

He's Bilingual Baby! (Ilya has a headache)

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He's Bilingual Baby! (Ilya has a headache)

by [thistleskull](#)

Summary

"Question for Ilya first but it'll be the same for Shane. Boston is an original six legendary team that has struggled to get to the playoffs for the past three seasons. How much pressure do you feel from the fans, and from the hockey world in general, to restore Boston to its former glory, and how much of that do you take on personally?"

What? *Fucking what?*

Ilya Rozanov has been in the States for years and mostly, he's good. He knows English, he understands English. But some days are easier than others and some days are harder than others.

Luckily, he's never had that issue with Shane.

Chapter 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Some days are easier for Ilya than others. Some days the words flow into him and out of him with little effort. He feels awake, capable, and like he belongs in the world of Hockey, playing for the Boston Raiders, speaking English and living in America.

“You played a decent game today but were saved a last minute goal from Hayden Pike as he went offside. Had he hadn’t gone offsides do you think you could have taken him?”

Fucking what? Ilya balks for a moment, confused on what the man is asking him underneath all the conditional tenses. The press room waits expectantly.

Ilya swallows, his mouth dry. He coughs lightly and responds.

“Well I would have caught him, no? Is not like Pike is Speedracer.”

The press room chuckles and Ilya sits back, pleased with himself.

While not perfect, his English and comprehension is a far cry from rookie season when Hollander kindly stepped in to answer that question in one of the first games...

“Question for Ilya first but it’ll be the same for Shane. Boston is an original six legendary team that has struggled to get to the playoffs for the past three seasons. How much pressure do you feel from the fans, and from the hockey world in general, to restore Boston to its former glory, and how much of that do you take on personally?”

Ilya remembers the hard mass of dread that slammed down into his stomach, forcing his throat closed. Fucking what? What the fuck was he asking? He had had no idea what that man was asking. One year into his career and everyone was going to know that he was stupid, stupid, *stupid*. The light tap against his shoe felt like a lifeline, a small piece of driftwood in the sea of Ilya’s panic.

“Sorry, not to jump the gun here, but with Rozanov’s permission...”

It’s been years and Ilya now understands what the man was looking for when he asked, in many many more words than were necessary for a question that essentially boiled down to “Are you going to work hard?” After that presser and for days afterwards, Ilya had watched the tape repeatedly until he knew what the reporter was asking, what it meant, and how he would answer if he was *ever* asked it again.

And such was how Ilya learned English. Repetition, repetition, repetition, along with conversational situations, some more high pressure than others, and retreating into his room to watch interviews every night; to understand how reporters asked hypotheticals in English, when they were complimenting him, when they were being presumptive or rude. Eventually

he became more comfortable, understanding that the reporters wanted Ilya the Brash, Ilya the Cocky. Ilya learned to contradict the reporters, to take his questions outside the locker room shirtless, and to wink at the camera before ending the interview.

None of that changed the fact that in the early days, he learned the most from Shane's interviews. It was obvious that he had been media trained from a young age. Young Shane answered the reporter's questions seriously, with a straight face, his tone measured. Lots of the time, Shane made an effort to restate, or rethread, the reporter's original question back into his response. Ilya found this very helpful. If the first presser with him and Shane was the one he watched the most when he was younger, well, now Ilya knows the reason why. Even to this day, the way that Shane smiles as he gently takes over for Ilya, his foot lightly tapping the Russian's, to answer the reporter's question makes something warm glow in his chest. Ilya knows it was one of the first times in America that someone was kind to him without expectation.

oOo

Even now, rookie season long over, as Shane and Ilya are traversing a new, lighter, brighter, *better* portion of their relationship after the cottage, Ilya loves the way Shane speaks English. He is always facing Ilya, his mouth pointed right at him so that Ilya can see his lips move. Shane is always so clear in his speech and his diction. His responses are level, no flitting inflections at random parts of the sentences. Every word said in the same flat cadence...most of the time. Ilya blushes thinking about the times that Shane loses his cadence, the times when Shane is flushed, a sheen of sweat, muscles taught in his neck as he loudly exhales from his mouth, the words coming out breathy and disjointed as Ilya buries his nose in the hair at the base of Shane's cock, as Ilya pushes his hand upwards, up, up, up until he can grab Shane's tit, and watch his head throw back into the pillows, a hiccuping coming out of his mouth as words fail him and Ilya sucks him down down down. Translating this language is easy, effortless. Ilya has never had to think.

But some days were harder for Ilya than others. Some days the English and the Russian get jumbled in his head—on one word running into another, “Must get this *razogret' etu yedu*, it needs to be hot on the *pech' , ya tebya lyublyu*.”

Ilya knew when he awoke the morning of the MLH Gala that it was not going to be a “language clarity” day. He already felt the words winding together in his head as he stumbled up towards the bathroom to piss.

Need to brush zuby. Shit—zubnaya pasta. Where is my zub-toothpaste, where is my fucking toothpaste?

The bubble of anger pops as quickly as it rises, as Ilya suddenly remembers that his toothpaste is in the shower. When he was last in this apartment he and Shane had showered together before going their separate ways. Ilya remembers brushing his teeth in the shower as Shane finished cleaning up, meticulously scrubbing his armpits and groin while Ilya looked him up and down, smirking around the toothbrush hanging out of his mouth.

“You are clean now, no? Skin will be gone soon and I will miss the freckles.”

“Shut up Rozanov,” Shane huffed, cheeks turning a light shade of pink. Ilya shrugged and continued to brush his teeth, eventually spitting towards the drain, dangerously close to hitting Shane’s feet.

“Hey! Watch it!” Shane retorted, his eyes widening as Ilya glanced up at him, feeling his lips stretch into a smirk as he slowly crowded him towards the shower wall. Soon his bulk was blocking out the water, caging in Shane with his arms. Shane didn’t balk, if anything he stood up straighter, forcing his mass into the space between Ilya’s biceps. His eyes contained a spark of humor as they met Ilya’s. Satisfied pleasure at the reaction oozed down, settling in the base of Ilya’s stomach. He felt himself harden slightly. Ilya gently pushed his hips into Shane’s.

“Relax Hollander. Besides, no toothpaste in my mouth means is much better to kiss you. Minty fresh—ahh.”

Shane, eyes glazed, had less than a second to react to Ilya exhaling right into his face, before Ilya swooped in, his arms surrounding Shane, and started hastily pressing minty kisses all over his chest. Shane guffawed as he tried to squirm away, laughing. “Ilya stop! I’m gonna slip, I’m gonna—” Ilya steadied him with a firm hand on his bicep, eyes shining.

“No worries. I hold you.”

“Asshole.”

Shane smiled as Ilya closed the gap between them, their mouths meeting, the kiss wet and fresh and entirely too short before. The toothpaste was forgotten as they made their way out of the shower to pack up Shane’s suitcase. Ilya would be seeing him in a few weeks at the gala.

Humming to himself, Ilya thinks about how good he felt that day, about how the lingering scent of Shane’s body wash (now a permanent resident in Ilya’s shower) and minty toothpaste made Ilya smile to himself when he came back inside after walking Shane to his car.

Moy kotenok. Ilya smiles to himself as he pushes aside the shower curtain to get the toothpaste off the shelf. He will be seeing Shane at this gala. While Yuna and David are aware of their relationship, Ilya and Shane both agreed to keep it to themselves for a bit longer. They are just getting used to being *them* unencumbered and in the sunshine. Neither is ready to bring more people into that...yet. Ilya gives himself a slight shake to bring himself back to the present, determined to get through this gala, because what is waiting for him at the end of the night is much better. He finishes his bathroom routine and gets dressed for the gym.

oOo

The gala is not going...well for Ilya. He thinks he manages alright. He smiles when he is supposed to. At least he thinks he does. Americans are always smiling. They smile about everything. It is a struggle to know when they mean it and difficult that at points they can speak through their smiles, denying Ilya the access to their lips moving, the words leaving their mouth meaning one thing when their face is saying another.

But just Americans is one thing, that is a night of only English. An effort, but only one track that Ilya must ride. No, tonight there were Russians too. Russian dignitaries and coaches and many businessmen involved in the world of hockey. Throughout the night, Ilya has found himself bouncing between Russian and English, back and forth back and forth, never feeling like he was able to have a full conversation in either before someone else was vying for his attention, and he would be forced to reorient his brain to that language.

As the night goes on, Ilya starts to feel more and more frayed. His brain is buzzing. His Russian, usually such a comfort to fall into, is leaving him almost without conscious thought. His words feel loose, ill-defined around the edges, especially as they start to push into his English phrases.

His English is much worse. It's like every time he tries to get a word out there is a stoppage in his throat that he needs to get past. His responses are studded, vowels and pronunciation and tenses haltingly coming out of his mouth. Ilya can feel the way that his accent is heavier, falling from his mouth to land on the floor of these conversations, people speaking at him, glasses in hand, unaware of his struggle to get his mouth to form the word "narrative."

Question.

"How's the season going? Are you finding yourself acclimating and becoming used to American customs?"

Response.

"Ah—yes. Boston—is cold. Not like Russia though."

Question.

"What are you doing in your leisure time?"

Response.

"I watch documentary and train."

These answers are not what Ilya wants to be saying. He has so much *more* to say. He could speak about how Boston is not as cold as Russia but sometimes when he is walking the streets he wishes it was warmer. He wants to say how he has almost made his way through all of *Planet Earth*, which he watches while he rolls out his hamstrings and stretches before bed, (Russian subtitles on with English narration, he must always be practicing, especially after seeing the way that Shane lit up when Ilya pointed out a cardinal outside the cottage). He could be saying all of these things, *anything* to make him seem like he's not just a Russian hockey player who still hasn't learned English 9 years later. But these words don't make it out of Ilya's mouth. They falter somewhere on their way out, getting lodged in his throat, costing him more than he has to leave his mouth.

On top of it all, Ilya can feel Shane's eyes on him at various points throughout the night. Ilya is grateful that they haven't been in any conversations together. He doesn't want Shane to see how he is struggling tonight. The frustration he is feeling is making Ilya feel small and brittle,

disproportionate with his size and the way that he is expected to carry himself in these situations; Upright, cocky, and self-assured. He feels frayed, like he can't think straight, can't even think clearly enough to decide what he wants in this moment. He feels like he is going to snap. Ilya imagines Shane finding him in an abandoned corner, his brain thunking out of his ears, babbling like a fool.

Enough. Nuzhna vodka.

After excusing himself from another conversation, Ilya makes his way over to the bar, his shoulders dropping slightly as he's able to make his way through the crowd, people's conversations weaving all around him.

"Eto dolzhno proizoyti v Rossii v sleduyushchem godu."

"I think it's the Metro's year this year."

"Vam nravitsya eta yeda?"

"What can I get for you?" Ilya startles, gaze snapping to the bartender who's looking at him somewhat expectantly. Ilya blinks and realizes that he must have made his way to the bar in a daze.

"Vodka. Rocks," Ilya gets out, his mouth refusing to pronounce the the forced friction of the English "v of vodka," instead moving around the wider, heavier, bulkier Russian *vuod* sound. He sighs as he props his elbows on the bar, head hanging heavily between his shoulders for a moment. The bartender puts his drink down next to him shortly after.

"Spasibo," Ilya murmurs as he turns away from the bar, spying the double doors that lead to the balcony across the ballroom. He scans the room for a set of eyes that he *knows* will find his. Shane catches his gaze from across the room. The lighting of the ballroom makes his skin look warm, rich and glowing. Shane's eyes carry a nugget of concern as his eyebrow ticks upward minutely.

You good?

Ilya looks down and takes a sip of his vodka as he moves towards the doors. He knows that Shane will join him shortly.

Ilya makes his way across the room, *"Proshu proshcheniya—thank you. Excuse me."*

"Da, is very nice being here with passionate hockey people."

"Happy to play for Boston, is good team. I am grateful."

Eventually he makes it through the double doors, inhaling as he steps out onto the patio, the cool night air calming him. Still holding the inhale, Ilya lets it drain out of him as he approaches the balcony, elbows on the railing, ending the exhale as his posture sinks and he supports himself on his elbows, looking down into the roundabout below where the valets purposefully walk, retrieving guests' cars. Little ants with an easy script for the night.

“Ticket?”

“Yes, right away sir. Give me a moment to get your car.”

“Ticket?”

And on and on Ilya watches them. A boring job, yes, but he would never stumble here. The rules are basically the same every night. Ilya bets he wouldn't even have to think—just deliver people's cars when told, a clarity of expectation conveyed through language and action. Ilya inhales again and takes a sip of his vodka, the familiar burn pulling him out of his wayward thoughts as his eyes wander around the rest of the grounds

Ilya feels his approach, the shift in the air, the way he can feel the bubble of calm expanding to envelop him. These nights aren't easy for Shane either, Ilya knows this, but Shane remains a steady presence in Ilya's life, their discomforts coalescing around each other so that one is always what the other needs in the moment. Ilya fights the urge to lean back into Shane as he feels him come up behind him.

“How are you feeling?” Shane asks him quietly, as he walks up to join him a respectful distance away, elbows resting on the balcony, mirroring Ilya's posture. Ilya grunts.

Shane shifts next to him, edging slightly closer.

“Hey,” he says quietly. Ilya senses him turning to face him. “Look at me.”

Ilya slowly turns, his sleeves catching slightly on the rough stone of the balcony, to meet Shane Hollander's brown eyes, brilliant as they catch the ambient light. They crinkle around the edges as Shane's smile grows when Ilya drags his eyes up to meet his gaze.

“Hey,” he states again, Ilya's eyes flit down to his mouth as he repeats, “How are you feeling?”

Ilya smiles to himself, a tendril of tension unraveling with the question—every word perfectly enunciated in the same way. No weird accents or inflections, just a steady, direct question stripped bare of any type of hidden meaning. A simple sentence solely for Ilya's comprehension and Ilya's simple and true response. Despite his exhaustion, Ilya's chest tightens as a warmth spreads throughout him. He feels himself relax further.

“Am fine. Tired. Lots of language today with many words in many orders.”

“Ah.”

“*Da*. Ah,” Ilya responds wryly, a slight smile fighting against the downturn of his lips. Shane gazes back at him softly.

“I'm probably going to head home in the next thirty minutes or so.”

And this was new. *Home*. After the cottage, Shane had begun using that to describe wherever he and Ilya would meet. Whether it was a hotel room on the road, or Ilya's apartment in Boston, or Shane's apartment in Montreal, Shane referred to it as *home*. Every time he heard

it, it made something expand in Ilya to the point of feeling like he was flying. He felt so full and so incapable of expressing it.

“But I’ll wait up for you.”

Ilya exhales shakily. “*Da, ya tebya lyublyu.*”

Shane’s eyes shone as he glanced down, a blush blooming across his cheeks, making his freckles stand out in stark relief.

“*I ya tebya,*” he says quietly as he turns away and Ilya’s heart skips a beat. Shane briefly squeezes Ilya’s shoulder before walking towards the patio doors to melt back into the crowd.

Ilya sighs, looking out at the valets scurrying back and forth as he grins down into his vodka, the ice clinking softly against the sides. Worth the scrambled brain. Every day.

Eventually, Ilya drifts back into the room, feeling lighter than he had an hour ago. He watches as Shane makes his goodbyes, artfully extricating himself from conversations and groups as he slowly makes his way towards the exit. Shane doesn’t catch Ilya’s gaze before he leaves, but Ilya never expected him to. Ilya could feel Shane weaving his way through the masses, catching a glimpse of the back of his neck through the crowd. He notes, with satisfaction, the slight flush at the base of Shane’s neck. Ilya smiles to himself. Eventually the energy in the room shifts, imperceptible to anyone but Ilya. Shane has left and the countdown begins in Ilya’s head. Soon.

Ilya stays long enough to make sure that everyone that wants to talk to him has a chance. He muscles through coaching strategy discussions, questions about team dynamics, “How’s Marleau adjusting to his knee surgery?,” questions about fundraising, questions about brand opportunities. He makes his way through all of it. Around the time that Ilya notices the majority of guests were starting to gravitate towards the door, coat check, and inevitably their cars, Ilya thinks he’s made it through enough that he’s earned the right to go *home*.

He deposits his empty glass at the bar and drops a hundred dollar bill in the tip jar. Already feeling lighter with the prospect of heading home, Ilya puts his hands in his pockets and walks purposefully across the ballroom to join the wave of people making their way to the exit.

Ilya retrieves his coat, another bill in another tip jar, and why shouldn’t he? Everyone here worked to make this night for people like him go seamlessly. Ilya is aware that so much of his life goes seamlessly due to the labor of others. Ilya is many things, but stingy is not one of them.

He checks his phone while waiting in the valet line, thumbing open an unread text from Shane. A photo of Coke can next to a small wrapped plate of pelmeni, with a small bowl of dill yogurt greets him. Ilya can see the tips of Shane’s bare feet in the bottom of the frame, toes poking out from loose sweats. Shane has showered and is comfortable in their home, *their* home. Ilya feels his heart clench as another small hardened part of himself cracks and falls aside.

Ready for you.

The pelmeni is from the Russian bakery that is thirty minutes away from the apartment, but Shane and Ilya make the trip every time they are home—in this home. It's routine at this point and Ilya treasures that thirty minute drive, Shane behind the wheel with Ilya's hand carding through his hair, catching up and reconnecting and realigning towards each other's orbit for however long they have that particular visit. It's the best start to every visit and Ilya never wants it to stop.

The screen goes blurry and Ilya realizes that his face feels flush and there's a stinging behind his eyes. He sends a heart and quickly drops his phone into his trouser pocket. He sniffs and rubs his hand across his nose, settling back into Ilya Rozanov, Boston Captain, as he approaches the valet attendant.

"Ticket?"

Ilya passes the valet stub to the younger man with a nod.

"Right away Mr. Rozanov. One moment."

Ilya stands with his hand in his pocket watching as people migrate towards their vehicles and pull out of the parking area. The line of red tail lights curves around the corner and out of sight as people make their way to the highway.

"Here you go!" The attendant hands him his keys.

"Thank you and here, this is for you," Ilya says as he presses a bill into the man's hand.

"Oh no sir, I couldn't possib—" "No. I insist. This is for you. Thank you." Ilya drops his hand leaving the man standing with a crumpled hundred dollar bill as Ilya makes his way to his car, keys swinging.

Easiest conversation he'd had all night.

Chapter End Notes

1. I have not read Heated Rivalry. Just the show!

2. I do not, I repeat I do not, know Russian. This was all Google translate!

Basically, I learned a second language in a foreign country and there were days where I felt completely useless in either language. When I saw the scene at the first All Stars presser and that man's convoluted ass question about Boston and fans and pressure and Ilya's face, I knew exactly what he was feeling, ie "fucking wat." And seeing the way that Shane stepped in, repeated the question, and synthesized a response, plus included Ilya in that response made my heart swell. So here!

There are plans for a second chapter, just had to get this out!

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Ilya exhales into Shane's mouth. Shane uses the movement to slide his tongue into Ilya's mouth exploring, claiming. Ilya loves this side of Shane, the one that takes. No one gets to see how Shane takes, how Ilya will give and give and give.

Chapter Notes

Sooooo this was supposed to be like "Hey I'm home, let's be cute and maybe fuck" and instead is like 6k of submissive Ilya (which is underrepresented from what I can see and has been on my mind since the "Not now okay? Later" "Ilya." "Shane." moment of The Phone Call Blowjob (poor Pike). I have not been able to get that out of my head, because that was a Tone of Voice that connoted an amount of control in the relationship. Love it!

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

I am heading home now.

See you soon.

Ilya had felt good when he left the venue, but now, in the silence of his car he could feel the anxiety creeping in. *Glupyy, foolish, slow, bespoleznyy*. Ilya's hands grip the steering wheel, his jaw clenched. His clothes feel too tight, too restrictive, the buckles of his suspenders are digging into his hips, and his tux jacket is bunching uncomfortably around his middle as he sits in his car. Ilya takes a hand off the wheel to unbutton his jacket. He breathes slightly easier. A little easier still after he tugs at his bow tie, undoing the knot, and unbuttoning his collar.

Ilya exhales. Distantly, he notes that he is thirsty, his throat clicking slightly as he swallows. His eyes feel dry. He can feel a headache starting behind his right eye, the tugging slight, but insistent.

God ya nadeyus' I didn't sound too stupid. Chto ya skazal—say again about The Kings? Tetya is aunt right? I think I remembered that Jackie's sister would be the children's aunt. Aunt is tetya. Right? Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Ilya's thoughts crash into one another as he merges on the highway.

Ilya feels too big for his clothes and like he's the densest object for miles. He can feel his car being pulled into his mass, tighter, tighter, tighter, the metal creaking as it condenses in on itself. He is his own black hole sucking everything into it, his chest the nexus point where it all crunches down, splitting as it gets sucked into his center, consuming and being consumed.

Ilya rolls the window down.

By the time Ilya gets home he feels like a livewire, everything just a little *too much too much too much*. But he can feel himself expand slightly when he gets out of the car and makes his way to the front door. He can see warm lighting painting the sidewalk in front of their home. The light shining through the window from the, Ilya would never say absurd, *amount* of lamps that Shane insisted they buy ("Ilya. We are not using the light switch lights. We are getting lamps"). And of course he was right, the result was that their home feels warmer, quieter, calmer than at any point when it was just Ilya turning on the "big lights" ("This I do not understand. These lights are much smaller than a whole lamp. They are in the ceiling" Shane had doubled over laughing).

Ilya's heart aches with the need to be *inside already*. He keys the code in, the soft "beep" of his car locking following him as he steps into their home, jacket on his arm.

"I'm home," Ilya calls out as he toes his shoes off and pushes them towards the shoe shelf, something Ilya would have never thought of but appeared on his doorstep after the first time Shane spent the night here after the cottage. The look on Shane's face when it was built when he came back a few weeks later was worth the frustration of building it.

"Be right there!" Ilya hears from the direction of the bathroom. Breathing deep, Ilya smells the familiar scent of pelmeni and smiles to himself. He makes his way towards their bedroom at the back of the apartment, his lips still curved around the small smile. He will be better. Tomorrow is another day.

As he turns the corner into the kitchen, Shane comes out of the bedroom, glancing back in towards the bathroom. Ilya feels a breath leave him in a full exhale, the first full exhale he's had in hours. Shane turns around and smiles at him.

"Hello."

"Privet, moy kotenok"

Shane's gaze sweeps down Ilya's body, noting his still-gelled-down hair, the tightness around his eyes, the way that Ilya's breathing, while deeper, is still slightly shallow, the slight purse around his mouth and the pinch to his brow. Shane notes the way that Ilya is standing straighter than usual. He can almost feel the knot of tension that's taken up in the center of Ilya's shoulder.

Shane crosses the room and gathers Ilya up in a hug. He inhales deeply and exhales deeply next to Ilya's ear. Shane inhales deeply again and Ilya finds himself copying him. Ilya's shoulders lower on the next exhale, his large hands finding purchase on Shane's hips underneath his hoodie wearing. Shane's skin is warm. Shane's skin is soft. Ilya relaxes further into his embrace, his next exhale leaving him in a groan.

“That bad, huh?”

“Just a long day. Everyone has something to say. No one says anything simply,” Ilya speaks into Shane’s shoulder as Shane slowly walks them back towards the bed, and gently takes the jacket from Ilya’s arm. Ilya senses Shane blindly lying the jacket on the bed, never making Ilya move from his cocoon of warmth against Shane’s shoulder, “My brain hurts and I feel not so smart. No is not it. I feel not...capable.”

Shane pulls back as Ilya averts his eyes, looking down at their feet.

“Hey. Hey look at me,” Shane says as he gently grabs Ilya’s chin and raises it so that they make eye contact. “You’re one of the most capable people I know,” he says, looking into Ilya’s eyes with a small smile. The warmth there makes Ilya’s heart stutter. Shane makes him feel unworthy and worthy at the same time. It is a confusing clash of emotions. Ilya never wants it to stop.

“*Da. Spasibo* Shane,” Ilya grumbles, ears pink.

Shane chuckles and kisses Ilya on the lips as he pulls the suspenders down from his shoulders, leaving them hanging at his side. Ilya inhales. Shane’s hands knead his shoulders once before smoothing down his back and gently tugging Ilya’s shirt out of his pants, his hands smoothing down along Ilya’s slacks. He relaxes further, Shane’s hands unspooling the tension from his shoulders as they move up and down his back, the motion rhythmic. Ilya drops his head to Shane’s shoulder. Shane supports Ilya’s weight.

“Ah, Shane—thank you.”

Ilya picks his head up from Shane’s shoulder and looks at him. Shane’s eyes crinkle as he meets Ilya’s gaze and a soft smile curves his lips. Ilya’s eyes flick down to his lips, a silent bid, and Ilya grins when Shane tilts his head into the kiss, his arms wrapping around Ilya’s waist, palms meeting at his back, continuing to support Ilya as they reacquaint themselves with each other, the kiss slow, and wet and unhurried. Ilya exhales into his mouth. Shane uses the movement to slide his tongue into Ilya’s mouth exploring, *claiming*. Ilya loves this side of Shane, the one that *takes*. No one gets to see how Shane takes, how Ilya will give and give and give.

Ilya pulls back and rests his forehead against Shane’s. Shane smiles quietly and gently grabs Ilya’s chin again, his hand splaying out on the side of Ilya’s face as he softly tugs Ilya back into another kiss.

“Follow me.”

Shane intertwines his fingers with Ilya’s and turns toward the bathroom, sweatpants low on his hips, as he walks into the other room, Ilya trailing behind.

“Shane. Wha—”

Ilya thinks he might cry. He really truly thinks he is going to cry. He can feel the stinging behind his eyes and can *feel* the way that his voice thickens as he becomes slightly congested

in the back of his throat. *Perestan' plakat' men do not cry*, a voice criticizes him.

“I thought this would be nice to come home to,” Shane replies confidently as he motions towards the steaming bathtub, a handful of unlit candles around it. Lying across the tub is a tray with a laptop and a few dishes of pelmeni and sour cream with dill. The laptop is open on an episode of *Ekaterina*, a show that Shane knows Ilya is fond of, even if it is about Catherine the Great, as he has caught him watching it a few times—has caught him watching it enough to know that Ilya has seen it all multiple times.

Ilya’s world careens to a stop before starting again in hyperdrive. His brain clanging *slishkom slishkom too much too much this is too much Ty etogo ne zasluzhivayesh'. You do not deserve this*.

“Shane wha—, this is so—this is too much, Shane. No—I do not need this. I am—alri—I am fine,” Ilya stutters thickly, eyes shining. A deep breath. A shaky exhale. “You do not need to do this.” The *for me* goes unspoken but heard by Shane.

“Ilya,” Shane says as he moves towards him and starts pushing the buttons of the suit shirt through their respective holes. Ilya snuffles slightly, he wipes his nose with the back of his hand. “This is nothing. This was simple. Don’t even think about it.”

Shane pushes the shirt off of Ilya’s shoulders and folds it over his arm. Ilya stands in the bathroom dumbfounded and overwhelmed, his brain buzzing, but catching on *you don’t deserve this this is too much too slishkom mnogo dlya tebya you are not worth this he has wasted so much of his time preparing this because what? Because you couldn’t handle a few hours at an event? Weak weak weak slabyy*. The voice is hard. Piercing. It’s masculine in all the wrong ways, thrown at him in rooms that were too big with too many medals on the wall in a house that was too cold and too too too quiet, a small boys footsteps echoing in the hallways.

Stupid lazy disappoin—Shane kisses him on his cheek before lithely sinking to his knees. Ilya’s eyes widen. He blinks, dumbfounded. *Chto?*

Ilya watches Shane pull his zipper down, the sound loud in the silence of the bathroom. Ilya blinks again, his throat struggling to swallow around the sudden dryness. Shane sinks to one knee, tenderly pulling Ilya’s slacks down his legs. His fingers wrap around his right ankle and squeeze. *Weak weak weak*.

“Come on. Step up.”

Ilya obeys. The internal tirade stutters again. Shane taps his left calf. “Now this one.”

Ilya’s foot raises without him thinking. Shane lays the pants over the jacket over his arm. He rolls Ilya’s dress sock down to the ankle.

“Lean forward. There you go.” Shane peels the sock off and it joins the pants on the jacket on Shane’s arm, everything lying flat. Ilya, somewhat wildly, thinks about how clothes appear to crease themselves in Shane’s presence.

“Last one, on your tip toes.” Shane takes off the last sock and looks up at Ilya who looks at him on his knees at Ilya’s feet. Shane’s eyes are bright and his smile makes Ilya’s chest clench with something borderline painful. Ilya snuffles and fights the urge to wrap his arms around himself. He keeps them at his sides, *exposed you are exposed*, through sheer will alone.

Shane grabs Ilya’s thigh, fingers digging into the muscle slightly, as he smoothly stands up. Ilya, standing in his boxers on the bathroom tile, shifts his weight. The tile is cold on his now bare feet.

With his free hand, Shane grasps his chin and forces Ilya to look at him before pressing a firm kiss on Ilya’s parted lips. Ilya feels himself sway forward, chasing Shane’s warmth as he backs away.

“Go stand on the bathmat,” Shane requests, jerking his head behind him. “The ground is cold.”

Ilya thinks he should push back, should make a joke about how Shane is bossing him around, break whatever is happening here so that Ilya can feel in control again. But, truthfully? This is the best Ilya has felt in weeks. It dawns on him slowly, distantly, wordlessly whispering into his consciousness that control by oneself feels lonely, it’s cold—the layers of it, the metal of it biting into your skin until all you have left is yourself and your “control.” Simply put, Ilya is tired of it. To unpack it all tonight sounds exhausting and complicated. He lets go.

Ilya feels like he is in a dream, the sounds out of Shane’s mouth coming to him slowly as he sinks towards the bottom of a warm pool in his mind. *Idiot nichego khoroshego no good no good prostoy mal'chik. Simple shallow man.* He blinks and he’s standing on the bathmat, his toes curling and clenching the fibers below his feet. He feels Shane come up behind him, a hand smoothing over his hip as he reaches around Ilya to turn on the faucet, ensuring the tub, while half full, is *steaming* for Ilya. Ilya can smell the ginger and honey from his shampoo, wafting up with the steam. Shane tests the temperature of the water with his free hand. Satisfied, he stands up and turns to face Ilya. He puts his hand on the center of Ilya’s chest, looking into his eyes, searching for something. After a moment, Ilya sees Shane’s brow smooth.

“Stay.”

Ilya exhales, shakily, but feels something slot into place in his chest. His eyes follow Shane as he steps around Ilya. Ilya hears his soft footsteps retreat and leave the room, opening the closet doors in their bedroom. Distantly, Ilya knows that he’s hanging the suit on the left side of the closet so that Shane can grab it and drop it off at the dry cleaners before he leaves town. Despite the warmth, Ilya shivers slightly in the bathroom.

Ilya sinks deeper into the quiet of the pool. The internal vitriol seems further away now, nonsensical, just an amalgamation of sounds, much easier to ignore. Ilya becomes dimly aware of the steady thunk thunk thunk of his heart against his ribcage. The sound is rich and full and present. Ilya is deeply comforted by this. He feels oddly at peace, at a higher (deeper?) level than he usually is with Shane. Shane told him what to do. Ilya knows *exactly* what he is supposed to be doing in this moment. It was so clear. Ilya watched Shane’s plush

bottom lip part slightly as his teeth came together to form the word, *stay*. *Stay stay stay stay stay*. Ilya lives for that word. *Stay*. He can still feel the heat of Shane's hand on his chest, the word sinking in through his skin, past his veins, past his muscles, slipping between his ribcage to seep into his heart. *Stay. Stay. Stay*. The word travels throughout Ilya's body with every beat of his heart. Ilya feels like he is slowly being flayed open, the skin on his chest slowly peeling apart to reveal the squish beneath. Ilya submits to this feeling.

Suddenly, he feels like he could cry. Conceptually, Ilya knows there are *no* expectations from Shane except to do what he asked, to stand here waiting while Shane puts his clothes away, while Shane takes care of *everything*, the sound of the rushing water and the steam filling the bathroom, creating a cocoon of humid warmth, the day beginning to release its hold on him. The relief of understanding, the relief of doing something right, the relief of responsibility. All Ilya has to do is wait. Conceptually he understands this. Realistically, mentally, emotionally Ilya is overwhelmed by the depth of Shane's love.

Ilya stays.

Shane returns.

Shane returns to Ilya standing stock still at the side of the tub, aside from his toes continuing to scrunch into the bathmat. He hums, the sound muted in the steam-filled bathroom.

"Good. Very good, Ilya," Shane praises him and Ilya hears him grab something from the cabinet behind him. "I love how well you listen to me," Shane says as he comes to Ilya's side, a bag of magnesium salts, the eucalyptus lavender blend (Ilya's favorite), in his hands. Shane opens the bag, the scent exploding out into the room. Ilya inhales and feels his shoulders relax further, a slight laugh escaping him. His cheeks feel wet. Shane dumps a cup into the rapidly filling tub, the steam rising, carrying the scent throughout the bathroom.

Shane turns around and brushes a kiss against Ilya's cheek while he goes to put the salts away.

"Last thing."

Shane, standing in front of Ilya, hooks his fingers into the waistband of Ilya's briefs. Ilya watches as Shane drags Ilya's briefs down and sinks to the ground to repeat the same motions of "step up. Now the other foot" from before. Ilya stares dumbfoundedly at the top of Shane's head, his dick plumping up slightly, but Ilya is too exhausted to feel anything other than soul crushing gratitude for Shane. The moment feels so delicate, so quiet, so painfully, what is the word? *Intimate*, so painfully *intimate* that Ilya isn't even thinking about sex with Shane right now, this feels like it transcends sex. Shane undressing Ilya so that he can get into the bathtub in their home after he had a hard day (he didn't even lose a game) transcends anything Ilya could have ever imagined. It's a version of love and care that he couldn't even conceive of, let alone *hope* for until Shane.

"Get in."

Ilya blinks as he feels his left leg hike up without his permission, moving over the side of the tub, to touch down in the good good good hot *fucking hell* good water, his right leg following,

a groan leaving Ilya as he sinks into the tub, the water rising up to meet his chest.

The heat of the water, the scent of the bath salts, the Russian comfort food neatly laid out in front of him, the laptop just waiting for him to press play on *Ekaterina*, Shane puttering around the bathroom lighting the candles he has set up, turning on one of the warm light lamps (the kind that looks like a pink rock that Ilya teased him for but secretly likes because the idea of making a rock into a lamp amuses him), the fact that Shane did...did all of this. He did *all* of this. And the part that fucking kills Ilya? That feels like his sternum is breaking open, that makes him want to reach into himself and pull his own heart out and lay it at Shane's feet (*good boy*) while he bleeds out in the tub? The part that makes him feel all of that is that this is not a power play, it's not a transaction. What *guts* Ilya, is that deep down he *knows* that Shane doesn't even consider this an effort. Shane feels, believes—*believes* to the point of not even having to think about it—it's intrinsic to his being—that this is obvious to do for someone that he loves, that this is so *so* simple to do for Ilya, why wouldn't he do it? It never enters Shane's mind not to.

Doing this for Ilya is as simple to Shane as making sure Shane has his favorite creams in all his travel bags, that Shane has multiple versions of his own favorite hoodie, that there is always food stocked in the cottage, this is just one of the myriad of things that Shane does on autopilot because *why wouldn't he?* Shane likes his life a certain way and Ilya is a part of that life so why wouldn't Shane treat Ilya with the consideration he treats every other part of his life with?

Ilya feels *ragged*. Ilya feels like he's simultaneously being ripped apart down the middle and shot with morphine as he's stitched back up. His breath hitches wetly and he feels a tear slide down his face. Ilya is shaking slightly.

"Okay should be all set up—Oh *Ilya*, hey, baby—hey."

Shane crouches at the side of the tub, breaking the tear tracks, thumbing away the tears now coming down Ilya's face. His thumb rubs circles behind Ilya's ear.

"Puppy, you're good here."

Ilya exhales weakly and nods, feeling like a small child.

"Do you want me to stay? I have some contracts I need to look over and I can do it in here or out front."

Ilya thinks about it for a moment, but comes to his answer fast. He feels like he might snap. "I think I need my time, but I will come out after?"

"Okay, that sounds good." Shane smiles at him fondly as he leans over the tub to leave a lingering kiss on Ilya's lips. His hand cups Ilya's cheek. "I'll be on the couch. Come whenever."

Ilya nods, feeling small. Shane stands up and moves towards the door, Ilya turns his head to follow him. Shane looks back and smiles at him, reaching to turn the light off.

“Shane?”

“Yes, Ilya?”

“I love you...very much.”

Shane smiles warmly back at Ilya. “I know Ilya, I love you too.”

Shane flicks the lights off and gently closes the bathroom door. Ilya is immediately plunged into the low light ambiance of the candles and lamp. He feels raw and ragged, but with the bath and the food and the lights and the love, *Shane’s* love, he feels...substantial.

Ilya takes a steadying breath and reaches his hand up to press play, cursing quietly when he realizes that his hand is dripping wet, but before he can curse his lack of foresight he notices a small hand towel hanging on the side of the tub. A disbelieving laugh escapes Ilya. Shane had already thought of this exact scenario. Ilya feels fresh tears prick his eyes and the laptop swims in front of him.

Dostatochno, enough. Enough!

Ilya clears his head with a shake, snapping himself out of it. He sinks down further into the tub, a sigh escaping him as he presses play and grabs a palmeni.

He eats the palmeni slowly while *Ekaterina* plays quietly, Ilya not paying much attention but allowing the Russian dialogue to wash over him, a comforting background noise while his mind wanders and nonverbally reorients itself. Right now, in the tub, Ilya feels beyond words. He feels so solid, so settled, so weightless, so unencumbered, so *cherished*. All of these things are intangible. Ilya doesn’t need words to describe what he is feeling because he has a front row seat to the emotions and the physical reactions. Most importantly, above everything, he is being good for Shane. He is doing what Shane wants. Shane didn’t set all of this up so that Ilya could continue to spiral. He set it up so that Ilya could just *be* and *be loved*. Ilya would never defy Shane in this.

Eventually, the water becomes more tepid and Ilya is cognizant of his head lolling to the side. He feels like caramel. As the credits roll on an episode, he reaches up and pauses the computer with a sigh. He hears a slight creak as the door cracks open.

“Oh are you done? I thought you might be wrapping up soon, I–uh, I have your towel.”

Ilya grins to himself before turning in the tub to look back at Shane, his head peaking through the door, the light from the bedroom backlighting him. Ilya thinks about the angels in St. Basil’s in Moscow. Ilya feels his smile grow. Shane takes a breath, a slight blush staining his cheeks, and stands up straighter, stepping into the room with Ilya’s towel spread between his hands.

Ilya glances up at him from beneath his lashes as he gingerly stands up in the tub, the water sloshing against the sides, the plink of it dripping from him sounding in the quiet cocoon of the bathroom. Shane’s gaze sweeps down his body and Ilya preens slightly. Ilya takes great pleasure in watching Shane’s mouth quirk up.

“Step out onto the mat.”

Ilya complies, stepping out in front of Shane, his head pleasantly empty, feeling how comfortable he feels, how his limbs feel like the correct extensions of his body. He feels *clean* in front of Shane’s devotion. He waits for Shane to tell him what to do next, meeting his gaze levelly.

“Oh *okay*. I see how it is,” Shane chuckles as he steps forward and bundles Ilya into the towel, the towel that Shane, love of his life love of all his lives Shane *moya lyubov'* Shane Shane Shane, has put in the drier so that it is warm and fluffy and incredible against Ilya’s prickling skin, the goosebumps that were just beginning to make their appearance rapidly banished when faced with an act of Shane’s love. A quiet noise leaves Ilya as his eyelids droop and he sways towards Shane. Ilya feels drunk, not drunk on sharp vodka but drunk on *glintvein*, the mulled wine oozing through his veins making him warm and slow and stupid and beautiful and real and simple.

Shane chuckles and busies himself with drying Ilya off. Occasionally, telling him to lift his arms or turn around in low tones. Shane crouches down and gently dries Ilya between his legs, buffing his pubic hair, and deftly running the towel between his ass. Ilya falls further to the bottom of the pool of his love, his chest rising and falling slowly.

“Okay bend down a little—yes, like that, perfect,” Shane mumbles as Ilya inclines his head towards Shane so that he can lightly scruff his hair with the towel, taking care to not be too rough so that Ilya’s curls stay healthy. Ilya knows this because he walked in on Shane watching “The Curly Hair Method” one afternoon after coming home from the gym. Ilya teased Shane endlessly, but submitted to The Curly Hair Method and, he would never tell Shane (well maybe yes would tell Shane), he has noticed a difference. Ilya remembers laying awake next to a sleeping Shane that night, with a t-shirt wrapped around his head, somewhat hysterically imagining what his father would say if he saw him. He had fallen asleep a few moments after realizing he couldn’t give less of a fuck. The next day Ilya stared at himself in the mirror for a full minute, his curls looking like a halo around his head.

“Thank you, Ilya. You’re doing so well.”

Ilya scoffed slightly at the praise, a line of tension returning to his shoulders. The sounds around him get sharper as he floats closer to the surface from the bottom of his pool.

“Hey no, nope nope nope. I am allowed to tell you how well you are doing, how well you listen to me, how good you are for me *Ilya*.” Shane squeezes Ilya’s shoulders, hard, and Ilya feels himself relax, contently sinking back down into his pool. “Good. Thank you.”

Ilya sinks farther. Ilya thuds on the bottom.

Shane runs his hands down Ilya’s arms, grasping Ilya’s hands as he walks backwards into the bedroom, Ilya following him like a fawn. Ilya dimly notices that his favorite XXL Boston Raiders hoodie, soft from repeat washes, and a pair of loose sweats have been laid out for him. Shane stops in front of the bed. Ilya stops in front of the bed. He blinks slowly.

“Arms up.”

Ilya's arms raise slowly above his head, the muscles pulling taught, the slight stretch pleasant, and Shane pulls the hoodie down, mindful of his face and nose, his hands holding the hood wide until it clears his head. Next are his sweats.

Soon Ilya is dry, warm, ensconced in clothing that is familiar and feels good on his skin. He can feel Shane's fingers drawing little circles on the back of his hand as he follows Shane into the living room, trailing behind him. Ilya feels small. He stumbles slightly at the couch.

Shane sits on the couch and pours them each a glass of water from the pitcher on the coffee table. *Planet Earth* is on the television. Ilya notices the subtitles are off. He feels a sense of relief.

Shane looks up at Ilya from the couch, a quizzical look on his face as to why Ilya hasn't joined him. "Sit wherever."

Ilya turns 180 degrees and then sinks to the floor, his back against the couch in front of Shane. Despite being warm and content, experiencing his life from the bottom of his warm pool, a small part of Ilya fearfully hopes that Shane doesn't ask him about this, doesn't question him, just lets him be. Ilya just wants to be...to be...he wants to be lower than Shane. He wants to, *needs* to sit at his feet. He just needs a little bit of distance from Shane, Shane who is blinding in his love, who will burn Ilya up with the force of his love in this moment if they are on equal footing. Ilya desperately wants to show his devotion to Shane, his loyalty, to keep Shane above him, thronelike. Deep down, far past conscious thought, Ilya knows that he needs to feel *owned* right now, sitting at the feet of the one who holds the leash.

Shane hums as he presses play, the volume low, puts his glasses back on and shuffles some papers into his lap. Ilya blinks slowly as David Attenborough introduces a small arctic fox preparing for the winter.

Ilya's breathing slows further.

Every once in a while papers shuffle as Shane continues to read through the contracts that Yuna sent over. A few minutes into the episode, Shane's hand meets Ilya's scalp. Fingers begin to run through his hair, scritchng at points, softly tugging through slight tangles. Ilya makes a soft noise of surprise that quickly turns into a sound of contentment, quietly released in the calm of their apartment. The firm circle that Shane makes around his mastoid lets Ilya know that he heard it. Ilya feels like he is boundaryless. He feels like his bones are liquid. He's never been this content in his life.

Halfway through the episode, Shane sighs, takes his glasses off and moves them and the stack of papers to the coffee table. Ilya starts and makes like he is going to stand up, but Shane stops him with a hand on his shoulder. "No no, stay. You're good there." Ilya settles.

Ilya feels one of Shane's legs cross over his head to settle on his right side, bracketing Ilya in between his legs, another window of safety, another way in which Shane bundles Ilya away from the world that sometimes overwhelms him with its expectations. Tomorrow when he is replaying this evening, because this evening *will* be replayed, will be replayed *endlessly*, Ilya

will be appreciative of Shane's hip mobility, but right now his mouth fills with saliva and he feels hyperaware of every point where he and Shane are touching. The scent of Shane's shampoo, the specific (oh *so* specific) laundry detergent that he uses, the creams that he uses to keep the harsh Canadian winter away, and the underlying scent of something that is so uniquely *Shane* envelops Ilya in quiet comfort. *Undeserving* the voice hisses, sharp in his mind. Ilya's hands clench slightly at his sides.

Shane's hands return to his scalp, starting at the top and then moving to his brow bones, fingers pressing down firmly as they follow his brows to his thumbs taking over at Ilya's temples before smoothing down his mastoid process, the sides of his neck and coming to meet at the base of Ilya's neck. From there, Shane's hands squeeze his traps as his hands move out his shoulders, giving his biceps a press before returning to the top of his head to start the process again. And again. And again. The sitting at Shane's feet and the bath had taken care of most of the errant thoughts that Ilya had, but the limited ones left soon get further and further and further apart.

"Oh fuuuuuuuuuck, *Ty menya ubivayesh'* Hollander," Ilya slurs. Shane squeezes the back of his neck in response. Ilya watches a small rabbit emerge from its den in springtime, flowers in bloom.

Ilya isn't conscious of the tears running down his face until Shane repeats the process again, this time his fingers dipping below his brow to gently wipe the tears from his face, before returning to his brow, his ears, his neck, his nape, his traps, his shoulders. Ilya feels, more than hears, Shane inhale behind him, feels him place a firm kiss to the ring of curls at the top of his head. Feels Shane lean down on his right side and kiss his tear tracks, pull back, and lean down on his left side and repeat. Ilya shudders. Shane wraps a blanket around his shoulders and wordlessly passes him his glass of water. Ilya turns to his left, looking up at Shane, so far above him so large in his life, as he brings the water to his lips.

"Drink," Shane directs softly.

Ilya drinks.

"More." Shane's mouth barely moves.

Ilya takes another sip.

"Good."

Ilya is flying. Ilya is drowning. Ilya is soaring and Ilya is beyond language.

Shane takes the glass from him and puts it on the table, knees still bracketing Ilya in on the floor, *bezopasnyy* safe safe safe. Ilya exhales, the last final calcified piece of his day cracking and falling away. He shifts slightly, reaching out and bringing Shane's legs more firmly against his sides and wrapping the blanket tighter around him. Ilya watches as the rabbit goes back into its den and reemerges with its mate as they start anew, fresh and ready to meet the springtime.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading and for all your kind responses!

1. I do not know Russian (this was Google translate)
2. I will (possibly) do my best to get the definitions down here at a later date!

Thanks for joining me in the pit!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!