

Plentiful, but Ultimately Finite (rewrite available in notes)

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by [broccolicheddarchicken](#)

Summary

Canada had given him his life as he knew it, but it had never felt one hundred percent comfortable, either. He missed Russia sometimes, but it didn't have the thing that mattered most. Ilya had exactly one home, and it was this: his face pressed into a smooth chest, his head tucked under a strong jaw, with freckled arms wrapped around him and delicate fingers combing through his hair. Anywhere else was a temporary excursion.

A treatise on second (and third) languages, homesickness, acceptance, Shane's struggle learning Russian, and the things people do when they care.

Notes

Tw: overt homophobia, mention of suicide. Both are at a level typical to the source material.

This fic has been rewritten. While you are obviously free to read whatever version you'd like, I really believe the new one is better in every way. [Here's the link.](#) <3

Thank you to [Tequila1989](#) for giving me Russian edits!

This was originally supposed to be an ~2500 word total fluff piece about Shane using diminutives on Ilya for the first time, and it somehow became this. Don't ask me how it happened.

I hope you enjoy reading this at least half as much as I enjoyed writing it :)

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

Russian was a difficult language for an English or French speaker to learn. At least, Ilya assumed so. English had been exceedingly hard for him and he figured it was probably the same the other way around. The alphabet was entirely different, the pronunciations were foreign and confusing. He'd been speaking it for more than ten years and got daily practice with native speakers, yet he was still occasionally dropping his articles and mixing up prepositions. He'd long since come to terms with the fact that he'd always have a bit of an accent, even if it wasn't as thick as it used to be. With how much Shane adored it, he didn't have the motivation to fully get rid of it, anyway.

Ilya had made a lot of progress, though. He hadn't had to mentally translate most sentences for years. He was *thinking* in English sometimes, which was a weird development that he still wasn't sure how he felt about. Very rarely, in a session with Galina, he'd even find that he was more comfortable expressing a certain thought in English than Russian.

Shane could certainly take a little credit for Ilya's proficiency. Starting from when they first met, he'd always been so kind to him about it. He never made him feel bad or dumb when he made a mistake. When Ilya didn't understand a word, phrase, or idiom, he'd explain it right away. Even when they argued, if Ilya was struggling to articulate himself, Shane would still help him find the word he was looking for. Right in the middle of the fight, just as gently as if it were pillow talk. Too sweet for his own good.

Unfortunately, not everyone was so helpful. When Ilya first arrived to North America, it had been hard. His accent was heavy, he spoke slowly, and he had to ask people to repeat themselves or rephrase often. They weren't always very patient with him. Perhaps Ilya was biased, but he didn't understand why strangers were so comfortable being rude to him just because he struggled with his second language. Particularly Americans, who didn't even have the excuse of also being bilingual. They had no standing to judge him on. He spoke their language poorly, but they didn't speak his language at all, and somehow that made *him* the stupid one?

Certain people were standoffish to him just for being Russian, which also felt unnecessary. He knew logically that Americans and Canadians didn't have the warmest impression of Russians, but he wasn't a fucking KGB agent. He was just a hockey player. He hadn't even been to his home country since 2017. If Canada had required him to renounce his Russian citizenship to become Canadian, he'd have done it without a moment's thought. He missed it, but it wasn't home anymore. It hadn't been for years.

Ilya knew he'd probably never step foot in Moscow again, but he still had love for the country that raised him. It was at the very core of him, completely irremovable. Even if his passport was now blue. He didn't just miss the creature comforts, like good vodka and familiar food, but the places themselves and the people who lived in them. The baroque-style spires stretching above his head until he had to tilt his neck back to follow them, the urban skyline reflecting off the river as it wound through the city center, the bright jewel tones and historic weight of the Red Square. Alexei and Larisa, the married couple who ran the coffee shop he used to go to in the mornings before practice. His elderly neighbor, Mikhail, who

walked to the park with birdseed every afternoon to feed the bullfinches and warblers. Dasha, his very first girlfriend, who convinced him to grow out his hair and broke up with him because she was going to Italy that summer. He'd have to send her a thank-you basket. He was pretty sure Shane only married him for his curls.

Well, come to think of it, she probably wouldn't want to receive it. Ilya carried love for Russia, but Russia did not carry love for him.

When Ilya got too wrapped up in his own head, about where home was and what he missed and how complicated the journey to Ottawa had been, he reminded himself of two things. First, he could hold on to the good things, even if they were over now. Nobody could take the warm memories from him, the ones he cherished like a nostalgic old coat. Second, the bad things didn't matter anymore, not even in the slightest. The life Ilya had built for himself was his greatest fantasy come to fruition. He spoke English fluently, and he had for years. He was a Canadian citizen, and there were consequences in Canada for mistreating someone over who they loved. He was the second-best active player in the NHL, not that he'd ever admit it. He was one of the greatest hockey players in history. His name was on the Stanley Cup four times. Three times, it was the first listed. Captain's privilege.

Ilya had this other thing, though, and it made all of that feel like nothing.

Ilya Rozanov had a husband, and he was *everything* to him. An adoring husband who looked at him like Ilya had personally hung the stars in the sky for his enjoyment. A husband who was generous and kind and made Ilya fall so deeply in love that he couldn't breathe with the force of it. A husband who could balance gorgeous, sexy, and cute in a way Ilya thought only existed in romance novels. A husband who was raising a dog with him and would eventually raise his children. Probably soon—they talked about it a lot. Who was learning Russian for him. Who he got to win hockey games with. Who had never judged him for struggling, who loved him exactly as he was, and who always met him in the middle.

Canada had given him his life as he knew it, but it had never felt one hundred percent comfortable, either. He missed Russia sometimes, but it didn't have the thing that mattered most. Ilya had exactly one home, and it was this: his face pressed into a smooth chest, his head tucked under a strong jaw, with freckled arms wrapped around him and delicate fingers combing through his hair. Anywhere else was a temporary excursion.

The kitchen carried the bitter scent of fresh coffee mixed with the sharpness of red chili flakes as Ilya sprinkled the spice container over the avocado. He was going to spread it on some toast and top it all with poached eggs. He loved cooking for himself and Shane. He loved taking care of him. Shane was in his own world, scribbling away in a Russian workbook at the breakfast table. They'd shared a thousand mornings just like this.

Shane practiced his Russian in a lot of different ways. Talking with Ilya was the big one, but sometimes he'd get too nervous or embarrassed, and so he'd practice by himself. He told Ilya

that he loved listening to podcasts, or music in playlists Ilya had made him. *This album was my favorite as a teenager, you're going to love it.* Sometimes, Ilya would show him shows he used to watch with English subtitles put on, or he'd play video games with Russian support while Shane did something or other on his laptop.

Sometimes, though, things like grammar or vocabulary were best studied on paper and applied in conversation later. That was where the books came in. Ilya was very invested in his husband's Russian education, so when Shane brought him a list of Russian-language workbooks he was considering buying, Ilya had carefully appraised each one. *No, no, that one will teach you to talk like a Soviet history professor who is like a million years old. You don't want that one. Buy this one instead.*

Once the workbooks were approved, purchased, and had arrived at their doorstep, Ilya watched Shane cut the box open with glee. He said he wanted to get started right away, so Ilya figured that Shane was about to, y'know, study with them. But no. What a ridiculous assumption. Shane spent a full two hours just looking through the first one. He considered the exercises within and how long he estimated they'd take him, then his own schedule. Finally, he set realistic goals for which chapters he wanted to finish by what dates. Ilya had watched this entire process from the other end of the couch during a very productive playoff run in NHL 2022. Shane was so systematic and studious, it was adorable. Ilya hadn't worked half as hard at learning English, and his entire livelihood had depended on it.

Ilya smiled warmly—first at the memory, then at Shane—as he dug a fork out of the cutlery drawer. Shane was just doing a few casual pages before breakfast. He had no idea that it meant the world to Ilya.

Shane's nose wrinkled in disgust at something in the book, freckles disappearing into the creases at the corners of his eyes.

Ilya was busy smashing the avocado with the fork, but that expression was too cute to not ask about. "What did you just read?"

"According to this chart in here, the English equivalent of your name is Elijah," Shane said with a frown.

"Equiv-a-what?"

"Equivalent," Shane said, emphasizing the pronunciation. "It means two things that are equal to each other. Basically, if I were to translate 'Ilya' into English, the name would be 'Elijah'."

Ilya's lips curled up. "Okay. What's so wrong with that?"

"You're not an Elijah. You're an Ilya."

"Correct. I have never gone by Elijah. I did not even know that was the *equivalent* until five seconds ago. You have cracked the code," Ilya said. The last sentence was dripping in sarcasm.

Shane huffed. "Fuck off, asshole. I just mean, like—"

Shane cut himself off and turned back to the book, a scowl on his face. “Like in elementary school, in my French class, I had to go by Jean because that’s technically the French version of my name.”

Ilya took a break from the avocado to sip his coffee. “You took French in school? Haven’t you been speaking it since you were two?”

“Okay, well, in Canada everyone takes French. We take it as a subject, and then eventually you have to take it as a subject *and* take a different class that’s taught in French. Mine was history.”

Ilya was impressed. “They really prioritize your fluency.”

“Yeah, it’s fucking Canada, Ilya. French is the only thing that separates us from the Americans.”

Ilya actually laughed.

“*Anyway*- I had to go by Jean in my French class, so I was just thinking how gross it would be if you took an English class, and they made you go by Elijah. Or what if when you immigrated, you decided to change your name to make it easier for people to pronounce, or whatever?” Shane pulled a face again. “I don’t think I would’ve fallen for you if you introduced yourself to me as Elijah.”

Ilya gasped. “That is very mean, Shane. I thought you loved me for me.”

“I do now, but your foreign charm is what first attracted me to you. I’d never have let you fuck me if it weren’t for that sexy accent.”

Ilya raised an eyebrow, not believing that for a single second. Shane had never been able to be anything but very attracted to him, even with his mouth shut. Probably *moreso* with his mouth shut. “Agree to disagree. I would’ve gotten in your pants, Elijah or Ilya. Also, what would my name have to do with my ‘sexy accent’?”

“I despise you,” Shane said, not sounding like he meant it at all.

“Double also, when did I introduce myself to you? Last I checked, you walked up to me one day while I was smoking and already knew everything about me. You were obsessed, Hollander.”

Shane rolled his eyes. “Y’know what, dick, never mind. I’m going back to my studying. Fuck you.”

Ilya laughed. This was all far too amusing. Being annoying at Shane was his passion. He couldn’t wait to retire and make it his full-time occupation.

Ilya’s curiosity about Shane’s studies got the better of him, so he wandered over to the table with his coffee in hand. Anya whined at his feet, begging for attention. She’d have to wait just a moment. He leaned over Shane’s shoulder to read what was on the page. Naming conventions. Made sense.

Ilya smiled at the page, then set his coffee down and picked up the dog. He pet the soft fur at the top of her head. “They’re starting to get into the details with you.”

Shane looked up for a moment, booped Anya’s nose, then turned back to the book. “I’d very well hope so. I’ve been learning this language for years.”

Ilya laughed, but he also felt a wave of affection at that. He *had* been learning it for years, and unlike English had been for Ilya, it wasn’t a job requirement. Shane was doing it purely out of love. “You have learned a lot, moya lyubov. I am very proud of you.”

“Well, not enough. I still have a long way to go. You’re way better at English than I am at Russian.”

“Is there anything you can be not competitive about?”

“Nope,” Shane said, popping the end of the word. He was so cute. Ilya couldn’t resist ruffling his hair with one hand, and Shane went on. “This unit’s all about communicating with friends, family, partners and loved ones,” he said. Shane looked up at him again, a shy smile on his face. “Very important, in my case.”

Ilya’s heart swelled so much that he wasn’t entirely sure what to do with the excess, so he leaned down and kissed Shane’s forehead. He was so grateful. He was so grateful it hurt, sometimes.

“Ya lyublyu tebya,” he whispered before he stood back up.

Shane blushed. “Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu.” Ilya was a lucky man—that was one of Shane’s most comfortable phrases.

Reluctantly, Ilya set Anya down and went back to the kitchen, and Shane turned back to the book. “They have your name in the conversion chart, but not the chart with the diminutives. That’s too bad, I wanted to call you nicknames.”

“I guess you will have to actually read the lesson and figure out how to construct them. No cheating.”

Shane laughed.

Ilya was lounging next to the pool, fidgeting with his crucifix, and the high was wearing off. They’d only been at Shane’s cabin for three days now—no, their cabin, they were married—and somehow, the high of winning the Stanley Cup on the same team as Shane Hollander was already wearing off.

It wasn’t that he wasn’t still happy—he was. By fucking god, he was. It was just that every award or broken record or Stanley Cup win made Ilya wish more than usual that he could call

his mother. His father had been dead for years, but it's not like he'd given a fuck before then. He hadn't spoken to his brother since 2017. He could be dead too, for all Ilya knew, and he wouldn't be particularly upset if he were.

His mother, though.

You are so determined, Ilyushenka. So graceful. You look like a figure skater on the ice. I can't wait to see you on TV when you grow up. You'll make us all so proud.

She never did end up seeing him play on TV.

That was before Ilya had even fully committed to hockey as his life's path. Before he realized that the only way to escape his brother's indifference and his father's ire was to put on skates and pads and waste entire days panting on ice. He practiced until his feet bled, because his father wouldn't pay for the right size skates until he made juniors.

He wasn't nearly as good then, and she treated him like he'd already struck gold. His soft, brave, young, beautiful mother.

Ilya squeezed his eyes shut to ward off both the bright sun and his wandering mind. This train of thought wasn't going to be good for him, he knew that. It's not that he avoided thinking about his mother. It's just that he could tell this specific line would end with the mental image of a wrist hanging limp from the edge of a bed, and he *did* try to avoid thinking about that.

Ilya was alone. Shane had gone to the grocery store. He'd asked Ilya if he wanted to come, but Ilya had declined. *Working on my tan, sweetheart. All for you.*

Now he wished he had gone. He hadn't expected Shane leaving to make him feel so deflated.

He tried to focus on the good. He'd won another Stanley Cup, and it was a first in so many ways. His first since leaving Boston. The first in franchise history for the Centaurs. Shane and Ilya's first together, as husbands.

During game seven, Ilya scored twice, and Shane scored once. Ilya's second goal had tied them against Los Angeles, saving them from a loss and sending them into overtime. It had been off an assist from Shane, which almost felt better than the first time he'd actually hoisted the cup. He wanted to press him against the boards and kiss him right there, but no. They had to finish the game first.

Later, when Shane scored the game-winning goal in overtime, Ilya went fucking berserk. He might've blacked out, he wasn't sure. All he remembered was skating over to Shane faster than he thought he was capable of. If he'd skated like that at the skills competition, Shane would've lost. He remembered ripping off his helmet, wrapping his arms around Shane's waist, and kissing the *hell* out of him. The clip certainly didn't get replays on ESPN, but it should've. That kiss could've won Olympic medals. He wanted to send a signed photo of it to Roger Crowell. Even better—a video on one of those smart frames.

Ilya wondered absently what the Russian newspapers had to say about their win. He'd never checked them since getting outed, because he knew it would just make him unhappy. They

didn't want to celebrate his accomplishments anymore. He was no longer something Russia was proud of. He knew any time he excelled would simply be used as an excuse to tear him down.

But he still felt like he needed to know.

Ilya got up off the deck lounge he'd been relaxing on. He was just in his swim shorts, the ones with the five-inch inseam that always drove Shane wild. They'd been in the pool earlier, but he was dry now. He grabbed his tablet from his backpack, which was currently sitting on the couch, then plopped himself down next to it. After settling himself comfortably in the throw pillows and resting the tablet on his stomach, he pressed the button in the corner of the keyboard that switched it to the Russian Cyrillic alphabet.

He pulled up one of the most popular Russian sports news sites, tapped into the search bar, and typed "Илья Розанов" without pressing enter.

It was still a little strange, sometimes. To see the words "Ilya Rozanov" and know that they were meant to refer to him. That was not the name he'd seen on the ranking boards when he played in juniors, or on the tags of birthday gifts wrapped by his grandmother, or on the top of his schoolwork as a child. It was like hearing your own voice on a recording. Recognizable, but deeply uncomfortable.

Well, sometimes it was okay. The Latin letters felt the warmest in Shane's neat handwriting, usually on a post-it. *Ilya, the leftovers are in the fridge. Love you!*

Yes, that was closer to the truth. Shane made the strange characters feel a little closer to home, but they were still not completely right. "Ilya" was not the name his mother picked for him, it was just the closest approximation.

Ilya stared at his name in the search bar of the site for a little longer. He knew that whatever awful things they had to say about them would hurt even more, in his native tongue and with the name he'd known since childhood. He knew he shouldn't press enter.

He did.

At the very top was a page of his stats, going back to when he'd first played in the junior league as a fifteen-year-old, and covering up to the Stanley Cup final he'd played not even two weeks ago. Below that were all the articles written about him or mentioning him. There weren't as many as some other Russian athletes. Hockey wasn't small in Russia, but it wasn't as popular as in Canada, and the players who stayed in the KHL typically got more coverage than those who left for North America. Still, there were a significant number of them.

Ilya scrolled down and furrowed his brow. The first few articles were incredibly old, about his disastrous Olympic appearance in Sochi and his decision to play in the NHL instead of the Russian league. He quickly realized the articles were arranged by hits, so he changed the sorting method to reverse chronological.

The title that appeared at the top of the page didn't surprise him, but it still stung. *Ilya Rozanov: National hero turned national disgrace*. Against his better judgement, he tapped on

the article so he could read it in full.

Oh god. This wasn't just a quick little update on how gross he was for kissing a man. This was a full-on think piece. It was *long*. It was written by an editor.

Even before Ilya Rozanov made his first appearance in the MHL, he stood out. An exception was made by the league's commissioner to allow then fifteen-year-old Rozanov to play for his hometown team, despite the league bylaws mandating a minimum age of 16. In his first season, Rozanov proved the commissioner's decision correct, scoring the fourth highest number of goals in the entire league. With incredible top speed, uncanny shooting accuracy, and a self-assuredness that hasn't been seen since, Rozanov managed to outplay forwards with years of experience over him. At nineteen, he moved to the United States to show his dominance in the NHL. In just four seasons, Rozanov took the Boston Bears from last-ranked in the league to Stanley Cup champions. Russia made him our hero. We rooted for him from across the globe. He was on our cereal boxes, advertised our sneakers, and captained our Olympic team.

Why, then, has he chosen to turn his back on everything good he could have stood for?

Ilya kept reading, certain that he was going to be sick. Praises of his achievements as an athlete were laced with barely-concealed jabs about anal sex and rhapsodies on the downfall of true masculinity. Ilya had never once felt insecure about who he was, but this was very nearly getting him there. He needed to close the tablet. But he couldn't. Despite knowing full well that this wasn't healthy for him, he felt an irrepressible urge to understand exactly what people back home thought of him. At least if he knew, he didn't have to wonder. He kept reading, kept wishing he had the strength to close the stupid window. He was a source of shame. A joke, an embarrassment to his country. He was proof that parents of hockey prodigies should ensure their sons played for the KHL. He had once had so much promise, but America had ruined him. God, didn't his father used to say the same thing?

In his so-called "marriage" to his former rival Shane Hollander, Rozanov has proven-

He couldn't bear to read the rest of that sentence. He slammed the lid of the tablet shut.

Ilya scrubbed his hands over his face and tried not to think about it too hard. It was no worse than what he had been expecting. Russian culture was very traditional, the media did not accept gay men. Or bisexual men, not that the distinction mattered. It wasn't really about *him*, they were just using him to perpetuate homophobia.

It still made his chest ache. Ilya wanted to be able to visit home. He wanted to hold Shane's hand and show him all the places that mattered to him when he was a kid. He wanted to take Shane on a date in the café he'd grown up getting hot chocolate with his mother in. He wanted to take him to the community center amphitheater, hold his hand while they sat, and tell him about the horrible children's play he'd had a lead role in when he was ten. He wanted to kiss him next to the altar in the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour. If anything made Ilya believe in God, it was the way Shane's mouth felt moving against his.

Shane had gotten to do all those things in Ottawa. The Canadian equivalent of them, anyway. Ilya had seen his old high school, and the diner he used to visit to get food with his

teammates after practice, and the park he used to do his ten kilometer runs in. Ilya wanted to share Moscow with Shane in the same way, but he knew he never could. He couldn't even express his yearning for it to Shane, because he wasn't sure he had the words to describe the feeling in English.

He tilted his head back to look up at the ceiling and nearly fell off the couch.

"Holy shit," Ilya said, hands flying away from his face. "What the fuck are you doing here, Shane? You scared the shit out of me."

Shane laughed a tiny bit, but it was humorless. "Sorry, I didn't mean to startle you, I just- I forgot my debit card. I was gonna come over and give you a kiss goodbye again, but... you were looking at your tablet like something was really wrong, so I guess I got nosy and peeked over your shoulder." Shane seemed embarrassed, but Ilya didn't mind. Not like he had any real secrets to keep from Shane, anyway.

Ilya turned halfway on the couch, putting his arms on the back so he and Shane were facing each other. He chewed on his bottom lip. He didn't want Shane to worry about that article. "Did you understand? What you were reading?"

Shane nodded. "Not a lot, if I'm honest. But enough to get why you're upset." He walked around the couch and sat next to Ilya, so Ilya untwisted. "Do you want to talk about it?"

Ilya sighed heavily and considered it. It might be good to tell him what he was thinking, but he didn't want to make Shane feel bad. He never wanted Shane to feel like he was a problem, like Ilya loving him made his life any harder.

Shane used to be insecure about Ilya being bisexual, he suspected. He once point-blank asked him if all the porn he watched was of women and if he missed fucking them. Ilya didn't want Shane to think that Ilya would've had an easier life if he'd married someone else. Even if the Russian media was being horrible.

He'd save this for therapy, then. He needed to figure out how to open up to Shane about this in a way that didn't leave him feeling stressed.

"No, not right now," Ilya said. "I will talk about it with Galina tomorrow, I promise."

Shane nodded. "Okay. C'mere, then." He opened his arms, and Ilya immediately crashed into him hard enough that it knocked Shane onto his back. He gave Shane a pillow for under his head—the arms of their couch were sort of hard—and settled himself on Shane's chest, eyes shut, letting the peace of the moment drag him out of the awful mental state that article had put him in.

When he started to cry, about ten minutes later, Shane didn't complain that he was getting his shirt wet or that he still needed to go shopping. He just wrapped his arms around Ilya a little tighter, pressed a few soft kisses to his forehead, and murmured sweet nothings until Ilya felt better.

Ilya would never deserve this man. He was sure of it.

Sometimes Ilya wondered *why* Shane was so focused on becoming fluent in Russian. Ilya was certainly grateful for it, but he was still surprised at the level of Shane's engagement. When Shane first told him he wanted to learn, Ilya figured that meant a few basic phrases. In the years since, Shane had flown well past his original expectations. Ilya had asked once or twice, and he'd given a lot of different reasons, mostly jokes. *I don't want you using it to say mean things about me to our kids! And I need to be able to read Russian recipes so I can cook you all those foods you miss.*

Shane was dedicated, too. They had lots of free time in the summers, and that was when most of his studying was done, but he didn't slack off during the season, either. He practiced at some point every single day, even if it was just for twenty minutes. Maybe it was a podcast during his run, or he'd read a few Russian articles in the locker room before warm-ups started. Ilya would never forget the time where Shane opened Duolingo on his phone not thirty seconds after Ilya had pulled his cock out of his ass.

Ilya stared at Shane, absolutely dumbfounded. It was the night after an away game. They'd just gone for two rounds in this shitty hotel bed. He was fucking exhausted, he still had Shane's cum on his stomach, and Shane was... studying Russian?

It was kind of cute.

Shane caught him looking and gave him a defensive glare. "What? It's 11:45! I don't want to lose my streak!"

Ilya grabbed the tissues from the nightstand and wiped himself off. "Is this how the spark in a marriage dies? With an evil green owl watching?"

*"Oh my god, relax, Rozanov. You literally **just** fucked me."*

"And what if I wanted to cuddle?"

"We can cuddle while Duo teaches me how to use formal language in the office."

He supposed one didn't become an elite professional athlete without that sort of commitment.

Stretched out on the couch with his feet in Shane's lap and the TV on, Ilya wondered how badly Shane wanted to keep up with it. Not because of any lack of effort on Shane's part, but because he seemed particularly frustrated tonight. They were watching a Russian medical comedy Ilya liked. Like *Scrubs*, but funnier. It had English subtitles, but Shane said he wanted to really practice his listening, so Ilya kept them off. Shane was staring at the screen with his eyebrows knit together, and the only other time Ilya had seen him look so confused was when he'd lost sight of a puck.

"I- wait, what was that last word?"

“Vnimaniye. Attention.”

Shane paused.

“Why did he say attention?”

Ilya sighed. He needed to explain the whole joke, didn't he? He didn't mind, but he wished Shane would just accept a tiny bit of help. It was still good practice, even with the subtitles. “The patient said that she had hearing loss, so Doctor Bykov told Varya to put in the chart that she was ‘moderately attractive’. Then when the patient complained, he said to add that she only said the hearing loss part for attention.”

“Oh.” Shane turned back to the screen and rested his forearms on Ilya's shins.

About two minutes passed before Shane needed help again. “Sorry, did she just ask if there was a bar in the hospital?”

Ilya turned to him before answering the question. “Are you sure you do not want me to turn on the-“

Shane cut him off. “Yes, Ilya. If I wanted you to turn on the subtitles, I would've asked you to turn on the fucking subtitles.”

Oh. Well then.

Ilya didn't turn on the subtitles, and he waited. He knew it was just a matter of time—less than sixty seconds, he was sure. He didn't need to say a thing.

Ilya was right. About half a minute later, Shane exhaled next to him. “I'm sorry. That was really rude. I shouldn't have been short with you. I'm just getting very frustrated with myself, because I feel like I spend half my free time learning this language and I still can't keep up with a fucking sitcom.”

Ilya smiled slightly. He sat up and scooted next to Shane, and Shane hugged his arm. Ilya paused the show before speaking. “Is okay. I used to get very upset with my English too. If it helps, understanding jokes was one of the hardest things for me to learn. Took a very long time.”

Shane's expression softened slightly, but he still seemed upset. “I just – how did you learn so *fast*, Ilya?”

Ilya offered a conspiratorial smile. “I didn't. I first decided to go to the NHL when I was fourteen, so I started studying more then. Also, I learned English in school as a small child. Most Russians do.” He found Shane's hand with his free arm and interlaced their fingers. “Then I came to Boston and I had no choice. Nobody here speaks Russian, except you, so if I couldn't say something in English, it was not getting said. You would be surprised how quickly you can learn something when it is literally the only option.”

Shane half-smiled. “Does that mean you need to start speaking exclusively in Russian to me?”

Ilya shrugged. "If that would make you happy."

"No, I think it would just make me pissy again."

"Ah," Ilya said as he pulled Shane into his arms, tucking Shane's head under his chin. "We cannot have that. You are very annoying when you're pissy."

Shane rewarded his candor with a light punch to the arm. "Fuck off, Rozanov."

Ilya laughed, but under it he was worried. He didn't want Shane to think this was a requirement of their relationship. He looked down at him and let his expression go soft. "You know, you do not have to keep studying this if you do not want to." Ilya kissed his nose, aiming for a specific freckle on the bridge. "I never expected you to become fluent in Russian when we started dating. You have already learned so much for me, and I don't mind speaking English. Russian is hard. If you are not enjoying it, please don't continue just for me."

Shane's lips tilted up slightly, and he nuzzled Ilya's neck. "I know I don't have to, Ilya. But I love you, and I like feeling more connected to you, and to your culture. Especially given that we can't really visit Russia together. I wish I could see Moscow with you."

Ilya smiled tightly. "Is a beautiful city. I would take you tomorrow if I could."

Shane kissed Ilya's pulse point, then his chin. "That's not the only reason, though." He seemed nervous. Ilya didn't understand why.

"What is the other reason?"

Shane let out a breath. "I don't know how to explain this. It's kind of silly."

Ilya played with the ends of Shane's hair. "Try to explain it anyway," he murmured, lips pressed to Shane's forehead.

Shane said nothing for a moment, took a breath, and started to speak with his face still hidden in Ilya's neck. "You're really, really good with English. But I know that sometimes you struggle to express some of your thoughts and stuff, especially when you're upset. It's not fair that when I need to get something out, we can talk in the language I was raised speaking, but when you're struggling, there's this whole extra layer of mental bullshit for you. I want to be able to speak Russian as well as you can speak English. But even if I never get to that level, I want to at least understand it. So that you can tell me what's going on in your head as easily as possible."

Ilya froze as he felt his eyes widen. Was it really that simple? Shane wanted communication to be easier for Ilya?

Shane had always treated him well, but it surprised Ilya how *good* it felt to know he was being considered like that. That Shane cared that much. Enough to learn an entire third language, just to understand Ilya the tiniest bit better. He actually had to look at the wall for a second to avoid crying.

Shane preened in the corner of his eye, and Ilya finally looked down again. He could tell that Shane was patting himself on the back for good husbanding, and it made Ilya want to smack him. Or maybe kiss him until the oceans boiled over and the sun stopped shining. He wasn't sure which.

"That is one of the sweetest things you have ever said to me," Ilya said. "Thank you."

Shane nodded. "Mhm. I know. I'm killing this whole marriage thing."

Ilya cracked up and pushed Shane back into the couch. "Oh, this was a mistake. I should have said nothing, you are too proud of yourself. I am going away now." He made a move like he was getting up.

Shane shook his head, grabbed Ilya's wrist, and pulled Ilya down on top of him. It was rare that Shane did the manhandling. Ilya kind of liked it.

"Actually, I had an idea of somewhere else you could go."

Ilya rolled his eyes. Shane could do better than that. "Is that your idea of a come-on, Hollander? Very poor execution."

Shane hit him in the shoulder with the heel of his palm. "Shut up and fuck me, lover boy."

Fair enough.

Ilya and Shane had a deal.

Well, sort of. It was an unspoken deal, but it was a deal nonetheless. Whenever Shane finished a chapter in one of his workbooks, he'd mention it offhandedly. Always seemingly the same day. And whenever Ilya heard that, he felt the need to make it worth Shane's while.

Ilya was making a smoothie in nothing but his palm tree pajama pants. When Shane came up behind him, pressed his face to the back of his shoulder, and slipped his fingertips into the front of the waistband, right where the cut of his hips disappeared, Ilya immediately knew what sort of morning they were going to have.

Still, he was going to play this cool. Just because they were married, that didn't mean he had to give it up so easily.

"Good morning, moy lyubimyy."

"Dobroye utro, krasavets," Shane murmured.

Oh.

Ilya attempted valiantly to keep his dick under control, but it was very difficult when Shane's hand was dipping lower and lower, pushing against his hip bone and grazing the skin around his cock. Ilya hadn't worn underwear to bed, and Shane was clearly using that to his advantage. Layer that with being called "handsome" in Russian, and Ilya was a mess. *Fuck.*

"What are you doing? I am trying to make you your smoothie because I love you," Ilya said. "You are distracting me."

"Mmmm." Shane didn't say anything in reply, just wrapped his hand around Ilya, and Ilya gripped the edge of the counter and inhaled sharply through his nose. He loved it when Shane took a little initiative. It was hot.

"I finished that unit I told you about the other day," Shane said.

Ilya could feel Shane's erection, hard and pressed up against the back of his thigh. He needed to get this under control. "Good boy," he said.

Shane didn't even flinch. Ilya was fucked. "I think I get a reward now, right? That's how it's always worked before."

Ilya smiled. So the deal wasn't just in his own head. "That could be arranged, yes." His voice was surprisingly level considering the way Shane was stroking him off. *God*, he was good at that. He had a lot of experience by now, nearly exclusively with Ilya. Ilya mourned for the world, that it didn't get to see Shane Hollander with his perfect pink lips wrapped around a cock or his eyes tilted back in pleasure when he came.

Ilya was far too selfish to share, though. That was all his.

Shane got Ilya out of his head with a slight increase in pressure that sent a jolt up his spine. "Okay," Shane said, then stilled his hand. He gave one more gentle squeeze, then pulled it out of Ilya's pants.

Ilya turned around and was greeted by an exceptionally self-satisfied grin on his husband's face. For a moment, he wasn't entirely sure what was going to happen, but he was trying to let Shane execute whatever plan he clearly had. Then Shane did something that turned his brain to useless mush in his skull.

"Vstan' na koleni," Shane ordered. Like it was the most casual thing in the world.

Holy fuck. Who taught Shane to say that?

Without a word, Ilya pushed Shane up against the island and obediently got on his knees.

Shane was only in his boxer briefs, and it meant that Ilya could already clearly see the hard outline of him. Usually, Ilya would've taken the opportunity to be irritating. *Okay, now what? You want me to touch you? Where?*

But today, Shane was taking what he wanted *and* he'd finished his workbook chapter. Two things Ilya liked. He wanted to reward good behavior.

Ilya leaned forward and mouthed at Shane's cock through the fabric, earning a hiss and a hand in his hair. "*Fuck*, Ilya."

Ilya already knew that he was going to take his time. Sure, it was Shane's prize, but that didn't mean he wasn't going to do it his own way. He ran his tongue over the head of Shane's cock, and Shane moaned softly. Ilya could spend a whole day with his head between Shane's legs, he was pretty sure. He nuzzled him a little further, mouth working against the shaft, and he could literally feel Shane twitch against his cheek.

Shane whined. "Ilya, please," he begged, voice cracking on the second word. Ilya's resolve broke. Still, he wanted to hear it.

"Please what?"

"Please, Ilya. I need your mouth on me. You're so fucking good at this, I need to feel it." Shane's lips were parted, eyes cast skyward, hand trembling against Ilya's scalp while the other was back against the cabinet.

Ilya leaned back on his heels, causing Shane's hand to fall away. Maybe he could be a little annoying after all. "You were very confident before. Now you are begging. Is very sad."

Shane looked down at him, eyes pleading and lower lip caught in his teeth. "It's what you do to me, Ilya. You always have."

Holy fuck. Ilya's brain had to reboot.

Fine. You win.

Ilya reached up and hooked his fingers into the waistband of Shane's underwear. He let his fingertips trail along Shane's thighs as they dragged downwards, nails scraping against the hard muscle and soft skin, and then Shane's cock was erect and leaking and right in front of him.

Unsurprisingly, there was a bead of precum that had gathered at the slit. Ilya wrapped one hand around Shane and used his thumb to spread it over the head. He always loved how wet Shane got, from the very first time they hooked up. He placed a few kisses along the tops of Shane's thighs, just holding his dick in his hand.

"So beautiful for me. So perfect. Stunning." Ilya punctuated each phrase by pressing his lips against Shane's flawless skin. He meant it. There was no piece of art or architecture that compared to Shane Hollander splayed out before him.

Shane whined again, legs trembling, and Ilya finally rewarded him for his patience by sliding the head of his cock into his mouth, letting it rub against the inside of his cheek. Shane moaned his name above him, which felt better than any award. As the familiar weight settled against his tongue, Ilya shut his eyes and hummed. He was going to savor this.

Ilya hadn't gone to church in years. Not regularly, anyway. He went to the local orthodox parish once a year, on his mother's birthday. He'd light a candle, say a prayer, donate \$100,

and leave. He'd never really understood it. He believed in God, in some form, but religion was another thing entirely. The spectacle of it all, the bowed heads, the silence. He'd never felt the presence of Christ in a cathedral or a church or his own home, but he went anyway.

This, though. On his knees in his kitchen, while his sweet husband panted and gasped above him purely from the workings of his mouth.

Ilya thought that maybe he was starting to understand what it meant to actually worship.

When Ilya bottomed out, his nose pressed against Shane's abdomen, golden crucifix hanging between Shane's thighs, he stayed perfectly still. He'd always loved this, the feeling of being filled. Knowing the babbling mess he could turn Shane into with nothing but his lips, tongue, and teeth. He opened his eyes, looking up at Shane through his lashes, and wanted to gasp from the sight.

Shane was looking right back down at him, brown eyes dark and eyelids heavy, his mouth hanging open and the longer bits of his bangs falling in his eyes. His entire face was flushed, the pink spreading to the tips of his ears and the top of his chest. One of his hands was gripping the counter, and the other sunk back into Ilya's hair. He felt a slight tug as Shane grabbed a handful, but it wasn't in a demanding way. More appreciative.

Ilya forgot that he was actually giving a blowjob. He just stayed there for a long moment, Shane eventually reaching down with his free hand to trace his thumb over Ilya's cheek. Ilya felt no rush to get to work—from the look on Shane's face, he didn't mind the view. Ilya's jaw was beginning to ache, and his eyes were watering slightly, but he didn't care in the slightest. He wanted to stay right here until the house burned down around them or the roof caved in.

No. He'd promised Shane a reward.

Ilya pulled off, got a good breath, went down again, and picked up the pace. Not too much, but enough to know that he was building Shane towards his climax. He took Shane's dick out of his mouth and drew slow circles on the underside of the head with his tongue until Shane was pleading. He took him to the base and swallowed around him until Shane was moaning desperately and pulling at his hair, his own hands digging into Shane's thighs. He'd been fucking him for more than ten years, now. He knew what Shane liked, how to treat his body, what to do to draw his pleasure. When Shane got close to the edge, Ilya doubled down and sucked him harder, and Shane came down his throat. Just the way Ilya had known he would.

Ilya kept Shane in his mouth till he was most of the way soft, sucking gently as he came off with a satisfying pop. He smiled. He liked that sound. The sharp feeling of pulled hair went away as Shane loosened his fingers, and then he started massaging Ilya's scalp with both hands in apology. Ilya nearly moaned, it felt so good. He tipped his head into the touch, closed his eyes, and hummed appreciatively.

After a short while, Shane removed his hands from Ilya's hair. Ilya stood, pulling Shane's underwear up with him. Once Ilya was settled on his feet and rubbing his jaw with his hand, Shane smiled sheepishly up at him. "Fuck, Ilya, I think you killed me. I don't know how I'm standing right now," he said.

Ilya grinned. There were few versions of Shane he loved more than happy, sated Shane. He leaned down and kissed him. Even though Ilya was half hard and they were both half naked, the kiss was light and sweet. Shane dragged a few fingers along Ilya's stubble. Ilya knew how much Shane loved the scratchy texture against his skin.

Ilya eventually pulled away, more out of a desire for breath than one to stop kissing. "Go sit on the couch. I will bring you the smoothie and we can watch a show. Maybe we take Anya to the park in like an hour."

Shane looked at him skeptically. "You don't want anything?"

Ilya grinned. "We have all day, Hollander. I'm not done with you yet."

Shane reached up, held Ilya's jaw in his hand, and kissed his cheek. "Good. Try to keep up," he said. Then he sauntered off to the living room.

Someday, Ilya was sure that Shane was going to stop surprising him. Today was not that day.

Ilya was sitting on the couch, half-finished with a mission in Modern Warfare Two, when Shane plopped himself into his lap.

"Oh, hello. No, is fine. I was not doing anything anyway," Ilya said, eyes still on the screen. He shot an enemy soldier and threw a grenade.

Shane pressed a kiss to his jaw, arms wrapping around Ilya's shoulders. "Quit whining and pause it, I can tell you're playing on story mode."

Ilya paused it, but he certainly didn't quit whining. "How can you tell? I think you just know I am working on the story right now and took your chances."

Shane pushed Ilya's curls back from his face with gentle hands. "If that's what you say, Ilyusha."

The warmth that spread through Ilya's body at being called *Ilyusha* could've ended arguments much bigger than this one. Ilya cocked an eyebrow. "I see that you have been practicing the diminutives."

"Mhm. Even texted Svetlana first to make sure I got it right."

Ilya could feel himself blushing, which was rare, and Shane's face made it clear that he was savoring it.

"Svetlana is helping you be romantic with me?"

"Of course, moya lyubov."

Ilya shook his head. “That’s mine, you can’t have that one,” he said.

“It’s ‘my love’! You can’t call dibs on ‘my love’, Ilya, it’s like the most basic term of endearment in the world.”

Ilya snaked his hands around Shane’s waist, the controller hitting the carpet. “Oh? Do you need me to pick more complicated ones? Are you no longer impressed?” He kissed Shane’s cheeks between sentences, making Shane laugh and squirm.

Shane managed to escape Ilya’s grip, twisting his body so Ilya wasn’t holding him so tight, and he held Ilya’s face between his hands. “Tell you the truth? I’m always impressed. You could call me anything and I’d probably fucking melt. Russian is sexy.”

“I will call you ‘ashtray’ next time.”

Shane’s nose wrinkled. “That’s disgusting, Ilya. Can you be not gross for like five seconds?”

Ilya grinned at him. “Why would I ever stop when you love it so much? Now let me play my game.”

Shane playfully rolled his eyes as he got out of Ilya’s lap. “Okay, Ilyushenka.”

Ilya shook his head with a laugh, leaning down for the controller. “No, Shane. That one is too cutesy. That is something your mother calls you when you are five.”

Shane laid down on the couch, put his head in Ilya’s lap, and watched him fire the game back up. “Hmm. Then I guess I’ll have to tell my mom.”

Ilya opened his mouth to argue, but then he shut it again. The thought of Yuna Hollander calling him *Ilyushenka*... it felt strangely right. Something he wanted. Yuna could never replace his own mother, of course, but she was certainly a lovely addition. She and David had been treating him as their own since long before he and Shane got married. Sometimes, he felt his mother watching over them when he spent time with Yuna. He liked to imagine she’d like Yuna, too. Someone had to love her son while she couldn’t.

Ilya loved Yuna. She loved him back, even outside of the fact that he was her son’s husband. Ilya was lucky. Lucky and grateful.

“Yes, you should. I would like that,” Ilya said, voice trembling slightly. Shane tilted his head back on Ilya’s thigh and stroked his forearm. The touch was reassuring.

Shane smiled gently up at him and whispered. “They love you, y’know.”

“I love them too.”

There was more weight hanging in the words, but Ilya didn’t explain any further. He knew Shane already understood.

Ilya went back to his game for a while, and Shane turned his head to watch. Later, when Ilya had the equipment menu up, he saw Shane look up at him again in his peripheral vision. Ilya

looked down, and their eyes met.

Shane was studying him carefully. "Did you like that? When I called you Ilyusha?"

Ilya smiled, ran his fingers through Shane's glossy hair, and nodded. "A lot. Don't overuse it, though. It's very sappy."

Shane smiled back. "I won't."

"It is like when I call you 'sweetheart', except with the mushiness multiplied by a thousand."

That made Shane laugh. "Noted."

It was a natural point to turn back to the game, and yet Ilya didn't want to. He wanted to count every freckle on Shane's face, individually. He wanted to hold Shane against his chest and not let him go until the apocalypse came.

Another moment went by, the two men just looking at each other. No words were exchanged, but things were said between them.

I love you.

I love you, too.

The next morning, Ilya slept in a little later than usual. Shane woke up before him on a normal day, so the fact the bed was empty when he opened his eyes didn't stand out at all. He got up and grabbed last night's t-shirt off the floor, pulling it over his head. When Anya saw he was up, she hopped out of her bed and started jumping at his feet, wiggling her whole body in excitement.

"Yes, Anya, papochka's awake!" This was why he loved dogs. Nothing else had ever been so happy to see him in his life. Ilya leaned down, gave her the scratches along her back that she loved, and smiled bigger when she licked his cheek. If Shane had seen that, he'd probably make him go wash his face. He did still need to go into the bathroom to brush his teeth, though. He wanted kissing privileges.

Once Anya had received an acceptable amount of head pats and Ilya had brushed his teeth, the pair of them wandered into the kitchen. He and Anya had a simple morning ritual: while Ilya waited for his coffee to brew, he'd give her a slice of cheese from the fridge. Shane wasn't allowed to know, because he would definitely complain that it was undermining her training. She had an issue with whining for scraps while they cooked, so Shane was strict about not feeding her in the kitchen. Ilya was trying to be the fun dad.

The soft pitter-patters of her paws on the hardwood echoed as they walked through the house. When Ilya saw Shane writing at the breakfast table, still sweaty after his morning run, in his

glasses and with half his hair pulled back, Ilya didn't think twice about it. He must've been working on his Russian.

Ilya walked over to the table, leaned down, and kissed the top of Shane's head. "Good morning, moy krolik," he murmured into his husband's hair.

He was about to stand up and wait for Shane to take a guess what "krolik" meant, but what he saw on the page made him freeze.

Shane wasn't writing in one of his workbooks. He was writing in a lined spiral notebook. The same word, over and over and over again. Four times per line, evenly spaced to form columns.

Илья.

Shane very rarely practiced his handwriting in Russian. He had done enough to learn the alphabet, but always said he wanted to focus his limited time on speaking and listening so he could talk to Ilya. This was excessive for him. Ilya squinted at the page, like if he looked at it for long enough, Shane's motivations would be magically revealed.

Nope. He'd have to ask. "Shane, what are you doing?"

Shane's cheeks were rosy under his freckles. "I'm practicing writing your name."

Ilya smiled against his hair. He was too cute. "Yes. I can see this. You wrote it like a million times. Follow up question: why?"

Shane squirmed, and Ilya wrapped his arms around his upper body. *Always so nervous, my sweetheart.* "I was just- I was thinking about how it might be kind of weird for you, I guess? Because you grew up your whole life with your name written down looking one way, and now you look at it and it's completely different and it probably feels wrong. It would feel weird to me, I don't know."

Shane stopped talking, but Ilya didn't fill the silence. Shane had more to say, he could tell. Also, Ilya's heart was about to start beating hard enough to crack his ribs, so he was in no state to converse.

Sure enough, a few seconds later, Shane went on. "I just thought it might be nice if I could write it the right way when I leave you notes around the house and stuff. I don't have to if you don't like it, but I thought that might be nice for you. So I started practicing. And I got it right the first time, but I wanted to make sure I *really* had it, that it was total muscle memory, because--"

Ilya couldn't take it anymore. He kissed him.

Ilya Rozanov had a husband who could read his mind, apparently, and did the sweetest things to make him feel a tenth of a percent more comfortable in his adoptive country. Ilya didn't care about English or Russian or anything else anymore. The only person he needed to

communicate with was Shane, and he could do it just as well with his hands and lips and tongue. Voices and words were optional.

When they separated, Shane looked so adorably confused that Ilya had to resist the urge to just kiss him again. “I love you so, so much, Shane. Thank you.”

Shane smiled, and Ilya could practically see the heat dissipate from the back of his neck. Had Shane been embarrassed at how totally he loved Ilya?

Ilya hoped not. He wanted a lifetime of this.

“Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu,” Shane whispered.

Never mind. Ilya was going to have to kiss him again after all. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to Shane’s, careful not to bump his nose against his glasses. He let dark hair get caught between his fingers and deepened the kiss.

Before Ilya fell in love with Shane, he thought the big things would be the most important parts of a relationship. Weddings, kids, so on and so forth. That was what everyone always talked about, right?

Ilya had actual experience now, and he knew that wasn’t entirely true. His wedding day was the best day of his life, and thinking about Shane’s proposal to him made him want to cry, but those weren’t the moments that actually made up their relationship. Those were celebrations of it. Their relationship was built on right now, a million times over, and also never again. Every second spent with Shane added together into the softest love Ilya had ever known, something he didn’t realize he needed until he had it. It was by far the greatest gift he’d ever been given, the one thing that made everything else in his life worthwhile.

Ilya wished he could live in the little moments forever. Stanley Cups were great, coffee over the breakfast table was better.

But no. The time was always passing. The seconds were plentiful, but ultimately finite. So as Ilya pulled back half an inch and stared into Shane’s warm, kiss-dazed eyes, and admired his little smile and his delightful freckles, he reminded himself to savor it. To hold on tight to this sexy, gentle, adorable superstar and never let go.

Ilya Rozanov had exactly one home, and it was this: hours spent in Russian workbooks and quiet mornings in the kitchen. Freezing cold feet in his lap and poached eggs piled on toast. Praise whispered into his skin and kisses exchanged before bed.

Ilya Rozanov had exactly one home, and it was Shane.

End Notes

TRANSLATIONS:

Ya lyublyu tebya – I love you
Ya tozhe tebya lyublyu – I love you too
Илья Розанов – Ilya Rozanov
Vnimaniye - Attention
moya lyubov – My love
Dobroye utro, krasavets – Good morning, handsome
Vstan' na koleni – Get on your knees
moy lyubimyy – my beloved
Ilyusha – endearing diminutive form of Ilya
Ilyushenka – very endearing diminutive form of Ilya
papochka – daddy
--
Krolik – Bunny

NOTES:

First I would like to thank Rachel Reid for singlehandedly bringing me out of retirement.

Apologies if either the Russian or the hockey descriptions were inaccurate, I am not very familiar with either.

The Russian TV show Ilya and Shane were watching was [Интерны \(“Interns”\)](#), which is a medical sitcom. I have never watched a single episode. The lines Ilya referenced were pulled from a scene from *Scrubs*. The character names were correct, though.

Ilya’s elderly neighbor used to go to [Измайловский Парк \(Izmaylovsky Park\)](#), which is apparently a prime bird-watching spot in Moscow. Look up the Eurasian Bullfinch, they’re adorable.

The warm reception on the last fic was so sweet and motivating, and I really appreciate y’all so much. It means a lot to know that people read my writing and get even a hint of enjoyment out of it.

Thank you so much for reading! Every single kudos and comment is so so very appreciated :)

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