

love is stored in the pelmeni

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love is stored in the pelmeni

by Anonymous

Summary

“It is the worst day of my life,” Ilya declares, throwing himself dramatically onto one of the kitchen stools. “I went to go get lunch at Russian place I like, the one with lamb pelmeni? They had sign on the door. They are closing. Forever.”

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Or: Ilya’s favorite Russian restaurant in Ottawa is going out of business. There is only one thing Shane “Mr. Real Estate” Hollander can do.

Notes

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

Shane takes one look at Ilya as he slumps through the doorway like a slug with a hockey bag and says, “Okay, what happened?”

Ilya pouts with the full force of his plush pink lips and big blue eyes. It’s criminal, that Ilya is allowed to yield these weapons of mass destruction without a government permit. “It is the worst day of my life,” he declares, throwing himself dramatically onto one of the kitchen stools.

Shane raises an eyebrow and waves a spatula in the air, a silent *go on*. He’s making vegetable soup, or trying to, anyway. He cut up the potatoes unevenly and now half of them are little white rocks, the other half turning to mush. “Was it something about the meeting with Wiebe?”

“No,” Ilya tells their marble countertops morosely. “Meeting was fine. It was after. I went to go get lunch at Russian place I like, with the lamb pelmeni, and they had sign on the door. They are closing.”

Shane stirs his soup. Now the carrots are dissolving. Great. “What, like for a holiday or something?”

“No,” Ilya sighs. “Forever. This month is their last month in business.”

Shane sets down the spatula. “Shit. Did they say why?”

Ilya shrugs. “I ask at counter, girl says they cannot afford the place anymore, and I guess nobody wants to take it over. Masha was not there, I cannot ask what her plan is.”

Masha was one of the first people Ilya met in Ottawa who could speak Russian. Shane remembers the first time Ilya went to her restaurant and tried the pelmeni; he gushed about them over FaceTime for at least five minutes before Shane managed to turn the conversation back around to phone sex.

“I’m sorry,” Shane says. “That fucking sucks.”

Ilya sighs again, but offers Shane a small smile, too. “Is fine. I am being dramatic. We will just have to eat there a lot this month, I guess. Until I get sick of it.”

Outwardly, Shane presses a kiss to the top of Ilya’s head and agrees. Internally, he’s already planning. Because Ilya has already given up a lot of his home culture—when he and Shane came out and Ilya knew it meant he could never go home to Russia again; when he moved from Boston, which at least had a small expat community with a few Russian restaurants and grocery stores, to Ottawa, with its singular Eastern European market in an old strip mall and this one little Russian lunch spot. Ilya had sighed and griped but he had adapted, because he loved Shane, because he was willing to give these things up for him. Shane loved him for it. It also sometimes made him so sad his chest hurt.

Mr. Real Estate, Ilya had used to call Shane. *Mr. Landlord*. Maybe it was time to add *Mr. Business Owner* to that list.

It's all very easy, once Shane gets his mother involved.

The restaurant is little more than a hole in the wall, and the asking price isn't high. Most of Shane's money is tied up in investments, but he has a few stocks that he's been meaning to cash in on anyway, and the proceeds are enough to cover the purchase. The whole thing is done through agents, very quickly, so Shane doesn't actually sit down and talk to the owners themselves until the day of the final paper signing.

Shane had sold Ilya a white lie about going with his mother to look at tile samples, which made Ilya roll his eyes so hard they almost popped out of his head and as a bonus, offers a good excuse for Yuna to be unreachable for the morning. She sits next to Shane at the table in the meeting room they'd signed out for the morning at the bank, and she's the first to rise and shake the former owners' hands.

It's Masha, of course, and her husband, Nikolai, hunched over his walker. Shane's never met him before—he always seems to be stuck at home with a cold when Shane swings by the restaurant for takeout—and he shakes his hand first, leathery and thin in the way of old people's hands. When he steps over to shake Masha's hand, too, her eyes widen in recognition.

“But I know you! You're Ilya's boy!” she says, and Shane smiles. There are a lot of great things about being out; getting to be known for his association with Ilya is one of them.

“He was very upset when he heard you were closing,” Shane tells her. “I think if he had to live without your pelmeni, he'd leave me and move back to Moscow.”

Masha smacks his arm, lightly, but she's laughing, clearly flattered. “You charmer,” she says. “Where is he, then?”

“Ah.” Shane ducks his gaze. “He doesn't actually know about this. It's a secret. Just until the deal goes through.” He'd thought about telling Ilya earlier, but he didn't want to risk things falling through and Ilya dealing with disappointment all over again. Better to be sure.

“Oh, so romantic!” Masha pinches his cheek. It's been a long time since anyone has pinched his cheek. Shane keeps smiling. “Don't worry, I can keep good secret. My father's brother was royalist and my father was Bolshevik. In my family, nobody tells each other anything!”

The paperwork goes quick. The lawyers say it'll take about a week for everything to be finalized. In one week, Shane will be a bonafide business owner. It's a crazy thought.

Afterwards, Masha insists everyone comes back to the restaurant for lunch. “Our treat,” she insists.

The invitation is not just for his sake, Shane realizes quickly: Masha has lots of questions to ask. What changes they want to make to the restaurant, whether they plan to bring in more waitstaff or fire any of the existing ones, if they want to alter the menu. Shane tells her he pretty much wants the place to run exactly as it's currently running, with her at the helm as

always. It's not until the busboy is hauling plates back to the kitchen that Shane's eye catches on something hanging on the wall and he gets an idea.

"Actually," he says, nodding at the signed picture of Ilya that Masha has hung in the corner by the ancient TV. "There is one thing I'd like to change."

The picture gets new place of pride right next to the cash register. Yuna takes a photo of Shane with it, which Shane debates sending to Ilya, but in the end he just sends it to his dad, who responds with a string of thumbs ups and *so we get a friend's and family discount now, right?*

"You're smiling very big," Ilya says suspiciously, when Shane finally gets home, a good two hours after he said he would. "Was the tile that exciting?"

Shane plucks the video game controller out of Ilya's hands, ignoring his faint squawk of protest, and settles himself over Ilya's lap. He wraps his arms around Ilya's shoulders, feels Ilya's grip, tight and lovely, on his ass. "You have no idea."

It's three days before Ilya goes to visit the restaurant for lunch again. Shane doesn't know he's gone until he comes barging into the house with such vigor he almost busts the drywall with the doorknob. "Hey," Shane says, idly chiding, but Ilya doesn't even appear to hear him.

"This is the best day of my life," Ilya declares. Shane raises an eyebrow and he hastily amends, "Aside from the day we got married. And the day I fucked you for the first time. And every other day I've ever fucked you. But other than that!"

Shane turns back to his laptop to hide his smile. "Well, I hope it's not a great day because you fucked some other young hot thing."

Ilya snorts. "Yes, I did Haasy in the showers, he kept moaning in German, it was very disconcerting. No, listen—the Russian place is not closing after all!"

How would Shane feel about this, if it was actually news to him? He'd care, but not that much, right? "Oh, really?" he says without looking away from his computer. "That's good. What happened?"

He nearly cringes at his own tone. *Oh, really?* No wonder Ilya has always called him such a bad liar. But Ilya is so high on excitement he doesn't appear to notice, bouncing to the fridge like he's on a corkscrew to pull out a can of Coke.

"They found new owners," Ilya says. "And I know what you think, you think, *they are going to change the place, Ilya, they are going to change the menu*, but they didn't change anything at all! Masha was at the counter today and she told me that the owner said he wanted to preserve it just as it is. It's perfect!"

"I'm happy for you," Shane says, and Ilya grins and smacks a kiss on his cheek.

“Thank you, my little rabbit. Maybe we go for dinner this weekend, to celebrate? I bet we could convince Masha to join us. She would help with your Russian.”

“You mean she’d tell me how horrible my Russian is,” Shane counters, but when Ilya hooks his chin over Shane’s shoulder, one hand sliding slowly down Shane’s chest, he obediently snaps his laptop closed.

“Just one little meal,” Ilya wheedles. “Lots of shashlik, you can eat a big bowl of borscht to satisfy your rabbit food diet. We can even order the mushroom pelmeni instead of the lamb.”

Shane sighs. He had been planning on waiting to visit in-person until after the sale was finalized and he had fessed up his involvement to Ilya, but... “You’re dangerous.”

He can feel Ilya’s grin against his shoulder. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

—

Shane doesn’t recognize the girl behind the counter when they walk in the door, which is good—if she doesn’t recognize him, she can’t give him away. She starts chatting away with Ilya right away, their Russian easy and natural to Shane’s ears, though when she ducks away Ilya leans in and confides to him, “She has a terribly thick Canadian accent.”

“Really?”

Ilya nods, emptying a sugar packet into his water glass as Shane flips his menu open. He always gets the same thing, but it never hurts to look again. “She is third generation. Masha is the one who moved here, after the Soviets turned on her family. They had royalist connections, an uncle, or something.”

Shane suppresses a smile. “You don’t say.”

“Mmm.” More sugar in the water. Such a man-child. “Anyway, she has never been to Russia, only Ukraine, and only once for short visit. Masha complains all the time about her accent, how she can barely understand her.”

“Can you understand her?”

Ilya tilts his head. “Well, *da*. But I have lots of practice listening to you.”

Shane throws a sugar packet at him. Ilya just laughs and adds it into his cup.

Things start to go wrong when someone shows up to take their order and it’s not the girl from behind the counter: it’s Masha. She’s wearing a brand-new apron Shane has never seen her with before and she bustles straight over to Ilya, kissing him on both of his cheeks and chattering away in Russian too fast-paced for him to understand. Then she turns to Shane. “And our new favorite visitor,” she says, kissing his cheek, too.

Shane averts his gaze from Ilya, whose eyebrows have shot up. “Um, hello, yes. How are you?”

“Better than ever, thanks to you!” Masha says. “What, who gave you menus, put away menus, I know what you like! Will be out quick, okay?” And she’s off again.

Shane studiously avoids Ilya’s gaze, but eventually Ilya says, “New favorite visitor?”

“I came in last week,” Shane hedges, which isn’t a lie. “Masha was here.” Also true. “We ate lunch together.” Wow, he is doing really good at this avoiding lying thing.

“You ate lunch with Masha? She has never eaten lunch with me.”

“Yeah, well, she must just like me more than you.”

Ilya hums, but he’s got that look in his eye, now. Shane is doomed, but he tries to play it off anyway, because he’s never been an easy loser. They chat idly about the newest rookie prospect, a pickup from the University of Michigan who plays right defense, and eventually, the girl from the counter appears again, her arms piled high with plates of pelmeni.

Masha definitely understands the appetite of her most famous customer. “These are mushroom,” the girl says, carefully placing a singular green plate in front of Shane, “And the rest are lamb,” handing three red platters of dumplings to Ilya. “And my grandmother told me to just let her know if you want more. She said, uh—” She pauses as if she’s remembering something. “You can’t eat her out of house and home now that you own the restaurant, so go crazy. I think that’s the closest translation. Um, all good here, then?”

Shane flashes her a despairing thumbs up and she goes. He fixes his gaze on his plate and eats a pelmeni. Then he eats another one.

“Shane,” Ilya says.

“They’re extra good today,” Shane says, stuffing another one in his mouth.

“Shane,” Ilya says again. “Why did Kim just say that you own the restaurant?”

Kim. That’s her name. Now that Shane thinks about it, Masha definitely mentioned having a granddaughter named Kim. “Must be confused,” Shane says around a mouthful of dough.

Ilya just looks at him.

Shane swallows hard and the pelmeni almost gets stuck in his throat. He gulps down water, but when he puts down his glass, Ilya is still looking at him. No escape now. “Um. Well. I may have, uh, bought the restaurant.”

“You bought the restaurant,” Ilya repeats. “For me?”

“It’s not just for you,” Shane says. “I would be pretty sad if you left me and moved to Ukraine. Also, it’s a good business opportunity. The food is great and the overhead costs are super low, they just need someone come in and improve the marketing side of things. A few Instagram photos, maybe a TikTok showing the local NHL team likes it here...”

Shane trails off. Ilya's looking at him with that particular gleam in his eye that means he's about to make fun of Shane spectacularly.

"Go on," Shane sighs. "Say it."

"I love you so much I sometimes think it might actually kill me," Ilya says.

Shane blinks. "Oh. Well, yeah. Ditto."

Ditto, Ilya mouths, gleefully.

Shane flushes, smacking Ilya on the shoulder. "Shut up. Come on, what am I supposed to say when you get all romantic like that?"

Ilya shrugs. "I don't know, maybe offer to buy me another restaurant. That was pretty romantic."

Shane rolls his eyes. "You're spoiled," he says, which isn't true at all, and also is the most true thing in the world.

Ilya's hand sneaks onto Shane's knee below the table. "Yes," he agrees. "You spoil me."

His hand is working steadily upwards on Shane's leg, now. Shane stomps on his foot before he can go any farther. "I am not letting you jerk me off at the *restaurant I just bought*," Shane hisses over the table, and Ilya pouts.

Then a thought seems to occur to him, and he brightens. "Does this mean we can eat pelmeni every night for dinner?"

—

At the end of their meal, Ilya ducks away to the bathroom and Shane heads up to the till. Masha, perched on the stool behind the counter, grins when she sees him.

"You do not have to pay here, you know," she says.

Shane doesn't even dignify that with a response. "What happened to 'I can keep a secret'?"

Masha laughs. "Ah, ah, ah! You Canadian boys, so innocent. I said I *can* keep secret. I never said I *would* keep it! You have to listen carefully to people. This is what you learn in political family! My uncle was royalist, you know."

Shane sighs. No wonder Ilya loves her. These fucking sneaks. "Yeah," he says. "I've heard."

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SHANE HOLLANDER SAVES LOCAL RUSSIAN EATERY: EXCLUSIVE

By William Sanderby, pub. June 3rd, 2023, 11:16 a.m.

How far would you go for love? Ottawa Centaurs' center Shane Hollander would go as far as to buy a failing restaurant in downtown Ottawa. In fact, that's just what he did when last month he acquired an ownership stake in local Russian eatery *Masha's*, previously owned by Nikolai Sorokin and namesake Maria "Masha" Khorkina since they immigrated to Canada in 1983.

"The restaurant was their whole life," says Kim Sorokin, the couple's granddaughter and a part-time cashier at the establishment who is currently obtaining her bachelor's degree at Carleton University. "They loved working there. But they've been getting older, and costs have been rising, and they just couldn't keep up with it."

In fact, as recently as a month ago, *Masha's* was preparing to close its doors. A Twitter photo dated May 5th shows a green flyer posted on the restaurant's front window, declaring their last day in business would be May 31st.

Then Hollander stepped in. He heard news of the closure from his husband, Centaurs' captain Ilya Rozanov, who saw the sign during a lunchtime visit. "He loves *Masha's*," Shane says. "It's the only place he can get pelmeni just how he likes them." Pelmeni are a type of Eastern European dumpling and are *Masha's* signature dish.

What's an NHL player to do to keep his husband happy? Hollander bought the joint. The flyer was removed from the window and *Masha's* chugged along as if nothing had happened. Hollander didn't ask for anything to be changed. Well, except for a few dead lightbulbs in the back of shop: "I figure I can afford a few new lightbulbs," he says.

Masha's is the sort of restaurant that makes you understand the phrase *mom and pop shop*. There are photos of famous Russians all over the walls—some signed, like the one of Rozanov, others not, like the faded sepia photo of actor Mikhail Smolyaninov—and construction paper signs for customers are primarily written in Russian.

In addition to its pelmeni, which go for \$9.99 a dozen, *Masha's* serves a host of popular Russian dishes, including cabbage soup, (\$3.99 a cup, \$5.99 per bowl), beef or mushroom stroganoff (\$14.99 and \$12.99, respectively), and take-out boxes of Olivier salad (\$4.99 per 8 oz), a holiday classic in Russia. Dessert options are more limited, but there's a rotating menu of classic Russian cakes, and usually *Masha* has some freshly-baked buns or pastries gleaming in the front-of-store display cases.

"This has been a dream," *Masha* tells us. "We love all our customers, but Ilya has been special to us for a very long time. Of course, he has terrible head for business, so he's not allowed to touch the books, but his husband, yes, that's a very smart man. And handsome! He is lucky. And us, too, yes, of course."

When I relay this message to Hollander, he ducks his head bashfully. "I don't think you need to be smart to want to be part of a place like this," he says. "It's great food, at great prices, made by great people. It's pretty simple. If people don't like it here, then I need to wash my hands of business entirely, because it's never going to work."

Masha's is open seven days a week 10:30 am to 9 pm on Mondays through Thursdays and from 11 am to 11 pm on Fridays through Sundays. For your best chances at a free meet-and-

greet with an NHL player, try an early lunch on a weekday or a late dinner on home game days.

ilya lick me @rozanovss

SHANE HOLLANDER LOVES ILYA ROZANOV SO MUCH WOW GIRLS WE ARE WINNING TODAY #LOVEISSTOREDINTHEPELMENI

Dmitri Baryshnikov Admirals #43  @DBaryshnikov

Ate at Masha's the last time we played Ottawa. Can confirm the pelmeni were amazing. Thanks to Rozanov for showing me this spot and thanks to Hollander for saving it. I look forward to visiting next time I'm back in Ottawa.

Wyatt Hayes  @hazzzzzzzy

Everyone's talking about pelmeni, nobody is talking about the stroganoff. THE STROGANOFF. The noodles are homemade. The beef is tender. The gravy is gravying. If Masha ever wants to move in with me and become my personal chef, my guest room is open and my wife says I give great foot massages.

 **@rozanovassy**

reporter: Shane, why did you want to buy this restaurant and make a major financial investment? Shane: my husband really likes this particular type of dumplings

 **@rozanovassy**

Like srsly shane is soooo whipped like baby is trying to make it seem like a good financial investment and the reporter is like yeah im going to out you as a simp in the first fuckin line

shane's freckles @hollanderbackgirl

"he's not allowed to touch the books" yes Masha walk Ilya Rozanov like a dog

Pelmeni with mama @hollanoverr

Ok but aside from the cuteness overload I've actually been looking for a place in Ontario to try Russian for AGES Masha's brace yourself for me and my 4'11 self I promise I really eat more than it looks like

Ilya's pelmeni @slavicsquatting

had to change my screen name to get on the trend

Grace S. @justalamehorssegirl

@slavicsquatting Omg do you think Ilya calls Shane his little pelmeni in bed??? Maybe when he's rimming him?

Ilya's pelmeni @slavicsquatting

@justalamehorssegirl have to change my screen name to get off the trend wtf

shane rim me @hollannys

@slavicsquatting babe what did you think you were getting into this is gay fandom on twitter these are the fujoshis like

Nobody's pelmeni @slavicsquatting

@hollannys I JUST LIKE SLAVS OK

Ilya Rozanov  @realilyarozanov

[Image ID: Picture of Shane Hollander flashing a thumb's up next to the camera. He's standing next to a cash register and a framed, signed photo of his husband wearing an Ottawa Jersey.]

Mr. Business Owner will be at Masha's with me for the next hour eating really good pelmeni. come buy something. lots of somethings. i have to pay for my beautiful baby girl Anya's nine million dog treats

End Notes

had this idea, banged on a keyboard for a while, here we are

have read nine million amazing fics in this fandom in the past month and a half. if anything is too similar to another fic, please call it out so I can fix or credit appropriately! I do not want to accidentally plagiarize.

I am not russian and know next to nothing about russia, so if anyone has corrections to foodstuffs, historical details, or anything else in the story, please let me know!

p.s. you can assume that shane and ilya are speaking at least partly in russian at home. I find translating the dialogue as a reader tedious, so I left it in english, but yeah shane is definitely trying out his russian in this.

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