Of Languages and Love

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Of Languages and Love

by books2beach

Summary

Ilya loved his team and playing hockey in the States, do not get him wrong, but there were still some days when he felt like a fish on dry land.

A large part of that was the fact that he did not speak English as his first language- or even his second.

Or:

5 times Ilya forgot a word in English, and one time Shane did

Notes

For Fulfill-a-Crave-ing- I love languages, so I couldn't resist this one! Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

I.

Ilya loved his team and playing hockey in the States, do not get him wrong, but there were still some days when he felt like a fish on dry land.

A large part of that was the fact that he did not speak English as his first language- or even his second. They had taught it enough when he was training to be a hockey player at the international level, and Ilya had studied it, of course, but it wasn't the same. He had learned in school too, but that was back in the days when he had thought that his love of hockey would not go anywhere, so like most of his classmates, he had not taken it seriously.

Now, of course, he was paying for it, and right now was no exception.

He was in one of the many interviews he had done with the press since Ilya Rozanov had become a name people knew all around the world. This particular interview, much to his chagrin, was also one with Shane Hollander. Ilya could not stand him, but in times like these, he could not help but be jealous of him too. Hollander knew exactly what they were saying, what they were asking, and it put him at a distinct advantage.

“Ilya, what has it been like, playing with an American team instead of a Russian one? Are there any coaching or regimen differences? Any variations in the team itself?”

Ilya had no idea what half of those words meant. Regimen? It sounded like some kind of pasta dish. “Is difficult to talk,” he admitted. “As captain, need to talk to tell players what to do.”

“What about the way practices are run?” Hollander asked.

There. Ilya would never admit it to him, but Hollander had just saved him. Ilya had to make it up to him somehow. He knew continuing this thing between them was twisted, wrong in every sense of the word, but he had a few ideas…

II.

Ilya was spent. Shane had really done his job well this time.

The thing was, though, normally, this would be around the time that he would leave and Ilya would go back to having the space- usually his hotel room, but this time, he had invited Shane to his home- to himself. Call it whatever you want- Ilya still wasn't sure what had possessed him to do it- but he had gone out and bought a whole case of Shane's favorite drink. And he had some… oh, he couldn't think of the word. He could make Shane food, and there was something about that, something in the fact that he was able to take care of him, even in this small way, that filled Ilya with a feeling he had never known before. He helped his brother and father out of a sense of familial obligation. Doing this for Shane because he wanted to… There was a part of Ilya that was terrified of this feeling, and another piece of him that never wanted it to fade away

“Making food. Want some?” he asked, getting out of bed.

Shane moaned and glanced at him sleepily. It was adorable. “If I don't have to get out of bed.”

Ilya kissed his forehead. “No. I do the work and bring it here.”

“‘Kay.”

A couple minutes later, Ilya found himself in the kitchen, putting the fish into sandwiches. He could not remember what they were called in English, though, and it was bothering him. Every time he thought he had a better grasp on English, something came up and completely stumped him. Shane would understand, though. He always had, ever since that first interview they had done together. Ilya still did not know what had convinced Shane to help him that day, what had persuaded him to give him an assist. He was thankful for it all the same, though, and he was pretty sure he had never told Shane just how much.

Soon, he was bringing the sandwiches into the bedroom. “Do you like these? Are fish sandwiches, um-” He still couldn't remember the word! What would Shane think?

His eyes, though, had lit up at the sight of the plates in Ilya's hands. “Tuna melts! Yeah, I like those.”

Ilya’s grin, he was sure, was small, shy, only a hint of the emotions he was feeling. He had a master plot, you see, one that would hopefully convince Shane to finally decide to spend the night with him.

Judging by how this was going so far, he was finally going to get his wish.

III.

It was their first Christmas spent with Shane's parents, and Ilya was nervous. He was great at hiding it, and knew he would be fine eventually. In the meantime, though…

He spent time helping Yuna in the kitchen. He hadn't spent a lot of time cooking, but he and Shane, now that they saw each other as much as they could, were trying to try simple recipes.

“Hand me the spatula please, would you, Ilya? It's in that drawer right in front of you.”

Ilya stared at the contents of the drawer, which were numerous- far too much so for him to have any hope of figuring out which item Yuna was referring to. He had this awful feeling that if he just wasn't nervous, if he was able to focus on the English instead of the fear that Shane's parents would change their minds about him…

“Which one?” he asked quietly, and she turned to him, a soft, pitying expression in her eyes. There was a part of Ilya that sounded a lot like his father that hated that expression, the sign of weakness it showcased.

Yuna and David, though, were nothing like his father. They had shown that from the moment Ilya met them, their tolerance- acceptance- of his relationship with their son blowing him away.

With a smile, she handed him a tool that could only be the spatula, and Ilya was reminded of their first interview together, when Shane had helped Ilya by covering his lack of English vocabulary up for him. Then, too, Shane had broken through the language barriers that plagued Ilya until they weren't so scary anymore.

He didn't deserve this family.

IV.

“Play with us, Uncle Ilya!”

Ilya smiled down at Jade and Ruby, Arthur behind them. He still wasn't sure how he felt about his husband's best friend and was pretty sure he never would be, but his children, especially his daughters? Ilya loved them almost as much as he loved Shane. “What are we going to play?”

“Pretty Pretty Princess, of course!” Ruby declared, brandishing a box in front of his face.

“Have never played this game,” Ilya admitted, making the girls giggle.

The girls gasped in horror. “It's so much fun!” they promised, Jade going on to add, “By the end, you're wearing all the pretty jewelry!”

“Maybe is best I look at my choices, then. Don't want something that does not look good with my curls,” Ilya mused, making the girls giggle.

He sifted through the pile, necklaces galore passing through his fingertips. There were smaller ones, though (ones that he would struggle to wear on more than his two smallest fingers, if he was being honest), that he could not remember the name of.

He held it up. “What is this one called? I want this one.”

Jade and Ruby giggled again. “It's a bracelet, Uncle Ilya!”

Ilya held it close. “This bracelet is all mine.”

V.

“Hey, can you find the Band-Aids?”

Ilya had no idea what that was, and they did not have the time for him to figure it out. They had agreed to watch Jade, Arthur and Ruby along with their baby sister, and Ruby had gotten her finger stuck in a door, blood as red as her name gushing out. Ilya had to do something about it, or he would not be able to live with himself. He knew Hayden would be furious with him, but that was not the problem. Hayden Pike being mad at him had been a staple of Ilya’s life for years now, both on and off the ice.

No, what Ilya would not stand for was the look of pain on Ruby’s sweet little face, the thought that it was all happening on his watch. He had injured more than his fair share of players on the ice with both words and fists, but kids were a different story. He had to do whatever he could to make Ruby smile again.

Which meant he needed something to stop all this bleeding. Someone with more mettle- his father, for instance- would probably say that it was not a big deal, that going through this would make Ruby stronger, but stronger than that toxic masculinity was the voice of his mother as she sang to him every time he was sick, her gentle hands as she cured every fever and ache he'd ever had.

Locking eyes with Shane, making sure he was going absolutely nowhere while he retrieved what they needed, Ilya moved to pull away, but Ruby clung to him tighter. “No, Uncle Ilya! Stay.”

Ilya did not know what to do. He had to go get bandages and whatever these Band-Aids were that Shane was talking about, but if Ruby did not want to be apart from him, who was he to tell her no in her hour of need?

“I'll go get them,” Shane said quietly.

Ilya's heart was full to bursting, the fact that Ruby saw him as hers in even this small way filling him with joy. He had to distract her from the pain, though. She was being remarkably brave, and he had to keep it that way, or he just might end up with a meltdown on his hands. “Do you want to play dress up with me once you are all better?” he asked, knowing how much she loved it. Hopefully, the mere suggestion of one of her favorite activities would boost her spirits.

She sniffed, then looked up at him. “Yes please. With Uncle Shane too?”

He probably shouldn't speak for Shane, but that didn't matter. All that mattered was that Ruby got everything her heart desired. “Of course.”

I.

Shane stood across from Ilya, their hands- now a bit more battered and bruised from their time on the ice, a sign of the years that had gone by since the last time they had done this- clasped between them.

It was their tenth wedding anniversary, and they had both just retired from the NHL. Since they were starting a new chapter, Ilya, romantic man that he was at heart, had had the idea to

have a vow renewal. Shane, of course, had had no hesitation, promptly agreeing to his husband's brilliant plan.

Now they were about to exchange vows. Ilya had said that he regretted not writing their own vows the first time they had done this, so now here they were, Shane with a piece of paper in his pocket that had been crumpled so many times with how often he had folded it. A part of him regretted that, knowing the romantic in Ilya might want to keep it for posterity's sake, but he couldn't help it. He was just so nervous. What if he forgot all of his vows, even with the written version of them in his hand?

The paper was partly crinkled from Shane's tears as he'd written the words he was about to speak, and he could feel them welling up in his eyes again as he unfolded the vows, prepared, finally, to say them aloud. “The thing about being bilingual is that usually, there's a word for everything. Even if it doesn't exist in one language, the other language has you covered.

“There are no words, though, that completely describe how I feel about you. You're so much more than just that guy I was supposed to hate but at the same time was attracted to with no rhyme or reason when we were teens, Ilya. I forget what it's called, exactly, but I made you something that commemorates our lives together- the eleven years, the long game that ended in our happily ever after, and this decade of finally having our dreams become reality.”

With that, he held out something, and Ilya took it. He laughed when he saw it. It was the Olympic rings, but in picture form, pictures of them from the early days (represented by those same selfies Ilya had taken at the NHL Awards all those years ago) to photos of them now, with Hayden's girls, now teenagers, and their own kids, whom Ilya loved more than anyone except their father.

Tears were glistening in his eyes when he looked back up at his husband. “Is perfect collage, Shane. Thank you.”

Shane slapped his forehead. “How did I forget that? It's the exact same word, just pronounced differently!”

“Is okay,” Ilya assured him with a kiss to his forehead. “You always help with my English. Is good that I finally got to help you.”

With that, they returned their attention to the matter at hand, Shane certain of one thing. He didn't know what he'd do without Ilya by his side.

End Notes

My last entry for this event will be released on cottage episode day, so don't forget to be on the lookout!

You can find me on Bluesky (suseagull5921) and Tumblr (books2beach)

Hope you all enjoyed this- thank you all for reading, please let me know what you think!

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