

I Came Back

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I Came Back

by [letsgettyderary](#)

Summary

Russia, 2035. In the two years since Putin's passing, the country has taken quite a progressive turn. Six months ago, they decriminalized homosexuality, and Ilya finally feels safe enough to return (with his family in tow). He takes them on a hike through the woods to visit his mother's grave.

Notes

Hi, the queer hockey show has brought me back from the dead. This show (and Ilya) are so personal to me in the sense that Russia is my second home. My mom is from Russia, Russian was technically my first language (though I speak English far better now), and I spent many childhood summers with my grandparents in Russia. It will always be a part of me, and it kills me that I can't go back until things are better. It has been nearly twelve years since I last stepped foot on Russian soil, a time in which my grandmother (who I am named after) has passed away. We had to watch her funeral and burial on FaceTime, and I keep thinking about how whenever I return to Russia - and I do hope that I will get to return one day - I will have to visit her grave, too. Hopefully with my husband and children as well. Basically, I have a lot of emotions about it and this little fic was really cathartic for me. I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed writing it last night at 3am through tears in my eyes.

Russia, 2035

A blanket of pine needles covers the forest floor. The scent of the trees and fresh air invades Ilya's nostrils as he walks, his dress shoes stepping on the occasional pine cone. It's summer and warmer than he remembers, but it *has* been 18 years. 18 years since his father passed. 18 years since he last walked this path.

The second he heard the news of Putin's passing two years ago, he had started planning this trip. He wanted to make sure that the Russian government was heading in a more progressive direction before he went ahead and actually purchased tickets, and so he waited. Six months ago, they decriminalized homosexuality. Six months ago, Ilya got VISAs in order and bought four round trip tickets to Russia.

"Papa! Daddy says you're walking too fast!"

Ilya slows down, admittedly caught up in his thoughts, and waits for his six-year-old daughter, Irina, to catch up to him. He sweeps her off her feet and sets her on his shoulders, sending her into a fit of giggles.

"You should tell your Daddy to WALK FASTER!" he says, turning around as he yells the last words into the woods.

Shane appears from around the corner a few seconds later, out of breath. He pauses for a second in an attempt to catch it, leaning on the hiking stick in his hand and shooting Ilya an annoyed look.

Ilya chuckles.

"Do you want me to take him?" he asks, nodding to the toddler asleep in a carrier strapped to Shane's back.

Shane shakes his head. "No, just give me a second."

"Ok, Zaichick (*bunny*)," he says, reaching up above his head to grab Irina, "I need to get some water for your Daddy."

Ilya sets Irina down and takes the backpack off his shoulders, pulling out a white water bottle and walking over to Shane.

"Na. (*Here*.)" He hands it over, their fingers brushing when Shane takes it from him.

"Spasibo (*Thanks*)," Shane replies. He is nearly fluent now — no accent. But he's had 18 years to learn. He takes a small sip, keeping eye contact.

"Isho (*More*)," Ilya orders, and Shane obeys, taking a couple big gulps before handing it back.

"You are okay now?" Ilya asks.

Shane nods. “Better. Just — walk slower. Please.”

“Yes. I will try.”

Shane grabs Ilya’s arm before he can turn around. “Hey. I can tell you’re anxious. You can take your time. We’re good here. Okay?”

Ilya nods, and then visibly relaxes. He touches his forehead to his husband’s for a few seconds, closing his eyes and taking a deep breath. He’s okay. His family is okay. No one is around anyway, and it wouldn’t matter if they were. And he finally gets to see his mom again. And she gets to meet Shane and Irina and Misha. It doesn’t feel real.

“Ok. I am good.”

“Okay,” Shane says with a soft smile. “Let’s go, then.”

“I am sorry,” Ilya says about ten minutes later.

“For what?” Shane pants.

“For making us wear suits. Was stupid. Am hot.”

Shane huffs a small laugh. “That’s okay. You wanted to look nice. I get it. We’re almost there, right?”

“Mm, yes. That is the fence up there.” Ilya nods to a knee-height rusted iron rod fence up ahead, marking the edge of the graveyard.

Shane can’t get over how different it is to graveyards back home. How beautiful. A small graveyard, nestled in the dense Russian woods. A thirty minute walk from civilization in all directions. *It’s kind of like a cottage of its own*, he thinks.

“Papa?”

“Da, Zaichick?”

“Is this where Babushka Irina is?”

“Da,” Ilya replies, fighting to hold back tears as the four of them come up on the entrance. There aren’t very many graves, but he remembers where his mother is. That, at least, is one thing that hasn’t changed in 18 years.

He takes Irina’s hand in his, and walks up to his mom with his family. He kneels, touching the foot high fence that surrounds her grave.

“Privet, Mama. Ya vernulsa. (*Hi, Mama. I came back.*)”

He looks up over his shoulder at Shane with tears in his eyes, before leaning over to give Irina a kiss on her temple.

“Eta Shane (*This is Shane*),” he continues, gesturing to the man he loves, “moy muzsh. (*My husband.*)”

“Ee eta Irina (*And this is Irina*),” he says, placing his hands on Irina’s shoulders, “Ee Misha (*And Misha*).” He turns his head to see Shane turning to the side, showing off the sleeping baby on his back. “Tvayi vnuki. (*Your grandchildren.*)”

“Privet, Babushka!” Irina pipes up with a shy wave towards the headstone. “We have the same name!”

Ilya can’t hold back the singular sob that escapes him. “Yes you do, moya zolotya (*my golden one*), yes you do.” He pulls her in close, placing a kiss on her head.

Shane then kneels beside him, placing his hand on the fence next to Ilya’s. “It’s so good to finally meet you,” he says in Russian. “I have been waiting 18 years to tell you that you have an incredible son. Which I’m sure you already know, but... I needed to make sure you heard it.”

Ilya can’t take his eyes off Shane as tears run down his cheeks. Shane turns to look at him, his hand moving to cover Ilya’s, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

“Do you want us to give you a minute? Then we can set up the picnic?”

Ilya nods. “Yes. Please.”

Shane nods, placing a soft kiss to Ilya’s forehead before standing up and taking Irina by the hand and leading her away. “C’mon, honey, Papa needs a minute with his mom, okay?”

Ilya watches them leave until they’re out of earshot but still in his sight, and smiles as Irina picks up a giant pine cone and begins jumping up and down excitedly. Then he turns his attention back to his mother.

“Kak vidite, mne yest' o chem vam rasskazat (*As you can see, I have a lot to catch you up on*),” he begins, chucking softly. And then he tells her everything. How the boy he had told her about 18 years ago was who she met today. How they made their relationship public. How he wished she could’ve come to the wedding, but that they saved a seat for her in the front row. How incredible it was to watch his children being born. How amazing the surrogates were. He tells her about how hard it had been to retire, about how now, at 44, every joint in his body cracks when he gets up from the couch. He tells her what her grandchildren are like, that Irina is equal parts kind and stubborn and loves sparkly dresses and playing hockey and sometimes playing hockey in sparkly dresses. That at three years old, Misha is gentle and quiet until he gets on the ice, where he skates around abnormally well for a toddler. Ilya thinks figure skating is in his future. And then he tells her about Russia, about how he hopes he can come visit more now that things are different. He hopes they stay different. And when he’s done, he wipes his tears and waves Shane back over.

He takes his backpack off and pulls out a blanket, spreading it out on the forest floor in front of his mother’s grave. Irina takes a seat on it, and Ilya helps both Shane and a waking Misha out of the carrier contraption on Shane’s back. Once they’re all sitting on the blanket, Ilya

takes the food out of his backpack — bread with butter and caviar, small Tupperware containers of borscht, and an Olivier salad — food that, despite everything his motherland has put him through, reminded him of the good parts of it. Reminded him of his mother. They spend the rest of their daylight hours eating and talking and laughing and playing tag. Ilya is sitting next to his mom, watching with a smile on his face as Shane scoops up a giggling Irina while Misha chases them.

Then he turns to his mom's grave and whispers, "Ya tak schastliv, Mama. Nadeyus', ty tozhe. (*I am so happy, Mama. I hope you are, too.*)"

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