

How a Russian Takes his Porridge

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How a Russian Takes his Porridge

by [lavagirlultra](#)

Summary

Ilya's supposed to tell Shane when he's getting bad again. He's promised, over and over, to ask for help. To reach out. To let Shane take care of him for once.

Ilya genuinely means it when he makes this promise. He has no intention of breaking it.

The issue is this: Ilya doesn't always realize things are getting bad. Actually, he almost never notices until someone else does.

or:

In the midst of a depressive episode, Ilya wonders if Shane truly understands what he's signing up for.

Notes

To be so for real, I did not proof read this. (Word spellcheck is carrying this fic on its back rn.)

Anyways, this is basically just a stream of consciousness; at no point when I'm writing does it ever go where I think it will. I just love these gay hockey players so much that I had to project onto them.

Also I don't think this is really in question, but obviously I did not use AI lmfao. I just love emdashes and semicolons (and am probably not always using them correctly).

More notes at the end, but for now enjoy and let me know if you see any mistakes! <3

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

Ilya's supposed to tell Shane when he's getting bad again. He's promised, over and over, to ask for help. To reach out. To let Shane take care of him for once.

Ilya genuinely means it when he makes this promise. He has no intention of breaking it.

The issue is this: Ilya doesn't always realize things are getting bad. Actually, he almost never notices until someone else does.

It creeps up on him, the insidious thing. A parasite burrowing under his skin, microscopic and unnoticed.

He gets up in the morning, Shane already awake making coffee. He takes Anya out, eats breakfast with his husband. Goes to practice. Sometimes gets a drink with the team, sometimes doesn't. He's just not always up for it; hockey is tiring. He'd much rather sleep, but that's not a warning sign to him. He'd always rather sleep, right?

And that's the damning thing about this fucking disease. It doesn't just twist the present, it twists the past. It whispers to him, *You've always felt this way. This isn't any different from any other day. Just come back to bed. Maybe sleep will make you better.* It's a siren's call, and he's got no rope to tether him to the mast.

That chronic emptiness, that feeling of his soul slowly wasting away inside his rotting corpse of a body? That parasite gnawing at his brain and heart and every organ it can reach until he's just an echo chamber of his own worst thoughts? It's always been there. It always will be.

Ilya's been stupid to think otherwise.

So no, he doesn't realize he's gotten bad again. When he tells Shane he's fine, he truly believes it.

Shane doesn't, though.

"Ilya." He raises his head at the sound of his own name from across the dinner table. He's alarmed to find Shane's plate already empty. Hadn't they just sat down?

His husband swallows hard. "You're not okay, Ilya. Please tell me you can see that," the desperate, pleading tone makes Ilya's chest twinge. He looks back at his own plate, still full.

"I am fine. Just not very hungry. Probably sick," he murmurs back, pushing food around with his fork.

"Ilya."

His name doesn't really feel like his own right now. He doesn't feel like the Ilya that Shane married, the Ilya that signed with Ottawa, the Ilya that led the Bears to the cup, the Ilya that looked Shane up and down in the showers and decided he needed to know every inch of this man. He doesn't feel like Ilya at all.

He's nothing. Not even in a self-deprecating way. He just...isn't. He's an observer in this moment, only meant to watch and think rather than be seen and heard. He has nothing to give to the world right now. He just wants to watch it go by in peace.

A hand reaches for his, slowly. He lets it.

"Ilya, please look at me," and if there's two fundamental truths in this life, they're this: Ilya Rozanov has always been sick, and he has never been able to deny Shane Hollander.

He looks up.

He's never understood people who call Shane robotic. Who claim he shows no emotion on his face, no humanity in his lines. There's so much in those eyes right now. Fear, love, concern, acceptance—all of them stare Ilya in his own dead fucking eyes.

He blinks harshly, giving himself a second to absorb it all.

"Ilya," Shane starts gently. "You're struggling. Please just talk to me."

Ilya's eyes sting suspiciously, and he looks back at the table. "What do you want me to say?"

A hand cups his chin gently, leading his eyes upward. "I want you to say what you're thinking. What you're feeling. I want to be there for you, I want to *help* you, but I can't do that if I don't know what's going on inside your head." The words are so soft, so understanding.

Fuck, he doesn't deserve this.

Ilya doesn't deserve this patience and loyalty. Shane doesn't deserve a husband who's fucking dead inside half the time. He married Ilya Rozanov, not whatever this fucking thing wearing his body is. He hates that Shane never complains about this. That he never shies away from Ilya's sickness.

Because he *has* to get fed up at some point. Ilya remembers all the times his father had screamed at his mother, telling her to "*Just get the fuck out of bed,*" or "*Either kill yourself already or get better, but stop making it my fucking problem.*"

In no world is Shane anything like Grigori Rozanov, but that doesn't mean he's immune to resentment. Just because he hides his anger better than Ilya's father did doesn't mean he can't be feeling it. Ilya wonders if it will ever boil over, hot enough for Shane to acknowledge, or stay simmering under Shane's skin, haunting their relationship for the rest of their lives.

He doesn't know which is worse.

"Hey." Ilya's brought back to the present again. His chin is still held in the calloused hand of his husband. "What are you thinking right now?"

He's too tired to lie. "Wondering if you will ever hate me enough to leave." He doesn't elaborate further. English is hard enough on a good day.

He expected denial, sharp and hurt and too quick to be sincere. He expected Shane to yell a bit, ask how he could ever think such a thing. He knows the anger's not nearly heated enough for truth yet.

What he doesn't expect is for Shane's face to completely fall. He doesn't look mad or offended. He looks devastated. Like how it gets when he watches those depressing dog shelter commercials, but amplified by a thousand. Tears slip from his eyes, but he blinks them away.

Both hands come to cup either side of Ilya's face. "*Ilyusha*." And fuck, a sharp pain shoots through his chest and claws up his throat at the name his mother used to call him. The name he was only ever called with love, untainted by cruelty.

Shane continues. "I love you so fucking much. I love you so much it fucking hurts to think about. I—" His voice breaks.

"I don't even think there's enough room in my body to contain all the love I have for you, okay? I'm constantly feeling like it's just going to split me open once there's nowhere else for it to go. So when I say I love you, I mean *all of you*. I don't mean I only love you when you're happy, I don't mean I only love you when you're winning, I don't mean I only love you when we're fucking. I mean that I love you at every second of every minute of every hour of every fucking day, of every fucking year, for as long as I exist to love you," Shane says.

He stares Ilya down, loving but stern. His passion shines through every line in his face, every movement of his lips, every glint of light against his teeth.

And always, his eyes. They hadn't once moved, not even a twitch. Full of determination. Ilya thinks Shane could stare down the Devil himself and send him home crying. He can always tell when Shane's made up his mind about something. His gaze turns to stone, steely and piercing. His teeth will worry at his lips, his nose will twitch with a snuffle. But his eyes? They're locked into place, never once flickering.

How ignorant those people must be to think Shane shows no emotion. How could that be true if Ilya can catalogue each one with just a look?

There's no doubt in his mind that Shane believes these words. Still, Ilya knows better than to expect good things. "I know you think that. I know you think you will never stop loving me, but Shane," Ilya swallows hard, collecting his thoughts. Shane holds his gaze.

"I will *always* be like this. This is not one year, two year problem. This is not something that can be fixed. No matter how good life is, I will still get like this. Imagine you want children. There is always possibility that our child's first birthday, I am like this. Our child's wedding day, I could be like this. I will not do to them what my mother did to me, but I will want to. You need to understand this. You need to consider that maybe...maybe I am too much for you, and that is okay."

Ilya can't look. Can't see the realization dawn on his husband, the doubt creeping in. He wouldn't be able to take it.

"You...you want to die?" Shane's voice is so small. Terrified in the way that takes all the air out of the lungs.

Ilya sighs. It's frustrating that he's fixating on the least important part of everything said. "That is not the point—Shane, I am trying to tell you it is okay. It is okay if you cannot handle this. I would not wish this burden on worst enemy."

Shane scoffs. "No, yeah, I got that. You hate yourself and think I should hate you, too. We'll talk about that later. Right now, I'm asking you straight-up. Do you want to die?" It's harsher than he's sounded all night. It seems Ilya's finally managed to spark the match into a flame. Sometimes he thinks that's the only thing he's good at.

He feels his own anger bubble up. He doesn't want to fucking talk about this. "Fuck, I don't fucking know, okay? Some days, yes, I think it would be better if I fucking died, Hollander. It is not so simple as 'want to' or not. I can *feel* myself becoming her, and she wanted to die so fucking badly that she left me," he chokes on the emotion crawling up his throat, but pushes on. "*That* is the important thing. This will only get worse." He's breathing harshly, jagged gasps doing absolutely nothing to quell the burning in his lungs. His chest hurts from contracting so much, but he can't stop it.

He's looking anywhere but at Shane, eyes desperate for something to fixate on. The house is silent but for Ilya's panting.

He hears Shane's chair scoot out. Okay, yeah. This is it.

He's leaving.

And fuck, Ilya's relieved—of course he is. He wishes better than this for Shane.

But the relief is infinitesimal compared to the grief. The all-consuming hurt, so excruciating that every other sense leaves him. His nerves are alight with pain, like each individual one is bare. Exposed to air and light and touch, they scream for it to stop; a dissonant chorus whining sharp in his ears.

Agony tears through his veins, flooding them with venom. The infected things wrap around his lungs, his heart, his brain, constricting like a Boa. Each organ is suffocating. They burn with desperation as the rigid grip tightens.

He's 12 years old again, realizing his mother is gone. That she's never coming back.

It's too much. He quite literally cannot cope with it; he has to. He has to wait for Shane to leave, wait until he's alone like he's always been. Then, he can numb himself, or maybe just end it now.

The only thing stopping him would be the guilt his husband would no doubt take on.

Ilya tries to quiet his choking. To wrap all his mess up for the two minutes it will take for him to finally be by himself, to constrain his insides that are begging to spill out all over the floor. He's been flayed open completely, skinned from neck to groin. He's holding his own fucking

guts inside his body with his bare fucking hands, forcing the skin back together through all the blood and bits leaking out.

He waits for the sound of the door, curled in on himself. It doesn't come.

God, he begins to beg. Please, take me. I can't be a person anymore. It hurts too fucking much. So fucking much.

He feels a presence hovering over him, and for a second Ilya thinks his prayer has been answered.

His eyes expect divine light, and they meet it. Just not in the way he imagined.

Shane is inches away from his face, kneeling beside Ilya's chair. Those fucking eyes are baring through him, seeing all the gore that is Ilya Rozanov and not flinching. How is he not flinching?

Tears are streaming from them, but Shane either doesn't notice or doesn't care. His gaze never falters.

Ilya breaks eye contact. He couldn't hold Shane in a stare-off with the power of God behind him.

And then Shane is sinking to the floor, pulling Ilya with him into his lap.

Ilya can't remember the last time he's been held like this. Strong arms keep him firmly tethered. Hands press his head into something solid. *Shane's chest*, he realizes.

That's when it actually occurs to him that his husband isn't leaving. That right now, Shane will not be moved. That's when Ilya fully breaks. Lets it all out, stops holding himself together. The arms around him are strong enough to keep him stitched. They hold his innards in place for the moment, allowing Ilya to finally rest.

His husband rocks him back and forth, whispering over and over again. "You're not her, Ilya. You're not her."

He doesn't really remember much of what happens after. He knows that at some point, Shane's managed to get them into the shower. He thinks the water is warm, but he can't really be sure. Can barely feel the droplets rippling on his skin.

He knows that there's a half-drunken protein shake on their nightstand. Vanilla, because it's Shane's favorite. The chalky texture sticks to Ilya's teeth. He must've been sipping on it, probably only because of his husband's coaxing.

He knows that they end up in bed, limbs so tangled and his own nerves so numb that he looks down and can't tell what belongs to who. They're like two trees inosculated. It's a comforting thought until he realizes that his own rot will no doubt pollute Shane's entire tree as it did Ilya's, slowly necrotizing from roots to dry, dying leaves.

He tries to pull away then, but Shane holds him tighter. He can't possibly know what he's sentencing himself to by doing it.

And that's the crux of the matter. Ilya is *sick*. Sick in a way that can't be cured, that doesn't respond to treatment or remedies, that eats away at him and hollows him out until there's nothing left to feed on. It's immortal, his sickness. Terrified of death. In its desperation, it will latch on to the closest source of life, sucking it dry and then some. He doesn't want to watch it suction all things good and light out of Shane Hollander. He might not be around long enough to.

Ilya thinks that if he had the same blind will to live as his sickness, he'd have beaten it by now.

But he doesn't and he hasn't.

Instead of getting up like he wants to, eating a proper meal and playing hockey and having sex with his husband and being a human fucking being, instead of saving Shane from his own terrible fate, Ilya lays there. God, he wants to move so fucking bad. Or at least, he *wants* to want to.

But his muscles ignore their signals, synapses misfiring. His eyes stay fixed on the indent on the wall from when Shane tripped and smacked his knee into it. His jaw stays painfully clenched, forgetting how to relax. And Ilya lays there, like he's done time and time again.

Time passes and it doesn't. It's agonizingly slow and dizzyingly fast.

He's awake and he isn't. Thoughts come, but jumbled. Pieces of his puzzle switched around and flipped over. They form no coherent picture.

He's here and he's not. The indent on the wall stares back at him, but his eyes are unseeing. He vaguely remembers Marleau teasing him about his 'Slavic Stare.' If only he could see Ilya now.

He's alive and he isn't. His heart beats raggedly, skipping and jumping. It's kept oxygenated by the machine attached to him. His life support.

He's everything and nothing.

Schrödinger would've loved him.

He wonders, perversely, if his sickness is the last remnant of his mother on this Earth. If this is the one thing left that they share, the last binding tie.

If it'll continue to live on in Shane when he's gone.

That brings an uncomfortable realization: he's nothing but a vessel to this disease.

He's always thought of his sickness as a kindred spirit. Malevolent, but only because that is all it knows how to be. Damaged and contaminated, just like him. Killing because it knows no other means of survival.

In his mind, he was born like this. Not because of his mother's genetics—had he been born to anyone else, he'd still be this way. He'd still be Ilya Rozanov, even if not in name, and Ilya Rozanov was always going to be sick.

For the first time, he considers that maybe the parasite latched on to him after draining his mother. That maybe, there is a world in which his mother gets better, and so Ilya never gets sick.

It's disturbing for all the wrong reasons.

If he was not imbued with this sickness at conception, if this illness was not a fundamental part of his being, then it truly is a parasite. An unwelcome intruder rather than an old friend.

He suddenly feels violated. If he and his illness are separate, then it should not be here. He never agreed to let it stay.

But maybe he did. Every time he laid in bed instead of seeing civilization. Every time he pushed away others' concern when he could've accepted help. Every time he idolized his mother when the cold, hard truth is that she was just a woman with an illness. Just as imperfect as him.

If those were invitations, he knew as much as he agreed to then as Shane does now. It's all grossly unfair.

Another epiphany rocks him, brighter this time. Ilya and the parasite are *separate*. They were apart before. They could be parted again.

They could be removed from each other. Maybe not entirely, after all the years of havoc it's wreaked on him. Maybe not permanently, with how it clings frantically to life. But it could be hurt, diminished in some capacity without destroying Ilya with it.

Hope sings in his chest for the first time in a long time. His cheeks become wet, but he can feel himself smiling like a madman. It doesn't matter how late this revelation has come.

It's arrived, and just in time. He's unsure if his shoulders are shaking with laughter or sobs.

"Ilya?" Shane stirs, sounding much too alert to have been asleep.

It's been hours, at least, since they went to bed.

"You do not have to worry this time. These are happy tears. Relieved," he assures his husband.

Shane's brows shoot up, eyes full of trepidation. Yeah, okay. Ilya can see how it looks like he's truly lost it now.

He maneuvers himself so that he is facing Shane completely. Cups his cheek in hand, thumb tracing the freckles there. "I am not her."

He's never known how to explain it: these rare moments of clarity. It's best described as a storm rolling over, the eye aligning perfectly to let the sun shine on him for just a minute. For that short time, Ilya is able to see things as they are, untainted by sickness. He basks in the warm ray, knowing it won't last.

He knows things will continue on, that he'll get caught back up in the storm. But after the eye, he knows he can make it through. Has a renewed sense of hope for the next day's weather.

Shane's face opens up a bit, lips parting slightly. Still, he stays quiet. He always knows when Ilya has more to say.

Ilya wets his mouth, dry from God knows how long of disuse. "When I am like this, everything is...twisted. My mind tells me I am just like her, that there is no better. And it always feels true. Feels like that was always the truth," he dares a look at his husband.

Wide eyes meet his, patiently waiting. No judgement clouds them. Just hope.

"But sometimes, I can see the truth for a minute. That things are not always this bad. That most of the time, I am very happy. That there might be a better for me."

Shane's hand is tracing circles on Ilya's back. The repetitive motion is grounding. No matter what may come, Shane will be here the entire time. Shane will be his anchor, always. No wind or tide could sweep Ilya under when he's tethered so securely.

"It will still be bad for a bit. But I have hope now, and you are right. I am not her. She did not have you," he whispers. His adoration shines through like that brief ray of sun, lacing every word from his lips and every sweep of his fingers across those beautiful freckles.

Shane smiles at him, soft but real. He plants a chaste kiss on Ilya's forehead. "No, she didn't. But you do, and I'm never going to give up on helping you."

Ilya's flayed open by the raw honesty in his expression. He realizes, belatedly, that he hasn't given Shane enough credit. His husband knows exactly what he's signing up for. He's not ignorant to the issue at hand; he just loves Ilya enough to brave it. Loves him so much that it's not even a question.

Ilya's not sure he's ever been a recipient of such unconditional love. Maybe from his mother, but he's still in that moment of pure truth. Right now, he can admit that she was flawed, and there were some bad days when he felt like she'd be better off without him. Like she regretted his existence.

He hopes he never makes Shane feel like that on his bad days.

His father and brother were completely out of the question. He's not sure any amount of greatness could've made his father love him.

And Alexei? He only tolerated Ilya for money. Maybe, some decade or two ago, he might've cared for Ilya. He vaguely remembers Alexei patching him up after one of his father's

rampages, harshly whispering at him to keep quiet. But those days are long gone, and he hasn't spoken to his brother in years.

Shane's love is different in every way. It didn't have to be earned; it couldn't be easily ripped away. It didn't flicker like a bad bulb. It was always present, a low hum that never leaves. Loving Ilya is not just something Shane does. It's become a part of who he is. Fused into his DNA, now inextricable from his very being.

Ilya feels the same way.

Their souls are intertwined, inseparable. Ilya remembers his mother telling him about soulmates, how she believed that people were separated at birth, meant to be one but split into two.

He thinks now that she was wrong. He and Shane weren't destined to be together by the universe. Every single thing in this world had tried to push them apart.

And still, here they are. Two people, completely incompatible in nature, but molded by life and hardship into a matching set. That's maybe more beautiful than any fairytale of soulmates.

Shane scratches at his curls, grabbing his attention. "What're you thinking about now?" It sounds floaty, less worried than before. It's like he can feel the emotions radiating from Ilya, always aware when thoughts are good or bad.

"Happy thoughts. How much I love you. How perfectly you know me. How beautiful your freckles are." It's all true.

Shane Hollander is the most gorgeous thing he's ever seen. Not for his face, nor his hair nor his eyes. He's beautiful because he's *Shane*. Because he may not light up a room, but he strikes a match in Ilya's chest all the same. Because he does things so wholeheartedly, never one for halves. Because he loves as fiercely as he plays, and cares equally about both. Because when it's just him and Ilya, he lets real smiles split his face and real laughs escape his lungs. Because he's Shane, and Shane is perfect. Not flawless, but tailored just right for Ilya.

What is the English name of the girl from The Three Bears?

Goldilocks. Shane is his Goldilocks; not too much or too little, but just right.

He chuckles to himself, imagining it.

"What's so funny?" Shane asks.

"Nothing, идеальная температура каши."

Shane's brow furrows. "Something perfect...porridge?"

"Mm, yes. My perfect temperature porridge." Ilya murmurs as he pulls Shane in closer.

"You're so fucking weird," his husband sighs. He sounds overly fond.

"Yes. Is why you love me," Ilya beams.

Shane tucks his husband's head to his chest, pressing a kiss to his curls. "Yeah, it is."

Tomorrow, Ilya will wake up feeling like shit again. The world will desaturate and the air will fog.

But he'll remember how it felt to bask in the sun, and he'll survive to feel that warmth again.

Anything beyond that doesn't matter.

End Notes

My genuine deepest apologies to any Russian-speakers who will no doubt be offended by the horrendous translation. (Yes, I used Google Translate. Yes, I am deeply ashamed about it.) Hopefully the fact that it's only one line makes it better.

If you speak Russian and would like to correct it, feel free! I won't be offended at all.

Also, from my (very very minimal) research, the story of Goldilocks was popular in Russia, but it was known as "Three Bears" and Goldilocks did not have a name. From what I could find, it seems more like Goldilocks was a warning against strangers than a story of finding what is "just right," but hey, I really like my parallels to childhood stories. For the sake of the fic, Ilya is aware of the western version. Possibly from babysitting all the Pike spawn.

Side note: I went back and forth with how to write Ilya's internal monologue--we know he's more intelligent than most would assume, but his English vocabulary is obviously going to be limited. I decided to just write it as if it were in Russian, so imagine Ilya is thinking in his native language and not English. Not sure if anyone cares about that, but just in case y'all were wondering!

Last little note: I have decided that Ilya 100% has beef with Schrödinger. No clue why, but I feel like Ilya would get so annoyed at the idea of a cat being both alive and dead. The beef doesn't show here since he's introspective and emo, but know that it's lurking.

Anyways, goodnight, sleep tight, and don't let the AO3 curse bite <3

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