.

"Are we in New Haven?"

"Maybe." Logan jumped out of the SUV and made his way around to the passenger side. After opening the door, he leaned in to undo Rory's seatbelt.

"Hey! I could've done that. I can't see but I still know how to unbuckle a seatbelt."
"Next time."

Logan's hands settled on either side of Rory's waist. Staring at her, he was inches from her face. He wondered if she felt his presence in the same way he always felt hers.

"May I tell you again how incredible you look?"

"You may. I'm gonna have to take your word for it since I can't see."

"Well, you do. You look incredible."

"The dress isn't too snug?"

"Ace. Stop. What part of 'incredible' wasn't clear?"

"Thanks."

An off-white shift dress, it hung at just the right length to be flirty but not to over-expose. Since there would be no more Lucas time until the following morning, Rory had opted to wear her long hair down, with wispy curls framing her face. She did look incredible. Incredible for any gorgeous woman. Taking into consideration the fact that she had had a baby three weeks earlier and subsequently spent many of the hours she ought to have been sleeping pumping, she looked phenomenal.

"Come on. Our reservation for Lorenzo's is 7:45 on the dot. We don't want them to turn on us."

"Lorenzo's?" Rory pulled her blindfold off. She smiled at Logan, who, for all his prodding her to get moving, continued to lean over her in the car. "Wow! I can't believe they're still in business! I would've thought they'd be divorced by now. Or one would be in jail for stabbing the other."

"Nope. Nobody's in the big house. Nobody's divorced. And they're still making couples squirm uncomfortably as they fight after eight PM." Logan's eyes met hers. "Like your surprise?"

"I do." She nodded her head, smiling. Logan finally backed away so she could get out of the car. "I don't know if their still being together is healthy for them but I'm actually pretty happy about it."

"Love conquers all."

"Except poverty and a toothache."

A few minutes later Logan and Rory had been seated by the hostess at a corner table near a window. They both spent a few minutes taking in the restaurant. Logan could tell it had been updated since the last time they were there. Mostly cosmetic changes. It was still essentially the same.

"Wow! I think they have even more Chianti bottles now."

"Come on, Ace. You know you can never have too many Chianti bottles hanging from the ceiling."

"Yeah, I guess you're right." Rory opened the menu and started to peruse the dinner specials. Glancing up at Logan she grinned as she spoke. "What made you think of this? Out of all the four and five star restaurants we could've gone to? In Hartford or New York?"

"Well," nodded Logan. "I figured we didn't have time for a long drive. What with busting Junior out tomorrow morning."

"Yes." Rory nodded, smiling. "That reminds me. Gotta grab some nail files from Finn."
"And I remembered you telling me your wishlist dinner idea when I left for London." Logan glanced around at the restaurant's tacky decor. "I'm sorry my Bangers-and-Mash party took over the evening -"

"Don't be. It was your night."

"Yeah. Well. This is your night." Logan opened his menu. "So? What're you in the mood for? Individual entrees? Or family-style?"

Once the words were out of his mouth, Logan realized just how much he'd unwittingly set himself up with a loaded question. Although, it really shouldn't have been a loaded question. But when you're trying to convince the mother of your child to be with you to the point that little else is on your mind, every innocuous word could potentially take on a new meaning.

Individual entrees? Or family style?

Individual entrees? Or will you marry me?

Luckily Rory seemed to take his words at face value.

"I think family style would be perfect." Logan felt something unfurl inside him. But he tensed again at her next words. "We can bring the leftovers home to Colin and Finn."

Great. Terrific. They could order the family dishes so they could feed Colin and Finn.

"Right."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong, Ace. What could be wrong? My life's suddenly hit eleven on the dial."

Rory chuckled. "That's good. You haven't worked in weeks. You really must be part sloth."

"Hey, no sexist double standard. I'm on paternity leave. It's legit. With the exception of Operation: Paris, I've been with you at the hospital every day..."

"Oh, I know -"

"...since I got here."

"Of course. Logan, I didn't mean anything by it. I was just making a joke."

"Eh, it's fine." Truthfully he didn't know why he reacted so defensively to her comment. He was still feeling a little disappointed at her logic for ordering the 'family' dishes.

"I know you're not like that. And I'm happy you're not working. Cause if you were you wouldn't be here with me." Rory smiled before remembering someone. "...and Lucas."

Logan buried his head in the menu so Rory wouldn't see him smirk. Rory clearly added the part about Lucas. She'd fight him if he called her out on their son being an afterthought. But maybe Honor was right. Rory was happy he was there. For her. Not just for Lucas. Whatever the residue of his psychotic parents, he could overcome it. It was just a matter of time. Whether it was a few weeks. A few months. Sensing someone watching him Logan lowered his menu slightly.

Maybe a few hours?
"You already know what you want, Ace?"
"Yes."

Suddenly there was a noticeable shift in the air. Rory had laid her menu down on the table. Logan followed her lead. As he watched Rory, he saw her lips open and then close. She directed her gaze away from him, instead staring to her right, taking in the other couples having their own dinner conversations.

"Rory? Something wrong?"

Shaking her head, she turned back to face him. Their eyes locked.

"No. For once everything's right." She smiled.

Logan let out a loud breath and smiled.

"So we're good?"

"Yeah. We are. Good."

We. We?

"We? We as in 'we'? As in Team LoRoLu?"

"Yes. But he's not here right now. And he won't be with us back at the apartment later..."

"Yeah..."

"So...It'll just be the two of us."

Colin. Finn.

"Hm. We can stop by a pet store and pick up an electric fence."

"Maybe it'll just be the two of us..."

"I could send Finn and Colin to a hotel if you want. Hell, Finn's family owns six hotels within an hour's drive."

"No. I don't think we need to kick them out. It's been fun having them around. And they're waiting to meet 'Logan Jr.'"

"Yes," he nodded. "I had nothing to do -"

"I know, I know." Rory's eyes were on his. "You still okay with his name? I don't think it's too late if we wanted to change it."

"Ace, come on. And mess with Team LoRoLu? Besides he's solidified for me as a person. A little person. I mean he's got a personality. Quirks. That pretending to be asleep thing. The stretching and kicking thing. The way he gets that disdainful look when he's sleeping. We can't mess with his name."

Rory had tears trailing down her cheeks.

"Rory?"
"I'm fine. It's fine. I just -" She shook her head before shrugging. "Your answer was pretty perfect." She paused and took a breath followed by another one. Laughing, she repeated the words she'd said to him Sunday night. Only this time she said them first. "I love you."

Showtime.

"I love you, too, Rory."

"No. I mean it. I love you. The kind that sticks."

"Oh. That kind."

"Do not mock."

"I'm not, I'm not." Thrilled, Logan laughed out of pure joy. "Mine sticks too."

Logan was pretty sure he'd always loved Rory. Vegas be damned. But rehashing any more of their past would be pointless. What did it matter? Where they were now and where they would go - together - in the future was all that he cared about.

As he watched her, Rory wiped away her tears before lifting her menu back up.

"God, I'm so glad that's settled. Now we can order."

Logan chuckled again. He wasn't sure exactly what had been 'settled', but things were definitely looking up. He wished he did have an electric fence to keep Colin and Finn safely at his place. He had a feeling he'd be staying with Rory. He didn't want those two clueless idiots to wonder where he was and come looking for him.

"You got it, Ace."

"Let's get the manicotti. It was always my favorite. Ooh. And the penne ala vodka. A side of meatballs. Chicken parmigiana. Garlic bread..."

"Don't forget the cannoli."

"Never."

The sound of pots and pans clanging could be heard along with a woman's high pitched screech and a man's shouting.

"It's after eight, Ace. We better order."

"Yep. Call the waiter over. I'll have it all figured out by the time he gets here."

AN: Thanks for reading. I think we'll go to 45 chapters now.
Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Rory's Bedroom, Friday, June 2, 2017, 6:00 am EST

Oh, I could hide 'neath the wings
Of the bluebird as she sings
The six-o'clock alarm would never ring
Logan stirred at the sound of a song playing nearby. Was that...the Monkees?

But six rings and I rise
Wipe the sleep out of my eyes
The shaving razor's cold and it stings
Cheer up sleepy Jean

Yes, it was the Monkees. Logan couldn't recall ever in his life -with Rory, without Rory - waking up to the sounds of the Monkees.

Not that there was anything wrong with the Monkees. If anything the group's inauspicious manufactured boy-band beginnings unfairly saddled them with a perceived lack of credibility as well as an undeserved lack of appreciation.

"Ace?" Tightening his hold, he pulled her closer, nuzzling the sweet spot where her shoulder and neck joined. "Shouldn't we be getting up?"

"Why didn't I reset the alarm?! It's so early!"

"Ace. Big day today." As he shifted out from under her, he maneuvered so he could drop featherlight kisses along her shoulder.

"No!" Rory whined. "Pillow!"

"Come on. Junior'll think we forgot him if we're late."

That woke her up. Sitting up, she turned to look at Logan.

"Logan! That's terrible! That happen to you? Your parents forget to pick you up?"

Logan snorted. "Please. Look at who you're talking about! I was never left somewhere unattended cause there was always somebody who's job it was to deliver me and pick me up."

"Oh. Yeah." Eyes closed, Rory settled back down with her head right back on his bare chest.
"What about you? Lorelai ever forget you somewhere?"

"Hm. I remember she slept through the alarm my first day at Chilton. That was fun. I can't remember her outright forgetting me. She might've not been able to be there but she would've arranged with someone. Sookie. Or Mia."

It was a sweet torture lying there with Rory but he knew they needed to get up.

"Come on, Ace. We really shouldn't be late today." Leaning in Logan dropped a kiss on her temple. "We've got eighteen years to screw him up. We don't have to start today."

"We're not even expected there until later. We have a whole schedule. The doctors. The car seat specialist. The vision specialist. The other specialists. Even if we hadn't been up half the night, I meant to set the alarm for later." Rory fell quiet as she yawned. "But I forgot."

Rory pulled the coverlet up to her neck and burrowed further into Logan's shoulder.

"Who's the sloth now?"

"You know I get no sleep. Those," pausing, she raised her head to glance over Logan at the clock on the nightstand, "four hours were the best I’d had in months."

Logan smiled. No regrets then. He hugged her tightly before lessening his grip.

"I'm gonna be here to help so you should have plenty of well-rested nights in your future."

"Unless your boobs start producing milk, I'm going to disagree on that."

The two lay entwined in a peaceful cocoon until Logan ended the silence.

"Hey, what's with The Monkees?"

"It's Lucas's playlist. So do not mock. Remember. We have eighteen years..."

"Lucas has a playlist?" Not even out of the hospital yet and the kid's got tunes. "How'd he let you know which songs he liked?"

"Most of the songs are from an NPR list of songs for newborns. Mom, Lane, and Sookie helped me come up with some more. You know if you're putting together a playlist for your baby, it's really important you like the songs too."

"Yeah, unless you're gonna keep the kid by himself in a soundproofed room."

"They say babies get used to music they hear in the womb. They may be more alert and active when they hear the songs later. So I played him his playlist - and some classical music too - before he was born. My plan was to play it for him now that he's here and see if he responds."

Logan chuckled. Junior wasn't even home yet and Team LoRoLu already had a quirky family game to play.

"Can I add to the playlist?"

"You'll have to discuss it with him. I'm not getting in the middle."

"Hm. I'll do that." Pulling Rory in, he kissed her cheek. "Shut off the tunes?"
"Go for it."

Logan shifted out from underneath Rory and leaned over her to switch off the iPod. Then he returned to his spot on the bed, gently lifting Rory and replacing her head on his chest. *If* they *really* didn't need to be at the hospital until later, then maybe another hour of sleep was permissible.

"Mother. Daddy."

Logan's close-eyed smile was replaced by a squinty-eyed cringe. Two's company. Three's a crowd.

"Oh my God...What?"

"Finn! Why are we hearing you?!"

"And -more importantly- is he hearing us?!" whispered Rory.

"You obviously don't remember telling Finn to test the baby monitors yesterday."

And Colin makes four.

"Logan! You didn't! Did you?!!"

"Of course not, Ace. Cause I'd be afraid of him doing this very thing." His words, low, were directed only to Rory. Raising his voice, his next words were directed at Colin and Finn. "How long you two been watching?"

"Watching?!!" shrieked Rory. Horrified, she turned on her side, pulling her pillow up over her head. "I can't believe..."

"Just a few minutes." Pause. "Here and there."

"Yes, he still had to make it through sniffing the red vegetables last night so he couldn't devote all his time to it."

"I'm pretty sure I'd rather he shallow sniff me from head to toe than watch us having sex!" grumbled an unhappy Rory.

"Tit-for-tat, Love."

"That's right. You've seen us naked plenty of times."

"Not on purpose, Colin! I can't help it if you guys strip on days that end with the letter "y"! And I never took pictures!"

"I beg to differ, Love."

"Okay. Maybe once or twice. When I got that new camera. But that was ten years ago!"

"If it makes you feel better, Rory. It was kind of an accident."

"How did you accidentally watch us having sex?"

Silence.

"Well, the watching wasn't the accident as much as the sex," admitted Colin. "I mean we didn't
"You have nothing to be ashamed of, Love."

Logan grimaced. This was exactly why his friends were good in small doses. And Robert should be there to keep Finn better occupied. Although what the hell was he thinking? The only good thing about this is that Robert - the one who had a crush on Rory - hadn't witnessed a damn thing.

"Finn!" Logan's tone was sharp as he warily watched an increasingly upset Rory.

"Finn has a point, Logan. We've heard you two many, many times over the years and with our imaginations -"

"We've pictured you doing quite depraved things is what Colin -"

"Oh my God..." Rory's eyes shut tight.

"- is trying to say. So actually seeing -"

"Oh my God..."

"-with our own eyes how quite normal -"

"Oh my God..."

"- and wholesome it all is has been quite life-affirming."

"You guys should know Finn's tearing up."

"Thanks for Finn's mental health update, Colin. Glad we could help ground you during your existential soul-searching phase, Finn."

"Yes, well. It has been helpful. Did you know this baby monitor has an interchangeable optical lens? You can customize the angle and the zoom..."

Rory groaned. "Just when the horror was receding..."

"What are you two doing up, anyway?" asked Logan.

"The alarm -" Colin started to explain before he was cut off by Finn.

"Oh, I could hide 'neath the wings
Of the bluebird as she sings
The six-o'clock alarm would never ring -"

"And there's another song ruined by Finn."

"Aw, come on, Logan. That's unfair."

"It's six AM!" Rory replied to Finn. "None of this is fair. Go back to bed."

Logan eyed Rory, who had finally removed the pillow from her face so that he could see the extent of her annoyance.

"If I were you two, I'd listen to Rory."
"All righty, then. What Mother says. Wake me up when September ends."

"You do look good, Rory."

Rory groaned again. "Shut up, Colin!" Rory started to lay back down before shooting back up and facing the baby transmitter. "And turn the damn receivers off! No more peep shows! I mean it!"

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**Harford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Friday, June 2, 2017, 11:30 am EST**

"Good morning, Lucas's parents!" Ashley the social worker greeted Logan and Rory in her sing-song voice. "How are you this beautiful day? Excited to have Lucas coming home with you?"

"Yes!" Logan and Rory replied simultaneously before glancing at each with a smile.

"Good morning, Ashley."

"Hey, Ashley," nodded Rory. "We're done with talking to the doctors. We just need the car seat expert -"

"Your CPST! I think you have Laura! Laura's terrific! You'll love her! She's so dedicated to being a CPST she says she'd do it for free but then she'd be homeless and no one would let her near their babies so ultimately market forces preclude its viability as a workable concept. She's very smart. She might be a socialist now that I think of it. Not that there's anything wrong with that. We try to keep politics out of the nursery. Although the White House is reminding me a little of Romper Room these days. Oh, shoot! Was I running my mouth off? I have to stop doing that! It's just really good seeing you two! I always feel like this when I'm reunited with family members after a week. Oh, not that you're my family members. That'd be weird. I don't. Think that. I'm not. Weird that is. At least I don't think so." Ashley paused for a breath. "So how're you two doing? You ready?"

"Yes," replied Rory, a tightlipped smiled on her face. Logan bit back on his laughter. "Do we know when Laura will be here to talk to us?"

"I'll call her and let her know you're ready. Hang on." With that Ashley stepped away from Logan and Rory

"I think she dethroned you on the non-stop soliloquy."

"Hey!" Rory punched Logan playfully on his shoulder. "Baby Mama? Aren't you supposed to be nice to me?"

"Oh, I think I'm very nice to you. I think I was especially nice last night." Logan leaned over and pressed his lips against hers. At first, gentle with closed lips they both opened their mouths at the same time. Logan felt Rory's arms wrap around his waist and pull him close.

This. This was as near as perfect as his life would ever be. It had nothing to do with what happened in a board room. Or the mast of a newspaper. Or what was in his wallet or his bank account.

Rory and he were together and they were taking their son home.

Team LoRoLu.

"Oh! Already thinking about making Lucas a big brother?"

Rory pushed Logan away at the social worker's interruption.
"Not quite-" replied Rory.

"Not yet," added Logan, his eyes smiling as they met Rory's widened stare.

"No. Not at all."

"Yet."

Rory groaned. "You're impossible."

"I'm sorry. That was inappropriate for me to say, wasn't it?" Ashley whispered. "You guys are so gorgeous together. I didn't realize you were a couple. I don't know how I got that wrong. Looking at you, you two seem perfect."

"I agree." A woman's voice was heard approaching the group.

Logan looked up behind Rory, behind Ashley. Emily.

"Grandma! What're you doing here?"

"I was coming in for the weekend. I'm not used to the charter plane. I got here so early it occurred to me I might as well go to hospital. Your mother told me you'd be here."

"Mom still not coming?"

"No, Rory. Lorelai's working today. Besides as Little Lucas's great-grandmother, I'm the one who needs to make the most of the time -"

"Grandma! Don't talk like that. You're gonna be around for a long, long time."

"I hope so, Rory. I would've liked for your grandfather to be here."

"I know. Me too."

"He would've loved not being the only male in the family." Emily shot a look at Logan before continuing. "Don't worry about your mother. She'll come around."

"I know. She said she'd probably stop by on Sunday."

Logan, mystified, turned his gaze from Rory to Emily and back again. There was definitely a subtext he wasn't following.

"Ace? Did I miss the script update?"

"Mom's not too thrilled right now."

Oh.

"Fair enough." Logan grinned.

If he was reading things correctly, Lorelai wasn't happy about *him*. About *them*. Lorelai's disapproval hadn't prevented them from being together in the past, so he wouldn't allow it to mar their day. Besides, he'd won Lorelai over in the past. He'd just have to do it again. It wasn't just about him now. Team LoRoLu needed all its members. Lorelai - no matter what her opinion of *him* - couldn't deny that.
“Pay no mind to Lorelai. She's always had a hard time accepting when things don't go exactly her way.”

Rory, frowning, glanced between Logan and her grandmother.

“Let's not talk about this. New topic.”

“Yes. We have much happier things to discuss.” Emily's eyes went to Logan. "Did Rory ever tell you how the baby's name flipped between Richard and Lucas?"

Rory groaned in frustration. "Not a better topic," she mumbled.

"Apparently I said 'Little Richard' too many times -"

"Grandma. I'm sorry. I just kept getting ear worms and -"

"Ear worms? That sounds horrible. What is it?"

"It's when you get a song stuck in your head. Every time you started to talk about 'Little Richard', I kept hearing 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Good Golly Miss Molly' in my head. Not to mention the visuals."

"Hm." Emily turned to look at Logan. "She tell you where 'Lucas' came from?"

Confused, Logan's eyes shot around to Rory.

"How does a woman honor her mother when she has a boy?"

Something clicked in Logan's head. Naming the baby Lucas was more for Lorelai than for Luke. The baby was named after Luke but for Lorelai.

"I couldn't name him 'Victor.' He'd never forgive me."

Logan's eyebrows quirked up. "Lorelai's middle name isn't Leigh?"

"No. It's Victoria."

"Good name for a girl." Emily commented innocently before looking up at the ceiling.

"Oh, now. Don't you start. If he'd been on time, I'd still be pregnant. Let me be for a while without the sibling talk."

Logan averted his gaze downward so she couldn't see the satisfied look on his face. She'd no doubt view it as him being smug.

Emily smiled. "Fine. I'm going to see Little Lucas."

"You go keep him company, Grandma. They know we're out here and that he's getting out today." Rory smiled.

With that Emily left Logan and Rory to wait in the lounge area outside the NICU nursery for Laura the CPST. Although expecting the woman, the couple started at the booming voice that seemed to come out of nowhere and echoed off all surfaces.

"Hi! I'm Laura! You the Gilmore-Huntzbergers? Damn that's a mouthful. I hope you're not giving the kid a first name too?"
Rory stared at the woman.

"What? Do I have a stock market feed ticking across my forehead?"

"No. Of course not. You just remind me of someone."

"Don't say Celine Beauchamps. If I had a dollar for every time I heard that. I'd take all that money and buy myself a tiny house."

"You know Celine Beauchamps? My grandmother -you just missed her- is close with Celine. She designs and dresses us for all our major family events. She just did my mom's wedding last fall."

"Well that's great. For your mom. Celine. And maybe your mom's husband. All I know is I've been working at this hospital five years and all the old bats on the board and the dusty fundraising yentas are always telling me I remind them of Celine Beauchamps. I tried to be flattered -because what the hell am I if not gracious? But then I googled old Celine -and boy, do I mean old! The broad's 102! I know I'm no Christie Brinkley but I do not look 102!"

"Oh. You know something? I think it's your facial features. I'm not sure about Celine. You actually remind *me* of this harp player who used to play at my mother's inn"

"A harp player? I didn't even know people still played harps. Thought that died with Harpo. What I do know is car seats! Did you know 90% of newborns leave the hospital in a car seat with at least one major installation or harnessing error?"

"No. We did not know that," replied Rory, who shot a concerned look over to Logan.

"That's according to a 2014 study by the AAP. Do you know what the AAP is?" The woman's vaguely dismissive gaze switched over to Logan.

"American Association Of Physicians?" he guessed.

"Nice try. It's the American Academy of Pediatrics. If I got my way parents who can't answer that question wouldn't be allowed to take their kids home. Did you know car crashes are the number one cause of death for children under 14?"

"No."

"Did you know the NHTSA estimates half of all child crash fatalities could've been prevented if the moron parents had installed the seats right?"

"No on that as well."

"A rear facing car seat -properly installed -reduces the chance of death by 96%. A forward facing seat -better than nothing I suppose - reduces the threat by 77%."

"Ace?"

"It's rear-facing. We got it from Paris."

Laura glanced at the car seat that sat on the floor by Rory and Logan's feet.

"I see you got a Nuna Pipa. Good if expensive choice. I sense you're not members of the proletariat."

"Good guess," nodded Logan.
"You two know how to read?"

"What?" asked Rory.

"I'm asking you if you read."

Logan and Rory exchanged puzzled looks.

"We both read. We're both writers actually. We went to Yale." Rory finally answered, somewhat defensively. Logan just stared at the woman.

"Well, it's good you're not letting your education get in the way of your ignorance. So here's the deal. This car seat is very intuitive. Any moron should be able to install it properly. As long as said moron reads the manual. Comprende?"

"Yes."

"No one ever does. Which is ridiculous since it's the most important piece of baby equipment you'll ever buy and it could save your child's life some day." Laura paused. "I'm thirsty. I'm gonna go get a Red Bull then we can get started on your car seat safety tutorial."

Once Laura was out of earshot, Logan whispered to Rory.

"Hey. Ace?"

"Hm." Rory had opened up the car seat manual and was diligently reading.

"Maybe we should leave him here until he's fifteen."

"Logan, it'll be fine. We'll install the thing right. Then we'll just take it slow on the drive home."

Although Junior's homecoming was not on his mind when he took the apartment, Logan found himself thrilled 42 North Main was only a few miles from the hospital.

A few hours later - Lucas having passed his hour-long angle tolerance test with flying colors - the family was finally on the road.

"How's it going back there?"

"Fine."

"He still awake?"

"Yep. I think he likes the new car smell. Right, Lucas?"

"He breathing okay?"

"Yes, Logan. Are you? I don't know when I've ever seen you this nervous."

"I'm fine." Logan hesitated. He felt like an idiot but there it was. "I'm just a little nervous about my driving. I never gave much thought to those "Baby on Board" signs before."

"Well, you're doing fine. We're only going ten over the speed limit. You only ran one red light. And I've only had to catch him once."

"Ha ha."
"You're doing great, Huntzberger. Can you get us home, now, please?"

"You got it, Ace. A few miles still. Shouldn't take more than an hour."

"Lucas! Look what you did to Daddy? Mommy's gonna have to teach him how to drive."

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**Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Rory's Living Room, Friday, June 2, 2017, 2:30 pm EST**

Upon finally arriving at 42 North Main, Logan and Rory settled in at Rory's apartment. The terrifying drive behind them, the proud parents were thrilled to be home. Logan in particular. Lucas safely ensconced in his SNOO, Logan and Rory stood in the doorway of her bedroom watching the baby sleep.

"I like the outfit you chose, Ace."

He did, too. It was grey and the baby onesie version of a seer sucker suit. Kid might've only been a few weeks old but he looked dapper.

"It's understated but classy. I figure there's plenty of time for the message onesies. Though I did order a couple for you yesterday."

"Onesies? For me?"

"Not for you to wear. Not quite ready to go there. For you to dress him in. Or for him to wear while you're watching him. You'll see."

Logan couldn't help but smile at Rory's offhand words. This was really happening. It was starting to sink in.

"Ah. Can't wait."

"They should be delivered tomorrow."

Smiling, Rory shifted her gaze from Logan back to the baby.

"When should we introduce him to the boys?"

"When he's 21?"

"How about in an hour when he's up for his feeding?"

Was she suggesting having Colin and Finn in the same room as she breast fed their son?

"Are you suggesting what I think you're suggesting?"

"What do you think I'm suggesting?"

"Breastfeeding Lucas in front of Colin and Finn."

"Hell, no! I'm still mad at them for using the baby monitor for their own x-rated amusement! I just meant I need to wake him to feed him. After he's done, we can introduce him to his -" Rory cleared her throat -"uncles."

"Yeah. Okay."
Two hours later, Logan texted Finn and Colin that 'Logan Jr.' was ready to make their acquaintance. Sure, Logan could've left Rory and Lucas for the five minutes it would've taken to walk next door and issue the invitation in person but he decided he didn't want to do that. It was their first day as a family - a real family - and he didn't want to miss a second. At the rate he was using his iPhone camera and video recorder, he'd be out of space before the end of the day. It was ridiculous that he didn't have his digital camera with him but he'd really only packed for a few days in London. Absurdly he still had suitcases packed and sitting in the townhouse for his never-to-happen honeymoon.

As for having a digital camera, maybe he could make some phone calls and have something delivered.

As Rory sat in the rocker with Lucas in her arms, Logan sat on the sofa, watching them with a new feeling of intensity. His. They were both his. To love. To cherish. To protect. Rory was right. He'd have to reconnect with his parents at some point. But he didn't feel that he - that they - owed them anything. Not at the moment. Not considering what they had done in coming between him and Rory. Yes, he was laying blame on both. His mother may have blocked his phone, but Mitchum hadn't exactly been an advocate in righting the wrong. The man had continued to push the marriage to Odette even after finding out about Lucas.

"Logan? Logan?"

Finally Rory's voice caught his attention.

"Yeah?"

"The door. The guys are here."

"It's not locked. Why don't they just come in?"

"Well, we did yell at them this morning. Maybe it sunk in."

Logan rolled his eyes. As if it were possible to train his friends using negative reinforcement. If anything scolding them would make them more determined to do that thing for which they were being scolded. Mildly irritated that he had to step away from the other two members of Team LoRoLu, Logan made his way down the hallway to the apartment door. Swinging it open, he saw why they hadn't just let themselves in. Colin and Finn were actually weighed down carrying gifts.

"Finally!" whined Colin. "You know I need to be careful with my knee."

He zipped past Logan toward the living room.

Finn was next. Wearing an equally exasperated look.

"Finally! You know I get bored standing."

With that pronouncement, he too flew past Logan down the hallway.

Logan turned to follow. Finally reaching the living room, Colin and Finn had taken a seat - Logan's spot - on the sofa across from Rory holding Lucas on the rocking chair.

"I think he looks like both of you."

Colin's words made Logan smile.
"With his eyes closed he looks quite like Logan sleeping."

Finn's words just reminded Logan of the creepy nocturnal sniffing incidents.

Rory must've caught his frown. She quickly sought to redirect the conversation.

"Hey, guys," she glanced at them both. "You know you didn't have to buy him all this stuff. You got him that ginormous teddy bear. And Logan and I are just happy you're both here."

God, Rory was something special; her hostess skills were unparalleled. As for Logan, his patience was non-existent; he was ready to help both of them to the door. With his foot.

"So what's in all these boxes?"

Logan followed Rory's gaze. Some of the boxes were big, some small. Some obviously held clothes while some were so oddly shaped, there was no telling what they held.

"Love, what's the most priceless gift one can be given?"

"Love?"

"No."

"Good health?"

"No."

"Appreciation for culture?"

"Now, I'm second-guessing our gifts."

Colin shot Finn a look of irritation. "How are you the face of your family's hotels? 'Maybe you'll like our hotels. Maybe you won't.' Rory, we're giving Lucas the gift of laughter."

"Oh, goody," she smiled. "He was just saying he wanted to learn some new jokes."

"How precocious."

"I'm kidding, Finn," Rory shook her head. "He's a baby. He doesn't know any jokes."

"Well," nodded Colin, "when he's ready to learn jokes, he'll have his uncles to teach him."

"In the meantime we picked him up some clothing with rather clever, if somewhat ribald, sayings."

Rory groaned. "Let's see them."

Later, after Colin and Finn had returned to Logan's apartment, Rory and Logan sat on the living room floor surrounded by open gift boxes. Or, according to Rory, the source of her own existential soul-searching phase.

"I don't know, Huntzberger. Would you put any of these on Lucas?" A look of amazement still etched on her face, Rory shook her head. "I don't even understand half of them." Her eyes fell on one. "'Don't Hate Me Cause I'm Gay; Hate Me Cause I Stole Your Girl'? Or this one. 'I'm not a Lesbian but my Girlfriend Is'? I can't even figure out if they're appropriate for the Stars Hollow Gay Pride Parade! I have no idea what they mean!"
Logan, grimacing, looked around at the boxes.

"I think the 'World's Cutest Tax Deduction' could actually be worn in public. The 'Feed Me You Peasants' - maybe in Hartford. The 'I'm going to need you to turn down your psycho' is perfect for visiting his Huntzberger grandparents -"

"Oh, we couldn't..." Rory started to laugh. "You think Finn'll really have an adult size made of that one he likes?"

Logan followed where Rory gestured with her hand.

"Was it the monocle one? 'Ah Good Sir I do believe that I have shat in my pantaloons'? Seems a little tame for Finn."

"Nope. The one next to it."

"'Last night is a blur. I remember sucking titties and then shitting myself.' Yeah. That's something Finn would wear. Proudly."

Rory, eyes closed and hinting a ghost of a smile, shook her head.

"I can't believe it."

"Which part?"

"All of it. You?"

"It's sinking in. Wanna guess which one's my favorite?"

"Favorite onesie? Is it 'Party in my Crib! Let's get tit-faced'?"

"No."

"'I'm too sexy for my onesie'?"

"No. I don't think you're really trying, Ace. You should've gotten it."

"Is it 'Sorry Ladies. My Daddy is Definitely Taken'?"

Logan nodded, a smirk on his face.

"And you knew all along. You just wanted to feed my insecurity..."

"No. No. Just keeping you humble, man."

Logan shifted over closer to Rory. Throwing an arm around her shoulders, he laid a kiss on her cheek.

"You can keep me humble. You can keep me however you want. As long as you keep me."

"Don't make promises..."

"Fully intend to keep them, Ace."

"Just be honest with me, Logan."

"Ace-?" Where was this coming from? "Something wrong?"
"No, no." Rory shook her head. "Just we're doing this. It's not just about you and whether you'll stay at HPG. Or Lucas and which onesies he'll wear. It's about me too. My book. My writing." Her eyes met his. "I'm trusting you with a lot here, Huntzberger."

"Ace, come on. You know I've always been your number one supporter. Your number one fan." At her raised eyebrow, he nodded, laughing. "Not in the creepy Kathy Bates way. You know me, Ace. I want you to finish the book. Then to write another. And another. Hey, if you sell them to Hollywood, maybe I can stay home and be your house-husband." Logan cringed. He did not want to spook Rory with talk about marriage before she was ready. Even in jest. "Or your live-in pool boy."

"Oh, now. Let's just see how you are changing diapers before I leave Lucas solely to your care. Or our imaginary pool, for that matter."

"Deal."

At the sound a small cry, they both fell silent.

"You might have a chance right now to test the waters..."

At Lucas's full throat cries, Logan rose to his feet and held a hand out to Rory. She stood too.

"Let's go."

AN: Yes. They are all real onesies.
Test Run at the Dragonfly, Part I

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, Dragonfly Annex, Saturday, June 24, 2017, 3:00 pm EST

As Logan accompanied Rory into Lorelai's new inn, his eyes took in the space with appreciation. Similar in style and decor to the first Dragonfly, the annex was considerably larger but had been designed to emulate the intimate feel of the original. It had also been deliberately planned to mirror the first inn, incorporating all the same features only reversed.

"Wow. It feels like I haven't seen this place in a million years." Logan, pausing behind her, watched as Rory continued to walk around the expansive room, examining every inch of the inn's lobby and front desk area. Once her survey was complete, Rory turned around to look at Lucas, who was contentedly snuggled inside a baby carrier on Logan's chest. "Or maybe more like six weeks."

"It looks great, Ace. Your mom's outdone herself."

Rory took a step closer to Logan and Lucas.

"Yeah. She has. It really did come out nice." Peering intently at the baby, Rory's face revealed her concern. "He okay?"

"He's fine."

"Carol's supposed to be here by three-thirty."

"That's a half-hour."

"I'll feel better when he's settled in the room. You don't think he's too warm?" Rory lifted her fingers to feel the baby's forehead.

"Ace, the kid's content. Look at him. He's not exactly shy about expressing his displeasure."

Rory chuckled. "Yeah. That's true. He kinda takes after Finn and Colin that way."

"Ouch! You just had to go there?"

"Hm." Rory smirked. Logan returned her smile. "You know something, Huntzberger?"

"What?"

"Anyone ever tell you you look good wearing a baby?"

"Considering this is my first time wearing a baby, no."

"Well, you do."

"Yeah? Thank you." He nodded, still smiling. He'd hold the kid until he turned eighteen if this was
the response it would elicit from Rory. "How good?"

Logan grinned as he watched Rory roll her eyes. He continued to watch as she proceeded to speak to their sleeping son.

"Mommy really needs to get on adding that time-traveling egomaniac in the hot air balloon to her book, doesn't she Lucas?"

"Don't listen to her, Lucas. Your mom's just jealous of how good Daddy looks with his Mountain Buggy baby."

"Jealous? I'm not jealous. I look good wearing him too."

"You know there's room in the balloon for two."

"Ha."

"So...? Come on. How good? Tell me." An eyebrow arched as he attempted to coax an answer out of her.

"Your Daddy's something else, Lucas." Rory rolled her eyes. "Fine. If they haven't all exploded already, I'd say ovary-exploding good."

Logan's grin widened. He wasn't expecting a borderline dirty answer.

"Ovary exploding, Ace? That really a thing?"

"Yes. It's a thing. How do you not know it? I thought you were on top of all social media trends, memes, hashtags-"

"I guess I missed that one."

"Yeah, well. Welcome to #hotdads. I'd say you're ahead of the Ryans but behind Darryl from 'Walking Dead."

"Not as hot as Darryl? I'm hurt."

"I think you'll get over it."

Standing across from one another, they were both watching their son as he started to fuss. Turning his head back and forth, Lucas rubbed his face on Logan's shirt.

"I think Junior's upset mommy's wishing Murphy MacManus was his daddy."

Rory looked up sharply at Logan's face. "Hardly." In a lower voice she continued, "and you know it." Her lips pulled upward in a slight smile.

All of a sudden their quiet family moment was interrupted by a heavily accented male voice.

"Rory! Look at you. So slim. And so quick! And the baby. It is so nice and quiet. And I take this is your Baby Daddy?"

Logan watched as Rory frowned. Sensitive to Rory's distaste for the term, Logan hid his smile. He'd long ago decided to accept the ridiculous moniker with a sense of humor. Until they came to a more formal understanding, 'Wifey' and 'Hubby' were clearly out of the question. Rory would just have to tolerate the Urban Dictionary lingo.
The man had appeared from behind a door and now stood at the concierge desk. Logan followed Rory further inside the inn to the desk. In excellent shape and well-dressed, it was hard to pinpoint the man's age. He was very well-preserved. Once up close, Logan could tell the man was actually close to Lorelai's age.

"Hi Michel" Rory replied, the telltale grimace still adorning her face. "Michel Gerard, Logan Huntzberger. Logan, Michel has worked with my Mom and Sookie for years. Even before the Dragonfly, at the Independence Inn. Yes, Michel, as you so delightfully put it, Logan is my 'Baby Daddy'."

"Nice to meet you, Michel." His hands on Lucas's bottom, Logan assessed the situation and decided Michel did not seem the type to welcome a handshake with a hand so recently removed from a baby's bottom. He nodded a greeting but kept his hands on Lucas.

Michel, wearing a slight smile, seemed to be studying him.

"Finally," the man nodded with what Logan could only describe as vague approval. "A man who knows how to dress and combs his hair. Are those Tom Ford?"

Snickering, Logan stole a glance at Rory. She was full-on glaring at Michel now. Michel had a good eye. The slacks were Tom Ford. "Yeah, actually. They are."

"I knew it!" Michel beamed.

"Michel, you make it sound like every other guy I dated was a Yeti."

"Oh, no. No, I did not say that." Michel chuckled as he spoke. "However, I will say the crazy apple does not fall far from the tree of insanity."

"Michel!" Lorelai's partner, Sookie, emerging from a central hallway, had obviously caught Michel's comment. Logan couldn't help but notice the warning look she gave Michel. "You shouldn't say those things. Logan doesn't know you. He doesn't know you're joking. Tell Logan you're joking."

"I am not joking. He is Little Lorelai's Baby Daddy. I am sure he knows all the skeletons in the closet by name."

Unbidden, Logan laughed. At Rory's annoyed look, he shook his head, still chuckling. "Sorry, Ace. But he has a point."

"Pay him no mind, Logan. He's just hangry because he didn't get any fat free granola today."

"Because someone is being evil."

"I can't give you any, Michel. Cause you eat it all and then there's none left for the guests!"

"That is not true. Besides you can always make more."

"Oh sure. I can spend all my time making fat free granola! Come on down to the Dragonfly! Breakfast? How about fat-free granola?! Lunch? Still got that granola! Dinner? Oh, yeah! More granola! You know what? I'm gonna ignore you now. Cause I see someone here who had a birthday recently! Hi Lucas! Happy Belated Birthday! I'm Auntie Sookie!" Sookie leaned over to greet Lucas.

"It seems like every other day is a birthday. On Monday he'll be six weeks, but really one week corrected."
"How much does he weigh?"

"He's good. Right at eight and a quarter when he was last weighed."

"That is good! He's a feeder and a little foodie in the making!"

"The kid does enjoy his meals." Logan had intended his comment only as an innocuous observation. He certainly hadn't meant to bring attention to Rory's breasts. Noting the Rory Look directed his way, he chuckled. Rory apparently perceived it differently; his girl had a deliciously dirty mind.

"Speaking of meals," Michel rolled his eyes as he spoke. "Your school friend who is one fry short of a happy meal has already checked in. Even though it was made clear that we would not be receiving guests until four."

**Rory's friend who was one fry short of a happy meal?** Logan could not for the life of him figure out who Michel was talking about. Unless, of course, he meant one of the guys. Possibly Finn. Likely Finn. But it was too early for the guys. They weren't due for a few days.

Rory's gaze shifted between Michel and Sookie. "What friend? From college?"


As Logan watched, he saw Rory's eyes widen.

"Paris? Paris is here? Where is she?"

"Yes," Michel's face held a look of disgust. "She has already checked into her suite. Her, her troll, and her hipster. What kind of place does she think this is? A couple and an extra man. I sent them out. To look at birds. Or to get pedicures. I do not recall which."

**Paris was into threesomes these days?**

"Ace?"

"It's Terrence, their marriage counselor. Where's Mom?"

"She's doing a final sweep of the rooms with the King of Jeans."

"Who?" asked Logan.


"Of course." Logan leaned in to whisper to his son. "Hey. You getting all this?"

"Oh! Joy! Look who has returned. Maybe her broomstick got caught in a tree."

**Broomstick?**

Logan, like Rory, turned to glance out the front window to see who Michel was referring to.

**Paris.**

Before he could stop himself Logan laughed. At Rory's sharp look, he understood her unspoken command and struggled to clear his throat instead. "Excuse me."

"Michel," scolded Rory in a hissed whisper. "You shouldn't insult the guests."
"I do not insult anyone to their face. I just talk to myself." Michel directed his next words to Logan. "It is a side effect of working with Lorelai for twenty-five years. Madness is inevitable."

"Michel!" Sookie gave Michel a warning look. "Again. You shouldn't joke with Logan until he knows you better!"

"Again. I am not joking! Oh look. She has her pet troll but not the mule-wearing hipster. If there is a God, then they left him at a shoe store. Why does the world need Michel Gerard to explain patent leather and exposed foot fungus do not mix?!"

Finally, the door opened and the new arrivals could be heard as they made their way inside.

"Well, I don't have it Doyle! If you don't have it, then Terrence must so we're going to have to wait for him to catch up!"

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Michel. "They lost Zippy the Bunhead!"

"Well, the way he was complaining about his mules sliding, it could be hours before he catches up." Doyle shrugged off his jacket. Logan noted he was wearing a vintage Smithereens concert tee.

"I told him to call that weird guy's mother if he didn't feel like walking anymore."

"He gives people rides on his pig?"

"No. He has a golf cart and a pet pig. But they don't have anything to do with one another."

"Hm. That's actually pretty - "

"No, Doyle! It's not! It's not interesting! There is not a movie script in the story of a man who gives people rides in a golf cart while talking to his pet pig!"

As they watched, and listened, enthralled, the door opened once more.

"Hey, you two. You were going so fast. If I didn't know better, I would've thought you were trying to lose me!" Logan could only deduce that the bun-sporting, soul-patched man wearing Gucci backless loafers was Terrence the marriage counselor.

"Oh no, joy! There he is! Two's company. Three's a circus act!"

"Michel!" Rory scolded Michel again.

"Of course we didn't try to lose you, Terrence." Paris argued. "It's just really nice out and we felt like jogging. Hey! Look who's here! Rory! Michel! Sookie!"

*Nice to see you, too, Paris.*

As Paris made her way over to Rory, Logan watched as Terrence grabbed Doyle's arm and held him back. Unintentionally, he caught some of their conversation.

"When you jog, do you hear her, Doyle?"

"Yes, yes. I do hear her. I'd like to hear less of you."

"Hi guys. It's good to see you." Rory was the first to greet Paris and Doyle. "And Terrence. How are you?"
"Good, Sweetie." Terrence nodded as he and Doyle stepped closer to the group. "I hear you've been going through a late bloomer quarterlife crisis. Just want to say I'm here if you need me."

"Oh? Thanks but I'm good."

"That's not what I heard!"

Rory's face contorted in irritation. Her eyes swept over Paris before returning to Terrence.

"Just what have you heard?"

"I heard there might be a little co-dependency going on. A little mourning for the past. A little not-quite-ready-for-primetime when it comes to the future."

"What?! Paris! I thought you said you were gonna be supportive..?!"

"Yeah and most days I am. It's just..."

"Just...What?"

"He's still Dandy Gibb, Rory. Some days I forget. But never mind that. What the heck is Lucas doing here? I know he's a brand new baby and this is a brand new inn but it's still a petrie dish filled with germs. You do realize that, don't you?"

"He's just down here for a little while until his nanny gets here. Then he'll be safely tucked in his room."

"Hm. Don't come crying to me when he gets sick."

"But you're a doctor!"

"Not that kind of doctor." Done admonishing Rory, Paris turned to face the others. "Sookie. Michel. This is my estranged husband and current lover, Doyle. This is Terrence, our marriage counselor. Doyle, Terrence. Sookie is the chef here while Michel is the concierge."

"Hi everyone. Hey Logan," Doyle nodded.


"Metta." Terrence brought his hands up in the prayer position, as he bent in greeting to each person in the group. "Metta, everyone. That means loving-kindness."

"Uh, yeah! Metta right back at ya!" Sookie responded, animatedly waving her hands. "And welcome to the Dragonfly! Who's up for some sangria?!"

AN: Thanks for reading.
Test Run at the Dragonfly, Part II

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman-Palladino.

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, Dragonfly Annex, Saturday, June 24, 2017, 3:30 pm EST

Once Carol arrived, Team LoRoLu headed upstairs to their suite. Carol, a Torrington-based nanny, had been found with Honor's help. Since Rory and Logan had wanted a nanny who could travel to both Hartford and Stars Hollow finding someone who lived in a town situated between the two was a no-brainer. Carol came with a ton of references. Though she'd never worked for Honor directly, she'd worked for several of Honor's friends and had babysat Honor and Josh's kids on occasion.

Carol, a pleasant woman in her mid-forties, had come to the Hartford apartment three times the previous week. Still busy getting into their own rhythm, as parents, as a couple, and as Team LoRoLu, neither Logan nor Rory felt comfortable with the idea of bringing her in as a full-time live-in nanny. Having someone in the apartment part of the time was okay; but neither one of them wanted someone constantly underfoot. Besides, they were doing pretty damn good on their own.

Logan, unencumbered by the need to report daily to an office, was all over hanging out with Lucas. He wasn't shy or tentative around his son. Aside from the breastfeeding, he did everything Rory did. Logan appreciated the fact that -beyond actually caring for their son- those moments afforded him an opportunity to get to know his son. Although getting to know Lucas was still a relatively uncomplicated endeavor -the baby's cries dictated by his basic needs- Logan swore hints of his underlying personality were already revealing themselves. He was increasingly assured Lucas and he had similar musical tastes; they made faces at the same songs.

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, Dragonfly Annex, Saturday, June 24, 2017, 6:05 pm EST

With Carol and Lucas successfully settled into the suite, Rory and Logan were free to attend the Dragonfly's opening night festivities. As they stepped out into the hallway Rory hung a sharp left to head towards the staircase. Before she was able to take a second step, Logan grabbed her arm.

"Whoa, there. Hold your horses, Ace." He pulled her closer to him.

"What's up?" She lifted her eyes to his. "We told Paris and Doyle we'd meet them in the dining room at six."

"Ah. Interesting tactic. You trying to get me to go downstairs? Or hide under the bed?" Placing a hand on either side of her waist, he caressed her gently.

"Very funny. Come on, Dandy. Your fans await."

"Yeah, about that. I don't really look like the lost BeeGee, do I?"

Rory shrugged. "I think it's the dimples, Huntzberger. But I don't care what Paris says. I'm not a fan of the late 70s disco scene but there's a few songs from the 60s I can listen to without gagging. I don't mind if you do look like the forgotten BeeGee."
"Lost BeeGee. Not Forgotten BeeGee." Logan corrected her.

Rory chuckled. "Of course," she rolled her eyes. "Nothing forgettable about you. And just so you know, I really don't mind your looks."

"You don't?"

"Nope." She shook her head. "You kinda look like Lucas."

"I look like Lucas?"

"Yeah."

"You sure it's not the other way around, Ace?"

"Chicken and egg, Huntzberger. Does it really matter?"

Rory stretched up on her toes to bring her lips to his.

"I can live with that."

"Great. So that's settled and we can go."

"One last thing." His hands still on her waist, he leaned in for one last kiss before their 'date' with Terrence and the McMasters. "You look amazing."

She did, too. She had on a vibrant print dress - a dramatic pattern of reds and violets and blues - with nude pumps. The dress brought out the blue of her eyes and the red highlights in her hair.

"Thank you."

"I think you look a bit like Lucas, too."

"Yeah. I've got his eyes."

**Stars Hollow, Connecticut, Dragonfly Annex, Saturday, June 24, 2017, 6:30 pm EST**

A few minutes late in their arrival at the dining room, the couple discovered that the station cocktail hour was already well underway. According to Rory, the guests were a mix of friends and actual inn guests from the original Dragonfly. Everyone had been invited to the party. While Rory was disappointed that they did not find her mother and Luke, Logan was disappointed that they did find Paris, Doyle, and Terrence. After some time spent on innocuous small talk - mostly about the inn and baby related things - Rory excused herself to go find Lorelai. Logan internally cringed at her departure which left him with the Witch, the Troll and the Hipster.

Ah. Who to talk to?

The last thing he wanted to do was have yet another heart-to-heart with Paris Geller. He glanced around looking for Sookie and his new friend Michel. He wondered if that Taylor guy was around somewhere? Maybe Michel could give him pointers on how to deal with Lorelai. Twenty-five years of working together; that was substantial. Logan was pulled from his thoughts by the sound of that voice he knew so well.

"So Huntzberger, it looks like Gilmore hasn't given you your walking papers yet."

Always so charming and to the point.

"How are those parents of yours? Any more special gifts? Maybe antique bowls from ancient Rome?"

"No, Paris. We haven't seen them in a month." Shifting his gaze, he locked eyes with her. "But I'm sure you already knew that."

"Yeah, well. I still want to ask you something."

"Ask away. You know what they say. There's no such thing as stupid questions. Just stupid people."

"Cute. Well until they make stupidity a crime, I guess you and your idiot friends will continue to walk free."

Logan sighed. They'd have to come to truce some day. Maybe. "What can I do for you Paris?"

"I just wanted to say that Rory seems happy."

Rory seems happy because Rory is happy.

"I sense a 'but' in there."

"The 'but' is this: You seem to be on a spring break from life. It's all shiny happy people holding hands. I don't know what your plan is. If you're retired or if you're gonna crawl back on your hands and knees to The Mitchum and Shirania -"

"Paris -"

"- but whatever your plan is, Rory and Lucas have to come first."

Was she kidding?

"Paris, I agree with you."

"Words are cheap, Huntzberger. It's actions that matter."

"Paris! They have crab puffs." Saved by The Troll.

"I'll be right there," she replied to Doyle over her shoulder. "Just do the right thing, Huntzberger." With that she stalked off.

Logan, left alone, studied the ice cubes in his glass. Enjoying his momentary, silent reprieve, he wasn't surprised when it all too quickly came to an end with the sound of another familiar voice.

"So Logan." Doyle approached with a small plate piled high with crab puffs. "How are you? And, before I forget, congratulations!"

Congratulations? Ah. Lucas.

"Thanks Doyle. Yeah, Lucas'll be six weeks on Monday."

"Oh yeah, there's the baby, too, isn't there?" He snickered. "I was actually referring to your artful dodge from unholy matrimony. Masterfully done, masterfully done. I wanted to ask you something: Do you mind if I borrow snippets of your story? I'm working on a screenplay and I think elements of..."
your life -specifically the runaway groom thing- would work in quite nicely." At Logan's silent reaction, Doyle tried again. "C'mon, Logan. We men-about-town have to stick together."

Logan's previously inscrutable face twisted into a grimace. "Men-about-town?"

Doyle giggled. "Well, yeah! I may not have been born with a silver spoon, but now that I'm a Hollywood screenwriter I've definitely found the ladies - shall we say - receptive."

"You're playing the mancard with me, Doyle?"

"I'm just saying we're two of the East Coast's most eligible bachelors. We should hang out some time. Maybe a weekend in New York. Paint the town red!"

Logan winced, feeling a new wave of gratitude for Rory. Wait until he filled her in on Doyle's mega-disturbing offer. "Doyle, you need to put that mancard away. In fact, I think my balls are trying to crawl back inside."

Suddenly there was Paris with Terrence in tow. Of course she'd overheard Logan's last comment.

"That shouldn't be too high of a climb, Huntzberger. But let me know if they need help," offered Paris.

"Of course, Paris." He sipped his scotch.

"You are so hot when you threaten other men." Doyle was staring at Paris with what Logan could only describe as a hungry look.

"Oh yeah? You don't even wanna know how I'd help Huntzberger get the boys back upstairs."

Without warning, Doyle handed Logan his plate and smashed his lips to Paris's. Logan thought -and hoped - for a second Paris was going to slap him. Instead she handed her plate to Terrence and enthusiastically returned Doyle's passionate embrace.

"Paris? Doyle? You can't hide your dysfunction behind lust. You know you can't hear one another when you drown yourselves in passion."

Frowning, Logan placed Doyle's plate on a table and stepped away from the deranged McMasters and their equally insane marriage counselor. Where was Rory? Looking around the room, he saw a couple of faces he thought familiar but it had been ten years since his weekend in Stars Hollow. The only one he knew he'd recognize was Kirk, the independent "film-maker" but he didn't see him. He thought he'd recognize Taylor, too, but didn't see him either. As he stood in the dining room, Logan noticed quite a few of the natives staring at him. He raised his glass in greeting to a group that included a short, heavyset blonde woman, a similarly built but taller dark-haired woman, and a very tall man wearing a black pork pie hat and sunglasses.

"Yoo-hoo! Rory's Baby Daddy!"

Following the voice, Logan saw Michel and Sookie standing just inside one of the entrances off the central hallway. He grinned. He'd hang with Michel over the McMasters and their demented therapist any day. He made fast strides to the duo.

"Hey Michel, Sookie. Nice party."

"Thank you. Yes. Yes it was. Until it became repulsive." Michel, his face twisted into a look of disgust, jerked his chin to where Doyle and Paris were still making out. "How sweet. They are made
for each other. And we get to share their joy. I think I am going to be sick."

"Make that two." Sookie agreed.

"Make that three." Logan grimaced.

Michel twisted his head around to look at Logan.

"I like you. You sure you want to subject yourself to the Lorelai's?"

"Michel! What did I say before about Logan not knowing you well enough to get your jokes?!" Sookie gave Logan a slightly manic smile. "Michel is joking. He jokes a lot. I mean Lord knows he could've left the Dragonfly dozens of times over the years but he keeps choosing to stay." Her eyes threw daggers at Michel. "Although someone else could always make the decision for him."

Michel sighed loudly. "Please. I can't with the empty threats. Fire me. I beg of you. Like you could find anyone to replace me. Yes, it is true. I do not leave. It is like Stockholm syndrome. I have acclimated to the crazy. I feel better about myself when I am standing next to the Hot Mess."

His soliloquy done, Michel fell silent. Sookie continued to glare at him.

New topic?

"So, either of you know where Rory is?" asked Logan.

Sookie nodded. "Yeah. She was in the office with Lorelai. She should be out soon."

Doyle and Paris, meanwhile, had tempered down their ardor and were quickly making their way to the small group. A silent, brooding Terrence trailing after them.

"So, Logan? What do you say?"

"About what, Doyle?"

"Letting me pilfer through your runaway groom drama for my script."

"Why don't you borrow from your own life, Doyle? Married to, separated from, and now once again dating the female Danny Bonaduce." He gestured to Paris. "There's gotta be a story in that."

Michel, listening with unabashed curiosity, chortled at Logan's comment. "I get it. It is because she is so pugnacious. She would wrestle a leaf to the ground if it landed on her."

"Nice! Real nice, Huntzberger."

"I sense some repressed hostility." Terrence observed, looking back and forth between Logan and Paris. "A little sexual tension perhaps?"

"Ew! God, no!" replied Paris.

"Do you even know what the word 'repressed' means?" Logan had a disbelieving look on his face.

"Never mind Terrence! I can't believe you're insulting me in front of some of my best friends, Euro-Disick!" Waving a hand at Sookie and Michel, Paris glared at Logan.

"Best friends?" repeated Sookie, her voice echoing surprise. She leaned in to whisper into Logan's ear. "She would send notes back to the kitchen listing all the things wrong with my dishes!"
"I'll have you know that Michel, Sookie, and I spent a lot of quality time together during college. It was when I'd come down to visit Lorelai. While you and Rory were 'Endless Love'ing it up in the pool house."

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! The pool house! I know this! I know this!" Excited, Sookie's head bobbed up and down while her hands flailed. "What is the renovated sex house?!


"What is a sex house?" repeated a horrified Michel. "Lorelai is not planning to build one of those at the inn, is she?" Michel groaned. "I need to install a nanny-cam if I cannot watch her 24/7. After camping in California, and the endless Reese Witherspoon purchases – 'Y'all This' 'Y'all That'– her taste is becoming quite questionable."

Rory chose that moment to join the group. "Hey everybody. Logan."

"Hey Ace."

"What're you all talking about?"

Grasping Rory's arm, he quickly moved the two of them away from the bickering group, toward the second entrance along that wall. "Nothing." He kissed her cheek. "How're things with Lorelai? All good?"

"Yeah. It was just some of the things I'd been working on she had questions about. Everything's fine."

"Luke and Lorelai making an appearance?"

"Eventually. April was flying in today so Luke went to go pick her up. My mom is just going in a million directions at once. She'll be in in a few minutes." Rory paused before continuing. "How're things here? You introduce yourself to everybody?"

"As in 'Hi, I'm Rory's Baby Daddy'? No. Figured I'd wait for you."

"Oh. Interesting time for your shyness to kick in."

"Believe me, I'm not shy. Why would I want to go around a room and introduce myself as the one who accidentally knocked you up? I have no idea what these people know or think. Without you on my arm, they'll wonder why you didn't want to be seen with me. I'd look sketchy as hell, Ace."

"So, you think you look less sketchy with me on your arm? I'm flattered."

"Ace -"

"Hey." Suddenly Lorelai materialized at the entrance. Within seconds she stood beside them. "How're things going?"

"Good." Rory nodded her head.

"Fine, Lorelai." Logan gestured to the room. "The place came out great."

"Thanks, Logan." Lorelai smiled.

Several weeks earlier Logan and Lorelai had reached a détente. It wasn't the forging of a great new
friendship but they had agreed that seeing Rory and Lucas safe and happy were mutual goals. Coming together at that basic level shouldn't have been as big a deal as it was, but they had a lot of baggage to overcome. While Rory was motivated to be optimistic and override her natural cynicism for the sake of their son, Lorelai had no such inspiration. Her impression of Logan's world was unshakable. Her own experience as a single mother her beacon. It seemed beyond her comprehension that Rory wouldn't follow suit. That battle belonged to Rory. His part was only to love her, love Lucas, and not give Lorelai any ammunition for 'I told you so's'. That last one had been tricky when they were younger but now he couldn't imagine doing anything to rock the boat. He wanted them to work even more than Rory did. Unlike Rory, he needed them to work.

"Lorelai! Rory! And who's this?"

At the sound of a female voice Logan turned to look behind him. Approaching were the three people he'd noticed earlier. The two women and the man in the pork pie hat.

"This is Logan Huntzberger." Lorelai took over the introductions. "Logan this is Miss Patty."


Patty held her hand out to Logan. Logan took it but then found he couldn't pull his back. Miss Patty had a strong grip.

"Oh. Does my reputation precede me?"

"I think your hands precede you, Patty," joked Lorelai.

"Oh hon, when you're my age you get it where you can. And what it is is is pretty open to interpretation."

"Oh Lorelai! Look at this place! Doll, you can do no wrong with this stuff. Right, Morey?!"

"It's looking good, Lorelai. You've got real talent."

"Thank you Babette, Morey. Have you met Logan Huntzberger?"

"Hi," nodded Logan holding his hand out first to Babette then to Morey.

"Oh is this Lucas's daddy?"

"Yes." Logan nodded, smiling.

"Yes, he is."

Rory and Logan answered at the same time.

"That's my claim to fame."

"I can't wait to meet the little guy. He's gotta be a cutie."

"Uh, Miss Patty, I'm sorry but as his mom I have to say he's a little too young for you."

"Oh I know sweetie, I just wanna pinch those cheeks."

"Which ones?"

"Lorelai! You're bad!"
"Uh, Patty. Me?"

Patty roared in laughter. "You know me so well." The woman leaned forward and pinched Logan's cheek. "Just like that."

Logan, stunned at having his cheek pinched at age thirty-five, could only stand there. Next to him, Rory laughed.

"I won't pinch you, Logan. But the pictures! The pictures! So cute I can't stand it! Right Morey?!" Babette glanced at her husband seeking his agreement before turning back to Logan and Rory.

"Yeah. Kid's got a good look," agreed Morey.

"Thank you," smiled Rory. Her hand casually reclaimed Logan's. "That's so sweet of you to say."

"Tell them about the hat, babe."

"Oh, yeah! We got him a little baby hat! Just like Morey's! It's so cute! Got it off the Internet! It's a loose cable crochet stitch and baby blue not black but other than that, it looks just like Morey's hat!"

"Wow! Thank you!" Rory smiled at the couple. "It sounds adorable. Can't wait to put it on him."

"So? Is he making an appearance tonight?" asked Patty. "Not that your cheeks weren't delightful."

"I get it," grinned Logan. "I'm a poor substitute."

"Hardly poor." Logan heard Lorelai mutter under her breath.

"Yeah, sug! We wanted to see the new place, of course. But we really wanted to see the new baby!"

"Oh, he's a bit young to be around so many people. He's upstairs with his nanny."

"Oh! So we won't get to see him?" asked an obviously disappointed Babette.

"Well..." Rory broke off, uncertain.

Logan leaned in to whisper in Rory's ear. "We could bring him down for an early walk through at breakfast."

"You think?"

"Sure. Why not? No passing him around though."

Considering, Rory nodded. "Okay. We'll bring Lucas down tomorrow morning."

"Aw!" smiled Patty. "That's something to look forward to."

"Even more than Sookie's blueberry pancakes!" agreed Babette. "And her pancakes are the cat's meow!"

After shooting a quick smile at Logan, Rory turned back to Patty and Babette. "So, is Taylor over the fact that we didn't name Lucas after him?"

"Who knows with that man?" replied Patty. "He's going through manopause."

"Oh, yeah!" injected Babette. "Rory you don't know the half of it! He's getting wackier and wackier and that's sayin' a lot for Taylor!"
"Man needs hormone treatments," offered Morey much to Logan's amusement.

"Ooh. Maybe he should be the next one to get a pig?" suggested Miss Patty.

AN: Thanks for reading.
The next morning Rory, Logan, Lucas, and the nanny, Carol, started the day off early. Since the
Dragonfly's dining room opened at eight, they decided to bring Lucas downstairs before breakfast
officially began anticipating there would be few others down there at that time.

"Carol, you sure you'll be okay? You're welcome to stay with us. Or you could go to my stepfather's
diner."

"Luke's, right?" At Rory's nod, the woman continued. "I haven't been to Stars Hollow in a while. I
think I'll just walk around. Text me when you need me back."

"Will do. Figure not more than an hour. Possibly less. Our friends were meeting us early but I don't
want him in there when they start the official breakfast so if it starts to get crowded, we'll bring him
back up."

"So before eight-thirty. Bye-bye, Lucas." With a quick wave Carol headed towards the door of the
suite.

"Ready?" Logan posed the question to Rory but was looking at Lucas in his Mountain Buggy as he
spoke.

"Ready," Rory nodded. "You ready, Lucas?"

As they watched, the baby yawned and briefly opened his eyes before closing them once more.

"Wow. I wonder if he'll always be this mellow."

"Yeah. He's a pretty easygoing kid."

"Right? I have to ask my mom if I was this quiet when I was a baby. What about you?"

"We can ask Honor but I think my noisy years started at two."

"Any idea when they'll end?"

"Ha ha. Cute, Ace." Logan tilted his head again to direct his next words to his son. "Hey. Big Guy.
Your mom thinks she's pretty funny, doesn't she?"

"Oh, hold up. He's got something hanging off his nose. Let me wipe him."

Rory pulled a tissue from her handbag and wiped Lucas's nose.

"Come on, Kid. We can't take you anywhere with all that schmutz."

"Oh, yeah?" Tilting his head, Logan looked at Lucas. "Boy. He takes after you, Ace. Big time. Talk about easy to please. Wipe his nose and he's thrilled."

Lucas squealed and proceeded to bubble up some drool between his lips.

"Hm. I'm starting to see how this is gonna play out. Kid's gonna be quiet but a slobbering mess."

"Ssh! No complexes yet." Rory wiped the baby's face again. "Remember? Eighteen years. We wait until next year to start."

"Next year?"

"Yep. Next year."

"It's a date."

"It's a date. Come on, Huntzberger. His public awaits."

"Let's go, Big Guy. Team LoRoLu in da house!"

"He's smiling again. I think he's trying to laugh. I know, Baby. Daddy's silly when he tries to do his street rapper jam." Rory grabbed Logan's arm. "Hey." Rory stretched up until their lips met. "Terrible but nice try."

"Thank you. Maybe I'll start playing guitar again. Get some street cred."

"Good luck with that. Just don't try it in front of the town troubadour. He'll laugh his ass off."

"Damn. I forgot the town already has a troubadour. Gonna have to come up with something else then."

"Logan - "

"Kidding, Ace. It's all good."

"You - we - are gonna have to talk to them eventually."

"And we will. But let's just enjoy this Huntzberger-free time while we can."

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, Dragonfly Annex, The Dining Room, Sunday, June 25, 2017, 8:00 am EST

"So it looks like I'm finally getting those Blackstone pricks out."

"Excuse me?" Logan nearly choked on his coffee at Emily's coarse language.

Seated in the dining room, it was Logan's turn to have coffee and breakfast while Rory held court with Lucas, now nattily attired in a baby blue pork pie hat courtesy of Babette and Morey. The current group seated at the table for four - aside from Logan, Rory and Lucas - included Emily and Lorelai.

"Didn't Rory tell you? I've been wanting to buy the house next door. Richard and I always talked
about having our own family compound. My house is lovely but it's not big enough to have you and Rory and Lucas and Lorelai and Luke and April and Berta and her family and Jack all there at once. But with the Blackstones' house next door, I'll have plenty of room."

"That's terrific, Grandma."

"Of course I won't have time to completely redecorate by the Fourth but I should be able to make some changes. You'll have to let me know what you need to have for Lucas so I have time to order it. When are you three coming out?"

Rory threw a hesitant look at Logan. "I don't know. We need to figure out how we're traveling. It's a long trip for Lucas between the drive and the ferry. He's still pretty fresh."

"Fresh?"

"You know. New."

"For heaven's sake. Of course he's new. He's a baby. Sometimes you sound just like your mother."

"Gee. Thanks, Mom."

"Lorelai, it wasn't an insult."

"Could've fooled me."

During his brief sojourn in Stars Hollow, Logan found himself gaining million dollar insights into the Gilmore girls' dynamics. Although what he knew amounted to a drop in the bucket, he knew enough to recognize that it was time to nip this in the bud.

"You know, Ace, we could always fly to Nantucket."

"Fly? But there's no direct flights from Hartford."

"Rory." As he said her name, he quirked his eyebrow. Logan tried to imbue his tone with everything necessary to get his message across without actually saying the words. 'Rory. Come on. Plane and ferry schedules are not things you or my son will ever need to worry about."

"Oh yeah. Guess that's... You have access to the jets."

"We."

"Right. We have access to the jets. I'll have to get used to that."

"Yeah."

Lorelai cleared her throat prompting Logan to glance over at her. He saw that her eyes were thoughtful as she studied Rory holding Lucas.

"Something wrong, Lorelai?"


Emily, not blind to the tension, resumed her story.

"So, as I started to tell you, my neighbor - Mark Greenberg - Rory, that's the retired lawyer who I told you might be friends with Whitey Bulger. Well, it turns out he is. Or at least he was. Until
Whitey got sent to the *slammer*. Anyway Mark's a very interesting man. He knows how to get things done. By *thinking-outside-the-box*.

"Mom? Are you telling Lucas the story of how you shook down the neighbors so he could have his own room?"

"Lorelai, I was telling a story. It's rude of you to interrupt."

"Mom. It's a horrible story."

"Lorelai, it's my story. You can tell your story next. So Mark hired a private investigator to keep an eye on the Blackstones."

"To spy on them, Grandma?"

"Nothing illegal. He just put a trail on them."

"A *tail*, Mom. It's called a 'tail' when you have someone followed. Not a 'trail.'"

"You'll never believe what happened next. His investigator discovered the husband was cheating on the wife. They delivered photo evidence to the wife. She was aghast at the whole thing. Now they're divorcing and want to do a quick sale on the house. So I get my compound after all."

"Grandma, that's awful and terrific at the same time."

"Yeah, Emily. That's some story."

"Does David Mamet know about you? This little enclave of yours on Nantucket has more infidelity twists and turns than *Desperate Housewives*."

"Oh, Lorelai! The woman was bound to find out eventually. This way she found out sooner rather than later. And she was able to file for divorce using the extramarital affair clause in her prenup. We did her a favor. And she was so grateful, I get my compound. It's a win-win. Besides they were horrible neighbors. As you can well imagine." Emily rolled her eyes. "Their marital shenanigans were just the tip of the iceberg."

Thankfully, the conversation came to its natural - yet supremely awkward - conclusion as Miss Patty, Babette, and Morey approached the table. The trio stood positioned between Rory with Lucas and Emily.

"Hello again." Patty apparently was the self-appointed spokesperson. "We know you're taking him away. We thought we'd get another look before he disappears."

"Fine. Look," replied Lorelai. "But no more cheek-pinching, Patty. Rory's usually pretty calm but you don't want to poke the bear."

Logan couldn't help but notice the irritated look Rory shot Lorelai at her mother's joke. Stealing a glance at Emily, he saw that she, too, was aware of the slightly tense undercurrent flowing between mother and daughter. Lorelai, meanwhile, all smiles at the new arrivals, pretended to be oblivious.

"Lorelai, you're bad." Patty, chuckling, shook her head. "Not that it wasn't a pleasure meeting you, Logan, but we're actually here to get another glimpse of your adorable son." Patty, smiling pleasantly, glanced back and forth between Logan and Rory.

Logan realized that Rory, still irked by her mother's comment, was not prepared to respond to Patty.
He quickly rose to his feet.


"You bet," replied Morey.

Patty and Babette, meanwhile, wasted no time in moving closer to Rory and the baby. The two women didn't take their eyes from the baby as they responded to Logan.

"Of course!" answered Babette. "Every musician's gotta have a pork pie hat! We're glad you like it!"

"We do. Now, we're just gonna have to get him a baby baby grand."

"Oh! I don't think you should start the kid off with a piano right away. His fingers are really tiny! It took Morey until he was eight to get good at it. Maybe you should start off with somethin' simple. Like one of those baby xylophones! He can bang the keys with one of those nobbed sticks!"

"Yeah. As soon as he's ready, we'll do that."

"Look at that face," cooed Patty. "If only I was seventy years younger."

"Logan. Give me a call when you get your guitar. We can jam."

"Sounds good, Morey."

"Lucas has definitely got piano fingers, Rory! All the girls'll be swarming around him like bees to honey if he's a musician!"

"Oh, Babette." Rory was finally emerging from her Lorelai-induced funk. "I'm not sure what I think about that."

"Oh." Logan nearly laughed aloud at Babette's look of utter bewilderment. It was obvious that, to Babette, there was nothing more sacred than being a musician.

"No. Not the musician part. It's just weird to think of him having girls chasing after him."

"Oh sure, hon. I get it."

"Well." Patty straightened, glancing around. "We better get back to our table before the late arrivals try to steal it. Rory, Logan. You staying in town long?"

"Uh," Rory started to reply but then fell silent. Logan knew she was hedging on his account. Even if they weren't currently talking to them, Huntzberger-related uncertainty continued to hang over them like a pall. Meeting her gaze, he shrugged.

"We don't have anywhere to be, Ace. Not until Emily's Fourth of July party."

"Yeah. That's true." Rory looked back to Patty.

"You still interested in buying the Oasis? One surefire way to make Taylor less grumpy is to drop a wad of cash into his wallet."

Logan laughed. "Yeah. That tends to work with a lot of people." Darting a look at Lorelai, Logan saw she wore a frozen smile; he figured she was probably biting down hard to keep herself from saying something sarcastic. Sensing Rory's eyes on him, Logan turned to meet her gaze. "You
wanna talk to him?"

"Oh there he is." Patty spotted the town selectman/mayor. "Taylor! Get your butt over here! I'm making you a sale!"

Patty would've gone far in his business. "I guess we're talking to him."

Taylor had been seated several tables away with independent film-maker Kirk and his wife Lulu. The sweater-afficionado perked up immediately at hearing his name being called. Although Kirk and Lulu had visited the table earlier to meet Lucas and Logan, Taylor had not. Observing to Rory that he thought Kirk had looked at him 'funny,' Rory's response was only "that's just Kirk." Lulu had been pleasant if somewhat talkative.

This town definitely had some characters.

"Taylor!" Patty called again. "Come on! Get a move on!"

Wearing a very beleaguered and put upon face, the man finally stood and made his way over to their table. Watching the selectman approach the table, Logan had only one thought: schnauzer. Once he got the image in his head, it was impossible to shake.

"Patty, I thought you'd agreed to stop referring to my butt in public."

"No, Taylor," replied Lorelai. "I agreed to stop referring to your butt in public. Patty made no such promise. And technically it wasn't your butt. It was your 'floppy Taylor underpants.'"

"Oh." Taylor huffily replied. "My bad. So what did you want? Did you call my butt over here for a reason?"

"Yes, I did. Look who's here." Patty gestured to Rory.

"Hi Taylor."

"Harrumph. I see who it is. The former editor of the Stars Hollow Gazette. The one I gave her start to. The one who thanked me for her career by leaving me in the lurch and by not naming her son after me."

"Taylor, I had a career before the Gazette. I ran the paper for free for months. I left you with a sustainable business model to keep it going with the high school. I upgraded the computers and the systems. And I never agreed to name Lucas after you."

Taylor snorted. "Fine," he replied peevishly as he cast his wounded gaze aimlessly around the room. "I suppose you don't want to buy the Oasis anymore either."

"No. I do." Rory stole a glance at Logan before revising her statement. "We do."

"Well, it's still there. As long as you don't think you're too good for it now. Considering your new financial situation," Taylor shot a look at Logan, "I'd only increase the price by a hundred thousand."

"Taylor! We agreed on a price!"

"But, we didn't close. Besides that offer was made months ago."

"We didn't close because the inspector broke his leg. And you decided you had to go see 'Hamilton'
with Nat. Again. Then I was admitted to the hospital and had a baby."

"Do you really think finger-pointing does either of us any good?"

"Fine. What do **you** suggest?"

"How about we get new comps on more recent home sales?"

"So we'll adjust the price to the new comps?" asked Rory. At Taylor's silence, Rory rolled her eyes before continuing. "We'll adjust the price to the new comps if prices have gone up."

Taylor nodded, a smile on his schnauzer face. "You got yourself a deal."

"Great. How about we schedule a time for a walk-through this week?"

"Excellent. You'll have to work out the details with my property manager."

"Property manager? Who's that?"

"He's sitting right over there." Logan looked to where Taylor was pointing. Ah. The independent film-maker. Kirk.

"Kirk?" Rory let out a breath. "Fine." Making a face, she turned to look at Logan.

This should be interesting. "I'll go, Ace. And the guys'll be here in a couple of days. They can come too. Colin can handle the legal."

Lucas seemed to follow suit with his parents by blowing spittle out through his lips.

"I think the Kid's volunteering to come along as well."

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**AN:** Really nearing the finish line here. Depending on what I decide to post there are either four more chapters or twelve more chapters.

**BTW - Lorelai has been coming to see the baby since he was released! She didn't visit the Friday he was released but did visit the following Sunday and has seen him regularly since then. It's implicit, not explicit.**

**Thank you for reading.**
A warm early summer day, once midday passed, Logan and Rory decided to bring an awake and full-bellied Lucas out for a stroll through Stars Hollow. Logan laughed at Rory's emphatic use of the word 'stroll' but she insisted it was the appropriate term; 'walk' would just not do. Logan welcomed the quiet time away from the inn, away from his friends, away from everyone. After a month of radio silence, he'd finally received a text message from Mitchum. It seemed that their self-imposed Huntzberger exile would soon be drawing to close. He hated being the bearer of bad news but he knew he couldn't keep Rory in the dark.

As they strolled side-by-side, with Logan wearing Lucas, Rory pointed out the various town landmarks, alternating her narrative between tales of Stars Hollow and Gilmore girls folklore. Though he understood by her tone that storytelling hour was largely for Lucas's benefit, Logan appreciated the recap. As he listened to her talk, he recognized random tidbits from the stories she'd shared with him over the years. As for the town itself, he wasn't sure how much of it had changed or how much had stayed the same. The one time he'd visited Stars Hollow - a weekend during Rory's senior year - nearly every building in the downtown had been obscured by hay bales.

"For Mom and Luke's wedding, this whole space was decorated. It was amazing. Kirk -"

"Property manager Kirk? Independent film-maker Kirk?"

Rory nodded. "The one and the same. Kirk had gone all out. The gazebo and all the trees were covered with pink and white lights and streamers and hanging crystals, mini teacups and teapots, and hats -"

"Hats?"

"My mom has a thing with hats. I'm not talking baseball caps. More like the steampunk hat you gave me. There was a whole 'Alice in Wonderland' theme."

Rory walked up to the gazebo and sat. Logan followed and settled down on the step beside to her. Logan smiled watching her fall back into the memory as she resumed recounting the wedding. Nodding, he encouraged her to continue.

"There were tons of lights. Taylor had a fit when he saw the electric bill. And over there, " she raised a hand to point, "there was an antique Volkswagen Beetle -"

"Antique Volkswagen Beetle? Is there such a thing?"

"Yes! Antique Volkswagen Beetle! It was yellow and the trunk was overflowing with flowers. There were tables set up all over the green covered with flowers, candles, clocks. There were pink and white roses wrapped around the lampposts and flowerpots placed all around the gazebo. The flowers
were beautiful. All my mom's favorites. Lilies. Buttercups. Anemones. Gardenias. Hydrangeas. Over there," she paused to point again, "they set up a dance floor -"

"Did you dance?"

"Yeah, but the dance floor was mainly for the flash mobs."

"Flash mobs?"

"Mom and Luke both arranged flash mobs with Miss Patty's dance students."

"You're kidding."

"Nope. I think Miss Patty must've suggested it. I have a hard time believing Mom and Luke both came up with the idea on their own. My mom used Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax. Don't Do It.'"

"TMI, Ace."

"Never! This is my family, Logan. Our family." She gestured to Lucas. "Luke tried to use Steely Dan's 'Hey Nineteen'."

"Tried?"

"My mom found out and had Miss Patty change it to 'Karma Chameleon'."

"Smart woman."

"The wedding was perfect. The weather was perfect. The leaves were at peak. My mom looked so beautiful. She and Luke were so happy. It was a really good time. And the whole town came out for the party -"

"Going by what I've seen the past couple of days, that doesn't seem like too big of a stretch."

"Nope. Agreed. It did help that it was opening night of the Harvest Festival so everyone was coming anyway. We had an open hot dog cart all night. Or, at least, until we ran out...
Hundreds, thousands of photos were taken. So, of course, I did a commemorative Luke and Lorelai wedding issue of the Stars Hollow Gazette."

At that Logan laughed. "You didn't?"

"Oh, no. I did."

"Rory Gilmore bringing back the bully pulpit."

"Do not mock. Their getting married was big news in Stars Hollow."

"I'm not. I'm happy for them." He was. If not a little envious. "They circled each other for over a decade."

"Yes, they did."

"Then what? They lived together another eight, nine?"

Rory turned to Lucas and caressed his cheek and lips as she said in a singsong voice. "Yes they did. Yes they did."
After her foray into baby-talk, Rory fell silent. Peering at her, Logan could see tiny worry lines creasing her brow. While Logan was only too happy to enjoy a peaceful outing with just the three of them and he would've loved being able to pretend that this was their reality, he knew he couldn't. Just like he couldn't ignore the two elephants in the room. Elephant number one was his family. Elephant number two was Lorelai.

"Speaking of Lorelai..."

"Yeah..?"

"You wanna tell me what that was all about?"

"What what was all about?"

"This morning." At Rory's blank expression, Logan sighed. "Come on, Ace. I'm an idiot on many things but one thing I can spot from a mile away is you and Lorelai at odds."

"Oh. That." Rory gave Logan a sidelong glance before continuing to speak. "We kinda had a fight last night. During the cocktail hour. When I left you."

"Why didn't you say something?"

Rory shrugged. "I didn't want to. We've only been back together a few weeks. I was hoping to space out my Lorelai freak outs. It's so retro." She let out a sardonic chuckle. "And not in a good way."

"Ace?"

Her face somber, she returned his gaze.

"First, you know you can talk to me. Anytime. As many times as you need. There's no limit. I'm not keeping count. I'd probably mess up if I tried. That's why I have accountants."

Unbidden, a snort of laughter escaped.

"As for it being unfashionably retro, are you kidding? Fighting with your parents never goes out of style."

Rory laughed again. "Yeah. Seriously. Especially your parents."

"I don't disagree! My dad alone. A tenth of the world's population could probably find a reason to hate the man."

"Logan, that's 700 million people." Rory chuckled. "As much as I can't stand him, even I say that's too many. Right, Lucas?"

"Okay. How about this for a bright side. You only fight with one parent. I fight with two."

"That's because I only have a relationship with one."

"Chris came by last week. And he came to your party. He'd probably come by more if you invited him. Even if it was just for you to pick fights with him."

"Maybe. I don't know. I told myself I'd make more of an effort after Lucas was born."

"But?"
"But it's awkward. I'm not making the effort. I don't know why I'm not. I'm just not."

"You waiting on him?"

"Maybe. Out of habit."

"Habits can be hard to break."

"Oh...Why'd you say it like that?"

"Like what?"

Rory refused to meet his eyes. Logan replayed his words in his head. Habits. Habits can be hard to break. Habits. Is that what she was afraid of? That they were a habit? A hard-to-break habit?

"Ace? Rory? Look at me."

Finally, she met his gaze.

"You and I -what we are -I've got news for you. We're not a habit. Vegas, New Hampshire, California - there was a slew of decisions -some really bad, some fantastic -but all very deliberate decisions -that brought us to where we are now."

"And where is that?"

Staring at her, Logan got lost in Rory's eyes. He always had and he figured he always would. He smiled as he answered her.

"We're a family. I mean, look at us. Look at me. Look at us. I'm walking around wearing a papoose. I look ridiculous. I wouldn't do this for just anyone." Catching a hint of a grin on her face, he leaned in and dropped a kiss on her lips. He chuckled as he continued. "Just one more under-employed, over-educated, homeless Connecticut family. Right, Big Guy?"

Rory snorted. Seeing the smile reach her eyes, Logan hoped he'd always be able to make her laugh, to put that smile on her face.

"So, come on. Talk to me. What was the fight about?" Still watching her, he saw the instant her eyes became guarded. Him. Of course the fight had been about him. "I'm gonna guess it starts with the letter 'L' and it's not Lucas."

The look on Rory's face confirmed his suspicion.

"She thinks I jumped into this too quickly. That I didn't think about it enough. She thinks we should've just tried co-parenting."

Logan wasn't surprised. In fact, he would've bet money on that being Lorelai's opinion. Even if she had warmed up to him a tiny bit after her initial chilly welcome at the hospital. He knew he'd never be her favorite person. Or even break the top ten. He had hopes for making it into the Top Fifty.

"Was yesterday the first time you talked about it?"

"No," she laughed. "You kidding?"

"Dumb question. So what sparked the fuse yesterday?"

"She asked me how the book was coming and I told her the truth. That I've done very little with it
since I got out of the hospital."

"She's upset that you haven't been working on the book?"

"Yep."

Logan let out a breath. He had to hand it to her: Lorelai was an interesting one. He wondered if he'd ever fully understand her.

"Let me get this straight: She's angry at you for not working on the book she was angry at you for writing in the first place?"

"When you say it like that it sounds insane."

"That's because it is insane."

"No. It's not. There's more. It's not just that I'm not working on the book. It's that I'm not working on the book while I've got a nanny and a maid, and I find time to go shopping with Honor."

"Whoa - hold on. Going shopping with my sister is the only logical thing to do if you actually want to spend time with my sister. It's like hunters tracking game in their natural habitat. Honor's happens to be Bergdorf Goodman."

"I enjoy spending time with Honor - I do. But my mother's right. I should be writing."

"Ace. First, my sister has three kids including a four month old. You've got a one month old. She's a half hour away. Not a bad connection to have. Second, you've gone out with her exactly three times, including that first time before Lucas was released from the hospital. That's it. I've got the credit card bill to prove it."

"Great. You're proving my mother's point even more. If I only went out with Honor three times then I really don't know what I'm doing with my time."

"I do."

"What?"

"You've got a pretty needy six week old and an even needier thirty-five year old constantly looking for you to pay attention to them."

"No, I'm not blaming you two."

"Listen to me. I'm not done. You're breastfeeding. You're pretty hands-on - even the days Carol's around. You're reading all those books. We're listening to Junior's playlist. You talk to Lane and Paris. Even though I wouldn't try to stop you if you decided less is more when it comes to Paris, I fully support you talking to Lane."

"Logan -"

"My point is this is all new and unless you let me talk you into having a second kid, it's a once in a lifetime thing we've got going on. The book isn't going anywhere. It's you. It's inside you. It'll be right where you left it when you're ready to go back to it. Don't let Lorelai get under your skin, Rory. You're doing exactly what you're supposed to be doing. And you're rocking it."

"I could -"
"Close your eyes. I'm closing mine. Don't make me blindfold you, Ace. The only thing we got on us are diapers." He paused a beat. "Eyes closed?"

"Yep."

He took her hand. "People can live a hundred years without really living for a minute. You climb up here with me, it's one less minute you haven't lived. Remember? Remember the rush of the air? We're mid-jump, Rory. That's where we are right now. You, me, and Lucas. And nothing else matters."

As if on cue, Lucas made a noise.

"Okay. Eyes open."

When he next looked at Rory, her face was decidedly more relaxed.

"Feel better?"

"How do you do that?"

"It's a gift."

"How many times did you use that line?"

"What line?"

"About living a hundred years?"

"That's not a line. That's how I got my Baby Mama to notice me."

At Rory's head tilt, Logan leaned down and met her for a kiss. After disengaging from Logan, Rory dropped a kiss on Lucas's forehead.

"I have to wipe his mouth. He's covered in spittle."

"We should invest in Kleenex."

"Haha." She wiped the baby's face with the tissue. "He's trying to smile again."

"He's a happy kid."

"Seems that way." Rory turned her eyes back to the green. "So what do you think I should do?"

"About Lorelai?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

"Try to talk to her. You two have always been close. She sees your similarities more than your differences. She sees herself in you. She looks at your decisions through the filter of her own. And she doesn't understand them. And she's afraid of losing you."

"I know. I'm afraid of losing me too."
"Rory." I won't let you get lost. I love you too much.

Rory sighed. "What am I supposed to do?"

"You'll figure it out. We're in a weird place right now."

"The Gazebo? Stars Hollow?"

"You know what I mean."

"Yeah, I know." As Logan watched her profile, Rory continued to stare out at the green. "Do you think I could start a not-for-profit dedicated to bringing '80s new wave music into the lives of today's disenfranchised youth?"

Logan chuckled. That was out of left field. "I think you could do anything you set your mind to. I'm not sure how many backers you'd find for that. It's a bit on the eclectic side. I can promise you at least one. Probably three. Robert's a tight son-of-a-bitch."

Rory turned to smile at him. Logan was debating bringing up the subject of his parents when Rory abruptly raised a new topic.

"So... the Oasis."

"Yes, the Oasis." Logan grinned. The walk-through was going to be interesting. Of that, he had no doubt. "Our very own Stars Hollow Summer Camp for the Overprivileged."

"Oh, come on. It'll be good to have our own place for when we visit."

"What? You don't think we can all fit in the trundle bed?"

"Well, you and I could. But we'd have to empty out a dresser drawer to stick Lucas in."

They both chuckled.

"Oh, you poor baby!" Rory touched the baby's cheek.

"He's gonna be one messed up kid if he doesn't get our humor."

"Don't I know it."

"Hey. I have an idea. Why don't I handle this Kirk walk-through? You can give me your list of questions or demands or mocking comments. While I'm meeting up with Kirk, you work on the book. I'll even bring the Big Guy so he won't distract you. I'll pack tissues to keep the kid happy. I'll bring my posse so they're out of your hair."

"Your posse? They gonna help?"

Logan shrugged. "Colin's many things - most of them strange - but he did pass the bar in Connecticut so he is a lawyer."

"Finn?"

"Finn has an eye for detail."

"Robert?"
"Robert can watch Finn."

"Deal. I'll put together a list."

The Huntzberger Reality Check loomed but there was one...other...thing Logan needed to mention. And it was something he should probably tell Rory before the McMasters left Stars Hollow.

"Oh. I forgot to tell you something. This is a good one. I was propositioned by Doyle."

"I'll have to cross that off the list of things I never thought I'd hear you say."

"He totally played the man card. Said -since we're both men about town - we should paint the town red. Do a weekend in New York. His words."

"Wow. He's really pulling out all the cliches now that he's gone Hollywood, isn't he? What did you say?"

"What do you think I said? I told him the idea was making my balls retreat."

Rory laughed. "Crap! That'd suck!"

"No kidding."

"Then what happened?"

"What always happens. Paris came over. She threatened to neuter me. Then I escaped."

Rory laughed at that. Logan knew he'd never tire of hearing her laugh.

"Anyway I'm telling you cause I figure you should say something to Paris. Let her know."

"I'll mention it to her. Somehow I think she already knows."

"What? Why?"

"It was probably a test. I'd bet she even put Doyle up to it."

"A test? For me? To see if I'd take the bait?"

"Yep."

"But...that's crazy." Logan paused. Of course it was crazy; this was Paris they were talking about. 
"And you're absolutely right. How'd I not see that?"

"Don't feel bad. I've known Paris way longer than you. Plus I've kept in touch with Doyle. Anyway you're not the only one Paris is testing."

"Who? Doyle? Let me guess. Something to do with Terrence?"

Rory cringed. "You don't want to know."

Logan laughed. "I'll take your word for it. So I have one more piece of news." Time for the Huntzberger Reality Check.

"Miss Patty finally get to your other cheeks?"

"Not yet. Still waiting. But, something else I was waiting on did happen. I heard from my dad."
"Well it was bound to happen sooner or later. What'd he say?"

"A little birdie told him we were gonna be in Nantucket for the Fourth."

"My grandmother?"

"Jack Smith."

"Ah."

"Anyway they want to extend their Martha's Vineyard stay and hopefully get us to come visit."

"Us? As in all of us?"

"Us. As in all of us."

"I knew this moment would come but I'm still not ready for it."

"I'm not sure anything can really make a person ready for them." Logan sighed. "Ace, I understand if you don't want to go but I think it's better at this point to face the boogeyman than to avoid him."

"But we're not talking about the boogeyman. We're talking about your parents."

"Ba-da-bump. She'll be here all week, ladies and gentlemen."

"I'm serious, Logan. I mean what do they want? Is it about you going back to work? They want to see Lucas? Your mother need more practice at darts?"

"The first two I'm guessing." Shira needed no practice at sharing her toxic form of interaction.

"What about Honor and Josh?"

"They're out there now. I don't know how flexible their schedule is. I'm sure if they can stay, they will. I'll ask."

"I'm getting flashbacks to The Dinner."

"It won't be like that. If it heads south, we leave."

"How am I-"

Logan held her gaze. "Listen. Act like someone who has nothing to lose. Because you have nothing to lose. We, he gestured to the three of them, "are all that matters. And we're not going anywhere. And nothing they say effects us."

"But -"

"It's just sticks and stones, Ace. And they should know better by now. But if they don't, they will."

_______________________________________________________________

AN: Next Up: Kirk meets LDB. Five chapters left.
Tuesday saw the arrival of Colin, Finn and Robert. Converging in Hartford from their disparate points of origin, they drove down together to Stars Hollow arriving after lunch. Logan had texted the crew the plans and all were on board with the proposed Oasis outing. Logan appreciated that his friends were usually flexible and amenable to his ideas; it would, however, be nice if they could, on occasion, be on time. Except for Robert. He preferred Robert be late.

As Colin, Finn, and Robert were supposed to meet him in the Dragonfly's lobby at two-thirty, he'd come downstairs with Lucas a few minutes before their appointed time. Waiting already for fifteen minutes, he was getting annoyed. The only silver lining - if it truly could be considered that - was the fact that their tardiness gave him an opportunity to talk more with Michel.

"There was one time - that I remember. We were snowed in. It was a long time ago but you do not forget such things. There was no coffee and Lorelai - in the guise of bussing tables - poured other people's backwash coffee into her cup." Frowning, Michel shook his head with obvious disgust. "She is a very sick woman." Michel raised his eyes to Logan. "Is it any wonder she married her supplier, the Brawny Man?"

"I've never thought of it that way, Michel. I mean, I knew Luke owned the diner, but -"

Michel grunted. "You'll see. Now that you are part of the Hot Mess Family." At the ringing of the phone on the counter, Michel looked down. "Speak of the She-devil."

[Intro phone.] "Hello...Yes. We are fine here..." As Logan watched, Michel rolled his eyes. "Yes, yes." Michel impatiently drummed his fingers on the front desk. "I take it back. It is so miserable without you. It's almost like having you here." Michel glared as he continued to listen to Lorelai. "That is not an age appropriate response. Goodbye." Done, he hung up the phone.

Turning his attention back to Logan, he spoke again. "The baby is cute. But are you sure this is what you want?"

Logan was spared the need to respond to Michel by the much-anticipated arrival of his friends. Colin, Finn, and Robert soon joined Logan and Lucas at the front desk.

"Morning, Logan. Lucas."

"Huntz."

Michel stared at Finn. "Do I know you?"
Finn, momentarily confused, studied Michel's face before shrugging.

"Colin, Robert, Finn. Have you met Michel Ger-?" Before Logan had a chance to finish the introductions, Finn excitedly interrupted him.

"Logan!" he yelped. "What the hell are you wearing?"

"It's my son, Finn. Pretty sure you met him."

"But...My God! You're a mangaroo."

"A what?" asked Logan. Logan glanced at Michel, noting the man avidly viewing the spectacle he and his friends currently presented. "We should get out of Michel's way."

"Oh, no. Do not leave on my account. People watching is my favorite pastime. Second only to planting seeds of insecurity in the Hot Mess."

Colin, Finn, and Robert followed Logan away from the front desk into the adjacent parlor.

"So? Finn? You were saying?"

"You're a mangaroo. You know. It's like a kangaroo. Only it's a mangaroo."

"So what if I am?"

"Finn, you're not looking at this the right way," argued Colin. "It's all about leveraging strategic assets."

"What are you talking about, Colin?"

"Colin's right. Huntz will be a chick magnet," agreed Robert. "Everyone knows babies are even better than dogs for attracting those of the feminine persuasion."


"You have no idea how much it pains me to hear you say that." Finn, frowning, scanned the room before settling his thoughtful gaze back on Logan and Lucas. "It's not like Logan needs to attract the ladies."

"Not unless he's looking for Rory to kick him in the mangaroo," muttered Robert.

"Well, if we're in agreement on that, then how about I wear him?" Finn leaned in to talk to Lucas. "Logan Jr. wanna play mangeroo with Uncle Finny?"

Cringing, Logan shook his head. "Man! That is so disturbing."

"Yes," agreed Colin. "And that's without him even trying. Imagine if he was going for 'Chester-the-Molester'?"

Grinning, Logan lifted his eyes up to his Australian friend. "Finn. Lucas stays with me. Maybe - maybe - after you've been sprayed and deloused - we'll let you hold him for a minute. Now. Come on. You guys were ten minutes late. We got to get a move on."

"How are we getting there?" asked Finn, still looking at the baby.

"Walking."
"What?!

Finn's head shot up. "Again?!"

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, The Oasis, Tuesday, June 27, 2017, 3:05 pm EST

Logan's concern that they would be late for their scheduled walk-through with Kirk was allayed by the fact that since Stars Hollow was the epitome of a small town it required only ten minutes to walk from the center of town to the house. That was even with factoring in Finn's meandering, Colin's suspicious glancing, and Robert's sardonic griping.

Once they'd reached the destination Logan noted Kirk sitting in a car parked out in front of the house. Although the man looked up and obviously saw the group standing in front of the house, he made no move to get out of the car. Instead, he continued to sit, his head bent over, deeply engrossed in jotting down notes in a notepad.

Shrugging, Logan took advantage of the extra few minutes to examine the house exterior. It was a relatively nondescript house. The entrance decor was dated, characterized by stones. The siding was a plain white, the shutters another shade of white. The house's brown roof clashed with the dark grey of the porch's roof. With it's myriad of mismatched details, it was obvious the house had been a rental for years. But the front lawn was gorgeous and green, with an attractive yet unfussy collection of trees, bushes, and plants. A two story colonial, it offered space but wasn't pretentious. While dated, the house had good bones. Ultimately, it looked comfortable.

Looking at the house, Logan understood the appeal it held for Rory. He knew Lorelai's house was around the corner. He understood how Rory, acting under the belief that Logan would not be involved in her and Lucas's lives, would choose to stay here for the first couple of years of their son's life. It was comfortable. It was around the corner from Luke and Lorelai's. After a year of surprises, it provided some stability.

"So you're Rory's baby daddy."

The sound of Kirk speaking to him drew Logan out of his reverie. He turned to meet the gaze of Stars Hollow's 'renaissance man.'

"Yeah." Logan nodded. "Logan Huntzberger."

"You're the Stars Hollow Mr. Snuffleupagus, you know."

"No. I didn't know. What's that?" Logan shot a questioning look at Colin, Finn, and Robert who had joined them.

"Mr. Snuffleupagus was a lovable wooley mammoth-like creature on Sesame Street. Only Big Bird could see him," explained Kirk. "Until Season 17 and then everybody could see him. I'm one of those people who believes that was the point Sesame Street jumped the shark. A lot of people believe it was when Elmo joined the show. But I definitely think it was due to Mr. Snuffleupagus's over-exposure."

"Ah, right." Logan nodded awkwardly.

"Mr. Snuffleupagus was cool, Logan," Colin assured him. "How do you not know him?"

"We even had 'Sesame Street' in Australia. Dark Lord have you watching 'MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour' instead?"

"Very funny."
"Oh, and I should tell you," continued Kirk. "Since we spent so much time debating your existence we did conjecture quite a bit about Rory."

"What?"

"Oh, not that any of us seriously regarded Rory as being -you know - simpatico with Mary. Like it could be a virginal birth thing. But a few of us did ponder whether it could've been a single-process type thing."

"Excuse me?" Logan's mouth dropped. Was this guy saying what he thought he was saying?

"You know. Like Komodo dragons. The females don't have to have sex with a male to become impregnated. They just do it to themselves. Then they lay eggs that hatch into offspring."

Momentarily stunned, Logan could only stare at Kirk.

"Rory the subject of an immaculate conception with Logan in the room! Ah! That would be a true miracle!" Finn laughed.

"They had sex. Believe me. I bought the inn. Their room had to be hosed down and the bed replaced," Colin asserted.

"I think I just threw up a little in my mouth," Robert commented. "Huntz, could I get one of those tissues?"

"Will you three shut it? I'm regretting bringing you."

"I'm regretting it too," mumbled Robert.

"Kirk. I think we need to start talking about the house. Fast."

"Oh. Right."

"I say? Mr. Kirk? Before we start, where's your pig?" asked Finn.

"Petal had to go home. She had chores she needed to finish." Kirk turned and pointed to a house across the street. "Behind that house is Lorelai's house. You can see the roof from here. Have you ever noticed how Lorelai's house seems big on the outside but then once you're inside you realize it's actually tiny?"

"No. I can't say that I have."

"Hm. Anyway, I've wondered if it doesn't have secret rooms in it like the Winchester Mystery House."

"That's fascinating, Kirk. I'll be sure to take room measurements next time I'm in there."

"That would be terrific if you could do that. Of course my other theory is that the house contains a portal to another dimension. Like Fae. Or perhaps Narnia. I don't know from experience but I suspect an otherworldly portal would take up a considerable amount of interior space."

Logan, unsure of what to say, quirked an eyebrow and just stared at Kirk.

"Fascinating. You're the film-maker, correct?" Circling around him, Finn studied Kirk like he was a museum artifact. "I thought your film was a lost classic."
"Yes. Kirk Gleason. I'm sorry. I don't believe we've officially been introduced." Excitement could be heard in his voice as he continued. "I have to say I'm a big fan of yours. And if Rory really didn't actually do the single process thing, then your visit is absolutely the most exciting thing to happen in Stars Hollow this year, Mr. Richards."

"Mr. Richards? Logan. Colin. Who am I?"

"Mr. Kirk, who exactly do you think our friend here is?" asked Robert.

"Isn't he the inimitable Keith Richards of the legendary band the Rolling Stones?"

"Ouch. Finn. I think you need to be walked," laughed Logan.

"Straight out to pasture and put out of our misery," Robert added dryly.

As amusing as Finn's mistaken identity was, Logan was well aware of Lucas's feeding schedule and the potentially dire ramifications of going off schedule. Belatedly, he realized that Rory never had given him the list of questions about the house although he was pretty certain she'd made one.

"Hey! Kirk! How about we get the details on the house?"

"Sure, sure. As one stud said to another, lay it on me." At the men's blank stares, Kirk attempted to explain. "That's my own brand of construction humor. It's new. Anyway, follow me. The key is here. In this combination box."

The four men followed Kirk up the stairs to the home's front door. They watched silently as Kirk punched the combination code into the lockbox. Key obtained he unloced the door and swung it open. Stepping to the side, he allowed the four men and a baby to enter the home first. Once they were inside, Logan heard him clear his throat.

"Mr. Huntzberger? May I call you that?"

"I'd prefer it actually." Logan glanced at Kirk over his shoulder.

Finn shook his head and directed his next words to Kirk. "You should call him 'Sir' ."

"Definitely," agreed Colin.

"I think," Robert drummed a finger on his chin, contemplatively. "He should call all of us 'Sir,'"

Colin considered. "I'm good with that."

"The temperature in Hades must've dropped," announced Finn. "I agree with Robert."

"It's settled then." Robert turned to Kirk. "Please address all of us as 'Sir.'"

"He doesn't -." Logan, frustrated, glared at his friends before reconsidering. *Anything* to get this over with. He really didn't care. "Whatever."

"Well, Mr. Huntzberger, sir, you'll notice that the house has not been updated recently. Years, in fact. I should point out that two out of the four bedroom closets, and one hallway closet, have shag carpeting."

"Not usually a selling point, but thanks for letting me know. So how many rooms in total?"

The group made their way from the entrance into the front room. What the hell was this room? Den?
Study? Tiki bar? wondered Logan. Kirk had not been exaggerating on the lack of updates.

"Living room. Kitchen. Dining room. Study/den. Half bath. On this floor. Two fireplaces. Second floor has four bedrooms. Two full baths. Downstairs has a basement. Laundry room. Half bath. And I wanted to assure you that there is a farmer's sink in the laundry room. There's also plenty of room for an ironing board and winter clothes storage."


"You angling for role of house-husband?" asked Colin.

"I have no idea what this guy is on," whispered Logan.

"Inside this cabinet are more than one hundred and fifty board games. Some iconic. Some vintage. You'll be happy to know the game collection does come with the house."

"Is that so?" asked Logan. Logan was starting to formulate a theory about Rory's list.

"Oh, and I should mention that I have slept in three of the four bedrooms. I can attest to the fact that it's very peaceful. Whatever the beings are that come out of Lorelai's portal, they're quiet."

Logan mouth widened into a smile. Definitely. Rory's list. "Anything else on Rory's list you need to tell me?"

"The house does not come with a pig."

"Noted."

Logan left the living room and made his way into the kitchen. Another room in dire need of upgrades.

"So Mr. Huntzberger, sir, I hear you make a mean paella and excellent lobsters."

Logan glanced at the pantry adjacent to the refrigerator. He noted a door leading out to a patio off the rear of the house.

"Excuse me?"

"I'm in charge of Stars Hollow Foodie Fest and in that capacity I need to know all the dishes everyone in town can make."

"Ah. It's a Stars Hollow thing."

"Yes. You probably won't be surprised to learn you continue the tradition of Gilmore Girls having their men do the cooking."

"That a fact?"

"Yes. Lorelai volunteers Luke to prepare something every year."

"So Rory volunteered me to make something?" During the pregnant pause following Kirk's nod, Logan's head filled with more questions. "When? Today?!"

"Oh, no! Foodie Fest isn't until September! But whenever we get new people in the Hollow I update my Rolodex."
"I don't think a sane person would use the words 'update' and 'Rolodex' in the same sentence." Finn inserted himself into the conversation as he ran a white gloved finger over the top of the refrigerator.

"Did Rory volunteer herself or just me?"

Kirk cleared his throat nervously, obviously uncomfortable with the direction the conversation had just taken. "I asked if she could make something, Sir." Kirk paused, clenching his lips briefly before continuing. "She just stared at me with those bewitching cerulean blue eyes and said 'milk.'"

"My God."

"Oh, Love!"

"Why couldn't she be twins?"

"Or triplets even?"

"Will you three knock it off? I'm right here. Lucas is right here." Logan turned back to Kirk. "Rory was joking with you."

"I suspected it could be a joke but Lorelai usually does funny voices so you can tell when she's doing a bit. Rory's much more deadpan."

"Yes," Logan nodded, smiling at the baby. Serious look back in place he returned his gaze to Kirk. "She is. So Taylor's good with the adjusted offer?"

"He's still a bit miffed that Rory wouldn't even consider Taylor Doose Gilmore-Huntzberger as an option."

"Yeah. He needs to get over that. But the offer? He's good with it?"

"Yes. As long as you have the money - and I think Rory said you'd be paying cash - the closing could be as soon as tomorrow."

"Yeah, we'll be paying cash."

"Then it's a go. By the way, did you know paella has held a place of honor and practicality in Spanish homes for centuries?"

"I did know that. Spent time in Spain. Do you know if this is a load-bearing wall?" Logan gestured with his head to the wall separating the kitchen from the dining room.

"I don't believe so. You'd have to get Tom in to do an assessment. Or TJ if you just want someone to sledgehammer it to find out. But if the answer is yes, then you'll have to get Tom in anyway to prevent the house from collapsing. So you might want to just go with Tom. What do you use for your herb blend?"

"Usually fresh parsley, fresh lemon juice, olive oil, minced garlic, water, saffron, and chicken broth. You have Tom's number?"

"Lorelai should. He did all the work on her house. You don't find the garlic upstages the saffron?"

"Not at all. Tom's a bonded full-service contractor?"

"I believe so. He hires subs to do whatever he can't. Do you use sausage or kielbasa?"
"Spanish chorizo sausage. More authentic. So what about the rattan furniture? What's the plan for it?"

"The plan is it should be taken outside and shot," injected Finn.

"Finn's right," agreed Colin. "We support everything about what you're doing Logan but we draw the line at rattan furniture and life-sized tiki statues."

"Never realized before now Huntz that you had such deep-seated dreams of living in Margeritaville," Robert added.

"We plan on updating the place as soon as possible but we might have to live with it for a weekend or two. At least if we're down here for Foodie Fest."

"And what are you going to do? Gouge your eyes out?"

"It's not that bad." Logan glanced down at his son. "Right, Big Guy?"

Lucas yawned.

"See? The Kid has the right idea. He's not worried."

"Lucas is probably working up a gift for daddy," called Finn from where he was conducting the white glove test on the tiki bar.

"Is he a prodigy?" asked Kirk.

"Are you?" Robert looked at Kirk.

"No. Mother had me tested. Many, many times. She was always so certain there had to be a reason but the doctors always said the same thing."

"Which was?" asked Robert, after a beat.

"Brain size has nothing to do with intelligence."

"So size doesn't matter?" asked Colin. "Hear that, Finn?"

Logan, amused, shot a glance over at Finn who was sniffing his gloved index finger, his face contorted into a look of disgust.

"Not what she said," replied Finn. "Robert, come here. I need a second opinion. Would you smell my finger?"

AN: Next: A total fluff of a chapter that contributes nothing. I admit it. I wrote it for my own amusement. There will be a seating chart on LiveJournal.
The visit to Stars Hollow passed quickly. Logan and Rory, along with Lucas, divided their time primarily between the new inn and the town center, with a few visits to Luke and Lorelai’s house thrown in—once Rory and Lorelai had come to a truce, of course. Logan was happy for Rory's sake that she and Lorelai had worked things out but he was under no illusions that Lorelai had changed her mind about him. Rory also made time to visit with Lane, while Carol and Logan split babysitting duties. Carol looked after Lucas, while Logan watched Colin, Finn, and Robert. Lucas had his first experience at Luke’s Diner as well as his first experience of being stared at by a crowd of townspeople through the window at Luke's Diner.

**Wednesday: The Closing**

On Wednesday, after the closing, Logan and Rory met with Tom the contractor to discuss ideas for updating the house. If they made quick decisions, and didn't go for anything too "fancy", Tom assured them he could probably fast track the renovations so the place would be livable if not completely done by Foodie Fest in September. Of course, if they took their sweet time getting back to him with decisions, and looked for fancy stuff that needed to be shipped in from all over the world, then it could be ready by Foodie Fest 2018.

"All right. So we're going with open concept kitchen and family room. Getting rid of the shag carpeting, the tiki bar, and the central wall now that we've confirmed it's not load-bearing. Puttin' in hardwoods. New windows. Updating the fireplaces. Games going to Lorelai for storage. Tiki statues going in the basement for someone named Robert. Couple chairs to stay so there's somewhere to sit. Everything else to charity or the dumpster but we're okay with Kirk doing a walk through as long as he doesn't grab the chairs, the games, or the tiki statues. Have I got that right?"

"Yeah," said Logan.

"Yep," agreed Rory.

"Personally I wouldn't let Kirk anywhere near my house but hey, that's just me. Seen that guy naked way too many times. I've never seen any of my other neighbors naked. Not even once. Him I can count on two hands the number of times I've seen naked."

"Ew." Rory made a face.

"Ew is right. So I got both your emails. I'll draft some plans and send 'em out to you."

"Sounds great."

"Yeah, Tom. Thanks."
"Last question is do you want TJ involved? It'll add about three weeks and 5%.

Logan, puzzled, looked at Rory. "Who is TJ? Kirk mentioned him too."

Rory shook her head. "I don't think that'll be necessary."

"Suit yourself. Your mom always finds an excuse to bring him in."

Rory made a face.

"Ace, who is TJ?"


Ah! A chance to score points with the extended family. He could afford to do that. Logan swung around to face Tom. "How about 8% and no added time."

"You're not from around here, are you? All right. You drive a hard bargain but I think I can work with that."

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**Thursday: Luke's Diner**

Logan and Rory sat next to each other, with Rory facing the window and Logan seated to her right. Lucas, in his stroller, was to her left.

"Why are they staring at us?" asked Rory. "You'd think they never saw a baby before."

Logan, wearing a sardonic grin, just shrugged. Upon the diner door opening, they could hear Kirk's voice filtering in as he addressed the group gathered outside the diner. It was a group, which, to Logan's utter amusement, included a priest and a rabbi.

Logan had to hand it to the town: you really couldn't make this stuff up.

"I talked to the Baby Daddy and it's not the Komodo dragon thing. Or the virgin thing. So it was not self-serve. I repeat: Not self-serve. So nobody wins."

"Told ya, Archie. You owe me dinner."

"Come on, David. I was kidding. Since when do you not recognize a joke?"

"Oh, sure. Now it's a joke! When it's Brennan and Carr's on my dime..."

As the door finally fell shut, Rory shot an even more quizzical look at Logan. Grinning back at her, he shrugged.

"Eh. Your town. You really want to know?"

"I don't know. Do I?"

"No. Let's get more coffee."

The door opened again. Lorelai entered the diner -with a flourish Logan couldn't help thinking - before taking a seat at their table to the left of Rory, across from Logan.

"How's my favorite grandson?" Lorelai leaned over and dropped a kiss on the baby's forehead. "Still
being unnaturally quiet and well-mannered like those freaky little kids from 'Children of the Damned'?'

"Mom, please. Language."

Lorelai scoffed, while Rory chuckled.

"No! I'm serious. We're really trying. We figure if we start now we'll curse less by the time he actually starts talking. And don't be fooled. He cries. We just try to anticipate and pre-empt."

"With Colin, Finn, and Robert here, we're already getting our daily fill of whining. With him, at least, we stand a chance."

"Ah," nodded Lorelai. She caressed Lucas's cheek before looking at Rory. "Still planning on Nantucket Saturday?"

"Yeah," replied Rory, her eyes meeting her mother's. "You gonna fly out with us?"

"An hour flight from Hartford or five hours drive plus ferry. I gotta say it's tempting."

"So come. It'll be Lucas's first flight."

"You know he's probably gonna be miserable and screaming the entire time, right?"

"Who's gonna be screaming?" Logan glanced up at Luke who had suddenly materialized at their table. "More coffee?"

"Yes, please." Rory smiled up at her stepfather. Luke proceeded to pour coffee for his newly arrived wife and to top off Rory and Logan's cups. "All the more reason for his favorite grandma to be there to distract him by playing with him!"

"Smooth, Kid."

"But did it work?"

"Who's gonna be screaming?" repeated Luke.

"We're flying to Nantucket on Saturday. Mom's afraid Lucas will be bothered by the air pressure."


Logan's eyes widened as he met Rory's gaze. He was going to defer to Rory on how to respond to Luke's comment. Fortunately Lorelai saved them both the trouble.

"It's one of your family's planes I assume?" Her gaze fell on Logan.

Logan nodded. "Only ones on the plane he'll make nuts will be us, you -if you decide to come with us- and the flight crew. We figure an hour flight is better than the five-six hours in the car."


"You two really should just come with us. You're busy. You could probably find better use for your time than stuck in Fourth of July traffic on Route 6." He gestured at the baby. "Plus, I'm sure it'll make the Big Guy happy."
Logan felt Rory's hand on his thigh. Glancing over at her he read her lips.

_Thank you._

He smiled at her. In the scheme of things it really was nothing.


"Think about it." Rory nodded. "Hey Mom, you decide yet what you're gonna have him call you?"

"I'm debating between 'Granmalai,' 'Nana Lorelai,' and 'Trix.'"

"Hell no!" Realizing what she'd said, Rory sheepishly shook her head. "Damn. I was doing so well."

"Cough it up, Ace."

Rory opened her handbag and grabbed a quarter from her wallet which she dropped into Logan's hand.

"I was kidding on the last one."

"Thank God." Rory turned to Logan. "My grandfather called his mother 'Trix.'"

"Was. But now, I'm gonna give it serious thought. Maybe it's one of the privileges of being the Reigning Lorelai."

Rory turned back to Logan. "Great-Grandma was the first Lorelai." She turned back to her mother. "What? The name gives you impunity to appropriate one of the top fifty stripper names as a delightful nickname for your grandkids to call you?"

_Grandkids?_ He loved hearing the plural. Even if it was just an unintentional slip of the tongue. Logan hid his smile behind his ginormous coffee mug.

"When you put it like that, it makes me think I should look at the other forty-nine."

"No! Come on."

Lorelai turned to Logan. "Your mom's not gonna have him call her 'Bambi' or 'Candy', is she?"

"I can guarantee that's a 'no.'"

"Good. I'll think it over."

"You're shameless." Luke shook his head at his wife. "You guys eating or what?"

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_STOP: There's a seating chart if desired. Google this exactly: miral's inside the monkey habitat livejournal._

**Friday: Movie Night at the Black, White, and Movie Theater**

Logan had no way of knowing just how memorable their final night in Stars Hollow would be. While he'd heard Rory and her friends talk about the theater weeks before at the lunch, it hadn't prepared him. Even the resident Stars Hollowans puzzling over resident film-maker Kirk's new film short hadn't raised an antenna.
In the future he'd know better.

After dinner, Logan and Rory said goodbye to Lucas and Carol and led their troop from the downtown Dragonfly to the Black, White, and Read Bookstore. As Logan trailed after Rory into the room that doubled as a theater, he noticed a few people he knew including Morey, Babette, Lane, and her husband, Zack. A few others looked familiar but he couldn't place them, so he figured he'd seen them around but hadn't been introduced.

"Hi Rory! Hi Logan! No Lucas tonight?" Lulu, Kirk's wife, all of a sudden, stood before them holding a clipboard.

"Uh, no, Lulu. Logan and I didn't think he'd fully appreciate 'Das Boot'."

"Oh, yeah. I guess he is a little young for World War II movies. How many are in your group and are you grilling tonight?"

*Grilling?*

Rory, thankfully, answered for them. "There's five of us. No grilling." Looking around the theater, Rory noticed some empty spots by her friend. "How about we go take those seats by Lane?"

"Works for me. Morey and Babette have the grill going so I'm trying to make sure we don't have too many grills near each other - gets smoky. But if you're not grilling, then feel free to sit anywhere! Enjoy the movies!"

"Thanks, Lulu."

Rory led them to the front lefthand side of the theater.

"This looks like someone's living room." To his credit, Colin made an attempt at whispering.

"Someone with *highly questionable* taste." Finn didn't.

"Sh! Rude!" Rory attempted to get them under control.

"The chairs look good." Robert noted as he glanced around the room.

"Hey! Aren't those the chairs from the Oasis?" Rory surveyed the room, a surprised look on her face.

"Don't worry, Love. I ordered beanbags for your Oasis."

*Beanbags?!*

Rory took the seat immediately to Lane's left, while Logan sat beside her. Finn positioned himself behind Rory, while Colin and Robert filled in the empty seats to the left of Finn.

"Rory! You made it! Full crew, too! Hi Logan."

"Yeah! Isn't it amazing?!" Rory smiled at Lane. "Colin, Finn - you remember my friends, Lane and Zack. From the dinner. Guys, this is Robert. That's Brian."

"Hey, good to see you guys again! Rory, your mom and Luke coming?"

"Yep. April too. It's her pick. 'Das Boot.'"

Finn groaned, lowering the brim of his tweed cap over his eyes. "Wake me when the boat sinks. Or
when they all die. Whichever comes later."

"Sh! Don't ruin the end, dude." Annoyed, Zack sat back in his chair.

"Dude?" repeated Finn.

"Rory, it's a good night for you to be here," Lane nodded. "Kirk's new film is premiering!"

"Oh, cool. The guys are fans of his last film."

"Are you talking about 'This Pig is for Reelz'? My favorite pig movie of all-time." Colin agreed enthusiastically. Or what passed for enthusiasm from a mostly sober Colin.

"A timeless classic." Robert agreed. "What's the new film about?"

"No clue," answered Lane. "Kirk's been all hush-hush. He was in here before. He's wearing a costume. Hat. Coat. Must mean something."

Lane sent a significant look Rory's way; to which, Rory shrugged. Lane chewed on her lip, deep in thought, before replying.

"Yeah, you're right. It could mean nothing."

"Hi everyone!"

"Hi. Hi. Hi. Hi."


"Hi Doll! Luke!"

"Hi Babette. Hi Morey."

"Hey."

Luke and Lorelai circulated through the room, waving and greeting everyone before settling down in the love seat located at the front of the room.


"Yeah, Lulu. We decided these are just gonna be our theater outfits, so we don't have to worry about where we sit."

"Oh?" Lulu quirked her head to one side, perplexed. Logan saw the instant she decided to let it go. Smiling she chirped. "Okay!"


Logan bit down a chuckle as he watched the guys' sedate greetings. Rory's mother had caught Finn eying the bannister at the inn and had given the three of them the evil eye. Lorelai must've recounted to Rory what she'd do to them if she caught them fooling around in the inn, because Rory subsequently managed to extract promises of good behavior from each of them.

"Rory. Can you shift down one? Don't you just love this movie? Have you ever noticed how subtitled films lose their subtle nuances? Especially German films. But I'll sit next to you so I can translate!"
"Oh, goody. That'd be great, April."

Logan stifled a laugh as Finn groaned again. Rory and Logan shifted seats to make room for April who settled in the seat in front of Finn.

"Finn. Just take out your flask." Rory hissed as she sat back down.

"Oh, right. Love. Thanks for reminding me."

"You brought a flask to the movie? Won't that diminish your understanding and enjoyment of the film?"

"Love-Sister, I find that highly doubtful."

"My name is April."


Logan's eyes traveled to the front of the theater. Kirk had finally appeared. Lane was right. He was in costume. A steampunk costume.

*Steampunk?*

"Ace," whispered Logan. "Check it out."

Rory's eyes swung from her stepsister who she'd been chatting with to Kirk. As Logan watched, he saw her eyes squint. "Steampunk?"

Logan shrugged. "Apparently so."

"How many times do I have to tell you people? You're not supposed to bring your own food into the theatre."

"Yeah, we get it Kirk. And I understand for Snowcaps and Rolos. And even for popcorn. But you don't sell shish kebobs in the theatre!"

"But Babette, we have -"

"Hey everybody, I got the dish I made for the last international food day if anyone wants some."

"Oh! Sounds good, Gypsy!" Babette turned toward Gypsy. "What you got? Poutine?"

"No! I don't got poutine. I got tapas. I've lived in this town thirty years! Now -thanks to Taylor - everybody thinks I'm Canadian!"

"Hey! Morey and I also got baby back ribs for anyone who wants!"

"I think I have heard the voice of an angel." Finn stood and sauntered over to where Morey and Babette sat with their grill. "I love you Tall Lanky Man and Zaftig Blonde Woman."

"Zaftig? Zaftig?! Morey! Am I zaftig?"

"In a heavenly way, babe."

"Aw. Nice." Assured 'zaftig' was a compliment, Babette turned her attention to Finn. "You want
some ribs? Or shish kebobs? I can throw some of both on a plate for ya! What are you, anyway? Australian? Like Crocodile Dundee?"

"Yes ma'am." Finn nodded his head at Babette before turning to call out to Rory over his shoulder. "Mother, may I?"

"Finn, I don't care what you eat!" Rory replied across the theater. "And it's bad enough you do it in the apartment. Don't call me 'mother' when we're out. It's downright creepy."

"All right then!" Finn turned his attention back to Babette who was making him a plate.

"Hey Rory, sugar! Who's your band of merry men?"

"Babette, Morey. You know Logan." Rory gestured with her head to him. He gave her hand a squeeze which she reciprocated.

"Of course! The Baby-Daddy!"

"Hi again, Babette. Morey." Logan waved with his free hand.

"These are our friends from college. The one you're feeding is Finn. Behind me is Colin and next to him is Robert." Rory turned to address the guys. "Hey, that's Babette. And her husband is Morey. They got Lucas his pork pie hat."

Colin and Robert offered polite nods and stately waves.

"Nice hat!" called out Colin.

"I'm planning on getting one for myself. Not sure I can pull off the baby blue." added Robert.

"Hey! Nice to meetcha! You can get a black one like Morey's! So, how old are you boys?!"

"We're a year or two older than Rory," answered Colin, with a questioning look at Rory.

"So you're in your thirties?"

"Yes," nodded Robert. His face wore its usual impassive demeanor. "Is that a problem?"

"Uh-no! We have a whole group of singles here in the Hollow!"

"Singles?" repeated Colin.

"The 'Hollow'?" asked Robert.

Logan waved to Miss Patty who had come in and took a seat to the left of Babette.

"Hiya boys!"

"Guys, that is Miss Patty." Logan felt comfortable making the introduction. Once a woman pinches your cheek, you got dibs on making intro's.

"Patty!" shouted Babette. "We got more for the Thirtysomething Gang!"

"Oh, nice to meet you boys. You three single?"

"Patty! This one's Australian! Like Crocodile Dundee!"
"Really?" Patty stood and slowly moved closer to Finn. "I'll show you my Tasmanian Devil if you show me yours."

As Logan observed what had to be the most bizarre mating ritual he'd ever seen in his life, Patty battred her eyelashes at Finn and was letting her fingers do the walking right up his forearm. Finn, meanwhile, was staring at Patty in wonder as he continued to eat.

"Ace, we might have a new love connection."

Rory pulled herself from her conversation with Lorelai, April, and Lane long enough to gape at Finn and Patty.

"Oh my Lord!"

"You can say that again."

Logan's fun watching Patty feel up Finn was short-lived. Colin and Robert taking note of Kirk's costume soon captured Logan's attention.

"Logan, why is Mr. Kirk wearing a steampunk outfit?" asked Robert.

"Yeah. That can't be good," added Colin.

"I don't know," Logan replied.

"It might be nothing," Rory looked over her shoulder to Colin and Robert. "Kirk usually dresses up for showings."

"This town is so weird, Ace."

"Sh!"

"Sorry Babette."

"No problem, sugar. I was just practicing."

"I'm sorry Mr. Richards," Kirk was trying to get Finn's attention.

"Get away, Kirk!" Patty shooed him. "This one's mine."

"I was just going to inform him that no one is supposed to eat food from outside the theater."

"How about I get you tickets to our next show?" asked Finn, with a raised eyebrow.

Kirk smiled. "That would be fantastic. Three, please? I'd like to bring my wife Lulu and our pig, Petal."

"Of course." Finn replied with a wink.

"Great. Okay. Could I please get everyone's attention?" Kirk asked, positioning himself in front of the screen. "Welcome, everyone, to the Black, White and Read Movie Theater. I am pleased to present tonight's feature film, 'Das Boot'. Now before we start, the management of the theater is aware that some of you have snuck food into the theater. You should know that consuming food purchased outside of the premises - is strictly prohibited." Lulu jumped up from her seat and whispered something to Kirk. Done she returned to her seat. "Since we can't really enforce that rule, Lulu says I should tell you if you don't have enough to share with everyone, you're not allowed to
"Ah, that's so sweet!" observed Lorelai. "Lulu will have us all adhering to Robert Fulghum's principles in no time."

"He's the author of 'All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.'" April turned to Rory. "I just love him."

"In 2003 I debuted my first film short. A family focused story of love entitled 'I Love Your Daughter'. It received the "Nice Try Award" at the Lake Chappaqua Film Festival. Last year, I released my long-awaited follow-up. It extended the theme of love and family to include children, or children substitutes. I'm proud to announce 'This Pig is for Reelz' won the coveted "Wilbur Award" from Good Earth Farms.

As Kirk paused, the group clapped. Finn finally rejoined the group.

"Thank you. I knew my next film would have to break new barriers. Last year quite by accident I discovered a new genre called Steampunk.

"Steampunk is a subgenre of science fantasy that incorporates technology and aesthetic designs inspired by 19th-century industrial steam-powered machinery. Although sometimes associated with cyberpunk, steampunk works are often set in an alternative post-apocalyptic future of Britain's Victorian era or the American "Wild West."

"In this story, set in a post-apocalyptic, anarchist future, one band of people are able to rise above the horrors of a world gone to chaos.

"I present to you my third film short -the first one in which I do not appear. Taking inspiration from such genre masterpieces as 'A Clockwork Orange', 'Logan's Run', and 'Ferris Bueller's Day Off', I am proud to say that 'Dystopian Golf Academy' is currently in the running for the 'Anomaly Award' at the New Haven Film Festival."

The group sat back as the lights dimmed and the film began.

"Oh, jeez."

Rory gasped.

"Rory! That looks like you up on the screen!"

"Um, yeah, Lane. I see that."

"Does this mean what I think it means?"

"Am I going to get my own IMDB page? How lovely."

"Leave it to you Huntz to ruin my attempt at a cyberfree existence."

"You have a website, Robert. Win a Date with the Second Son. How is that cyberfree?"

"Since when are you Huntz's defender?"

"I'm not but I know Kirk. Logan couldn't have known."

"Sh! That was not me practicing!"
"Sorry Babette!"

"Hey, isn't that Rory?" asked Luke. "Lorelai, why is our family the only one that gets suckered into his movies?"

"Don't know. He's around us a lot. Guess our Kirk-spidey senses are off." Lorelai replied. "Hon, what're you wearing? I wanna borrow that hat! I didn't realize end of the world dystopia included such cute hats!"

[FILM] "I think we can bring civilization back if we can bring back the world's most civilized game...golf!"

"Kirk doing a female voice over. That's not supposed to be me, is it? I don't sound like that, do I?" Unhappy, Rory made a face. "You could've at least let Lulu do my lines, Kirk!"

[FILM] "Aw that's right, Sheila. We'll be okay once we get to the barby, as long as we're together, mates."

"That hideous accent! Is that supposed to be me? I don't sound like that, do I? No Australian sounds like that! And the lip-synching was awful!"

"Maybe he went with the New Zealand accent."

"Shut up, Robert."

"So I'm not given any dialogue?"

"Ace, it didn't sound like you. Sounded more like Norman Bates doing his mother's voice in Psycho. Finn, I don't know what the hell that accent was but it wasn't Australian. Colin, why would you care? He didn't give me a voice. I'm fine with it."

[FILM] "Here's lookin' at you kid. And here's lookin' at my ball before I hit it with this club."

"What the hell? Is that supposed to be me?! Come on!"

Rory laughed. "Oh, don't worry, Huntzberger. It didn't sound like you. I think it was supposed to be Humphrey Bogart from Casablanca."

"Touche, Ace."

"That was a good shot, Finn."

"Yes, Colin. I'm always better when inebriated."

"Not what she said."

"This is interestin'! Artsy! Taylor we should make Kirk's film the new Stars Hollow theme! What do you think, Patty?"

"Hey, why didn't you ask Hep Alien to do the theme song? We could've pulled together a score and you wouldn't have to pay as much on the royalties."

"Oh my God." Rory was peering at the screen from behind her hands. "It's still on?!"

"Ace, what're you so freaked out about? You look good."
"She looks good but look at me!" complained Finn. "I look so pale! Love looks tan next to me."

"Maybe you have cirrhosis of the liver."

"Nonsense, Colin. Everyone knows cirrhosis of the liver is characterized by a yellow complexion. Not a pallid one."

"Thank you Robert. I had no idea you cared." Finn pretended to dab a tear from his eye.

"I don't. But you are my top pick in the LDB death pool so I am paying attention."

"That's sick, Robert!"

"Second son, Rory. I have to develop entrepreneurial pursuits."

"You need therapy."

"Hey, were you really dancing to this song?" asked Lorelai. "I've never seen anyone dance like that to the Doors 'The End.'"

"No, Mom. We weren't dancing to the Doors. We weren't dancing. Period." Rory let out a sigh of frustration. "Could you please pass the popcorn?"

"Last fifteen, hon."

"My God. I'm mortified in front of the whole town and you won't share your popcorn?!"

"Fine! Here!"

"Rory, honey, you shouldn't worry about the last fifteen. I just read an article that said skinny girls are more likely to be abducted by serial killers."

"I read the same article, Patty! It was in the Daily Moon! Remember me readin' you that article, Morey?"

"Ace, I actually think it's not that bad. It's dark and the camera was too far away to really identify us."

"In your dreams, Huntzberger!"

Logan hadn't realized that Taylor had come in until his voice echoed throughout the room.

"What the heck is this? When was this? Where is everybody? Was this that night last fall when the air raid sirens went off in Woodbury and then those strange lights appeared in the sky so we all went into lockdown in the high school?"

"It must've been, Taylor. I'm always in front of my dance studio. I can't think of another time I was away. Believe me I would not have forgotten such lazy choreography had I seen it."

"We weren't trying to dance!" repeated a frustrated Rory.

"Why didn't we go to the bomb shelter?! I had no idea that's where everybody went! We could've had a sub-party in the bomb shelter!"

"It's not a bomb shelter, Finn! It's just an auditorium!"

"Strange flouncy dancing, kid."

"Oh my God. For the last time, we weren't dancing, Mom!"

"I thought we were dancing, Love."

"Why am I the only one who remembers this? Finn, we danced at the tango club. That' Rory paused to point at the screen, "that is called walking."

"Oh yes. What is it with you and Logan and walking?"

"I think that might be called prancing more than walking, actually. Why we could have had you come in as ringers for the Gay Pride Parade." Taylor was nodding thoughtfully as he watched the screen.

"This town needs ringers for its Gay Pride Parade?" Logan was incredulous.

"Ah sorry there -Rory what's Father Time's name?"

"That's Taylor, Colin."

"Oh! So uh, Taylor, last time I checked we weren't gay. Well, I know I'm not gay. Logan doesn't seem to be gay. What with Rory and Lucas. Finn? Robert? You'd have to ask them yourself."

"Oh? Well, you all prance very well."

"Thank you," nodded Finn. "I appreciate you saying that."

The group quieted as they watched the film.

"Fine. Guess it does look a little like dancing. We went to a tango club in the city after. Definitely danced there. But then Colin bought the club and you just can't dance to Rosemary Clooney."

"Hon, you just can't dance."

"Wow. Crabby. Eat a kebob."

"Kid, I'm just sayin. You've got your father's two left feet."

"So I should send Christopher the bill the next time you nearly break my foot?"

"Haha" Rory replied to Logan. "Thanks for that," she retorted to her mother.

"So there were cameras set up in the stores?" asked Logan.

"Wait a minute! I came in the next morning and someone had already cleaned up the market - including all that money off the floor. I never got that money!"

"Taylor, that's interesting. I'll check my film to see if I caught the hardened criminals who marauded through Doose's."

"Kirk!" Lulu scolded her husband. "You said you got that cash from stripping at the Secret Bar!"

"Secret bar?" repeated Taylor. "What secret bar?"
"Somebody paid money to see Kirk strip?" Patty sounded incredulous. "Who?"

"Ew! See? Always trying to be naked in front of the whole town."

"Yeah, Lorelai. I caught that. Listen, Taylor, we're sorry you didn't get the money we left. Of course, I'll make good on it."

"Thank you, Logan. I appreciate that. And I suspect I know who got the cash. It was That Pig!"

"Petal? Petal is a free spirit! She scoffs at money. Besides she doesn't carry a wallet. Doesn't believe in leather. She stands with her bovine brothers and sisters."

"I'm not saying she took the money to spend! But she eats paper. We did away with the Thursday street sweeping since you got Petal. Why do you think I allow you to keep her even though pot-bellied pigs are on the verboten list?"

"I didn't know you meant pot-bellied pigs as pets were verboten. I thought it was a new dietary restriction for the town."

"Now that's ridiculous! You can get pork at any restaurant in Stars Hollow. Although I've never thought about placing dietary restrictions on the town. That's not a bad idea. We could get some people who shall remain nameless to have better eating habits."

"Oh my God! Back off, Bloomie! You're not taking away my supersize fries!"

"Lorelai, you're not getting any younger. You should be making healthful eating choices."

"Luke! Hit him!"

"Taylor, you're not gonna tell me what I can and cannot serve at my diner. That's it."

"Quiet everyone! The movie's almost done!"

"Babette," Luke turned to look at her. "This is the Doors' "The End." The song's 12 minutes long."

"It is?! How much longer we got?!"

"Seven and a half minutes."

"You're kidding! Kirk! You gotta do something about the movie pacing! Or maybe choose a different song!"

"Hep Alien can do the theme!"

As Logan watched, the room erupted in chaos. Kirk killed the movie. Taylor made his way to the front of the room.

"Thank you for being my test audience for 'Dystopian Golf Academy.' I will take your feedback into consideration. Stay tuned."

"Thank you, Kirk. I would definitely vote for that film for the 'Anomaly Award.' Before Kirk starts the feature, the heart-warming story of the deep abiding friendships forged on a German U-boat during World War II."

"That's not what the movie is about! He's just making stuff up!" April, outraged, whispered to Rory and Logan.
Rory shrugged. "That's just Taylor being Taylor."

"I'd like to say a few words. Since we have some fine esteemed guests this evening."

"Is Santa talking about us?"

"Sh! Finn! Be nice!"

"Finn, allow me. Rory, we've known each other a long time. Has Finn ever been nice?"

"Now you're being a jerk, Robert."

"Told you so." Logan just couldn't resist.

"Wow, nothing's changed. You guys are good in small doses."

"Very small for Colin."

"No working blue, Finn! Family theater."

"I'm sorry, esteemed guests. Are you quite done?"

"Methinks we're on the naughty list now."

"Pretty sure your name's pre-printed on the naughty list stationary, Finn."

"Et tu, Logan?"

"Sorry, Taylor."

"As I was saying, we here in Stars Hollow are a culture-loving people tied to our long-honored traditions. That said we're not afraid of stretching our boundaries into new traditions. I am pleased to announce that this Halloween -to commemorate two Hollywood icons – though they never made it to Stars Hollow we do know they made it to Mohegan Sun, which is, as you know, less than a hundred miles east of Stars Hollow. This Halloween we will hold our first ever Stars Hollow Commemorative Carrie Fisher/Debbie Reynolds Day."

"What?"

"My God. I want to live here."

"What about Rosemary Clooney?"

"I'll take one of those shish kebobs now."

"The town will be cross-decorated between two incomparable Hollywood styles. 'Star Wars' and 'Singing in the Rain'. Everyone will be expected to be costumed in one or the other styles."

"So let me get this straight -"

"Nice one, Colin," complimented Robert.

"Thank you. You're encouraging everyone in town to dress like Carrie Fisher or Debbie Reynolds?" asked Colin.

"What I don't understand is how this town doesn't have enough gay people for a Pride Parade?" Logan puzzled aloud.
"It's the eighth wonder of the world, Huntzberger."

"Well. Technically you could dress like the ladies. I mean we don't have rules forbidding it. But what we're looking for are characters from those films. So the character could be female or male. Choosing the right costume is important as we will be having a best costume contest."

"I'm going as Darth Vader!" called out Kirk. "It's so I can go up to Luke and say, 'I am your father, Luke.' I've been dying to say that for twenty years. I've been practicing my heavy breathing while working my customer service job."


"Wait!" shouted Lorelai. "So 'Purple Rain' is definitely out?"

"Lorelai, you were the only one who wanted 'Dress Like Prince Day'."

"Miss Patty? Babette? I thought you two were gonna vote for Prince Day, too?"

"Ah, Doll. I look like an eggplant in purple!"

"And, I danced with Debbie Fisher many moons ago. I had to vote for her."

"Love, you'll have a guest room for me? I don't need to be anywhere for the next -Colin?"

"Four months, Finn. Halloween is in four months."

"Thank you. Four months. I'd love to stay."

"Well let's start with me saying you can stay one more night." Rory leaned in to whisper to Logan. "Logan, no way."

"Don't worry, Ace. I'm on it."

Taylor cleared his throat. "If you're all done talking, I'll continue." Everyone gestured for him to continue. "Since we haven't decided on the official title of the festival, for promotion just see me or Kirk about the best way to describe it. I should mention that The Town Council events committee took a vote and we ended in a dead heat. It'll either be "Rain Wars," "Bright Lights in Stars Hollow," or "Postcards from the Edge of Stars Hollow'. There will also, obviously, be a Stars Hollow Got Talent singing competition."

"Oh. I can sing!" sang out Finn.

"Contestants will only be allowed to sing Debbie Reynolds songs. Or songs that Carrie Fisher was known to sing. Either on Oprah or in her shower. Whatever we can authenticate via YouTube."

"Fascist!" heckled Colin.

"Hey Taylor!" called out Zack. "Can Hep Alien do modern rock versions of those old broads' tunes?!"

"Is there a monetary prize for the contests?" asked Robert.

"Good question, dude!"

"Will a shower be provided or do we bring our own?" asked Finn. "Will contestants shower -oh, how shall I say - in their birthday suits?"
"Quiet down! Quiet down!" Taylor huffily shook his head in aggravation. "Nobody's showering. There's no monetary prizes. Winners will receive gift certificates to the local businesses. And if we let everybody sing any old song they wanted, the point of it being to commemorate Debbie Reynolds and Carrie Fisher would be lost. But I guess we can't stop you from changing the musical arrangements."

"Score! High five!" Zack high-fived Lane and Brian.

"But how can you expect us to authentically recreate Carrie Fisher singing in the shower if we can't sing in the shower?"

"Oh! Finn! Good idea. And what about the rain? How do we know it'll rain on Tackypalooza? Can you make it rain, Santa? So we can have the full effect of singing in the rain?"

"What? I don't even know who you are, Young Man, and you're -"

"Colin's right, Santa. We should have rain on Tackypalooza. And Finn's right. Contestants doing Carrie Fisher songs should be allowed to sing in a shower. I am standing by my opinions." Robert tapped Logan's shoulder. "You remaining neutral on this?"

"Call me Switzerland."

"Will Oprah come?" shot out Finn.

"You know something?" Logan couldn't help but overhear as Lorelai leaned forward to talk to Rory.

"What?"

"I think Logan's friends are starting to grow on me."

"Yeah. They're kinda like mold that way."

"Exactly. Like mold."

AN: Some call it fluff. I call it fun and games. It's done now. For the record, I love both Carrie Fisher and Debbie Reynolds. I personally think this event would be awesome no matter what the name. Next Up: The Family Feud. Technically there are two more chapters and an epilogue. Thank you for reading/reviewing.
It was day seven of their two-week stay with Emily in Nantucket. Luke and Lorelai, still busy with the new inn, had wound up delaying their trip to Nantucket, arriving only the day before, on Friday. Although the Huntzbergers had extended their official season at Martha's Vineyard, Mitchum had been called away to New York the prior week. While it certainly wasn't any sweat off Logan's back that the Gilmore-Huntzberger dinner had been postponed, it did present a potential drawback - for his parents; with the dinner party rescheduled, Luke and Lorelai would now be included on the guest list.

"Good morning. I hope everyone slept well." Emily greeted them from her place at the head of the table. Luke and Lorelai sat to Emily's left. Logan and Rory moved to the other side of the table.


"How's the fresh kid?!" Since Rory and Lorelai had had it out before they left Stars Hollow, the mother-daughter duo seemed to be getting along better. Logan was under no delusions that it would last forever but he was grateful, for Rory's sake, that they had reached an understanding. It was especially important that Lorelai have Rory's back today.

"Morning Rory. Logan."


"Oh, he's very fresh, Mom." Rory sat down at the table with Lucas positioned on her lap. "Logan. You eat first."

"You got it." Logan took a seat next to her.

"Rory! What on earth is that child wearing?!” Emily had noticed his outfit. Logan was wondering how long it would take and who would be the first one to say something. He should've bet on "Eagle-Eye Emily."

"I'm going to need you to turn your psycho down a little bit." Lorelai read aloud the lettering on the onesie. She made a quizzical face as she glanced up at Rory. "I hope that's not directed at us."

"It's...a little weird," observed Luke.

"Uh, it's just a joke," explained Rory. "We're not actually gonna leave it on him."

"Yeah. Finn and Colin got it as a gag," added Logan. "Figured we might as well use it. He goes through more costume changes than JLo. We're trying not to make him self-conscious, but the kid seems to have a drooling problem."
Lorelai snickered as she took a bite of her breakfast.

"Very amusing. I take it it's in honor of seeing his other grandparents today?" asked Emily.

"Uh –" Rory stumbled.

"Wow. Interesting coincidence. Right, Big Guy?" Logan leaned in and winked at his son. Glancing up he caught Rory's eye. She snickered, shaking her head.

"Grandma, I'm surprised at you for thinking that."

"Yes, I imagine you are."

"Hm. Well, speaking of imagining things, I had an interesting dream last night." Lorelai announced this with an obvious expectation that everyone around the table would beg for her to elaborate. And Rory did not disappoint.

"Oh, yeah? Do tell."

"Lorelai, you really sure you want to share that dream?" asked Luke.

"Uh, of course. What are my dreams if not an excuse for me to talk? That was rhetorical. Do not answer. Anyway, so I had this dream that we were on "The Family Feud."

"Vintage or sell-out?" asked Rory.

"Vintage. Of course."

"What's that mean?" asked Emily.

"I'm taking it to mean Richard Dawson, not Steve Harvey." Logan glanced at Lorelai for confirmation.

Lorelai nodded. "Impressive."

"He's had some practice," replied Rory, sneaking a grin in his direction. "So who were on the teams?"

"The Gilmores had us four. Sorry Logan. You were with the Huntzbergers,"

"No apology necessary, Lorelai. It was a card dealt by fate."

"Anyway, your team had your parents, you, and your sister."

"So the teams only had four members?" asked Rory.

"Yeah. I know. My subconscious obviously doesn't care about game show rules. Anyway, so each team was down a Cousin Oliver."

"Who won?" asked Rory.

"We didn't get that far," answered Lorelai.

"What were the questions?"

"Oh, we didn't get that far."
"So what happened, Mom? Sounds like the most boring round of 'Family Feud' ever."

"Yeah, Lorelai," nodded Logan. "You've got us waiting with bated breath."


"We got through the whole welcome to the show thing. Richard Dawson greeted each of us. Gave us a personal hello and flirted with us. He really liked you, Mom."

"How delightful." Logan bit back a laugh as he watched Emily roll her eyes.

"Did he -" started Rory as she glanced toward Luke, a frown on her face. Logan did laugh at that.

"No!" Luke shook his head vigorously. "Richard Dawson did not kiss me." His gaze switched over to his wife. "Lorelai tell your daughter that Richard Dawson did not kiss me."

"Luke, you know there's nothing wrong. I do not judge. I love and support. You know that -"

"Lorelai!"

"Okay, okay. Luke escaped the pursed lips of the Kissing Bandit. So Richard was done with us and he moved on to the Huntzbergers. Shira was all flirty with him so I thought maybe something was gonna happen between the two of them but then Richard Dawson totally surprised me by deep-tonguing your dad, Logan."

"Lorelai!" scolded Emily. "What the hell is the matter with you?!

"That..." Logan grimaced. "That is quite the visual, Lorelai."

"Yeah, Mom," agreed Rory.

"You know we're going to be seeing that man later today. How are we supposed to not think of your strange delirium?"

"It was a dream, Mom. Not a strange delirium. What can I say? I can't help it. I can't control my dreams. Guess it's all the public-figure-molesting-people stories making their way into my subconscious."

"Wow. You know? Now that I'm picturing the two of them together, I kinda think your dad looks a little like Richard Dawson." Rory found his eyes. "In the chin a bit."

"And the nose!" agreed Lorelai.

Logan cringed before looking at Luke, an unspoken question in his eyes.

"Uh, you'll get used to it." Luke nodded as he spoke.

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_Hy-Line Inter-Island Ferry, Nantucket Sound, Saturday, 1:30 pm EST_

"So the schedule is we arrive at Oak Bluffs at 6:20." Rory looked at her cell phone as she spoke. "The Huntzbergers are sending a car to get us. We'll miss the last ferry back, so Mitchum's sending us back on their yacht."

"Mitchum gonna captain the ship?" asked Lorelai.
"Doubt it," replied Logan. "Probably one of the servants."

"So are we prepared for this?" asked Lorelai.

"What do you mean?" replied Rory.

"I mean you - we - don't have a great track record with breaking bread with these people. Let's see. There was the fiasco at the Au Bon Pain. Before that, there was Mom," Lorelai gestured to Emily, "and Dad tag-teaming at that DAR fundraiser thing. Then, of course, there was the one time you went over there for dinner when you first started dating. I'm sure if I open it up Logan has more."

Logan sighed. "Rory and I talked about it. We're ready to make a quick exit if we need to."

Lorelai shot a skeptical look at Logan.

"The second we're through the door, I'll find out who's on tap for the yacht and let them know what the deal is."

Lorelai nodded. "I hope it's not necessary but something tells me -"

"Yeah," agreed Logan. "I'm not exactly falling over myself with optimism here either."

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**Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, The Huntzbergers Summer Home, 6:40 pm EST**

The drive from the Oak Bluffs ferry landing to the Huntzbergers' house typically took ten minutes. Logan told the chauffeur to drive slow out of consideration for Lucas. It was really out of consideration for Rory, who he saw looked a bit pale and had become noticeably quieter over the second half of the ferry ride. Finally the car was pulling inside the gates and stopping in the driveway.

"Oh, yeah. I remember this place." Luke said, glancing around. "Looks the same."

"It's a little different inside." Logan nodded. "Kitchen's new. They tried to improve the water pressure in the showers. Not sure how well they did."

"Luke, you've been here before?"

"Yeah, Emily. About ten years ago. Lorelai and I came out here for Valentine's Day. With Rory and Logan."

"I don't believe this." Emily frowned. "Why am I only finding out about this now?"

"Grandma, it wasn't a big deal." Rory shrugged.

"Mom, it's not some big secret. We just came out for a weekend. It wasn't even a full weekend. We don't tell you every time we go someplace. You want me to set up a camera in the car and program the computer so you can watch us when we drive somewhere?"

"No. I don't want you to set up a camera in the car and program it so I can watch you when you drive somewhere. Really, Lorelai, I don't want to know where you and Luke are 24/7. Honestly, I suspect it's not that interesting. But I find the fact that you've been to the Huntzbergers' estate on Martha's Vineyard interesting." Emily mumbled the rest of her thoughts under her breath. "Good Lord! It's probably the most interesting thing I've heard from you two in years."

"Hey!" called out Lorelai. "We lead very exciting lives. Rory, tell your grandmother how Luke and I
lead very exciting lives."

"I watched you two devote a weekend to organizing the spices."

"Fine. That wasn't very exciting. But there have been other times." Lorelai gazed upward to ponder the question. "I know we've done interesting things."

"Hate to put a damper on this party," interrupted Logan. "But we're there. And the sooner we start this, the sooner we finish it."


As the group exited the car, Logan and Rory both stayed behind to grab Lucas from his car seat.

"I can carry him, Ace."

"I need the baby armour more than you do."

Logan chuckled. "Point taken. You take him, I'll take his stuff."

After a few minutes, the group made a procession to the entrance. Before they had an opportunity to ring the doorbell, both doors opened. Logan forced himself to smile. His mother stood inside, one of the maids next to her.

"Welcome, welcome." Shira smiled, glancing at the group. "We're so happy you could join us."

"Mom."

While neither he nor Rory had forgotten what his mother had done with his phone and the ramifications of her actions, they'd discussed it and neither of them felt inclined to hold a grudge. It was in the past. They were happy now. They were together now. They didn't trust his parents. That went without saying. Any energy expended on his parents ought to be spent keeping an eye on them; energy spent on anger and resentment would be nothing but a waste.

"Logan." Smiling, his mother nodded, her eyes slightly guarded. Logan took some satisfaction in that. At least she had a level of awareness to be concerned.

"Hi Shira."

"Emily," Shira greeted her long-time acquaintance before turning her attention to the others standing at the entrance. "Please come in. Hello Rory. And Lucas. My goodness. He's gotten so big! And he looks just like you, Logan!"

Logan grinned proudly as he briefly caught Rory's eye.

"Please. Come inside. Mitchum just stepped out to take an important call. We're all set for dinner on the table at seven-thirty. Lorelai, it's good to see you again." As Logan watched his mother he saw her eyes flit across Luke. Her momentary curiosity in the unfamiliar face was quickly eclipsed by interest in her grandson. "Isn't he a darling? What does he weigh now?"

"He is a darling," agreed Rory, smiling. "He's over eight pounds."

"Oh! He looks like he's smiling."
"He's pretty good-natured." Rory lifted her eyes to Logan's. "So far."

"Well, everyone. Please follow me into the living room. Rory, of course, you remember the way."

"Yes, of course."

"I see you've redecorated since last time I was here, Shira. How delightful."

"Thank you, Emily. I've heard from Jack that your house on Nantucket is quite lovely."

"Yes, it is. Thank you."

Logan noticed Emily shoot a glance over her shoulder to Lorelai, who walked side by side with Luke. Logan carried Rory's handbag, Lucas's bag, and his babyseat. Before too long, they had all settled in the living room, Logan and Rory on one sofa, Lucas still in Rory's arms, while Luke, Lorelai and Emily sat across from them on the other sofa. Shira sat in her armchair perpendicular to the sofas. Small talk had just commenced when Mitchum joined them. Logan, followed by Luke, stood.


Logan stepped in for the introduction. "Dad, this is Luke Danes. Rory's stepfather."

"Right. Of course. Met you here if I'm not mistaken."

"Yes. We had the bedroom with the pink and red roses. I remember Dan the gopher."

"Stan the raccoon." Logan chuckled. Logan and Luke both took their seats.

"And look at who else is here." Mitchum's eyes zeroed in on Lucas.

"Didn't he get big, Mitchum? Look at how big he is!"

Logan threw a sharp look at Shira. The way his mother was harping on how big Lucas had gotten was starting to annoy him. Was she surprised the baby was thriving? She was hardly one to be casting aspersions on others' parenting skills.

Or were her comments designed to underscore the fact that they hadn't seen the baby in a month?

"Yes, he did." Mitchum's eyes met Logan's then Rory's. "He looks good. Wonderful as a matter of fact."

"Mitchum, get the camera." Shira pulled her gaze from the baby and instead looked towards Emily, Lorelai, and Luke on the opposite sofa. "I almost had my cameraman, Raul, here. But then I decided that would be intrusive on our limited time with him. They grow up so quickly. It's so important to try not to miss a single minute."

Logan fought the urge to roll his eyes. Manipulative.

"I'll grab it in a minute Shira." Mitchum walked over to where Rory sat with Lucas. "May I?"

They were both caught off-guard. As Logan watched, Rory eyes sought his, questioning. He shrugged. He wouldn't trust his father with much but he knew the man wouldn't drop his grandson.
Rory stood and handed Lucas over to Mitchum. Mitchum smiled as he continued to look at the baby.

"So? What's everyone drinking?" Mitchum walked over to take a seat in the chair next to Shira. "Shira, get Lisette in here. Of course we have much more in the house than what's on the cart so name your poison. Emily? Lorelai? Rory you drinking?"

"Actually, Mitchum, I would love a glass of wine." Rory sat back down.

"Scotch neat for me." Logan's eyes settled on Rory. He grabbed her hand and gave it a squeeze. They were in for a long evening.

Nearly an hour and a half later, Rory, accompanied by Logan, escaped to their old bedroom to feed Lucas. Rory stepped inside first, while Logan shut the door behind them. Logan's gaze traveled around the room before coming to a stop on Rory; he watched as she made herself comfortable on a wingback chair, Lucas held tight to her chest.

"How do you think it's going?" asked Rory as she undid her blouse.

"Considering we spent nearly an hour talking about your grandmother's Fourth of July party I think we've gotten off pretty easy so far." Dropping Lucas's infant seat on the floor, Logan laid down on the bed, on his side, his hand propping up his head.

"Yeah. So what are they waiting for?"

"Don't ask me." As he watched her feed Lucas, he considered. "Maybe they were waiting to make sure their grandson got dinner before upsetting his meal ticket."

"Right. Like that would ever happen." She shook her head, grinning. "If they don't say anything, are you?"

"About what?"

"I don't know. Pick something. Going back to work?"

"Eh." Logan joked but quickly realized his flippant response wasn't going to fly with Rory. "There's time for that. I'm taking my dad up on the two months paternity leave. Plus I had leave scheduled. I'm enjoying myself right now. I don't want to think about work. Time zone differences and endless conference calls. Besides now that Junior's a little sturdier I figure we can start mixing things up a little."

"Logan, he may have gotten bigger but he's still a newborn. Walking around a park at a slow speed is it. We're not taking him to the zoo. No merry-go-rounds, no swings. He's not ready for a pony ride."

Looking at his son, Logan shook his head. "Sorry, kid. Your mom's a tough one."

"What about that article? I haven't exactly been pouring over the society pages. Was your dad right? Our scandalous behavior all over the internet?"

Interesting question. Logan was surprised it had taken her so long to ask.

"Actually there were a few articles. Here and there."
"What?! You're kidding! I mean I was kidding!" Rory heaved a heavy sigh. "Do I even wanna know?"

"Ace, it's all conjecture. Those writers don't know us, our history. Anything. They read like fiction."

"Oh. How did I not know? Why didn't you tell me?"

"They're really not a big deal. I wasn't looking for them. Just happened to spot a couple, while keeping up on business. Colin sent me a few others."

"What do they say?"

"They say I had an affair with my ex, had a baby with her, and dumped my heiress fiancé. What do you think they say?"

"Okay. No mincing words."

"Not really. I don't write society page gossip myself, but if it had been me, I probably would've said something similar."

"Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

Logan shrugged, their gazes locked. There really wasn't anything to say.

Rory sighed. "Am I mentioned by name?"

"Sorry. You've had a few too many bylines to pull off anonymity in the publishing world."

"Great. Just great. Is that supposed to make me feel better?"

"Figured it was a bad news/good news type thing. Did it work?"

"Ask me again when I'm shopping my book."

A short while later, the trio, Logan, one hand carrying the baby asleep in his infant seat, the other settled on the small of Rory's back, made their way back downstairs to join the others.

"Do we have to go back?" asked Rory.

"Look at this way. Now that everyone" Logan gestured to the sleeping baby, "has eaten we can go."

"Good point, Huntzberger."

"Call it like I see it."

"Yeah, well. I like how you think."

"And I like how you do a lot of things." Pausing in the hall yards away from the foyer that led into the living room, Logan leaned in to kiss Rory full on the lips. Caught up in the moment, the kiss took on a life of its own, ebbing and flowing like the tides beyond the walls. Finally the sound of a throat being cleared hit them like a bucketful of ice water. "Whoever is there needs to..." whispered Logan.

"Hi Shira!" Rory greeted his mother brightly. Too brightly.

"Rory. Logan." Glancing over at his mother, Logan saw she was wearing her benevolent mistress of the manor face. He and Rory watched as she leaned down look at the sleeping baby. "I see Lucas is
asleep. That's a shame. Mitchum and I would've liked a chance to see him awake one last time before you took him home. Mitchum grabbed the 35mm camera."

Over his mother's bent form Logan and Rory locked eyes. He could tell they were having the same thought. There is no way in hell they would wake up their son just so his parents could get one last photo op with his eyes opened.

"So I guess you two are together?" his mother continued. "We weren't really sure what was going on. You two have always been so...hot and cold..."

'Hot and cold'? Logan frowned, an eyebrow raised in disbelief. That was pretty much a lie. While he'd never been one for sharing information about any of his relationships with his parents, he'd been especially protective of his relationship with Rory.

"You moved quickly."

Eying his mother, he noted her eyes had settled on Rory as she made her snarky observation. His hand still resting on Rory's back, he felt the second she tensed up.

"Well." His voice was cold as he responded to his mother. "When you know something's right, there's no point in waiting."

With that his mother seemed to sense it was time for her to return to the rest of the dinner party. "Why don't you three join us in the living room? It's quiet. I'm sure the baby won't wake up."

Waiting until Shira's retreating form was out of earshot, Logan whispered to Rory. "I see your vein pulsing. Sticks and stones, Ace."

"I know. I'm going to start packing them in his bag. It has like a million pockets. I didn't realize that's what they were for."

Logan erupted in laughter. "Touche. Or we could wait until next year and let her babysit. We'll set him up on the new Italian tile with a pack of crayons and let him go to town."

"I can't wait until he's ten. Then we'll be able to trust him with permanent markers."

"See?" Meeting her eyes, he smiled. "Now you're thinking."

At her return smile, he grazed her with his lips. Time to go back.

As they made their way back to the living room, Logan noted his parents had gone outside onto the patio. Logan and Rory reclaimed their spots on the sofa while placing Lucas, in his infant seat, on the floor by their feet.

"We miss anything good?" asked Rory.

"Just The Blowhard News," replied Lorelai.

"Yeah," nodded Logan. "Sorry about that. It's a frequently updated broadcast."

"Lucas down for the count?" asked Lorelai.

"For now," answered Rory. "If we leave in the next hour, we should be able to get home."

"Well, that's a goal I can get behind." Lorelai swung around to exchange looks with Emily and Luke.
After a few minutes, the sliding door to the patio opened and Mitchum and Shira returned. Shira reclaimed her seat while Mitchum remained by the door.

"Logan." Mitchum called him, his tone sharp. "I need to speak to you. Grab your drink and join me out on the patio for a few minutes."

Logan's eyes found Rory's. She was wary. Undoubtedly with good reason. Glancing at Shira, he saw his mother's gaze was averted. Staring into her martini, she was deliberately avoiding his eyes.

"What's this about, Dad?"

"Logan. It's a family matter. There's no reason to air it in front of our guests."

"I'd say Rory's family is family. Not guests. Whatever family matter you need to get off your chest, go for it."

Mitchum shot a meaningful look at Shira before continuing. "Okay, we'll do it your way. Have you two given any thought to the custody agreement?"

"Custody agreement?!" repeated Emily. "Why on earth would they need a custody agreement?"

"Emily," started Shira. "Rory left Logan in the past and-"

"Not how I saw it," mumbled Lorelai.

"- we don't know how long this latest go-round between the two of them will last. What if they're not speaking six months from now? We'd like to be assured that Logan will be able to see his son."

Logan made a face. He knew this had everything to do with them, not him.

"Be assured I'll be able to see my son? Or that you will?"

"Well, Logan, Lucas is a Huntzberger," replied Shira with a tight smile.


"Yes. Of course. He must be raised properly. He must be groomed so that he understands his responsibilities, his world. After all heavy is the head that wears the crown. If he's not prepared for it, it might seem overwhelming."

Rory's eyes shot open at that. "He's six weeks old! What the hell do you have in mind?! And you misquoted Henry IV. It's 'uneasy lies the head that wears a crown."

"Rory," Shira's voice was dripping with condescension. "The quote really wasn't that important. Of course, I don't expect you to understand these things."

"Shira." Mitchum's tone was saccharine as he looked to his wife. "Maybe this conversation ought to be shelved for now."

"No, Mitchum. It needs to be said. Rory, through no fault of your own, or yours Emily, you were not brought up to understand how our world functions. It's very different from your small town upbringing."

"I'm thirty-two!" replied an agitated Rory. Logan's sought her hand; finding it, he gave her a squeeze. He'd owe her big-time after this. "I've spent the past ten years living in New York and traveling! It's
"Oh, for heaven's sake," muttered Emily glaring at Shira. "Do you know how ridiculous this is coming from you? At least let Mitchum spout off that nonsense. Since he graduated from Yale, and as far as I know, never did a stint as a *cocktail waitress.*"

"Ah...I-" Shira gasped and actually appeared to be rendered speechless by Emily's taunt.

*Cocktail waitress?* Logan let out a breath. He'd have to ask Honor about that one. He should've recorded this for Honor. She was going to be furious that she missed it.

"Good Mom." Lorelai grinned appreciatively at Emily. "I'm glad you got that one in after all these years. Dad would be proud."

"Thank you, Lorelai." Emily returned her daughter's smile.

"Emily, I want you to know that I am in no way attacking you," smiled Shira. "Of course. But Lorelai did pull Rory out of our society. She doesn't have a grasp of *noblesse oblige.* It is very important for those in our circle-"

"*Noblesse oblige?!!" Emily spit the words out in disbelief. "Frankly, I'm amazed you even know that term, Shira. Did somebody buy you *The Gold-diggers' Guide to Nouveau Riche*? Along with *foie gras*, and *ménage à trois*, I suppose Elias had to make sure his daughter-in-law didn't embarrass him with a major *faux pas* on account of her poor French."

"Hey now, wait a minute, Emily. You're a guest in my home and I'm going to have to demand you treat my wife with respect."

"Oh please. How much respect do you show her? Keeping all those side pieces?"

Shaking his head, Logan winced. He gripped Rory's hand even tighter.

"Emily, I know you've had a difficult past couple of years, what with Richard's passing and, now, of course, this whole thing with Rory must be quite the disappointment to you-"

"Hey," interrupted Logan. "'Whole thing with Rory'? Are you referring to *me*?" *What the hell?* Logan felt Rory give his hand a squeeze.

"Don't be silly, Logan," his mother dismissed him with barely a thought. "Surely no one understands better than you, Emily, how it's your family's *sad history* that has brought us to the point where we are today-"

"Okay, She-Ra. That's enough." Lorelai's eyes were blazing as she set them on Shira. "You need to shut it and shut it now. You are sitting there on your highly botoxed high horse attacking my mother and my daughter for my actions. If you really want to go down this road, I'm the one you need to aim at."

"You misunderstand me, Lorelai. No one's attacking anyone. I'm just saying that Rory and Logan, considering their checkered history, should have a custody agreement in place. The arrangement should also assure that Lucas, as the Huntzberger heir, is allowed adequate time with his Huntzberger grandparents so he fully appreciates the tremendous responsibilities, as well as gifts, he's been given."

"Listen, Shira is making it sound a bit dramatic. Of course, we know he's only six weeks old. A lot of this stuff won't kick in until he's much, much older. But it is reality. Rory," Mitchum's eyes went
to her. "You saw how torn up Logan was. We just want to make sure Lucas doesn't go through the same thing."

_Seriously_? It was his turn to be speechless. Thankfully, there was nothing wrong with Rory's voice.

"Then why on earth would we let you and Shira pull the same number on him that you did on Logan?! No! No! No! No! And no!" Rory's gaze shot from Mitchum to Logan. "Logan? You got anything to add?"

Logan expelled a breath. "No. You said it all. Mom, Dad. This is not your place. The sooner you realize your place, the better it'll be. Chances are you'll see your grandson more once you acknowledge he is your _grandson_. Rory and I are his parents." Logan's gaze went around the room. He pulled out his phone. "I'm texting Henry. We should be ready to sail in ten. Side note," he turned to face Rory. "I can't believe the kid slept through all that."

"I know," nodded Rory. "I was just thinking the same thing. That's all you."

"I don't know, Ace. I've seen you hit snooze for days."

All of a sudden, Emily stood. "I guess we're leaving. Shira, I've had a perfectly lovely evening. This, of course, wasn't it. Better luck next time."

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**AN: Thank you for reading.**
The Rory Chronicles, Part I

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman Palladio.

Author's Note: Logan's narrative is over. The July timeframe narrative is over. The next few chapters (including the final one) are all from Rory's perspective.

Since the final chapter is from Rory's POV - and it's an important one - I thought it would be helpful to gain some insight into Rory's thoughts as her relationship with Logan was evolving. These chapters take us back in time to pivotal moments for Rory. The final chapter takes a time leap forward.

The sub-chapter numbers provide the time context of where the dialogue fits.

Chapter 31A: Guess Who's Coming to the NICU? Part IV

Hartford, Connecticut, St. Joseph's Hospital, Sunday, May 21, 2017, 12:00 pm EST

Still shaken from the exchange with Shira, Rory welcomed Honor's presence on the elevator heading back up to the NICU. Although she didn't know Logan's sister well, the woman had always been kind to her in the past.

"You know some think having a monster-in-law is character-building. My friend Alicia has a terrible relationship with her mother-in-law."

Rory, thinking of the watch and Shira's slams in the hospital cafeteria, shot a dubious look at Honor.

"Well think of it this way," continued Honor. "Yes, she's horrible to you but at least she's not your mother. Shira loving you is not much better than Shira disliking you."

Ouch. With that Honor successfully managed to put things in perspective. And she would know. Even Rory had years of insight observing firsthand Logan's feelings of ambivalence when it came to his parents.

"You're close with your mom, right?"

"Yeah. We're pretty close."

"So maybe it's like the law of entropy? That's the one that equalizes order and disorder, right? Since you're close with your own mother, the rule of entropy dictates you have a monster-in-law. Maybe the trade-off is if you'd had a more disappointing relationship with your mother, you'd score a better mother-in-law. Hey! My mother-in-law isn't too bad! Wow." Honor trailed off thoughtfully. "Maybe there's something to this theory. I just thought of it." Happy, she turned to Rory. "I love when I remember things I read!"

Rory, amused at Honor's excitement, smiled. "I never realized how alike you and Logan are. Crazy theorizing is totally something he'd do to cheer me up."
"Well we did grow up together. It was one of our many, many, many coping mechanisms."

Arriving at their floor, the two women stepped out of the elevator.

"I guess so," replied Rory. She fell silent a moment before continuing. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Well first thing you're going to do is reframe how you think about it. It's not what you're gonna do. It's what you and Logan are gonna do. You're not in it alone. He'd do anything for you. You have to know that." Honor suddenly grabbed Rory's arm. "I'm so happy you two have another chance. And I'll do whatever I can to help with Shira. Consider me co-president of the monster-in-law support group."

The women continued to make their way down the corridor.

"Honor, that's nice of you but I think I need to do this myself. As for your mother, I should've said something more to her. Remember the dinner? I should've said something then. She's just gonna keep doing it. Logan and I could be married forty years and she'd keep saying stuff like that."

Entering the mostly empty lounge area, Rory and Honor settled in an unoccupied corner.

"First, I love that you're saying that aloud. You have no idea how happy that would make me."

Honor smiled as she nodded happily before continuing. "Though I'll admit the idea of all of us being in our 70s and 80s does fill me with horror. Second, don't beat yourself up. I enjoyed your snarky retort. Sure. You could've told her to take that watch and shove it where the sun don't shine but you kept it classy. Third. You're right. Shira can be a bitch. You'll probably have another opportunity. Maybe even later today. It's up to you to decide how you want to deal with her. Logan will stand by you, whatever you decide. You could also just limit how much you see her. Lord knows Logan's not one for family gatherings. He sees my dad at work. You know. When they're on the same continent. Then we'll have family things at holidays. The kids' birthdays. And a month over the summer at Martha's Vineyard."

"That actually sounds like a lot, Honor."

"So you pick and choose. Logan and my dad never do the full month anyway. Go to Nantucket instead. Do Martha's Vineyard for a couple of weekends. I'm telling you Rory. My brother will do whatever it takes to make things work with you. Just ask."

"Really? You think?"

"Oh my God, yes! As for that dinner, did I apologize enough for that? Because I was so, so sorry. God, I'm still sorry! When I told my mother about Logan bringing you -I hope you know I wasn't trying to deflect trouble or attention in your direction. I was happy. For you. For him. Especially for him. I know my brother. He can be a playboy cad but he's always been aware."

'Aware'? What did Honor mean by that? Rory shot a curious gaze at Logan's sister.

"I know you never met Odette -" continued Honor.

"No. Definitely not."

"Logan gave in to Shira and my aunts playing matchmaker. It was easier to shop among the heiresses because at least he knew they weren't seeing dollar signs when they looked at him."

"Honor, not every woman-"
"Enough were. I think -probably because you were so young when you met -Logan never doubted you. You didn't care about money. Or the lifestyle. He'd never worry that you were there for any reason other than you wanted to be. Logan's always seen you as a partner more than anyone else he's dated. And he loves you. And it's a Dr. Suess kind of love."

"What's a Dr. Suess kind of love?"

"You know. From "Green Eggs and Ham." In a boat. With a goat. In the rain. In the dark. On a train. In a car. In a tree. In a box. With a fox. In a house. With a mouse. Like that."

"How on earth do you have those memorized?" asked Rory, amazed. After a brief pause, she continued. "He actually said that about me?"

"Oh, no. Not in those exact words. We used the Dr. Suess reference when we were kids. It was short-hand for 'anyway, any day, anyhow.' It was for when we felt really strong about something. I know him pretty well. I can tell when he's thinking it even if we don't say it anymore."

Rory chuckled. That was funny. "I'm gonna remember that. And I'll have to watch his reaction when we read "Green Eggs and Ham" to Lucas."

"Please don't tell him! He hates when I give up his secrets." Obviously joking, Honor sent a panicked look in Rory's direction.

"Well..." replied Rory, laughing.

"Hey? Daughter o mine? What's going on?"

Rory's head shot around at the sound of her mother's voice.

"Mom! Hey!" Rory and Honor both rose from their seats to greet Lorelai. Relieved, Rory sighed. "It is really good to see you!"

"Yeah, I had a feeling," replied Lorelai.

The mother and daughter duo threw their arms around each other as Honor looked on. Rory was the first one to pull away from the hug.

"Mom. This is Honor, Logan's sister."

"Hi Rory's mom!" Honor waved to Lorelai; Lorelai, nodded, acknowledging the introduction with a tight smile.

"Please. Call me Lorelai. Yeah. I can see the resemblance to Logan. Jeez. I think I can even see a resemblance to Lucas."

"Oh I'm flattered! He's gorgeous! He was asleep the entire time we were in there. I've heard about his big blue Rory eyes and I've seen pictures but I can't wait to see them in person. And now that I've met you I see where Rory gets them."

"Yes. We are the family of freakishly blue eyes."

"You just get here? Where's Grandma?"

"Emily's here?" Honor said in amazement. A big smile slowly danced across her features. "I haven't seen your grandmother in years! I'd love to see Emily!"
Honor and Rory reclaimed their seats, while Lorelai took a seat next to Honor, across from Rory.

"So, funny story. We came in and I had to answer a call on the construction." Lorelai turned to Honor. "I own an inn that I'm in the process of renovating." She returned her gaze to Rory. "So your grandma and I were stationed at the info desk -"

"The one by the entrance?"

"The one and only."

"Diagonal from the Au Bon Pain?"

"Yeah. It would be that one and only too."

"So you saw everything?"

"Well, I was on the phone. But your grandma -and you know she has big eyes to see you with - saw everything. She said Shira said something that upset you and then you stormed off. I was expecting to find you up here in tears instead you're here laughing. What happened?"

"My mother happened," answered Honor.

"Shira bought me a beautiful Van Cleef and Arpels watch."

"That bitch," huffed Lorelai.

"No. There's more. The reason she bought me the watch –a reason she wasn't shy with sharing – is because I obviously need one to keep track of time. Who else but someone terrible with keeping track of time would forget to tell someone they were going to be a father until after the baby arrives?"

"Oh, hon!"

"Yeah."

"That bitch."

"Yeah," agreed Honor.

As Rory watched she saw her mother shoot a curious gaze at Honor.

"Sorry. Was I not supposed to agree? Because I do."

"No," answered Lorelai. "Hey, you're free to think what you want. Lord knows I haven't always seen eye-to-eye with my mother."

Lorelai's gaze shifted back to Rory.

"Does she know - do they all know -" Lorelai's eyes flitted back to Honor "how you tried to let Logan know about the baby?"

Before Rory had a chance to answer Honor spoke.

"Rory, Lorelai," Honor smiled awkwardly "Actually I do know. I may be the only one who knows the full story. I don't think Logan told my parents everything yet though he might be telling them now. About how Odette blocked you on his phone."
"That's what happened?" exclaimed Lorelai. She turned to face Rory, a shocked expression on her face.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Honor apologized. "I just assumed you knew."

"It's fine, Honor," Rory nodded at Honor before turning back to Lorelai. "I told you most of the story. I guess I left out a few of the details."

"Yeah you did. Logan knows for sure it was the ex who did it?"

Rory shrugged. "She denied it but he's pretty certain."

"Wow. So, because she changed the settings on his phone he never got your messages?"

"Yeah."

"You could've sent hundreds of messages. He never would've gotten any of them?"

"Yeah."

"You could've sent him a picture of Lucas. He wouldn't have seen it?"

"Pretty much."

"You could've called him every day for the nine-eight-months. His phone would've never rung?"

Rory made a face. "Not sure. Honor do you know?"

"Calls from a blocked number go straight to a blocked number voicemail inbox. I'm not even sure you can retrieve them. They definitely do not show up as missed calls either. Believe me. I know. Friends gone toxic."

"Wow. So even if I'd tried to call him I still wouldn't have gotten through?"

"Afraid so," Honor grimaced as she spoke.

"Good thing my battery was dead on Wednesday."

Honor looked questioningly at the two Lorelai's.

"My cell phone was dead. I was using it to listen to music. I knew I had to call Logan – even though I was pretty sure I was - Well. You know. I was also on pain meds and a little out of it. So my mom," Rory nodded at Lorelai, "called him from her cell. I'm just realizing how much of a near miss it was. I mean if my phone hadn't been dead, I would've just handed it to her to use. And he still wouldn't have gotten the message. He still wouldn't know. And he still wouldn't be here."

"You're the victim in this -you and my brother. My mother is being her classic narcissistic self, twisting it so she's the injured party."

"Uh! I really hate your parents!" Lorelai said the words with such vehemence Rory twisted her lips to mask her grin from Honor.

"I know. I'm sorry. They're not easy people. I keep praying they'll mellow. My dad actually has. Maybe it's because he's got Logan there now picking up the slack. My mother's always been needy. What she desperately needs is a hobby. When she's not busy she fixates on stuff. It's not healthy. For her or for us."
Rory started to laugh. "Why can't she remember it's Van Cleef and Arpels? She got it wrong every time. I don't even own the jewelry and I know the name!"

"I know. She's insane. And you do have the jewelry. Not the watch. But please keep the necklace and the earrings. I paid for them. My mother was going to write me a check. If she does I'll tear it up. But please keep them. And wear them. They're lovely and you're lovely and I can promise you that was the only thought on the mind of the person who picked them out for you because I was the one who picked them out for you."

"Oh. Honor." That completely caught Rory off-guard. "You're making me cry." Rory snickered as she swiped at her eyes. *Damn hormones.*

"So you'll keep the jewelry?"

"Yes. I'll keep the jewelry. Thank you."

Leaning forward from her seat, Honor hugged Rory, while Lorelai looked on. Finally the two women separated. Rory smiled at Honor before turning her attention back to her mother.

"Hey. You never said what happened to Grandma?"

"*Your grandmother* decided to crash the Huntzberger party."

"No!" squealed Honor.

"You're kidding!" seconded Rory.

"No," Lorelai shook her head. "I'm not."

"That's fabulous! I wonder if Logan'll record it if I ask!" Honor pulled her cell phone from her bag.

"Could you please remind him that I'm feeding Lucas this afternoon? We were going in together."

"Kangaroo care?" asked Honor.

"Yeah."

"Oh my God. What have you done to my brother? You've not only domesticated him but you're whipping him into a dad. And not our dad. He sounds like a good dad."

"Oh. Well. I guess. I can't take the credit. Logan's amazing with Lucas. He must be prewired that way. God, they're so cute together."

Honor started typing on her phone. "Guess it's his latent Peter Pan tendencies."

Lorelai glanced at Honor, an expression of disbelief on her face. "You really telling him to record it?"

"There's no such thing as telling when it comes to Logan. Maybe if it's Rory issuing the directive. Me? I can just beg. Beseech. Implore. Plead. But yes that is what I'm doing."

Rory, momentarily silent, stared down at her chest. She hadn't even heard Honor's words.

*This,* she thought, *is not something I'm ever going to get used to. It feels as though my breast is gonna blow.*
"I'm gonna have to leave you two for a while." Rory smiled awkwardly as she stood, glancing between her mother and Logan's sister. "I really need to go into the pumping room. This morning's schedule is completely off. I'll be back at one. I'll leave my phone on. One of you please text me when Logan comes back?" Rory's gaze settled on Honor. "I know. Why don't you two go see if he's awake? You still have a chance to see his eyes today."

"I'm actually gonna head back downstairs." Lorelai rose to her feet. "Check on your grandmother."

"Grandma needs you to protect her?" questioned Rory, her suspicions obvious in her tone.

"You just want to see Emily in action, don't you?" asked Honor.

"Yeah. It's good to learn from the master." Lorelai hesitated. "Tell you what. I'll record it if Logan doesn't."

"That would be wonderful!" laughed Honor.

With a nod goodbye Lorelai retraced her steps towards the main elevator bank.

"Well, I'm fine amusing myself." Honor reassured Rory. "Do you have a laptop or a tablet? I could bookmark some terrific baby sites for you."

"That would great. Thank you. Then you'll have to come in to see him when we go in. He'll be awake then." Rory grabbed her tablet from her bag and turned it on.

"Oh, I don't want to intrude on your family time."

"You're family. Just come in for a few minutes. See him awake. See him with Logan."

"Okay! You twisted my arm!"

"Let me show you some pictures." Rory pulled up some pictures of Logan holding Lucas on her tablet.

"Oh my God! They are adorable!"

"They are. Aside from his eyes, I think Lucas is going to be Logan's mini-me."

"Yeah," agreed Honor. He brows drew in pensively as she glanced at the photos. "Rory?"

"Yeah?"

"You know he would've been here if he knew."

"Yeah, I know."

"It kills him. Missing everything he did."

"It hurts me too. If I let myself think about it."

"I'm so sorry you two have had such a bumpy ride. But, God, what an incredible opportunity you have now. And that precious little boy."

"Yeah. It is pretty incredible isn't it?"
Chapter 36A: Shopping with Honor


"Hey! What about this one?"

Rory stopped in front of a portable changing table. She hadn't thought about getting a portable one but now that they were closing in on zero hour of Lucas coming home, she was getting visuals of running back and forth between the apartments and scrambling to make sure there were diapers and washcloths and baby wipes everywhere she needed them to be.

"Here's what I'm gonna say about changing tables. First, get the real ones. Second, you can never have too many."

"What?"

"I have one on each floor. A friend of mine told me it was obnoxious. I haven't talked to her since. When you're running around with a screaming baby in a poop-filled diaper, do you really want to have to climb stairs?"

Rory's thoughts immediately flew to Paris. Paris who had twins! No wonder she and Doyle hated the stairs! They called it a "vertical Armageddon."

"So how many? And remember - everything's being delivered."

"I guess one for the Hartford apartment and one for the house in Stars Hollow. But I haven't even closed yet on the house."

"Don't you have two apartments?"

Aside from when she was sleeping, pumping milk, or trying to work on the book, Rory found herself gravitating to Logan's apartment. Once in a while, Logan would follow her to her apartment. Given the security of the building -a key or assistance from the doorman was required to access their floor, they didn't even lock the doors. She had a feeling Logan toyed with the idea of turning the two apartments into one huge luxury apartment. She wasn't ready to address the implications associated with that. So she remained silent and ignored it whenever she caught Logan introspectively gazing at an interior wall, likely visualizing it gone.

"They're right next to each other. One level. No stairs. I think one table will work. Or maybe one and one portable."

"Mm-mm. Sure." Rory ignored the sly smile that appeared on Honor's face as the woman leaned over and snapped a photo of the product barcode.

She can think what she wants.

Walking down the aisle, Rory fell silent as Honor continued to chatter on about products and toss things into the cart.

"I'm sorry we weren't able to make the dinner the other night. Harper had a dance recital. You'll see. Although maybe not dance. Logan always played basketball. Aside from the crazy stuff. Like ski-football."

"If it comes down to ski-football or dance, I'll definitely steer Lucas towards dance."
"Don't blame you there. It's a miracle Logan didn't spend half his childhood in the hospital."

Before Logan's arrival, Rory had been envisioning Lucas's first few years would be spent in Stars Hollow. She figured she'd continue to work on the book, help out at the inn, and rely on Luke and Lorelai for help with the baby. She figured she'd probably eventually get part-time help from a nanny. Wrapped up into this plan was the vague idea that, if they were in town long enough, Lucas could take dance lessons from Miss Patty.

But that had been the plan before Logan had come back. Now that Logan was back, those assumptions didn't seem to hold.

It hadn't occurred to her how much shopping for baby gear would bring up all the relationship questions!

When you're buying baby furniture, the baby furniture goes where the baby is.

So where was furniture needed? That was easy. Hartford and Stars Hollow.

What else was there to consider?

The baby goes where the breast is.

The breast goes where the mom is.

The mom goes where the...dad is?

Rory realized that was a question she hadn't asked Logan in light of him seeing Mitchum on Friday. Had there been any new developments regarding London?

"So do you have a budget or something? I tend to like what I like. Sometimes it's actually not the most expensive thing if you can believe it!" Honor paused as she examined a multi-compartment diaper bag. "Who am I kidding?! It usually is the most expensive! But I'm sure Logan won't care -"

"I come armed with the black Amex." Rory smiled, uncomfortably.

"And I'm sure my brother is happy as a clam that you agreed to take it, so what do you say we wear out the magnetic strip?!"

Honor was absolutely right. Logan told her to get anything and everything she might possibly want or need or think she might want or need or even just be vaguely curious about. He certainly didn't want her to economize when it came to Lucas. He didn't care how much she spent, one way or the other. He just wanted to provide for them in a way he wasn't able to during the pregnancy.

But Rory couldn't shake feeling that the shopping was a little extravagant. She'd lived too much of her life trying to be frugal. Thank God she was at least able to get the baby stuff from Paris. Her eyes falling on infant travel gear, Rory's mind turned once more to London.

*London...?* She decided to just ask Honor.

"Hey, I forgot to ask Logan this but did London come up at all? At the dinner?"

Watching Honor, it seemed to Rory that the woman was deliberately averting her eyes away from her. Rory noted with perplexed amusement Honor's sudden fascination with the baby swings.

"Not that I heard. But Dad and Logan did disappear from the living room for a bit. I suppose they might've discussed it then."
"Right. I forgot to ask when Logan and I talked about the dinner. He didn't really say much about the article either."

Honor's head spun around. She fixed her gaze on Rory.

"You and Logan talked about the dinner? When?"

"Last night. Why?"

"Oh, thank God!" Honor's eyes closed briefly as she let out what seemed to Rory to be a sigh of relief. "I spoke with Logan last night too but I guess it was before you two talked. I told him he had to tell you everything no matter how Huntzberger it was. I was freaking out about it to be honest. That's why I was late. Sometimes my mouth runs faster than my brain. And I don't realize the extent of the damage until later. But if Logan told you everything, then there's nothing to worry about. We can talk. I want you to know he was pretty devastated at the news. Shira really went too far this time. I still can't believe it."

As Rory walked pushing the cart, she struggled to follow Honor's words.

"I mean I was right there with Logan. Positive it was Odette. Who knew my mother knew about blocking? She calls the maid in to set up the DVR for crying out loud!"

**Shira. It was Shira who had blocked her on Logan's phone.**

Logan hadn't told her. Here she was finding out from Honor. As she shopped for baby things with Logan's black Amex.

She found herself willing away tears of anger. Forcing a smile, she discretely wiped her eyes before tuning back into Honor's rambling.

"He was furious. That's why he took off. I can't blame him. But you shouldn't worry about it. Remember. You have an awesome mom. And Logan is not going to let any of Shira's crap fly. He was so angry. I think he'd welcome being disowned at this point just to not have to deal with the drama."

Rory nodded. "Logan's never been fond of drama."

"No. Got that right. So Rory, what do you think? Blue or green?" Honor held up two coverlet sets.

Blue or green?

"How about one of each?" She tittered nervously.

"Yes! Oh my God! I knew shopping with you and my brother's black Amex would be fun! Let's go!"

"Let's go!"

"But, first, Rory, can I say something?"

"Uh. Sure, Honor..."

"I just wanna say I'm really happy you're back in each others lives and giving it another shot."

"Oh, Honor, I'm not sure what Logan's told you -"
"He's told me he loves you. He loves Lucas. And he's thrilled that you're a family."

"We are. But we're not. I mean not like that. We're not together. At least together-together."

"Not yet. It's clear to me now that he was hoping you'd come around. The last couple of years."

"Oh, Honor, I really don't."

"You're right. You're right. I'm sorry. I'll shut up. After I say one last thing. It's so great seeing Logan so happy. I mean he's always happy -you know -on the surface. But it doesn't always run deep. But I can tell he's really happy now. He's so proud of the baby. You hear how he talks."

Rory smiled. That was very very true.

"And he's happy to have you back in his life. I think you two are wonderful together."

Wonderful together. Honor thinks that Logan and she are wonderful together. Wonderful together? Why isn't he honest with me? Why doesn't he tell me things? Because he's afraid of losing you. Afraid of not getting you. Afraid of getting you and losing you.

"My brother would do anything for you. And after that disastrous dinner, I think he's seriously considering leaving HPG."

"What?! Did he say that?!" Rory wondered if her voice sounded as horrified to Honor's ears as it did to her own.

"Oh, I don't think my dad'll let it happen. He'll muzzle Shira before he lets her drive Logan away. But Logan did take off. He didn't even stick around for dinner. Not that he missed anything. The filet mignon was over cooked. And the sugar-free sorbet was awful."

When Logan found out it was his mother who blocked her on his phone, he was so angry he left. His sister thinks he's angry enough to quit the company.

And he told her that the feature article on Lucas was a non-issue.

Why would he be so confident that the feature article on Lucas was a non-issue? Unless it was because it no longer mattered?

If he -the reigning heir of HPG walked - then of course his son wouldn't be in line for anything.

Was he really going to walk away from HPG?

In a daze, Rory followed Honor. Fortunately, being a mom of three had provided Honor with a plethora of anecdotes about babies and baby products, which she happily used to regale Rory. Rory struggled to pay enough attention so that she could muster up minimally appropriate responses to Honor's funny observations.

Curiously Rory found the anger that had been so quick to spark when she realized Logan hadn't told her the full story of the Friday night dinner gradually dissipating. In its place was concern and compassion for a man who'd always carried so many responsibilities, not always gracefully as she thought back to their college days. But he carried them nonetheless.
A man she knew loved her and their son now more than anything.

A man she knew she loved just as fiercely but her love had been tempered by fear for so long she didn't know how to show the love without the fear.

What was she so afraid of, anyway?

Fear of the unknown. Fear of the known.

After everything her mother had done to escape that world - the world of the Shiras and the Mitchums and the Logans - was she really going to deliver herself back into it?

Logan wanted it. He wanted them to be a family. He wouldn't give up on that. If she thought it was hard for them to move on from each other before, how hard would it be now that they had Lucas tying them together?

Could they really do this..? Could they be together..? As a family..?

Could she be Logan's partner – and Lucas's mother – and still be Rory Gilmore?

In any case, of all the battles with destiny, Lorelai's fight to ensure Rory grew up to a life with options and Mitchum and Shira's drive to ensure Logan met his dynastic obligations, in the end, neither one mattered.

The one they -she and Logan- needed to protect and put first was Lucas. That was something they'd definitely do a better job of if they were together. She couldn't deny that. When she and Logan were on the same page - they made a good team.

A great team even.

Could they be a team again?

Glancing around, Rory saw what aisle they were in and laughed.

"So everyone knows 'Diaper Genie' but these Diaper Pails are really where it's at! Hands-free and so fresh scented you would never know there was a pile of poop nearby!"

A metaphor for life if ever there was one, thought Rory.

"We have a few more aisles. I know you must be anxious to get back to the hospital but I so wanted you to come over. You could meet the kids. And you haven't seen Josh in years."

"Yeah, I think we can do that," smiled Rory.

"Perfect!"
Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman Palladio.

Author's Note: Logan's narrative is over. The July timeframe narrative is over. The next few chapters (including the final one) are all from Rory's perspective.

Since the final chapter is from Rory's POV - and it's an important one - I thought it would be helpful to gain some insight into Rory's thoughts as her relationship with Logan was evolving. These chapters take us back in time to pivotal moments for Rory. The final chapter takes a time leap forward.

The sub-chapter numbers provide the time context of where the dialogue fits. The following conversations take place after Logan throws Rory the surprise party, after the first Huntzberger family dinner, after the shopping outing with Honor, but before Logan and Rory's date at the Italian restaurant.

Chapter 37: The Kind That Sticks - sandwiched into the middle

Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Tuesday, May 30, 2017, 7:00 pm EST

"Hey. It's me." Rory glanced out the window as she sat on the rocking chair in her Hartford bedroom.

"Hey, stranger!" God bless her, Lane sounded happy to hear from her. "Long time no speak."

"I know. I'm sorry. Finally out of the hospital and my life revolves around two things." She glanced down at those two things. Was the right one leaking?

"Lucas and Logan?"

"Well, yeah. Them too. But I was actually referring to my boobs."

"Ah! How's that going?"

"He's getting big. As long as he passes the sitting-in-the-carseat test, we can bring him home this week."

"That's terrific! But I meant the breast-feeding."

"Oh. That! You know I've never felt more like a farm animal."

"When did you feel like a farm animal before?"

"New topic."

"Does the saying about the cow, and giving the milk away for free, make more sense now?"

"How's that a new topic?"
"I guess it's not. I was just wondering."

Rory mulled over Lane's question for a few moments before replying.

"No."

"Okay. I didn't breast-feed so -"

"Yeah, I get it."

"So how are you? How are things? Are things good? We didn't have much time to talk at your dinner but you seemed happy!"

"I am happy, Lane." Her voice came out hesitant and low and filled with trepidation. It was probably the exact same tone she would've used to say, "I'm not happy."

"Okaaay. I believe you. But why're you saying it like that?"

"How'm I saying it?" She knew exactly how she was saying it. She was saying it in the exact same tone she would've used to say "I've got a terminal illness."

"Like you don't believe it."

"Guess cause I am finding it hard to believe. I don't know. I just didn't picture this -"

"You mean with Logan?"

"Yes. No. With all of this. With my life. I didn't plan on any of this. Starting with the baby."

"A lot of things aren't planned. I didn't plan on having twins my first year married."

"I know! That was a major curveball! I don't know how you did it!"

"Uh, you know how we did it -"

"Oh yeah. I know how you did that. But once they were here. You two did an incredible job."

"Thank you. Teamwork. There comes a point where you just shrug and do what you gotta do."

"Shrug and do what you gotta do." Rory repeated Lane's words. It made for a great mantra. Shrug and do what you gotta do.

"Yep. So, anyway... How are things?"

"Things are great. Logan's been terrific. I'm -"

"Happy?" Lane, God bless her, dusted off her squeaky cheerleader's voice. She was so rooting for her.

"Starting to be less terrified."

"Okay," Lane replied cheerfully. "That's getting there."

"Yeah!" Rory tried to sound upbeat but her tone betrayed her. It was the exact same tone she would've used to announce a flat tire. "Flat!"
"I don't know, Rory. You're saying one thing but your tone is saying another."

"I know! I know!" Sighing, she jumped up and started pacing across the floor. "I don't know what's wrong with me! I should be happy. Shouldn't I?"

"Well, you just had a baby. There's a lot of extra hormones trying to figure out what to do with themselves."

Rory stilled. "I have never heard it described like that."

"I have three men, Rory. Five if you count Brian and Gil. To get them to understand me, I have had to become fluent in mansplaining."

*Mansplaining? Mansplaining? I have two men now. Five if I count Colin, Finn, and Robert. Or is it one man and four children? Two and three if I get Colin on a good day?*

"Oh my God. Oh my God! Lane!" She resumed her pacing. "I'm gonna have to add that to the list! I have to learn mansplaining! Is there a book? Can you tutor me?"

"Uh, if you haven't had to learn it yet with Logan, you're probably in the clear. Calm down."

Rory focused on steadying her breath as she walked back and forth in her room.

"Hey! Have you thought about maybe talking to someone?"

Rory sat on the edge of her bed. "Uh, what? Who?"

"You know. Someone."

"No. I don't know. Who?"

"Like a therapist. Did it help Lorelai and your grandma?"

"Uh." She'd forgotten all about the therapist. *Hm. Interesting question.* "I have no idea if it helped. They have been getting along lately."

"See? So it worked!"

"I think they bonded over hating their therapist, not the therapy itself. I heard she's dating mom's ex, Jason."

"Who?"

"The therapist."

"Small world."

"She was also the understudy for Kinky Boots last year."

"Oh. Really small world."

"Yep."

All of a sudden Rory could hear raised voices in the background at Lane's.

*[Background] "No! That is how the devil-clown gets into you!"*
Ah. Mrs. Kim.

[Background] "Ah! Ah! No! Pennywise! No!"

Steve and Kwon screaming.

"What's going on? The boys wanna see "It"?"

"No. Yes. But it's not out until September. We're not gonna let them see it. I'm not even sure Zach and Brian should see it. The boys are trying to talk my mother into letting them have Happy Meals."

"Mrs. Kim knows about Pennywise?"

"No. That's a coincidence. She's always referred to Ronald McDonald as the 'devil-clown.'"

"Oh! Mrs. Kim. She's always been surprisingly hip."

"Yes. She has."

As Rory listened, she heard the shrieking continue from Lane's.

"Wow. They're loud."

"Yes, they are. But don't worry. I suspect having only one - not two -- is less loud."

"Right. Ah. So... You really think I should see a therapist?"

"No. Maybe. I don't know. I was joking. But you do seem a little stuck."

"I am stuck, aren't I? I am stuck." Frowning, she stared at the bed cover.

"You might be. So anyway why don't you want this?"

"Want what?"

"Why don't you want to be with Logan?"

"It's complicated. Love him, love his family. His world. His job."

"Rory, don't you think you're exaggerating?"

"No?"

"You asking me or are you telling me?"

"Well, since I just said it obviously I believe it. So I'm asking you."

"Oh. You're being very literal today."

"I'm in an anti-metaphor kinda mood."

"Okaaay. Well, I think you need to focus more on you and him - and Lucas - and less on that other stuff. I mean you know my mom took a while to warm up to Zach. And Zach doesn't like his own job so it doesn't matter if I like it. And the store's just a store."

"You think I'm insane."
"I think you're hung up on disappointing Lorelai."

"No! No!" Rory paused. "No. Oh my God. You think?"

"You two have always been close. I know she was never a Logan fan-"

"Even more with his family. But now there's Lucas to think about."

"Yes," agreed Lane before adding a clarifier. "To an extent."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean be with Logan cause you wanna be with Logan. Don't be with Logan because of Lucas. It's like that song."

Song. Song. Which song could Lane possibly be referring to? Lane was an unapologetic audiophile.

"Uh. 'Cats in the Cradle'?"

"No." Rory cringed at the disgust she heard in Lane's voice. "Rory, you really think I would cite Harry Chapin to you?"

"I don't know. Yeah. It seemed like a long shot but I wasn't sure where you were going with the analogy."

"It's the song about the boy whose parents split up."

"'Father of Mine'?"

"Rory." Cringe. "How many times do I have to tell you? Everclear can be a guilty pleasure once in a while but they're not good enough for life anthems."

"I forgot. You have to admit it's been a while since we talked tunes."

"Besides I'm sure Logan's good for at least a twenty in a birthday card. Not a fiver."

"You got that right. So which song are you referring to?"

"Blink-182's 'Stay -'

"Together for the Kids! There's really a song for every occasion, isn't there?"

"Pretty much. Anyway, there's no reason for you to rush into anything with Logan."

"Rush? We already have a baby together. And I've known him since I was nineteen."

"Yes. And something's held you back from committing to him."

Ouch. Yep.

"Yes. That's true."

"So what is it? I mean now. He's no longer engaged. You're not dating anyone. What's the problem? Do you love him?"

"Yes! Of course I love him. I've always loved him."
"Afraid he doesn't love you?"

"No! That's not it. I don't doubt him." She hesitated. "Not that way."

"Okay. Is he a workaholic? I know he works a lot."

"He does. But I can usually get him to adjust his schedule."

"Do you think he'll make a lousy father?"

"Oh my God! No! Not at all! You have to see him with Lucas. All those dimples and cuteness. It's enough to make my knees go weak."

"So what're you afraid of?"

"Lane, I don't even know. I just am. It's gotten so big over the years. This looming fear of getting in over my head."

"With Logan?"

"No. Not Logan. But his parents. His world. His money. I'm afraid of losing myself. I mean look at me now. If I marry Logan, I'll have to volunteer on boards and organize fundraisers. I don't know when I'll have time to finish the book. And then the other things if/when I do finish the book. Interviews. Tours. Promoting."

"You wanna do all that?"

"Not so much actually. But I'm pretty sure it's all a necessary evil if I want to sell books."

"How would you have done it with Lucas if Logan weren't in the picture?"

"To be honest I never got that far in thinking about it."

"Did Logan say he'd expect you to do that stuff? The fundraisers? And being on boards?"

"No. He didn't. And he wouldn't. But everyone else would. His family. Co-workers."

"Do you have to do what they want?"

"I'd be afraid it'd reflect badly on Logan if I didn't."

"Maybe you could start a cause you believe in and just work on that?"

"Like what?"

"How about 'Bringing '80s Music into the Lives of Disenfranchised Youth'? I would so be on your board! I could be your vice chair!"

Rory burst out laughing. "You're crazy! That would be too much fun. I'm sure I couldn't do that!"

"Hey. You never know until you ask. It seems like Logan would do anything to make you happy."

"Anything within reason..."

"Rory."

"Yeah?"
"He's got more money than God, right?"

"Family money. Not his."

"Still. Maybe it can't be just 80s music but maybe it could be something about music. And kids. And it doesn't have to be stodgy and dull."

"Okay. Maybe. I should've thought of that."

"You're a little stuck. And I don't mind being your sounding board. Lord knows you've been mine enough over the years. And it's been great having you back. Even if you didn't want to be back at first."

"Yeah. This has been nice, hasn't it? World travel is over-rated."

"I'll take your word for it. I'm still waiting on my European vacation."

*Foot meet mouth*. Lane's been trying to get her European vacation for years.

"What's the latest?"

"Next summer. Zach and I are doing it. Even if we have to fly standby on a courier flight. That's rock-and-roll, isn't it? Hey, you know something? My parents were gonna watch the boys but you'll be an experienced mom by then. So maybe you could take them for part of the time?"

*Hell no!*

"Wow. Maybe. They'll be what? Eleven? Really it's not that much different from watching Finn and Colin."

"Having finally met those two, I'd actually argue that Steve and Kwon are more mature."

"And you'd probably be right."

"Back to the other topic. Wouldn't your grandmother be a good person to talk to about how much you can get away with doing or not doing?"

"Good point." Rory snickered. "Grandma's come a long way too. Ten years ago she probably would've made up stuff to encourage me to marry Logan. Now I think she might actually tell me the truth."

"There you go. Therapist not needed. Just talk to Emily."

"Can you imagine my mother's reaction to hearing those words?"

"Lorelai's got opinions."

"That she does."

"So when are you gonna be back down?"

"Soon I hope. We can do a girl's lunch now that I can drink again."

"I'll introduce you to mommy juice."

"I think I've met mommy juice. Pre-baby."
"You'll have a new appreciation. Trust me."

**Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Tuesday, May 30, 2017, 7:45 pm EST**

After hanging up with Lane - and before she had a chance to talk herself out of it - Rory hit Emily's number on her cell.

"Hello?"

"Grandma. Hi. It's me."

Rory let out a sigh of relief at having gotten through to her grandmother. She silently congratulated herself for allowing herself no opportunity for chickening out.

"Rory! It's good to hear from you. How are you? How's Lucas? Is he still being released this week? And how's Logan?"

"I'm fine. The boys are both fine, Grandma. *The boys'? Where the hell did that come from?* "Yes, as long as there's no surprises, Lucas is being released on Friday. How're you? How's Nantucket?"

"I'm fine. And Nantucket is absolutely lovely. I can't wait until next month. I'm looking forward to having you all join me. Do you know if April will be back in time for the Fourth of July?"

"Actually I don't. But I could text her." Rory jumped up and strode over to her desk. Grabbing a pen she jotted down a reminder on a pad to text her step-sister about the upcoming holiday.

"What a clever idea. Yes. Please text her."

"Will do, Grandma."

"So how's your mother? And Luke?"

"They're both good, Grandma."

"Any more Shira sightings?"

"No. Not for me. Though Logan had dinner with them on Friday -along with Honor and her husband. I didn't go."

"Were you invited?"

"No, I wasn't. I didn't want to go anyway. Really, it was for the best. Logan had a chance to talk to his parents without me there -" Tell Emily about Shira and the phone? No. "He got some work things settled. Here's some news. He may be done with London for good."

"That's wonderful! Definitely something to celebrate when you three make it out here for the Fourth. And you're still planning on going to your mother's opening?"

"I think so but until Lucas is out of the hospital, I have a hard time picturing it."

"Nonsense. It's still a month away."

"I know. But he's so little. I'm not sure I want to bring him to the inn. But I definitely want to go." Thinking about it, Rory frowned. "I mean I have to go! To see it through. It's so important to Mom! Plus I did a ton of work on it, too!"
"You'll be there. You. Lucas." Emily paused before slyly adding, "And Logan."

"Yeah." Rory agreed, although the word came out sounding more like a question than the affirmation it should've been. "Grandma. The reason I called -" Rory stopped. Why had she picked up the phone so impulsively? She should've made a list. "I called because I wanted to ask you something."

"Do you need money?"

Genuinely amused, Rory let out a chuckle. "Ah, no, Grandma. I'm fine. Logan actually got me a black Amex with my name on it. For Lucas. I told him I didn't need it but ..." Rory's words fell off.

"He's trying."

"Yeah. He is."

"You know something? He reminds me of your grandfather in some ways. Oh, Richard never quite had Logan's devil-may-care attitude but then Logan's more confident than cocky these days. You humbled him."

Rory laughed again. "Grandma! We were barely in each others' lives. I didn't 'humble' him."

"Rory. Don't be naive. That boy -man- would do a lot to make you happy."

That Rory knew was true. But was 'a lot' enough?

"I know, Grandma." Rory played back her grandmother's words. "Logan really reminds you of Grandpa?"

"Yes, he does."

In terms of comparisons, that wasn't half bad. Not a day went by that Rory didn't think of her grandfather at least once and usually it was more than once.

"Of course, not all of it is good." Ouch. "Has he told Shira off on your account?"

Rory's eyes widened at her grandmother's odd question.

"Uh, yeah. Actually he has. A couple of times."

"Well." Rory listened closely. There was an unmistakable sadness in her grandmother's voice. "That's good."

"Oh, Grandma, I didn't mean to make you feel bad."

"Don't be silly, Rory. Your grandfather and I were products of a different era. We weren't raised to challenge our parents. The fact that your grandfather did so at all was a small miracle."

"Oh."

"You and Logan, on the other hand, were brought up differently. I would expect him to take your side and support you."

"He does, Grandma."

"Good. If he doesn't, I'll have to talk to Mark about how to deal with it. You remember Mark
Greenberg? He's my neighbor to the right. Two houses down. He and I are trying to get those Blackstone pricks out."

"Yes. I remember." Mark Greenberg. Also known as Emily's David Mamet instructor. And the Blackstones, the loud annoying family Emily was determined to buy out.

"Mark -as you know - is an attorney. I think he's 'connected'. Now, he hasn't admitted it to me yet but he is from Boston. And he talks a lot about his good friend, 'Whitey'. I can only assume he means 'Whitey Bulger'."

"There are other people with the nickname Whitey, Grandma."

"Hm. You think?"

"Yes. Maybe? Wasn't there a baseball player named Whitey Ford?"

"Did he live in Boston?"

"I don't know, Grandma." Emily's words finally registered. "Wait a minute. Were you gonna talk to your neighbor about getting guys to rough up Logan?"

"A beatdown can be an effective way to convey a message, Rory."

"Um. No! Not with Logan! He's Lucas's father. No beatdowns, Grandma."

"Relax! I'm teasing you. I meant to talk to Mark as an attorney. Not for his possible mob connections. He's away this week anyway. So how is Logan with the baby?"

"Really good, actually. They're super cute together. You'll see. It's kind of amazing to watch."

"I am looking forward to it."

"Yeah. So, Grandma..."

"Yes?"

"I just - I'm running through a lot of things in my head right now" -_understatement of the century-_ "and I was wondering if I could maybe bounce some ideas off you?"

"You're asking me for advice?"

"Yeah. Guess that's what it boils down to."

"Of course, Rory. I'd be happy to help. So what do you want to talk about?"

_Wow_. Now that she was actually doing this, how did she think she was going to do this? What did she even want to ask her grandmother? _Why hadn't she made a damn list?!_

"You seem really good these days. Happy." Rory internally cringed. She just told her widowed grandmother she seemed happy.

"Me? You want to talk about me?"

_If I can do it without sticking my foot in my mouth._

"Uh. Yes. And me. My point is since you left Hartford and quit the DAR, and moved out to
Nantucket, you just seem content. Like you're doing exactly what you want to be doing and you're doing it for no other reason than it's what you want to do."

"Yes," agreed Emily. "It does feel good to do what I want. Like buying this place. Did you know it's the first big purchase that's ever been in my name? I finally got a credit card with only my name. My old ones all said Mrs. Richard Gilmore."

"Oh?"

"Yes. And I'm determined to wear those Blackstones down eventually. Your grandfather and I talked about having our own compound some day."

"I remember."

"I'll get it. Eventually."

"That's great." After a lull, Rory continued. "How're things at the museum?"

"I'm enjoying my docent duties. I recently started doing research to expand some of the narratives. We're also talking about putting together more age specific tours and tying history to the present by working with the high school." Emily paused. "Oh! We're also partnering with the whaling museum in New Bedford on some promotional materials. That's been interesting. I met with the - Rory, I'm sorry. I'm rambling. I'm sure that's not what you're interested in talking about."

"No, Grandma. I am interested. In all that stuff. I'm happy for you. Of course, Mom and I miss you not being here but it's not so far."

"No. It's not. Rory, I appreciate your interest in me but I know you didn't call just to talk about me. I think I know what this is about. You're afraid, aren't you? That if you marry Logan you won't get to do what you want to do?"

"Something like that."

"Did you discuss this with Logan?"

"Yes. Some of it."

"What did he say?"

"All the right things."

"Do you not believe him?"

"I don't know. I guess I'm worried that he's saying things now -not that he's lying but that he's being naive or overly optimistic. And it won't hit me until twenty years have passed. Then I'll be wondering what happened."

"What do you want to happen?"

"I want to be able to pursue my writing. I'm afraid I'll be pressured to spend my time on other things."

"Like the DAR. The hospital board. The ballet. The family foundation."

"Yeah. I mean...I saw how busy you always were. And I worked for the DAR. I'm not sure how I'd be able to balance Lucas, Logan, my writing, and that other stuff. And what if I get stuck working on
something I hate? I just don't know how to do it on my terms."

"Rory, I think you can do whatever you want. How much you want. For whatever cause you want."

"Really? Lane suggested I could do something with music and kids. And she'd work on it with me."

"So do it. It doesn't matter what the others think. It only matters what Logan thinks and he's so happy to have you and Lucas in his life, I'm not sure disappointing him is even possible."

"Grandma, that's not true. I mean… I know there's all these expectations. Certainly Shira never thought I had it in me. To do that stuff. I don't disagree with her. Not because I can't but because I don't want to. I still want to write. Do my own thing." She let out a nervous titter. "The Writer Rory Gilmore is not ready to retire."

"So don't, Rory. What if you didn't worry about Logan – or the Huntzbergers -'letting' you have your career? What if, instead, you just told them how it was going to be? It's very forward, but you are of the younger generation. You know your mother would have no qualms whatsoever laying down the law. Just pretend you're your mother in this matter."

Pretend I'm Lorelai…?

"But Shira and Mitchum –"

"Rory, Rory. It's Logan and Lucas you should be thinking of. Not Shira and Mitchum. All I can tell you is I didn't realize until after your grandfather and I married just how against us marrying your great-grandmother Lorelai was. But had I discovered it sooner, it still wouldn't have changed a thing."

Rory sighed. That was reassuring. Maybe.

"But I'm not like you, Grandma. Or like Mom."

"You're right. You're you. But you have every bit of your mother's metal. And my wit. But you also have a lot of your grandfather in you. You're more even-tempered. Like Richard. It takes a bit more to provoke you. But now – with Lucas, with Logan – you'll realize what's important for you to protect. And, of course, with Shira and Mitchum, I have faith you'll get your requisite provocations."

Rory laughed. Her grandmother could definitely be witty.

"Yeah, without a doubt."

"Why are you worrying? You should be happy. We all should be! You have a beautiful, healthy son. His father rushed out here as soon as he heard and wants nothing more than for you to be a family."

That was true. God. Why couldn't she just be happy? She'd loved Logan for so long. Why was she so afraid? Did she really believe -if she agreed to marry Logan- everything in her life would suddenly spin out of control? Was Lane right? Was part of this just long ingrained regret at disappointing Lorelai?

"You're right, Grandma. Thank you."

"Of course I'm right. But you probably shouldn't tell your mother that. It'll send her right back to that insane therapist."
Feeling calm and relaxed for the first time in a while, Rory had just settled into reading one of her baby books when her cell phone buzzed on the desk. She glanced at the name before wincing.

*So much for achieving inner peace.*

"Hey," she greeted her caller.

"Hey. Wondering if I'd ever hear from you again. How're things going with Kato?"

*Kato?* Rory thought for a minute. She was as good a Paris whisperer as existed on the planet but sometimes her friend's references were a bit obscure. It often depended on what was playing on cable. The O.J. Trial mini-series had been playing.

"Paris, Logan is back in my life. Officially. He's not a guest."

"Warren Beatty Jr. strikes again? What'd he do? Baby-wearing like all the Ryans and faking the devoted father act?"

"I'm pretty sure he's not faking it, Paris. He's really good with Lucas. And I'm not really surprised. He's so much of a kid himself, it makes sense that he'd be good with kids."

"Uh-huh. Did he tell you about Terrence?"

"He mentioned you and Doyle had a marriage counselor named Terrence. It's not Terrence-Terrence, is it?"

"Oh, it's Terrence-Terrence, all right. I can't believe I've got that discount, pill-popping Tony Robbins wannabe back in my life after all this time."

"Paris, if you don't think Terrence is gonna help, why is he your marriage counselor?"

"Doyle's about-face on the divorce was a little sudden. One minute he's crashing in Michael Bay's guest house, the next he's knocking on the door asking me to take him back. It was all just too quick."

"Okay. Then you should be talking to Doyle. If you don't believe in Terrence, how will his being around help?"

"I'm testing Doyle with Terrence. Wait until you see that man bun and soul-patch he's sporting. Let's not forget the cropped skinny jeans and man mules. He's like a 50-year old man who had an anvil fall on his head and he now believes he's twenty. As much as I can't stand him, Doyle really hates him. I figure I'll know exactly where I stand with Doyle by how much he's willing to tolerate Terrence."

*What?*

"I don't get it."

"I'm afraid Doyle's only interested in getting back together because one of Bay's lawyer buddies gave him the heads up on what it would mean to divorce right now. It's his knee-jerk reaction to the sticker shock."

"So you figure if he really wants to get back together, he'll be more willing to tolerate Terrence?"
"Huh? Is that what you think? I figured he'd be more compelled by greed to tolerate Terrence."

Wow. She really needed to get back into a regular routine of talking to Paris now that she was no longer pregnant. She totally misread that.

"So if Doyle throws out Terrence, he really wants to reconcile? If he allows Terrence to stay, he's just back for the money?"

"Bingo."

"Okay, I get it now. Does Terrence know what you're doing?"

"Are you kidding? That would require the man to have a level of self-awareness beyond his abilities."

"How long has Terrence been back? And how much time are you planning on giving Doyle to make a move?"

"That's the tricky part. Since we're both so busy –Doyle's been working on a Marvel movie- Squirrel Girl - don't ask - the timing is tough. But we're both planning on going to your mother's opening next month."

"You are?!"

She talks to Lorelai nearly every day; how did they miss this topic?

"Of course. I pride myself on maintaining close relationships with all my clients. Even the ones who don't know what's best for them."

Riiight. Her mom and Luke had explored the surrogacy option with Paris the year before.

"We still email once in a while. Me and Lorelai. I think your step-father is intimidated by me."

"Luke's just not as outgoing as my mom. Don't take it personally."

"Oh, I don't. Anyway so the three of us will be coming down to your town -"


"Are you taking one room? Or two?"

"I requested a suite. I hope that's what I'm getting. Michel was very standoffish when I called. I don't think he realized it was me."

"Hm. Yeah. You haven't seen Michel in a while. He and his husband, Frederick, are talking about having children. You may have a potential new client."

"Huh. Is that right? I'll have to bring a new client package. Has that chef improved at all?"

"Who? Sookie?"

"I mean it's been over ten years. She'd had to have gotten better by now, right?"

"I'd say so. Yes."

"Good. How're you doing anyway?"
"Me? I'm fine. Lucas is set to be released on Friday. We're still getting things ready at the apartment but - "

"Has he asked you to marry him?"

Paris actually caught her off-guard. After knowing Paris half her life, that rarely happened.

"He's waiting for a sign from me. That it's what I want."

"And? Do you?"

"I don't know. This is not what I thought my life was gonna be. Not at this point."

"Yeah well. Join the club. You think I ever saw this coming?! That the survival of my marriage would hinge on Doyle's level of disgust for Mr. Man Bun? You pick your cards from the deck and then the game of life just rolls on."

"Yeah. I guess."

"You do have a child together. You made a good team once. You sure you don't want to try?"

"Point taken."

"Well. It was your point. Besides, you and Blondie did make a good team."

"I know. We did."

"You want me to talk to him? When he came out to get the baby stuff, I think we built a slight rapport."

"I think I got it, Paris. But thanks."

"Let me know if you change your mind."

"I will. It'll be good seeing you two – three – next month."

"Yeah. I'm looking forward to it. If anything'll get Doyle to jettison Terrence, it'll be a shared hotel suite."

"Yeah..."
The Rory Chronicles, Part III

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman Palladio.

Author's Note: Logan's narrative is over. The July timeframe narrative is over. The next few chapters (including the final one) are all from Rory's perspective.

Since the final chapter is from Rory's POV - and it's an important one - I thought it would be helpful to gain some insight into Rory's thoughts as her relationship with Logan was evolving. These chapters take us back in time to pivotal moments for Rory. The final chapter takes a time leap forward.

The sub-chapter numbers provide the time context of where the dialogue fits. The following conversations take place after Logan throws Rory the surprise party, after the first Huntzberger family dinner, after the shopping outing with Honor, but before Logan and Rory's date at the Italian restaurant.

Immediately Before Chapter 37: The Kind That Sticks

Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Thursday, June 1, 2017, 11:00 am EST

(Hours before Logan and Rory's date at the Italian restaurant; Day before Lucas is released from hospital.)

Rory listened as her mother continued to describe the latest happenings at the inn. Busy since she and Luke returned to Stars Hollow, it was obvious to Rory how much her mother enjoyed regaling her over the phone with in-depth descriptions of the small town happenings she was missing stationed as she was in Hartford. That her mother had always enjoyed talking so much had tended to make it easier on Rory who -as a rule- did not enjoy talking quite as much.

Rory wondered when her mother was going to bring up Logan. As far as conversation topics went, when it came to the guys she dated, Rory had learned early on to filter the information she provided to Lorelai. With no boyfriend had that been more true than Logan. Since Logan had flown in from London, Rory had deliberately avoided discussing him with her mother. They would talk about everything from organic diapers to the inn renovations to Lifetime movies but no discussion of Logan beyond the basics of where he was and what he was doing.

Rory had to concede that Lorelai -and Luke -had been unflagging in their support of her -and of Lucas- the past eight months. Not to mention how supportive Lorelai had been about the whole book thing since her initial not-quite-enthusiastic response. For those reasons Rory really did not want them to fall into any weird patterns of keeping secrets from one another. Eyes closed it was still heartbreakingly easy to revisit their argument of the prior year. When she'd gone to live with Lane. It was all still so fresh. She knew she didn't want to return to that. Hearing a question directed at her, Rory focused her attention back on her mother.

"Did I tell you Paris is coming to the annex opening?"
"No, you didn't. But I talked to her the other night and she told me."

"Oh good. Since you talked to her maybe you know. Michel took her reservation and unless Paris has converted to fundamental Mormonism complete with polygamy I'm not sure what the hell they've got going on."

"Paris and Doyle are bringing their marriage counselor. So they need a suite. Two rooms, two beds."

"Oh...Huh. It's never what you think."

"Yeah. I know."

Rory listened as her mom sighed. Rory took that as a sign that they were finally venturing onto the topic that had remained untouched up until that point.

"So I got the Lucas update but you haven't said a word about how things are going at the dorm."

Dorm? Dorm. Leave it to Lorelai. Rory hadn't explicitly made up her mind about saying anything but her mother's comment goaded her.

"Things at the dorm are fine. More than fine." Rory took a breath. Ready for anything. "There is a bit of news. Logan and I are going on a date tonight."

Silence. Where are the dropping pins when you need them?

"Mom?"

"He wormed his way back in, huh?" Rory could tell her mother was purposely trying to make light of it. It wasn't working. Her mother realized it too. "Wow! I am getting such a feeling of deja vu right now! I mean how many times have I said this? Talk about your vicious circles."

"Mom..." Rory went for a 'gently chiding' tone.

"Sorry!"

"I'm trying to be open with you."

"I know and I'm sorry!"

"What are you sorry for?"

"I don't know. I just feel like I should apologize."

"Mom. Stop."

"I'm sorry! Dammit! It happened again!"

"What happened again?"

"A deja vu moment. You and your grandmother in cahoots now?"

"I thought we'd agreed to try to live the rest of our lives without ever saying that word again?"

"Yes! You're right. I'm sorry. Argh! I have to learn how to be quiet. Maybe meditation? Didn't you say you tried meditation?"

"Yes. And I sucked at it and you'd be a hundred times worse. You broke a leg doing yoga,
"Don't remind me. Let me try this again. So you and Logan are going out on a date. He taking you someplace fabulous?"

"I have no idea where he's taking me. It's a surprise."

"What about Lucas?"

"What about Lucas?" She repeated her mother's words. She had no clue what Lorelai was getting at. "He was a surprise too," she joked. "But he's not coming."

"But he gets released tomorrow."

"Yes, I know that."

"I just find the timing of your date a little strange."

"Strange? How is it strange?"

"I mean it's at the last possible moment before Lucas is released."

"So?"

"Shouldn't you two be focusing on the baby?"

"We are focusing on Lucas. What exactly are you saying but not saying?"

"Well, it's just... you know - all the old points still apply. Everything we talked about when you thought Logan was Caspering -"

"Ghosting."

"- you. You don't need him, Rory. You could do this alone -"

"Yes. I could. But Logan's Lucas's father and he wants to be his dad."

"Fine. You two don't have to be married -or even dating -to co-parent. If you don't love him -"

"Mom! If I didn't love him, I doubt we'd be here today. Yes, my getting pregnant was an accident, but it's not like we were a couple of horny teenagers fooling around."

As soon as the words were out of her mouth, Rory wished she could take them back.

"Wow, Rory. That was pretty pointed."

"Mom, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for it to come out like that. I just meant it's not like it was some random hook-up."

"Oh? Cause you wouldn't do a random hook-up?"

Wookiee! The unspoken word that came through clear as a bell.

"Mom! Are you really going to throw every mistake I ever made in my face the day before my son comes home from the hospital?!

"No, cause I don't even care about that mistake. But this? You and Logan? Don't make it out to be
some grand love story, Rory. It was Vegas! You know it. I know it. Logan knows it."

"Wow. This is why I don't discuss things with you."

"So what are you going to do? Give up on your dreams? Give up on the book?"

"You didn't even want me to write that book! And I'm not giving up anything! I'm going out on a date!"

An uncomfortable silence settled over them.

"Rory. Listen. I'm sorry. Really - I am. But I have to say my piece. I've stifled myself so much the past few weeks Archie Bunker would've been proud. I just don't want to see you do something that's not right for you because you think you have no other choice!"

"I know. I'm not. And I won't."

"As your mother -and your best friend – I feel like we were in it together. I didn't go through everything I did just to see you settle on being one of the 'Real Housewives of Hartford'! Or London!"

"Cute. So are we talking about me? Or are we talking about you?"

"I didn't mean it like that. Of course this is about you -"

"Is it? It shouldn't be. My future, my decisions, everything is gonna effect Lucas."

"Yes! That's right! And do you want him to grow up in that world?"

"What world? The world where his parents are?" Rory sighed. She'd always known her mother's insistence on separating herself from the world of the Gilmores was a game of smoke and mirrors when it came to her. "I want him with me." And with Logan. "With his parents who love him. He'll be with us."

"But a child in that world - you know how easy it is to become spoiled? Entitled?"

I was raised by you. How could that have escaped my notice?

"I'll have to do my best so that that doesn't happen."

"Logan -"

"What about Logan?! Oh my God! Do you truly believe he's as bad as you make him out in your head? I mean - if you do - if you believe he's that awful, then what must you think of me?"

"Rory, no. Lord knows I tangoed long enough with your dad. I know what it's like..."

"What what's like?"

"What it's like to have the right feelings for the wrong guy."

"Mom! That's not what this is! I'm not you! Logan's not Dad! Argh!"

Frustrated beyond belief, Rory fell silent. There was no winning.

"Rory-"
"No. Mom. Don't say anything."

"Okay. I guess I'll just stifle myself again."

Rory cringed. Lane was right.

"I can't keep doing this. I can't keep being afraid that I'm gonna disappoint you. I have to live my life."

"Oh, no, Rory." Lorelai sighed. "Don't, you don't...Can I say something?"

"Sure," she muttered. "Go for it."

"I'm not saying 'don't be with Logan'. I just think you're rushing things. Lucas is only three weeks old. Logan's only been around a few weeks."

"You think I don't know that? You really think I need you to remind me how old my son is?"

"Of course not - "

"How long Logan's been around? You think I can't count? Like I wasn't counting each day of the 35 weeks Lucas and I were on our own?"

"Oh, Rory -"

"Mom, it doesn't feel like I'm rushing things. Things with Logan - it feels...good. He came as soon as he knew and he's been incredible."

"I'm not saying -"

"Let me finish, please."

"Sure."

"The past few days, I've been really trying to put things in perspective." Thanks to Lane and her grandmother. "For my sake but mostly for Lucas's. I need to stop doubting myself. I need to stop second-guessing every decision."

Rory paused to allow Lorelai an opportunity to say something; she didn't.

"This is my life. I have to stop worrying that I'll disappoint you."

"Kid, you never disappoint me. Not possible. I love you. You'll find out."

Was it really not possible for Rory to disappoint Lorelai? Looking back on her life, their lives together, Rory was fairly certain she could safely rebut her mother's assertion. For all her mother's claims that she'd love Rory no matter what -Lorelai had always been both heavily vested and opinionated when it came to Rory's decisions.

And those included decisions regarding Logan. When it came to Logan, talking to Lorelai inevitably meant arguing with Lorelai. And, at thirty-two, Rory was tired of arguing with Lorelai.

"If you mean that - and you want to support me - support this. Because this is what I want."

Mother and daughter both fell silent. Rory waited for Lorelai to say something. She knew it was her turn.
"Well, I hope you know what you're doing." Even more than her words, Lorelai's tone was crystal clear: 'I think you're doing the wrong thing, but you're obviously too stubborn to listen to me so I'm forced to wait this out.'

Rory grimaced. Thinking ahead to the weekend, to the next day, to bringing Lucas home, she knew she had to take a stand. It was as much for her as it was for Logan and Lucas. She hated that Lorelai had pushed things to this point.

"Mom, as you know, we're bringing Lucas home tomorrow. If you can put your feelings aside, and be happy for us, you're welcome to stop by. If you can't, then I'm gonna ask that you hold off until you can."

Rory waited as there was a long pause on Lorelai's end.

"I think I'll let you guys have your first day – or couple of days – without any intrusions on our end –"

"Mom –"

"No, Rory. I'm not gonna lie to you. I think you're rushing things with Logan. I think you're doing it because you're afraid. I think you're letting that cloud your judgment. I'm not sure it's the best thing for you - or for Lucas. As much as I want to see Lucas, I am gonna wait."

"Okay. Well, he'll miss you."

"Maybe after a day. Or two."

"We'll be around all weekend. Just let me know."

"I will."

"Okay. So... bye."

"Bye."

Rory winced as she ended the call. Those were some strained goodbyes. Throwing down the gauntlet with Lorelai would always and forever be a calculated risk. She'd hoped against hope that her mother would just put aside her opinions and be happy for her - for them. But she wouldn't be Lorelai if she didn't hold strong opinions. And the ones about Logan and the Huntzbergers were more than a decade old, while the steely determination against the world she herself had been born into was even older.

The call with Lorelai out of the way, Rory hoped she might find herself in a more sanguine mood by later that evening. Talking with Lorelai always brought her insecurities to the forefront.

Maybe she'd give Lane a quick call. Irony of ironies how awesome a life cheerleader her best friend turned out to be.

_Immediately After Chapter 38: The Innocent Can Never Last_

_ Hartford, Connecticut, 42 North Main, Rory's Apartment, Sunday, June 4, 2017, 2:30 pm EST_

_(First weekend Lucas is home from the hospital)_
Rory found herself exhausted the first couple of days Lucas was home from the hospital. Considering how tired she'd been before the baby had been released, that was really saying something. While it was wonderful that Lucas was home, Rory couldn't help but be tense and worry and hover over him. It took some persuasion on Logan's part to get her to relax.

Since the baby was home, Rory and Logan didn't have to make the daily trips to the hospital; now they only needed to go in for his follow up doctor visits. Thrilled to drop some things from her schedule, Rory took to napping while Lucas slept. It worked in that she was getting more sleep but once she realized how much time had passed without her cracking open her laptop once, she vowed to cut down her nap time. Unfortunately, her efforts hit a stalemate as she sat at her laptop, too tired to write or edit or even think. Logan helped when he could but feeding Lucas was all on her.

Sitting on the rocker, Rory held Lucas cradled in her arms while she fed him.

"Too bad Daddy can't feed you. That would be a big help."

Thinking of Logan Rory smiled. He'd do it if he could. He was pretty hands-on. He adored 'Junior.' It was amazing to watch. After the scary drive home from the hospital - and she couldn't fault him for being nervous considering the statistics Faux Drella was throwing at them - he calmed down and quickly went back to being his confident self when it came to Lucas.

Thankfully they had managed to keep guests to a minimum. Emily, only in Hartford for the weekend, stopped by each day for an hour or so. Honor, meanwhile, kept her promise to wait one whole day until she visited. She'd stopped by on Saturday assuring them she'd gotten it out of her system. She was delighted all the purchases were working out. They were instructed to call her if they needed her - especially if they wanted help in finding a nurse or a nanny.

"If only everyone was so supportive? Right baby?"

As for Lorelai, Rory was hoping their battle of wills would be of short duration. As much as she didn't want to be subject to Lorelai's uncensored moments of judgment and disapproval, it was not her intention to raise her son not knowing his grandmother. But she knew she couldn't just roll over and let her mother's disapproval go unrestrained. And she figured it'd be good practice for dealing with Shira and Mitchum when the time came. She'd texted Lorelai to invite her to stop by Sunday afternoon either with Luke or without. Rory had been clear in her message that Logan would be out at that time. It was her hope that Lorelai would just say whatever was on her mind. Rory hoped, that once those were out of the way, she and Lorelai could establish a new equilibrium.

After all, she reminded herself, she was an adult. She had her own life. She had her own child. She had Logan. Her mother had to stop treating her like a child, like Rory's sole existence was predicated on Lorelai and on pleasing Lorelai. As for Rory, there were other people who came first now.

It was past two when Rory heard her mother's voice outside the apartment door.

"Knock knock."

Rory smiled. Her deeply ingrained hatred of the chimes was well-known. So everyone had come up with ways around using the doorbell.

"Coming!"

As Rory rose to her feet, Lucas whimpered at the change in elevation.

"No, baby. It's okay. We're going for a walk." Uncertain about whether it was just her mother or her mother and stepfather, one thing Rory was certain of was the fact that Luke might not ever recover
from seeing her uncovered breast. She carefully covered Lucas and her breast as she made her way to the door.

"Hey." Swinging open the door she saw only Lorelai. "No Luke?"

Lorelai lifted the coverlet and draped it over Rory's shoulder so she could see Lucas.

"No. He sends his love."

"Caesar couldn't cover?"

"I told him you and I had some things to discuss so ..."

"Right." Rory nodded, unsurprised. She stepped away from her mother and backtracked her steps towards the living room. She heard her mother shut the door before turning around and following her.

"So you're still staying here? The other apartment -"

Rory paused her progress to answer over her shoulder. She caught Lorelai glancing into the master bedroom. She wondered if in her quick perusal her mother would spot anything of Logan's.

"The guys have been staying down the hall."

"Right. Of course. The guys. Logan's a little old to be living in a fraternity house don't you think?"

Still walking in front of her mother, Rory rolled her eyes.

"Their best friend just got the shock of his life. They came out to support him. Both of us, actually. They're my friends too."

"Rory-"

"They're my friends, Mom."

"Don't they have someplace to be? You and Logan - this is all new to you. Being parents. Not to mention being a couple both inside and outside the sheets."

"Mom-" Guess Lorelai had spotted something of Logan's inside her bedroom.

"Where's Logan now? I know he's not working. And yeah, while I'm willing to bet anything that puts distance between him and the Hamburger is a good thing, is he out at a bar? Playing pool somewhere? Maybe at a casino with those friends of his?"

"Friends of ours! Colin and Finn are our friends! They're my friends too! And Logan drove them out to the airport. That's where he is. The guys are leaving today. I told you to come now because Logan wouldn't be here."

"Oh."

"Yeah. Oh. And I know you saw Logan's stuff when you snooped just now. So I know I don't have to tell you this but I will. He's been staying here since Thursday. Our date went well and we're trying again. To be a couple."

Lorelai's face was crestfallen. Wow. Her mother's animated face really didn't pull any punches.
"I knew when you said you two were going out that this would happen! I knew it! Rushing things! What about the book? Your career?"

"What about them? I just had a baby. Regardless of being with Logan, I'd have to hit pause on that stuff."

"Rory, I just don't want to see you give up your dreams. Last time you took a stab at being lady of the manor you weren't all that happy."

"I'm not giving up anything. Logan supports my writing. We talked about getting a nanny -"

"Oh, great!" As Rory watched Lorelai actually snorted in displeasure. "By all means, got a life challenge to work through? Pull out the Amex to make it disappear."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean? You think hiring a nanny to help is wrong?"

"What exactly are the two of you doing that's got you so busy? I know you're not cleaning cause that's the maid's job. And I know you're not cooking because - hello? Who raised you?"

"Just because neither of us is working doesn't mean we're not working. Whether he goes back to HPG or not, Logan needs to stay current on stuff. And he has been working. I've got my book which is- in some ways -a lot harder than having a set job. I know you never had a nanny when I -"

"Damn straight I didn't."

"Yeah. And I don't live in an inn with a dozen friends willing to pitch in. I don't have a Mia. Or a Sookie. I don't have a freaking village over here with people tripping over themselves to help me!"

"Rory!"

"What? I'm saying something wrong? It's the truth. And I'm not you! I'm not a maid. I'm not emptying trash bins or answering the phone! I'm trying to write a book. It's not the same thing! I can't afford to be exhausted all the time!"

Rory internally cringed. She swore she could hear her words echo in the air around them. They sounded terrible. They sounded mean. She hadn't meant to imply that what she did was harder than what her mother did. But it was different. Very different.

Rory waited through a moment of awkward silence. Finally she figured it was time to try to say something.

"Mom-

"No, Rory. I get what you're saying. I do. There's a reason I didn't go back to school until you were older. If I'd tried it when you were a baby I wouldn't have been able to. You're right. It's not the same thing. You're much older. What you have on your plate is much different. And if you're really going to try to work things out with Logan…In some ways you have help with Lucas. In other ways, you have one more person competing for your time."

"Mom, Logan's good with him. Really. I think he's more help than hindrance if you can believe that. I'm sure you can't but it's the truth."

"Rory, I'm just afraid you'll get swept up. Money… money can sweep up so many things. Sometimes it's good. A lot of the time it's not."
Rory nodded. "Yeah. I know."

"I mean...Did you forget about the yacht incident?"

_The yacht incident? Wow. Talk about memory lane._

"No. What about it?"

"Three hundred hours of community service."

"Yeah. So?"

"And Logan got what?"

Rory sighed. "Mom. What's your point?"

"My point is what would you want Lucas to get?"

"I think I'd want Lucas to not take someone else's yacht."

"Okay. Yeah. I agree with you. But you know he's gonna do something. Look at his parents. Hell look at his grandparents. At the very least he's got a triple recessive Gilmore/Hayden/Huntzberger troublemaker gene. He'll do something, Rory. Raised in your world-by that I mean the world I raised you in, not where you are now - he won't skate free. He'll learn there are repercussions for his actions. Especially the crappy stuff. Raised in Logan's world, I don't know what he'll learn. He'll probably learn a call to daddy can make anything go away. And if that's an early life lesson, that can spiral pretty fast. Is that what you want? It's not what I wanted. That's why I raised you the way I did."

And I thought it was because _you_ didn't want to be under Grandma and Grandpa's control anymore.

Rory redirected her gaze from her mother to her son.

__How to respond to that?__

"Mom, I don't disagree with what you're saying, but..."

"But?"

"But Logan is his father. He loves him. I don't know what's going to happen in the future but this is where we are now. I'm not running and I'm not pushing Logan away. These are the cards we're playing."

"Okay, then." Lorelai took a deep breath. "I'll do what I can to help."

"I know. I appreciate that."

"Maybe Lucas can spend summers with me and Luke in Stars Hollow. He could work at the diner. Or at the inn."

"Actually summers in Stars Hollow is something _I_ want to do. Wherever we wind up the rest of the year."

Lorelai smiled and let out an audible sigh of relief. "I'm so glad to hear that. You hadn't mentioned the Oasis and I wasn't sure if you were still going ahead with the plan to buy it."
"Oh..." Rory made a face as she considered her mother's words. "I've just been preoccupied. Yeah. I'm still planning on buying the Oasis. Actually I should get on that. If we get it fixed up, maybe we'll be there for the holidays."

"What about London?"

"Logan's pretty sure London's done. It's either Hartford or New York. But Stars Hollow could be for weekends and holidays."

"Maybe Lucas can take dancing classes with Miss Patty."

"He could. I'd let him do that over ski football."

"Logan plays ski football?"

"Yeah."

"Doesn't he know that's what wiped out 25% of the Kennedy population?"

"We don't discuss."

"You think he'll put up a fuss?"

"Logan? At me not letting him teach Lucas ski football?"

"Yeah."

"No. Not if he knows what's good for him."

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Immediately After: Chapter 42: The Jump


After the talk with Logan at gazebo Sunday afternoon, Rory promised herself she'd seek her mother out and hopefully make things right between them. They had such a bad track record. As they were both exceptionally stubborn, once on the outs, they could go months without speaking. Now that she had Lucas, she didn't want to be on the outs with Lorelai. Especially since they -she and Logan- were in this weird place where they didn't actually know where they'd wind up living. Though it seemed likely to be either Connecticut or New York -as opposed to London- she was still anxious that she and Lorelai not be on bad terms. Because you never know.

Walking into the new inn's restaurant, her eyes sought and quickly found Lorelai. At the table with her mother was -of all people- Paris. Glancing around Rory wondered where her grandmother had disappeared to. Hearing Paris call her name, Rory's gaze shot back to their table.

"Rory! Over here!"

Forcing a smile, Rory made her way to their table.

"Hi. What're you two up to?"

"I was just filling Lorelai in on Doyle's and my marital issues."

"And where is Doyle?" Rory turned to glance around the dining room. "You sure you want to have
this conversation out here?"

"Please. I selected this table for a reason. My back's to the wall and I can see both entrances."

"Oh," nodded Rory. "Of course. That's very Goodfellas of you."

"Yes," agreed Lorelai. "Paris has it all figured out."

"Yes, she does." Rory gave her mother a sardonic grin which Lorelai returned in kind.

"Kudos to Logan by the way," continued Lorelai. "He aced his test apparently."

Rory grimaced, whispering. "I knew it." She turned to look at Paris. "You wanna tell me about the 'test'?"

"He didn't tell you?"

"He told me Doyle propositioned him to a weekend of debauchery in New York."

"Which he turned down." Paris nodded, smiling. "Warren Beatty Jr. might actually be ready to settle down."

"I already knew that! I didn't need you to send Doyle over to creep him out!"

"Well. It wasn't so long ago he was cheating on his fiancé. You know what they say: 'Once -"

Rory refrained from rolling her eyes as she interrupted.  "Do me a favor and-"

"-a cheater, always a cheater."

"- don't say it."

"Sorry Rory, but they do say that," said Paris. "I know I said you guys made a good team. And you did. But..."

"Yeah, but..." nodded Rory. "You know where Doyle was every minute he had his bachelor pad in Tribeca?" Seeing Paris's silent glare, Rory continued. "You worry about yours, I'll worry about mine."

"Good to hear." Lorelai replied.

Rory shot a determined look at her mother. Lorelai's words were low enough to make Rory wonder if her mother had actually intended them not to be heard. She decided to ignore Lorelai's comment for the moment.

"So Paris," Rory poured herself a cup of coffee from the carafe. "Where is Doyle?"

"Well, as I was just explaining to Lorelai," Paris gestured to Lorelai, "Doyle left to go drop Terrence at the train station."

Rory smiled. "So it's good news?"

"Doyle tried to throttle him. I had jump in and restrain him. It was like old times. And it only took two days. Two days. That was it. Oh, I realized belatedly that Doyle's knee-jerk default to trying to
be a good dad was also a factor I should've considered when I hypothesized the parameters of the test. I should've shielded the kids from Terrence more."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, while Doyle was definitely motivated by a genuine desire to reconcile, he was also partially motivated by his desire to keep Terrence away from Timmy and Gabby."

"What?" Rory felt her face twist in confusion. "Why? What was Terrence doing to the kids?"

"Oh, nothing. I mean nothing illegal. Or perverted. But his usual pseudo intellectual weirdness was rubbing off on them. Doyle had the kids out at the park last week. They were running around. Chasing birds or something. He called them to come over. Gabby came but Timmy didn't. When he finally got them both to come over, he asked if they'd heard him. Gabby said Timmy heard him - but didn't come over because he was stonewalling."

"Huh! Stonewalling?" Rory could understand Doyle's annoyance.

"Wow!" Lorelai observed. "That's pretty precocious!"

"Thank you, Lorelai. Anyway, so, on top of everything else, Doyle doesn't want Terrence around to spew any more of his psycho babble around the kids."

"So, that's good, right?" asked Rory. "I mean it's not exactly -"

"Hey, I'm good with it. True. I did not factor in influence on the children but, then again, he still sent Terrence packing. I suggested we just keep Terrence away from the kids but that wasn't good enough. I'm satisfied that Doyle wasn't motivated by greed. I can handle that it was me and the kids. We're kind of a package deal anyway."

"Well, that's great!" Rory smiled. "We should celebrate. Maybe a bottle -"

"Oh, no. What time is it?"

"Four thirty."

"Doyle's not due back until after six. I'm supposed to meet Miss Patty at the dance studio in a little while."

"For what?"

"Pole dancing refresher."

"You go, Paris."

"That sounds like a super idea," agreed Lorelai.

"Yeah." Paris turned to face Lorelai. "I've always thought this small town Americana was weird. I still do. But it is strangely convenient."

"Yes it is," agreed Lorelai.

"I'd better go change." With that Paris stood. "Mrs. Cassini was going to meet me out front so we could walk over together."

Mrs. Cassini?
Rory, slightly shocked, shot a look at her mother. Lorelai seemed to be biting down on her lip to keep from laughing.

"Lorelai, it's been great. I'm sure we'll see you again before we leave but in case we don't - thank you."

"It was my pleasure, Paris. You're always welcome. You know that."

"Thanks. A girl couldn't ask for a better mother."

Rory, frowning, looked between Paris and her mother.

"Rory, I'll see you before we leave Mayberry."

"Definitely. Have fun pole-dancing. Tell Patty and -uh - Mrs. Cassini I said hello."

"I will."

The mother and daughter duo waited, in an awkward silence, as Paris took her leave. Finally Rory broke the silence.

"Mom, so, I was looking for you actually."

"You were?" Lorelai's eyes found Rory's.

"Yeah," she nodded. "I don't want us to fight. I'm sorry I'm disappointing you but I'm doing everything I can. I just need help. More help that you did, I guess."

"Rory, no. I'm sorry. You're not disappointing me. And of course you need help. You were right. What you said. I did have help. A lot of help. I was lucky I didn't have to pay anyone to be your nanny but I did have a lot of help with you."

"We're still figuring stuff out but I think we're doing okay."

"I agree. I do think you - and Logan - are doing okay."

"I sense a 'but' in there."

"I'm still afraid."

"Afraid? Of what?"

"I just don't want to see you give up your dreams. As your mother, I had dreams for you, too. I mean you're my only kid. That I know of."

"Mom -"

"No. You'll get it now. You have Lucas. I wanted everything for you. I wanted you to have a chance for everything you ever wanted."

"I know. And I had my time as a journalist. It was exciting. I learned a lot and now I'm moving on. I'm writing a book and that's exciting and I'm learning a lot there."

"Rory, please don't let them take any of it away from you."

"Mom, I won't." Rory let out a snort. "I'm sure you won't believe this but Logan's one hundred
percent behind the book."

"Is he in it?"

"No. Not yet. If I stick with ending it at Yale he won't be. But I think he's insulted he's not."

"Remember the end of 'Grease'?"

"Original 'Grease' or 'Grease 2'?"

"Mommy's going to pretend she didn't hear that. At the end of 'Grease' they slip in a little subtext-as-

Rory knew exactly where her mother's mind had wondered off to. Their shared movie knowledge
really came in handy at times.

"Mom, no. Don't be silly."

"I'm gonna miss you, Kid."

"One of us has to go somewhere for you to miss me and since I'm not going anywhere -"

"Maybe not today. But you will."

"Mom, it's not going to be any different than the past ten years. Not the last year, since I was here. But before when I was in DC and Brooklyn and traveling -"

"Yeah. But it's not just the distance. It's like that song."

"Oh my God. You mean 'Cat's in the Cradle'?!

"Yes!"

"No. Never. It won't be like that. Harry Chapin is not someone you should look to for life anthems."

"So sayeth Lane?"

"So sayeth Lane." Rory looked at her mother, a thoughtful expression on her face. "Please don't
think you're losing me, or that we'll never see each other. We're still buying the Oasis. This week as a
matter of fact. It's gonna be our summer hideaway. Just like I said."

"Yes, and with relatives like those Hamburgers, you'll need a hideaway." Rory shrugged. Her
mother wasn't wrong. "What about holidays?"

"Holidays too. Maybe we can even get Tom to fix it up in time for Thanksgiving."

"Halloween. Did Kirk talk to you about Foodie Fest?"

"Not yet."

"He will." Lorelai took a breath. "I'm sorry. I just don't want to see you miss out. You're a mom now
so I'm sure you get it."

"I do. I do. I'm not going to miss out. But I am going to have to compromise. It's not just me
anymore. I have to think of Lucas and Logan."

"I just want you to be happy."
"Right back at ya."
Epilogue

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Gilmore Girls is the creation of Amy Sherman Palladio.

Author's Note: Still Rory's narrative. We did a time leap.

Stars Hollow, Connecticut, The Oasis, Thursday, November 16, 2017, 4:00 pm EST

As Rory turned onto her street she saw that the front of their house looked, as usual, like a parking lot. Only not covered with the cars she'd been expecting. While Lucas's Mercedes was in the driveway where she'd left it that morning, it wasn't Carol's Ford Fusion parked behind it. Instead of the car belonging to the nanny, it was Logan's Range Rover. Rory smiled. Apparently someone had come home from London a few days earlier than originally planned.

Rory figured Logan got home and told Carol she could leave early. A hands-on dad, he wasn't afraid to be left alone with Lucas for a few hours. Rory really wasn't surprised that Logan was comfortable with the baby - he really was a kid at heart - but a part of her still marveled at the fact that he changed diapers.

Yes, he cracked kryptonite jokes while he did it, but still he did it. Lucas would grow up not just knowing his parents but knowing both of them took turns cleaning up his kryptonite. When Carol was off-duty, of course.

Rory pulled the Toyota in front of the driveway; they were in for the night so blocking the Range Rover wouldn't be a problem. She had decided to hold onto her hybrid and continued to drive it whenever it was just her going out. It was quick and fuel efficient and easier to navigate on highways and in parking garages.

Grabbing her laptop bag from the passenger seat, Rory climbed out of the car. It was just past four. Glancing up at the house, she couldn't help but smile in satisfaction. The exterior of the Oasis had really come a long way. Decorated with lights, plants and cornucopias, she loved how festive it looked.

Since Rory had wanted the work on the house completed quickly - she had desperately wanted them to be able to spend the holidays - Halloween through New Year's - in Stars Hollow - they'd had Tom and his men working non-stop for months. With the Oasis covered in dust from August through much of October, they had been living at the apartment in Hartford up until the previous week.

As for the Hartford apartment, it's days seemed numbered. They were thinking either an apartment in New York or a house with a yard in one of the Connecticut suburbs. They agreed to back-burner the decision until after the holidays. Logan was keeping the London townhouse so he -they- always had a place there when they needed it. But now he was only there intermittently. A week here. Four days there. He was still wrapping up projects and transitioning responsibilities to other staff. Which is what he had been doing that week.

As Rory made her way to the Oasis's front door her mind returned to where it had been since she left
the meeting with her potential literary agent.

Meg Sutton had come highly recommended. While Meg had never worked with Logan, Logan had been introduced to the woman in passing by his literary agent and he'd taken note of her Connecticut location, Yale background, and literary specialties.

Rory found herself grimacing recalling the options the woman had laid out to her.

Sticking with the direction she was heading in-it was a mix of sardonic humor and family pathos. Ending it at her Chilton graduation kept the ending open -and also left it open for follow ups. It could qualify for teen, general audiences -an unforeseen benefit of her waiting until nineteen to have sex.

Or she could make it a full on memoir and carry it forward to the present day. Changing some names, not changing others, she could- not that Meg presented it this way- "cash in" on her new-found Huntzberger "standing." It could be a multi-generational saga of riches-to-rags-to-riches. This seemed too sensationalist and it wasn't the focus she'd taken at all, nor was it the focus she wanted to take.

Oh, yeah. It wouldn't make her seem much like a gold-digger. Not at all.

Shira would have a field day.

Another possibility was to make it a fictionalized account. Borrow elements from her life but keep her story unique. Change parts. Change the ending. Change pieces in the middle. This path would be more work. She'd essentially have to go back and rework everything. But it would justify her desire to take "creative license" in certain areas. Nothing would have to be substantially changed. Just tweaks here and there.

And it would allow her the opportunity to enact several "do-overs." Say the things she wished she'd said back then. There was something very satisfying about the idea of do-overs. Was it the reason fiction writers got into writing fiction to begin with? To finally say the words that were originally left unsaid? Saying the snarky replies that bubbled to the surface five minutes -or five days- too late?

Regardless of this book, she had found herself typing up other ideas -tangential from "the" book but potential plot bunnies for other books. Now she had a reason for them. Maybe the original book could be left in its original form but the plot bunnies it had wrought could be more fiction than fact.

Unlocking the front door, she gently pushed it open. Quiet. Given the time, Lucas should be down for his nap. Logan -Logan should've been in London another two days. He'd given nothing away during their call the previous night. Walking into the beautifully renovated living room she paused at the entry.

My men. Well, the ones here at any rate.

Logan was sprawled on the sofa wearing a t-shirt and work slacks. His dress shirt hung on the back of a chair. His eyes were closed but she knew he was awake by the way his hands were holding the baby. Lucas was lying atop Logan's broad chest. He, she could tell by his rhythmic breathing, was asleep. Suddenly Logan opened his eyes and she saw he was staring at her.

Hearing a whimper she looked down.

My furry brother is here too.

"Hey Paul Anka. What're you doing here?" She kept her voice low, not wanting to awaken Lucas.
"Carol had Lucas at your mom's when I got in. They were having fun so I brought Ole Paul back for a play date."

"Ah. He tired him out."

"They tired each other out."

"That sounds cute. Pictures?"

"There might be a few on my phone. A few more on Carol's and your mom's."

Taking off her coat she made her way into the living room and hung it over the back of one of the chairs. Hearing something rustle in her pocket, she remembered the small present that she'd casually slipped inside her pocket. She had no idea he'd be home. Thankfully she'd gotten it wrapped at the store. Surreptitiously, she palmed the box and made her way over to the sofa.

*No better time than the present, right?*

"Good." Rory pulled a chair close to the sofa before plopping down on it. "So what're you doing here, Huntzberger? I thought you weren't due back until Saturday?"

"I sensed kryptonite in the air and figured I'd hurry back to save the townspeople from certain olfactory torture."

"Hm-mm. Thanks Superman. Or would that make you Pooperman?"

"Let's go with Superman. I live to serve."

"That's good. It looks like you're serving as a mattress."

"What can I say? Kid got tired. Lightweight. Must be those Gilmore genes."

"Yeah right. Please. If you'd been the one to carry him, I'm sure you wouldn't have left your bedroom for months."

"Ah. Maybe. If I'd had you as my caregiver, definitely."

"He should be sleeping in his overpriced bed."

"I tried to tell him. I think we're gonna have a problem with this one."

"His nap should've started an hour ago."

"Technically, it did. And he's rockin' it."

"Yeah, but you're immobilized."

"You know I embrace my lazy time these days, Ace."

"Back to being a sloth?"

"Is there any other way?"

Although Logan had definitely slowed down since Lucas, since her, since whatever this was they were doing, she doubted he'd ever return to full-out sloth. But he had started to delegate more. And he didn't sweat all the details quite as much. His plan was to do some further redistribution of
responsibilities among his relatives that worked at the company once Mitchum stepped down.

"You didn't answer my question. Why're you back early?"

"Where's the fun of being the boss if I can't let myself go early?"

"Still on schedule?"

"It'll all be transferred by March."

"Good."

"Yeah. So how about you? How did it go?"

"Well, Meg laid out three options."

"Lay it on me."

"Stick with the current plan. Teen audience growing up family drama. Leave it as a memoir."

"But that narrows your audience and limits you to non-fiction."

"I don't think it limits -"

"Fine. It gets you categorized as a non-fiction writer."

"I could make it a full-on memoir and carry it forward to the present day."

"And write about how terrific our families get along?"

"Something like that."

"Hm. Yeah. I'm not feeling that one."

"Me either. Third option is to use the story but fictionalize it."

"I vote for that."

"Figured you would. I thought you wanted to be included."

"Changed my mind, Ace."

Rising to her feet, Rory leaned over Logan to look at their son, who had turned his head and now faced the sofa's seat back.

"Why, look at that. He's wide awake." Rory's gaze flitted up to Logan before returning to the infant. "Hi Lucas. You enjoying your Daddy and me time?"

"Come on, kid. Go back to pretending. Daddy wants Mommy's attention."

"You're unbelievable!"

"Maybe. But I was right. I told you he faked it."

"You didn't tell me it was because you trained him to!"

Sliding off the seat, Rory kneeled on the floor beside the sofa. Noticing how tangled up the baby's
"Do I get one?" Logan was watching her intently.

_God, one of these days I am just going to do it. I will post a #hotdad photo online._

"Sure," she smiled before leaning over to kiss his lips. It felt wonderful but it went a beat too long. She pulled away. "I'm crowding him. _This_ is why you should've put him in his bed."

"Well, I didn't realize _this_ was the reason why. Lesson learned, Chief."

Logan still called her Ace, but he'd taken to calling her Chief as well. He had called her Chief when they had been on the Yale Daily News. She thought it was for that but Logan assured her it was a Get Smart reference. He insisted it was so Lucas and any other 'operatives' that came along understood the pecking order. He referred to himself as the 'Deputy'.

Toying with an idea…Hardly toying. "Idea" was too hypothetical. It wasn't a new idea. It wasn't even new. Just something that she had been thinking a lot about lately. Which is why she picked up the gift.

As for the rest, it was just a matter of hammering out the details.

"Hey."

"Hey what?"

"You still think about us getting married?"

Watching him, she saw the instant seriousness crept into his face, his eyes.

"Only every day, Rory."

Okay. That choked her up a little. He joked around -they both did. But he still had the power to floor her once in a while. Their eyes locked, Rory placed a hand over Logan's where he held onto Lucas.

"Every day?"

"Pretty much."

"Ah. So, what do you think?"

"I'm in if you are."

"But how would things change?"

"Who says anything has to change? We already live together. In several homes, on several continents. We have a child. We share a bedroom and a bathroom. I don't think either of us is looking to change any of that though I agree more drawer space in the London en suite would be welcome. I was thinking you might want to redecorate that place a bit when we're done here -"

"Uh, uh, uh -"

"I mean done here. In the States. Not with this house."

"Better. Go on."
"We might want to talk about having a sibling or two for Lucas to help him stay grounded. As you've pointed out, I can't move and him expecting me to be his mattress is *slightly obnoxious* on his part. Aside from that, I suppose we'd wear matching rings on our left hands."

"That's it? I could keep writing? You'd continue at HPG? I'd participate in random functions once in a while but I could continue to do my own thing?"

"Absolutely. You want it in writing?"

"You'd do that?"

"In a New York minute, Ace."

"Okay, okay." Rory nodded. "Okay, that's all good. We'd continue to have homes in Stars Hollow, Connecticut or New York and London. It's a bit much – or a lot much – but I guess it's kind of necessary. Obviously we'll have to settle down in one place for the school year when it's time for him to be in school. I'm not sending him to boarding school. I don't care how great the Chinese food is."

"Agreed. No boarding school."

"Right. Right." Nodding, she turned away from Logan and pulled up the small box from where she'd tucked it under the sofa. "Logan Huntzberger, will you marry me?"

Logan's lips spread into what was perhaps the widest smile she'd ever seen on his beautiful face.

"And here I thought I was doing so well as a kept man."

"Logan –"

"Seriously, Ace. I was starting to think you'd never ask."

"So? What do you think?"

"I think you should know my answer. But, in case it's not clear, yes, Ace. I'll marry you." She exhaled loudly. "You seriously think there was a chance I'd say no?"

"Well, we've had a bumpy ride."

"People say that about the Cyclone, Ace. It's still riding strong after a hundred years."

"Yeah, that's true."

"So?"

"So?"

"Any thoughts about a ring?"

"Actually," she brought the box up to where he could see it. "I did think about that."

"You buy yourself an engagement ring, Chief?"

Rory chuckled at the puzzled/annoyed look on his face. He was such a traditionalist at heart.

"No. This is for you."

"Much as I'd love to tear it open, I should probably keep my hands on the kid so he doesn't slide off."
Speaking of, I guess maybe I never made this clear; he was pretty much enough of a gift."

"You say that now…"

"I'll say it forever. Or at least until he hits his teens."

"Well, still…I got you a Christmas gift. That I thought would also double as a man engagement ring for when I asked."

"You were planning on asking then?"

"Yeah."

"Change your mind?"

"Coming in. I had it in my pocket. It just seemed silly to wait."

"I could still open it on Christmas Eve? I mean, I'm wearing a t-shirt, Ace. I don't think cufflinks – "

"Yeah. Wait. How'd you know they were cufflinks?" Rory nearly chuckled at the face he made. Silly question. "I should've gotten you a pinky ring. That would've gone well with your t-shirt and biceps. And you never would've guessed. Maybe for an anniversary. Okay. But promise me you'll wear a button-down shirt on Christmas Eve?"

"Promise." Both parents quieted as Lucas lifted his head and rubbed his face back and forth on Logan's t-shirt before settling back down. "Just like his mom. I'm getting you both your own set of handkerchiefs for Christmas."

"He's probably too warm. Sleeping on top of you is like sleeping near a furnace."

"Yeah. I guess you'd know." Logan's eyes didn't move from Rory. "So, speaking of what we were just speaking of –"

"Furnaces? Handkerchiefs?"

"Promises. I got you something too. It's in my right pocket. Why don't you get it?"

"You want me to dig around in your pant pocket?"

"Come on, Ace. I'd do it myself but this kid's a crank like his mom if he doesn't get enough sleep. I think he's settling down again so I really don't want to disturb him."

"You're so full of it."

Lucas had inherited his father's ability to sleep through anything. If Logan somehow jarred Lucas awake by riffling through his pant pocket looking for something Rory had no doubt the boy would fall back asleep immediately.

"Rory. My right pocket. Please."

Rory slowly – teasingly- reached inside Logan's pant pocket. She let her fingers do the walking as she moved them ever so slowly – at a torturous pace. Satisfied at the tormented look on his face, she grinned at him. "Dirty."

"It's gonna get a lot dirtier if you don't pull your hand out."
Logan watched her face - always animated - as her fingers finally grasped the gift. Her eyes went from teasing to nervous to puzzlement as she finally realized it was a jewelry box.

"It looks like a ring box. What is it?"

"Ah. You're gonna have to open it to find out."

"Isn't it a Christmas present? Shouldn't I wait?"

"It's not a Christmas present. That's why it's not wrapped. As for Christmas, I told you. You and the Big Guy are both getting handkerchiefs."

It was obviously a ring. Not a Tiffany's box though. Had Logan been about to propose? But she beat him to it? He promised they'd go at her pace. Sure, they'd never actually had a discussion where it had been stated, "Rory, you ask me when you're ready." But that certainly had been the implicit understanding that she'd been going along with.

"Is this -?"

"Rory, only way to know what it is is to open it. As soon as you do, I can get up and put the Big Guy to bed. And let's face it, the kid really needs his beauty sleep. Too much rough housing."

Rory laughed. "Oh? Who exactly was he rough housing?"

"Ace, stop procrastinating. Just open it."

"Okay." She started to open the box and then stopped. "It's not an engagement ring, right? You promised."

"Promise."

Logan watched as Rory opened the box. Chagrined, she grinned a half smile at him before shaking her head.

"You like?"

"You said it wasn't a ring."

"No. I said it wasn't an engagement ring. That was supposed to be a promise ring, Ace. Now, I guess it could be a place-holder engagement ring. Or it could be the engagement ring. It's not a diamond center but I always liked you in sapphires. It's different from…"

It's different from the other one. The twenty-something ring.

"So you were planning on asking me to go steady, Huntzberger?"

"Kinda. Until you outdid me with the proposal."

"Big of you to admit it."

"I can be big."

"Oh, yes, you can."

"Ace," he chuckled. "Any thoughts to a date?"
"Lots of thoughts."

"Long engagement?"

"I don't think so. They had no reason for delaying things. How about New Year's Eve?"

That's just weeks away.

"You want a big party?"

"No. I don't need big. It would be nice to have guests available to come though."

As Rory watched, Logan grinned. He looked halfway guilty and halfway victorious.

"What? Logan? Tell me. You have that 'cat-that-ate-the-canary' look."

"I may have already been talking to folks about coming together for New Year's."

"You were? Who?"

"The guys. Some other friends."

"Really? Where?"

"I was thinking New York but if we're doing this instead why don't we bring everyone down here?"

"Ooh. We could get married out at the gazebo. It could be a winter wonderland."

"Cold, Ace. We live in the northeast. Why don't we target having the wedding indoors? We can do something outdoors for the kid's birthday."

"Oh. Yeah. May. Much better for outdoors. But if it's not too cold, we could still do sleigh rides."

"Hey, I'm not saying we can't do it up right in case it's not sub-zero degrees, but we should probably have a contingency plan. I don't think Lucas will care for the cold."

"Yeah, you're probably right. Oh, this'll be fun. A winter wedding. I have a good feeling about this."

"Yeah, me too."

AN: Fini! Yay! Thank you for reading. I know it wasn't much. This chapter was just about tying the loose ends. I hope you enjoyed reading the story at least half as much as I enjoyed writing it. This fic was a lot of fun to write. I am taking a break from fanfic. Thank you again!

03/11/2018

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!