

If only you knew how dear to me The evenings near Moscow are (Если б знали вы, как мне дороги Подмосковные вечера)

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by [Tabitha_Hess](#)

Summary

Shane secretly learns Russian and plans an elaborate surprise for Ilya after realizing that even painful homes can leave behind things worth missing. With help from friends, he recreates a piece of Ilya's childhood and honors his late mother on her name day through food, language, and quiet remembrance.

Notes

As an immigrant in a relationship with someone from this country, I really wanted to see more of Shane incorporating Russian traditions in small or not-so-small ways. If anyone has an Idea how to format this better, it will be greatly appreciated. :)

Shane had been on edge lately.

Keeping a secret from Ilya was bad enough. Keeping a secret when you were a terrible liar? A personal hell. He'd been sneaking around, taking strange phone calls, disappearing at odd hours, by his own honest assessment-acting weird as hell. Of course, Ilya noticed.

The first few times, he asked. Gently. And Shane, faced with those observant eyes and that calm voice, practically imploded trying to talk himself out of it. Eventually, Ilya let it go. He trusted Shane. Still, the unease lingered.

Shane had good reason for the secrecy.
It started with Rose.

They were talking about Shane and Ilya-about them-when Rose asked, casually, "Do you think he ever gets homesick?"

Shane froze.

Homesick?

The thought had never crossed his mind. Why would Ilya miss Russia? His home there was broken, full of shouting and bruises and things best left behind. Ottawa was better. Here, people loved him. Their neighbors were amazing. Russia was everything Ilya hated about himself. He'd even talked about ditching his Russian citizenship.

Rose stared at him, then laughed-really laughed.

"Oh, Shane," she said fondly. "You lovable idiot."

She explained that no, Ilya probably didn't miss being yelled at or punched by his father. But he might miss his mother's cake. The song that played when he won his first game. Playing outside with his friends until it got dark, and they had to be called home. The smell of roses in the garden. Russian wordplay that couldn't exist in English.

"He can miss a thousand little things," Rose said gently, "and still be happy with the bigger picture."

The realization hit Shane hard.

He felt ashamed. He complained about not having ginger ale on the road, or about ketchup chips being impossible to find-but Ilya probably felt that ache constantly.

Great. Worst boyfriend in the world.

Rose tried to reassure him, but Shane Hollander didn't sit with problems. He fixed them.

Within minutes, he was brainstorming, Googling Russian stores, cultural traditions, and language classes. He was going to fix this. He was going to make Ilya happy.

Rose loved seeing Shane like this-laser-focused, wildly determined. She hooked him up with an accent coach she knew from an old film project, and together they made a plan.

A ridiculous plan.

Shane would learn Russian in six months while playing professional hockey-and keep it a secret from Ilya.

Shane was a perfectionist. And maybe a little obsessive.

He dove in headfirst.

Russian music played constantly. Audiobooks filled his downtime. Flashcards haunted every free minute. His teammates noticed but said nothing. Harris helped him study. That was it. Five months later, Shane was proud of himself.

He wasn't fluent, but he could hold a conversation. He'd memorized a few terrible jokes. Some sweet phrases Ilya had taught him without realizing Shane understood. Others he'd picked up from listening.

He felt ready.

Then came May 5th.

Saint Irene's Day. Ilya's mother's name day.

Name days weren't a thing in Canada, but after frantic Googling with Rose, Shane decided to combine traditions. It felt right. Also terrifying.

Now that the day was here, Shane was second-guessing everything.

Should he have asked Ilya first? What if this was too much? What if Ilya hated it?

Panicking, Shane called Rose while setting up the house. Harris was keeping Ilya busy.

Rose listened patiently, talked him down, reminded him why he was doing this-and promised that if everything went wrong, they could blame her.

Bolstered, Shane went all in.

With help from Svetlana-God bless her-he found a picture of Ilya's mother, Irene. Russian moms from a tiny grocery store helped him prepare a proper spread: Olivier salad, pelmeni, pirozhki, solyanka ("childhood," they promised), and a beautiful medovik cake.

He set the table for three. One place held a shot of vodka with black bread. Cabbage roses decorated the table. And for Ilya, a small plaque with his mother's name-something he could place at the Orthodox cemetery, if he wanted.

When everything was ready, Shane took Anya for a walk to calm his nerves. Harris texted back a string of excited emojis.

Then Shane waited.

Ilya came home not long after. He kicked off his shoes, shrugged out of his jacket-and froze. A familiar smell wrapped around him, sharp and sudden, pulling him back through time.

"Shane?" he called, confused.

Shane stepped out of the kitchen, smiling nervously.

"Dobro pozhalovat' domoy, moya lyubov'," he said carefully. "Ya prigotovil dlya tebya syurpriz." (Welcome home, my love, I have a surprise for you.)

Ilya blinked-then smiled wider.

"Oho," he teased softly. "Kak ofitsial'no." (oh how formal)

Shane flushed. "Poydyom na kukhnyu-uzhin gotov." (Let's go to the kitchen-dinner is ready.)

They walked together. Ilya stopped dead at the sight of the table.

"Izвини," Shane rushed, suddenly nervous again. "Yesli eto slishkom..." He hesitated.

"Slishkom mnogo." (Sorry if this is too... Too much.)

“Prosto slishkom,” Ilya corrected gently. (It's just slishkom)

“Slishkom,” Shane repeated, nodding.

“You made this for me?” Ilya whispered.

“Konechno,” Shane said quickly. “Ya vse eto sdel-” He stopped. “Sdelala-” (Of course, I did it all.)

“Sdelal,” Ilya said, smiling. “Ty zhe muzhchina.” (Sdelal, You're a man)

“Sdelal,” Shane said, pointing at himself. “Bol'shoy muzhchina.” (Sdelal, A big man)

Ilya laughed and kissed his cheek.

They sat. Shane explained the food haltingly, pausing to search for words.

“Ya eto gotovil ne odin... zhenshchiny iz magazina pomog-” (I didn't cook this alone... the women from the store help-)

“Pomogli.” (Helped)

“Pomogli,” Shane echoed. “Oni skazali, chto budet vkusno dlya-” He winced. “Dlya my?”

(Helped,” Shane echoed. “They said it would be good for” He winced. “For we?)

“Dlya nas.” (For us)

“Dlya nas,” Shane said, sighing. “Russkiy yazyk-zhestokiy.” (For us, Russian-cruel language)

“No krasivyy,” Ilya said softly. (but Beautiful)

“Krasivyy,” Shane agreed, meeting his eyes. “Kak ty.” (Beautiful, like you)

The food was incredible. They ate in comfortable silence until Shane spoke again.

“Segodnya pyatoye maya. Den' svyatoy Iriny,” he said, glancing at the photo. “Eto imeninnyy den' tvoyey mamy.” (Today is the fifth of May, Saint Irina's day. It's your mother's name day.)

Ilya's eyes filled with tears.

“Ona by tebya ochen' polyubila,” he whispered. (She would have loved you very much)

Later, over dessert, Ilya smiled mischievously. “Znachit, segodnya tol'ko po-russki?” (So... today, only Russian?)

“Tol'ko po-russki,” Shane agreed. “No medlenno. Pozhaluysta.” (Only Russian, but slowly. Please.)

“Dogovorilis'.” (Deal)

When Ilya asked how the idea came to him, Shane answered more smoothly now, his Russian flowing with fewer pauses.

“My s Rouz govorili... i ona skazala, chto tebe, mozhet byt', ne khvataet chego-to iz Rossii. I ya podumal-ya khochu byt' luchshe dlya tebya. Ne potomu chto nado. Potomu chto ya khochu.” (Rose and I talked... and she said that maybe you miss something from Russia.

And I thought-I want to be better for you. Not because I have to. Because I want to)

“You don't need to change,” Ilya said softly.

“I know,” Shane replied. “No ya khochu rasti. S toboy.” (But I want to grow. With you)

Finally, Shane brought out the small box.

“I know ty ne religioznyy,” he said, voice shaking, “no ya podumal... chtoby pamyat' o tvoyey mame byla zdes'. Chtoby ty mog prikhodit' k-” He stopped. (I know you're not religious, but I thought... so that your mother's memory could be here. So that you could come to)

“Prosto syuda,” Ilya whispered. (Just here,)

“Syuda,” Shane said. “Da. Syuda.” (Here. Yes. Here)

Ilya stood and kissed him-deep, emotional, overwhelming.

“Spasibo tebe,” Ilya said through tears. “Za segodnyashniy den’. Za tvoyu lyubov’. Za moyu mamu. Za budushcheye, kotoroye my postroim vmeste.” (Thank you. For today. For your love. For my mother. For the future we’ll build together.)

“I’ll always love you,” Shane said, breathless.

Ilya smiled, brushing his thumb over Shane’s cheek. “Ty tak khorosho spravilsya, kotyonok. Khochesh’ svoyu nagradu?” (You did so well, kitten. Want your reward?)

Shane nodded-no Russian needed-as Ilya took his hand and led him upstairs.

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