

The Food of Love

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/75754566) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/75754566>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandoms:	Heated Rivalry (TV) , Game Changers Series - Rachel Reid
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Yuna Hollander , Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Food as a Metaphor for Love , References to Depression , Dumb Hockey Boys
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-14 Words: 1,433 Chapters: 1/1

The Food of Love

by [lately](#)

Summary

Ilya gets a surprise.

Notes

This has some minor spoilers for The Long Game.

With thanks to smugrobotics for midwifing this fic, and hoko_onchi, toomuchplor and someoldcircuit for beta. Any remaining mistakes, especially with the Russian, are my own.

Ilya opened the door to Shane's house quietly, and toed off his shoes. He could hear voices coming from the kitchen: Shane and Yuna. It meant he wouldn't get his dick sucked before dinner, but also that there might be edible food available. His keys dangled from one finger as he took in the view, the twin dark heads of Yuna and Shane bent together over the kitchen counter. The kitchen smelled of onions and meat. A line of finished dumplings lay beside them. Ilya swung his keys round his finger so they jingled, and cleared his throat.

Mother and son both turned, Shane's expression going from shock to delight to panic as Ilya watched. He grinned, swung his keys round again. "Ilya! What are you doing here?"

"Surprise," Ilya replied, opening his arms to catch Shane as he flung himself at Ilya.

"I thought you were coming tomorrow," Shane murmured between quick kisses.

"Today is better, no?"

"I wanted to surprise you," Shane retorted, and Ilya tilted his head to look past Shane at where Yuna stood smiling at them both.

Ilya closed his eyes, and resisted the temptation to open his mouth wide. "Give me a surprise, then."

Shane blew out a breath in exasperation as Yuna laughed, the sound muffled like she was covering her mouth. "He's been trying to surprise you for weeks now, Ilya." Ilya opened one eye, and Shane immediately looked away. Ilya caught his chin with his fingers, drawing his gaze back.

"What surprise, Shane?"

Shane closed his eyes and sighed. "Look, you know how Davidov joined the team back in October?"

"Yes, Davidov," Ilya agreed, though all he could remember about him was *rookie* and *from Krasnoyarsk*.

Shane dragged his hand up the back of his head, ruffling his hair, then crossed his arms, fidgeting. "Well, his mom has been visiting, and he was telling us about her cooking, and I thought--I thought maybe you might like to have some Russian food, maybe? It was supposed to be a surprise."

Ilya looked past Shane to the row of what he could now see were clearly pelmeni on the counter. They were imperfect and beautiful.

Even at the beginning, Ilya rarely got homesick. Not that America was *all that*, but there was little enough to miss about Russia; it all revolved around his father and brother and their demands on his money and attention. Still, there were moments when America was just too... American. And that's when he followed Lavrov's tip and went to the Russian grocery store in Allston.

The frozen pelmeni they stocked had very little of his grandmother's pelmeni about them, the industrial process stripping out her particular way of crimping them shut, the thinness of her dough, how she always caramelised the onions before adding them to the filling. They didn't have the particular burnt radiator smell of her apartment, nor the soft murmurings of his mother and grandmother saying nothing particular as they worked together in that kitchen, talking in that lilt of his homeland. But even industrial pelmeni was still something, like a shadow of the thing he remembered, the aftertaste of a dream.

Abruptly it felt like a puck was stuck in his throat, and he didn't know whether he wanted to cry or vomit. He swallowed and swallowed again.

"I am surprised," he said, when he found his voice again. It didn't sound quite right, but the words were in English so he considered it a victory. "Thank you, *moy dorogoy*, thank you Yuna."

Shane looked so relieved, Ilya almost laughed, but the tightness in his throat had moved down into his chest and he—he needed a minute. "I forgot. Phone. Car." He fumbled his shoes back on and as soon as he hit the driveway outside he was running.

It was hard to get a full breath, with the weight in his chest, but he ran down to the corner and then back again, crouching down beside his car as his quick breaths became hiccups he swallowed, his eyes swimming.

His stupid wonderful boyfriend who wouldn't eat anything that tasted of anything was in his kitchen making pelmeni for Ilya. And his mother-in-law (?) was helping. He hiccup-laughed and swiped at his eyes. It was a nice fucking thing to do and Ilya was hiding outside between a snow bank and his car and crying about it.

Galina would definitely have something to say about that.

"Ilya?"

Shane didn't know it had been more than half a lifetime since the last time Ilya'd had homemade pelmeni. Well, he might have guessed that it wouldn't have been Andrei or his father who made them, but Ilya hadn't told him about his grandmother, or about what making food meant to her.

"His car's still here," Shane called out. "But I don't see him."

Ilya wiped the back of his hand over his eyes, then under his nose and slowly stood up. "Here, I'm here." His voice was all fucked up, and he coughed twice, trying to loosen the knot in his chest, his throat.

Shane took one look at him and stepped outside, closing the door behind him. He crossed his arms over his chest, hunching his shoulders against the cold.

"Are you okay?"

He wanted to say *yes of course* like a normal person, but Ilya wasn't a normal person. He was a depressed person who kept dreaming about his dead mother while hiding the best thing in his life.

"Thank you, Shane," is what he said instead, forcing himself to come round the car and get close enough to touch his thumb to Shane's bottom lip.

"I just figured," Shane said, a bit distractedly. "You don't cook much and my mom said she could help and—"

"You have to try," Ilya interrupted. "Won't be as good as my babushka made, but if Yuna helped, am sure will be delicious."

He didn't wait for Shane's protest or his agreement but kissed him instead, cradling Shane's face with his palms. He kissed the memory of his grandmother and mother in that dimly-lit Soviet flat into Shane's mouth, kissed his love and gratitude and sadness until he found he was crying a little again. Just two tears, but they ran down his cheeks to his mouth and he kissed the salt against Shane's lips too. He would have to tell Shane about that apartment, someday.

"Ilya," Shane said, very quietly, when they had their foreheads pressed together, sharing breath. "I didn't mean to upset you. I thought it would be a nice surprise."

"If you love me," murmured Ilya, lacing their fingers together. "You will eat pelmeni with me and Yuna."

Shane huffed and tried to pull away, but Ilya held him close. "But I made them for you--"

"If you do not want to disgrace Mother Russia," Ilya continued, warming to the subject. "And insult my homeland, you will eat pelmeni with me."

By now, Shane was laughing a little and Ilya could feel the corners of his mouth rising to match.

"Do you want to be banished to Siberia, Shane? Go to Krasnoyarsk and see where Davidov is from? You must eat pelmeni, or you will dishonour Mother Russia and your own mother."

Shane was laughing enough now that Ilya couldn't help his grin as he held Shane close. "Tell me the truth, Yuna did everything?"

"Not everything!" Shane protested. "I did--half."

Ilya gave him a look.

"Okay, like 30 percent. But it was my idea!"

"You will disgrace--"

"Okay, okay, I'll eat pelmeni," Shane said, pronouncing the word not quite right, but close. "I won't dishonour Mother Russia, et cetera et cetera," He said the etceteras like that, *et cetera*,

and Ilya snorted, tucking his nose into the side of Shane's neck.

"Good," he said against Shane's skin, and he realised that it was good. It was good that his boyfriend and his mother-in-law (?) had made Ilya Russian food. It was good that they were going to eat it all together. It was even good that Ilya missed his babushka and her apartment and the quiet time with her and his mother, with Andrei out with their father leaving them in peace. It was good because it was love, all of it.

Maybe Ilya didn't miss Russia, exactly. Maybe he missed his grandmother's pelmeni, his mother, *upokoy yeyo Gospod'*, but he had Shane, and he had Yuna and David, and he had his team, and that could be enough. Especially if he could have pelmeni now and then that didn't come from a plastic bag.

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