

Ilyusha

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Ilyusha

by [boysquipleurent](#)

Summary

Shane decides Ilya should also have a nickname.

Since it's Shane, this quickly becomes the language equivalent of "Started making it, had a breakdown, bon appétit!"

Notes

Disclaimers: I have only seen the show, have not yet read the books so the timeline is a little handwave-y. Let's just go with it's post-cottage, post-Ilya moving to Ottawa, pre-wedding, generally speaking.

I am also not a Russian speaker on any level, so please forgive any inaccuracies in logic or explanations. Not beta'ed, did proof this, but might have missed some mistakes here and there which I will fix when I inevitably find them immediately after posting.

I have always found Russian diminutives very sweet, and when I first started reading fics post-series, didn't see a lot using them, although now they seem to have proliferated! Also Shane's spiral over trying to find the correct one to use is actually just me crashing out when trying to look things up for this fic, so I decided to simply add it in since it seemed to fit our anxious boy. And it all went from there, as it tends to do.

Dialogue in italics is implied to be spoken in Russian.

Enjoy!

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

It starts with the movies.

Shane hasn't ever been close to what you could call a cinephile, even with the amount of movies he watches on planes while traveling. Outside of hockey films and documentaries and Rose's movies, he mostly watched what his teammates and friends or family wanted to watch or what people called "popcorn flicks." If asked to pick himself, he normally just said whatever was popular or that he'd last seen an advertisement for.

So trying to wade into Russian cinema was intimidating, to say the least.

Granted, Shane didn't really care about *cinema* per say. He'd just read about how watching and listening to media in whatever target language you were trying to learn could be really helpful, especially for listening comprehension. And since he was making pretty good progress with his Russian now, he'd thought it was a good idea to take it to the next level. And of course he tried to choose mainly Russian movies so that he could learn more about Russian culture as well as the language.

After the first few times Shane had tried to watch something with Ilya, though, he'd realized it would have to be a solo activity for him, at least for a while. Ilya teased Shane about his film choices relentlessly, mainly because they were mostly rom-coms. Shane attempted to defend himself by pointing out that they were easier to follow for him, which actually helped reinforce his Russian skills. Of course, Shane was used to Ilya's chirping, so he didn't actually mind it, but it was hard to focus when Ilya would heckle the TV constantly over the corniness. It was even harder when Ilya would get bored and start amusing himself with trying to get Shane's attention at any cost.

They had also tried some of Ilya's choices, of course. He'd tried to introduce Shane to what he called "classics," and Shane was sure actually were excellent. But those ones were often too advanced linguistically for Shane to keep up, and the more dramatic or experimental, the more Shane struggled to follow what was happening and what it all *meant*. Even switching from Russian to English subtitles didn't help him much, and kind of defeated the point.

So eventually Shane had accepted he needed to save his Russian movie studies for when he and Ilya were apart.

Shane is sure, later on, that the thing that grabs his attention *had* to have come up before. Somehow he hadn't noticed it much, probably too absorbed with concentrating on following along with the major points of a movie and recognizing vocabulary words he'd been studying. So maybe it's a sign that his Russian really is getting better when a character being called by a nickname catches Shane's attention. Or maybe all those "-cheek"s and "-ska"s have been building up in the background of his brain over time.

Not exactly a nickname, Shane learns later, at least not in the linguistics world. A "diminutive." Kind of like calling an Ann "Annie" or John "Johnny," but for some reason Shane finds the Russian diminutives so much more...charming when he looks at a list of common ones. He immediately wonders if there's one for Ilya. There must be right? With the

amount of pet names Ilya has for Shane (and how much Ilya loves when Shane speaks Russian), he really likes the idea of giving Ilya one of his own.

Before he looks it up, though, Shane grabs the most recent notebook he's been using since he should probably write all this down. In fact, he moves to the desk in the room, movie now forgotten, as he settles in and opens up his laptop to search up the diminutive for Ilya.

The first one appears immediately.

"Ilyusha."

Shane realizes he's smiling as he says it. It's cute, but still something he can imagine using on Ilya. He reads on, smile fading into a frown of concentration. The site says that it's something mainly family would use, especially a mom or grandmother. Would it be weird for him to use it, then? But then it does also say romantic partner... Hmm. Shane worries at his lip as he keeps reading, making notes as he goes.

There's "Ilyushen'ka," too. Shane likes that one as well, and they seem to be almost interchangeable. He clicks back and then on another link to a language forum. These are user-contributed answers, so he scrolls through the message boards. He notes that several of them stress that these aren't names you'd want to use on an adult around many other people, that they were sweet but slightly childish. And apparently *Ilyusha* and *Ilyushen'ka* weren't exactly interchangeable, either. Similar, but the latter was even more intimate than the first.

Then he sees "Ilyushka," too, which is closer to what he would have guessed at for a nickname before he started searching. But someone mentions that's almost a little scolding sounding? And then "Ilyu'kha" which he sees mentioned in a few places as more common among a man's friends and father. Shane wrinkles his nose a little at that. Anything associated with fathers in Russian Shane tries to stay away from. And they're definitely more than *friends* so that one's definitely out, even though he's still scribbling away at the notebook, writing down every little detail.

Unfortunately, in the case of things like these, more isn't always better. With every new site and comment Shane reads to try and clarify his understanding of which name he'd best use and when, he only starts to doubt himself more. He doesn't want to embarrass Ilya if they're not close enough for Shane to actually use the name (though of course he wasn't planning on using it in public). Even worse, he doesn't want to sound like a *mom*.

This ambiguity, the way the words can be used for more than one thing but it's all dependent on context...Shane really enjoys learning languages, but once he advances past the stages of verb conjugation and memorizing vocabulary, cases like these frustrate him. He just hates making mistakes, and it always seems like there's no way to avoid doing that when the rules around language lack clarity!

Of course, the easiest way to clear things up would be to ask a native speaker, but that's not an option considering Shane was kind of hoping to surprise Ilya with the nickname. Unless that's not a good idea either...

There is also, technically, Svetlana but Shane still hasn't spoken with her very much. He knows he should think of her as Ilya's Rose basically, but he hadn't even been with Rose long enough to so much as approach contemplating marriage. (Shane may or may not still be annoyed by that part of their couch conversation.) And Svetlana's intimidating, okay? He can't just text her out of the blue even if he does have her number now, especially not about this. Plus, he doesn't trust her to not immediately tell Ilya what he's up to.

So the Internet is all Shane's got right now.

At the end of his searching and ruminating, Shane's pages of notes are a mess, far more than his usual study habits. He frowns, then flips to a clean page and rewrites his notes in a much clearer and methodical way. Looking at them that way and comparing the most helpful of the sources he found...he settles on the original name he'd found as what he wants to try on Ilya: Илюша. *Ilyusha*.

He leaves his research there for the day, but it's never far from his mind. So Shane tackles the next step as soon as possible: pronunciation. He tries to it on his own at first, feeling secure enough in his knowledge of sounds in the Russian language that he probably can get it right.

...but probably isn't good enough. Shane soon resorts to the Internet again, scouring it for the best example audios he can find, and it turns out his instincts weren't too far off. More proof his studies are paying off maybe?

"Ilyusha. Ilyusha. Ilyusha. Iiiiiilyusha."

Shane does start to get a little silly with it when he's said the name so many times it starts to sound like gibberish, but he knows he has the proper way down. He'd somehow gotten over the embarrassment of hearing himself speak in order to record and play back his attempts until they matched the examples he'd been using.

Okay, so Shane's figured out the right name (he's pretty sure) and practiced it enough that he's (reasonably) confident Ilya won't laugh at his pronunciation on the spot. Now he has a new dilemma, though.

When does he try it?

Shane can't just...drop it on Ilya out of the blue. Okay, well, he *can*, obviously. Shane would actually love to see Ilya's expression if Shane just casually slipped it into conversation the way Ilya does with whatever new ridiculous word he's attaching to Shane.

He's become a little more self-aware than that, though. Unfortunately, as much as he wants to, Shane knows he's not nonchalant enough to pull that off. At least not with this. Everyone knows by now that Shane can't really do "casual" when it comes to anything about Ilya, but especially not this. Names have, of course, been pretty significant between them in their past, and things involving Russian always feel...weightier to Shane. And that was part of the reason why Shane felt like he had to get this as perfect as possible before he used it, even more so than his usual perfectionistic tendencies.

Or maybe he's just a big corny sap, which he has certainly been accused of before.

Shane decides to follow part of that idea to be somewhat casual about it, though, and tries to find a way to use it on just a normal day. He thinks about tacking it on to the end of something sweet as Ilya wraps around him from behind after they finish cleaning up from dinner. Or when Ilya comes to join Shane in bed for the evening and insistently gets in the way of Shane's reading until he gets a kiss. Or when Ilya jogs up to the cottage from a run with Anya, glistening with sweat and breathing a little heavier, radiant in the sun.

Each and every time, though, the word catches in Shane's throat and he hesitates, a little sliver of doubt clogging his vocal cords.

Is it really the right moment?

Shane *knows* there's no such thing as a perfect moment. He's worked through all kinds of magical thinking with his therapist at this point, yet he still finds himself looking for one. It frustrates Shane, that he logically knows something but can't force his brain into following along sometimes. His therapist would probably ask him, if he were to bring it up with her, what he's trying to protect. That's a big theme with Shane's withholding, he's come to learn.

And it's probably his progress in therapy that allows Shane to acknowledge, even for a second, that it's his own feelings getting hurt he's trying to prevent. He *knows* Ilya loves him, but even after all this time and work Shane's anxiety still skulks around, waiting for its next opportunity. And it is working hard to convince Shane that Ilya will be mad at him, will maybe even be hurt, if Shane misreads this. And then Shane will be hurt, even though it shouldn't be *about* him, and he'll think about it constantly even if Ilya says he's over it, and-

Shane does bring it up at his next appointment. And his therapist says she's proud of him for recognizing his own patterns, and that being frustrated is natural while he's still working on breaking cycles and learning how to use his grounding strategies. And that, for the record, she thinks Shane's plan is lovely and that Ilya will certainly appreciate it when Shane is ready to bring it up.

With his head back on straight, for the most part, Shane considers using it during less mundane opportunities next. After winning a game, or when they're alone in the hotel before one. But he still can't quite cross that threshold, his breath always catching in his throat.

Ilya definitely catches on to something being up a couple times, tilting his head or quirking a brow when Shane's mouth stays open but nothing comes out. Not necessarily the strangest occurrence with Shane, but he still feels stupid whenever Ilya comes close and asks if something is wrong with that gentle concern in his voice, smoothed with a playful kiss or tease. And every time Shane reassures him that no, nothing is wrong, or borrows a small worry to cover it up while appeasing his boyfriend.

It's getting too obvious, and Shane doesn't want to ruin the reveal with the pressure he's putting on his own self, so he tries to just...drop it for a while. Absurd that he feels like he's letting Ilya down somehow when Ilya doesn't even *know* what's happening, the things Shane

is cooking up inside his own head, and yet he feels it anyway.

Regardless, Shane forgets it for a little bit. Not totally, the name floating around in the back of Shane's head whenever Ilya looks particularly happy or mischievous or sleepy. And he never lets himself get out of practice with the pronunciation, toying with how it sounds every once in a while. But it remains unused for months, until Shane has a sponsorship shoot that takes him out of town for a bit. Ilya has to stay behind to take care of some things for the foundation, and that's also what keeps him from coming to pick Shane up at the airport when he finally gets back.

That's how Shane actually ends up beating Ilya back to the house. His parents have dropped him off and thankfully take the hint that he wants to spend his first night back with Ilya *alone*.

He's actually got his suitcase unpacked and everything put away, and he's waiting on the couch when Ilya finally manages to make it back after a snag that needed clearing up kept him longer than expected. It's the perfect position to see Ilya stop on a dime when he spots Shane already halfway to standing, the way Ilya's eyes light up and his shoulders sag with relief. They meet in the middle of the room, nearly crashing into each other in their hurry to hold each other again.

Shane lets Ilya take his weight, those strong arms wrapping around him tightly, always the perfect amount of pressure. Shane returns the hug, squeezing Ilya back as Shane presses his face into Ilya's shoulder and breathes him in. He can hear Ilya muttering in Russian between the kisses he's littering across Shane's hair and temple.

"Missed you, sunshine. Missed you. Missed you." Each murmur is punctuated with another kiss. Shane's hand drifts up and down Ilya's back, rubbing firmly. God, it's overwhelming how much he loves this man. Shane would never leave him if it were possible, whether that's healthy or not. How can he consider anything else when Ilya reciprocates his obsession?

Shane is overwhelmed with the force of the affection he has for this man, and he thinks later that it's that exact thing that leads the Russian words onto Shane's tongue with ease.

"I missed you, too, Ilyusha."

Ilya stills under Shane's hands. He doesn't let go of Shane, but his grip loosens so that Ilya can draw back a little to see Shane's face better. His expression looks purposefully neutral, his gaze boring into Shane.

"Who taught you this name?" Ilya asks slowly. Shane's grin starts to fade a little. Oh no. Had it been a bad idea to try this after all?

"...the internet? I mean, me? Like, I looked it up on the internet," Shane explains with a shrug. He tries to play it cool, but Shane is starting to squirm inside.

"Why?" Ilya asks. He still won't give Shane anything to go off as his face remains impassive.

“Why? I mean, I just started, like, noticing it in shows and movies and stuff. A-and, you’re always giving me nicknames!” Shane points out, sputtering a little as he tries to explain and worries that he’s somehow upset Ilya after all. “I just looked it up and I thought it...I dunno...” Shane’s voice starts to lose volume as his confidence flees. “...I just thought it would be...nice...to call you...” he mumbles.

Shane doesn’t even realize he’s dropped his gaze until Ilya is gently nudging his chin up with a finger. Some of the tension that had crept into Shane’s posture immediately disappears when he registers how much softer Ilya’s expression is.

“I am sorry. I did not mean to make you think I was upset with you.” Ilya leans in to give Shane a soft kiss, reminiscent of the one from that first lunch with his parents where Shane was starting to melt down.

“Are you, though?” Shane asks after the kiss, not exactly anxious now, but still needing to know. “Did me calling you *Il-* ...that, bother you?” Ilya immediately shakes his head, but he looks hesitant even while he says “no.”

Shane stays quiet for a moment, searching Ilya’s now conflicted-looking expression.

“Maybe we should sit down?” Shane suggests quietly, and they do. They stay close, hands linked, and Shane rubs his thumb over Ilya’s knuckles. He’s not sure if this is an “Ilya needs a moment to collect his thoughts in English” situation or an “Ilya doesn’t want to talk about it and Shane might be able to wait him out” situation.

“It’s okay if you didn’t like it,” he eventually murmurs, because it’s true, and he wants Ilya to know it. “I won’t use it again.”

“No, that’s not-“ Ilya starts, immediately turning to look at Shane in distress. He starts to explain, but then stops. He glances away again, almost like he’s...embarrassed? Shane squeezes Ilya’s hand in encouragement. And with a little patience, Ilya does slowly turn back to Shane, although he’s the one still avoiding direct eye contact for once.

“Was just surprised. I thought at first, maybe you were...making fun,” Ilya admits.

“Of you?” Shane asks, immediately alarmed and concerned. He presses a hand to Ilya’s cheek, and Ilya gives him what passes for sheepish on the Russian man’s face.

“I should have known you would not do something like this...” he mumbles before Shane can say that exact thing. Shane shakes his head for extra emphasis.

“No, not about something like this,” Shane agrees. He presses a soft kiss to Ilya’s lips, and his boyfriend’s eyes are finally back on him again when Shane pulls back. The look in them makes Shane’s stomach do something undignified and fluttery.

“Always so sweet to me,” Ilya murmurs, and Shane gives a soft huff.

“I wouldn’t say always...” he replies, a grin forming. Now that they’ve settled again, though,

Shane needs to know.

“So...should I not call you that again? Or is it okay?” he asks, voice gentle. Ilya seems caught off guard again, and his lips part.

“I...I have not heard that name in a long time,” Ilya finally says. It’s rare to see Ilya so indecisive, but Shane is actually a little glad to see that look on his face. It feels like one of the few opportunities he gets where he can be the one to take care of Ilya.

“Do you want me to say it again?” Shane asks. Both hands cup Ilya’s cheeks now, but he doesn’t force the man to look at him, patiently waiting and watching Ilya’s eyes slide from one side to the other before glancing back to Shane hesitantly. After a moment, he nods.

Shane feels that absolute *fondness* wash over him again and leans into that feeling as he rests their foreheads together, gazes locked, and murmurs to his beloved.

“*My Ilyusha.*”

Shane catches the sound of a soft gasp and Ilya starts blinking rapidly. After a second, he clears his throat and nods.

“*Da.* I like it. From you. Is good.”

“Yeah?”

“Very much.”

Shane feels himself break out into a smile.

“Okay then. *Ilyusha* it is.”

He thumbs away a bit of moisture clinging to Ilya’s lower lashes and presses a kiss to his cheek. It’s warm under his lips, and when Shane pulls away, his smile gets bigger as he takes in Ilya’s face.

“What is it that you’re always saying about Russians and blushing?”

“Shut up,” Ilya bites out immediately, without any heat. “Is true,” he insists. The ruddy flush to Ilya’s face, as subtle as it might be, would beg to differ.

Shane’s smile tugs a little higher on one side as he leans back in, eyes still locked on Ilya’s and his thumb still stroking over Ilya’s warm cheek. He keeps his murmur low, private, but can’t quite keep the chuckle in as he chides his boyfriend.

“*Don’t lie, Ilyusha.*”

Shane immediately catches the way Ilya’s breath hitches at the new tone Shane uses when deploying the nickname this time. Ilya’s grip on Shane’s wrist tightens a little and Shane’s

smile is teetering dangerously close to becoming a smirk.

“You are menace, Hollander,” Ilya breathes, though he sounds more awe-struck than anything. His pupils look a little more dilated than they were just a second ago, too.

Yeah, Shane is absolutely going to abuse this new power.

“I distinctly remember you saying something about how you liked trouble. Always dishing it out, yet can’t take it, hm?” he chuckles, pressing a sweet kiss to Ilya’s lips. Ilya seems to come back to earth a little with the gentle needling and he growls playfully.

“I’ll show you about ‘taking it’!”

Ilya’s eyes narrow and Shane braces for impact. He’s laughing even before Ilya actually tackles Shane to the couch and tries to bite him.

And that night, Shane makes sure that *Ilyusha* is the last thing Ilya hears before they fall asleep, and the first thing that greets him when they wake up, that day and all the ones after it.

End Notes

I don't think I've written a fic this wholesome in eons.

Hope you enjoyed, any thoughts at all are welcomed!

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