Svetlana and Shane become pen pals

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Svetlana and Shane become pen pals

by unfuckitall

Summary

r/russianlanguage
u/genuine_metal_45
Cahteeohnik???
I'm kind of in a situationship with this Russian guy. He sometimes struggles a bit with expressing himself in English. I've been trying to learn some Russian, but it's going to take a long time before I can have much of a conversation with him in his language.

Right now, I'm such a beginner at Russian that I can't even manage the spelling to try to look up any of the things he says. He calls me something that sounds like cahteeohnik, but I can't figure out the correct transliteration to look it up. And trying to spell it in cyrillic is hopeless.

Any help would be appreciated!

In the early days of Shane and Ilya hooking up, what if Ilya was a little more free with endearments, but only in Russian? And what if Shane went online for some help understanding what Ilya is saying and somehow connected to Svetlana? This is Svetlana's POV of how that plays out.

Notes

These guys have been bouncing around in my brain for weeks now, and I finally wrote down one of my specific ideas.

This got a bit more serious and more closely tied to the timeline of the show than I originally intended. It's still pretty fluffy, but I was originally expecting it to be borderline crack, and I think I veered away from that.

I know almost nothing about reddit. I have no idea if there's a Russian language subreddit, and if there is whether it's good, bad, or other. Any details that seem wrong are because this is a different universe than ours. The same way the show has MLH instead of NHL, maybe their version of reddit is different too.

I also relied on Google translate and various online listicles for everything to do with Russian language and culture, and I hope I have not been led too far astray.

Svetlana didn't exactly spend a lot of time on Reddit, but she did find it useful to track the current gossip in the world of hockey. Especially to see what was being said about Ilya Rozanov.

She didn't comment much. Ilya didn't need her to stand up for him and wouldn't appreciate the effort even if he did. Her account was mostly used to follow a few hockey-related subreddits, though occasionally posts about other topics popped up.

She wasn't sure why the post caught her attention, but she found herself reading about some poor idiot who was looking for help with the Russian language.

It didn't seem inherently unreasonable to look for help with the language on a subreddit called r/russianlanguage... except for the fact that r/russianlanguage was a cesspit.

> r/russianlanguage
> u/genuine_metal_45
> **Cahteeohnik???**
> *I'm kind of in a situationship with this Russian guy. He sometimes struggles a bit with expressing himself in English. I've been trying to learn some Russian, but it's going to take a long time before I can have much of a conversation with him in his language.*
>
> *Right now, I'm such a beginner at Russian that I can't even manage the spelling to try to look up any of the things he says. He calls me something that sounds like cahteeohnik, but I can't figure out the correct transliteration to look it up. And trying to spell it in cyrillic is hopeless.*
>
> *Any help would be appreciated!*

The comments were consistently, across the board, not helpful in the slightest. They ranged from criticism for struggling with the language to complaints about the word situationship to attacks for apparently being gay.

Before she could think about it for too long, she clicked through to start a Reddit Chat with the poster.

> "hey, if your Russian guy is addressing you when he says cahteeohnik I think he's saying Котенок – kotyonek. means cat or kitten but cute and affectionate"

u/genuine_metal_45: "Wow, I think that's it! Thank you. I take it that's the masculine form of it? I mean, there's a different version you'd use for a woman, right?"

> "Yes, for a woman, you'd say ко́шечка – kóshechka."

u/genuine_metal_45: "I should've thought of that, but I figured I'd just not identify myself and let them assume I was a woman…. I should go see if I can delete my post now. I didn't expect the comments to be such a shitshow."

"yeah, r/russianlanguage isn't one of the good subreddits. you can message me directly if you need help with other russian translations"

u/genuine_metal_45: "Thanks again"

Svetlana didn't think much more of the interaction until a few days later when a notification popped up.

u/genuine_metal_45: "What does "ya skochoyo po tebye" mean???"

"я скучаю по тебе
ya skuchayu po tebe
I miss you"

u/genuine_metal_45: "Oh. Oh wow."

"your guy is very sweet"

Over the next couple of weeks, they exchanged several other messages, some for translations just as sweet (darling, sunshine, pretty boy) and others far less so (shit, fuck).

u/genuine_metal_45: "Are you actually Russian? Or do you just know the language well?"

"Actually Russian. Born and raised there, but I live in the US now."

u/genuine_metal_45: "OK, so I read something about how Russian friends would basically never refer to each other by their real first name. Like, Natalia would always be Natasha to her friends. Is that true?"

"Yes. My friend Sasha is only ever Alexander when his father is angry at him. Why? You want to call your Russian boyfriend by the diminutive of his name?"

u/genuine_metal_45: "He's not my boyfriend!"

"Sure. That's why you care so much not only about learning his language to understand what he says, but you want to understand Russian nicknames. But it's just a situationship. Right."

Just when she'd started to think he wasn't going to respond, another message appeared.

u/genuine_metal_45: "It's complicated."

"If you wanted simple, a gay Russian was not the right choice."

u/genuine_metal_45: "He's bi, actually."

"That's not any more simple. Even more complicated, actually"

u/genuine_metal_45: "yeah, well, none of my simple relationships have had the chemistry I have with him"

"Ooh, so the sex is good?"

u/genuine_metal_45: “amazing enough to keep the most complicated situationship I can imagine for myself going for years now…”

Svetlana noticed that he was back to calling it a situationship, but she stopped herself from continuing to poke the bear. She had to remind herself that this was not Ilya or another close friend, that she didn’t even know this man, not really. This was neither her circus nor her monkeys.

And yet, two days later when she received a Reddit chat message from genuine_metal_45 saying that he needed to delete his Reddit account because he was getting increasingly harassing messages, even though he’d deleted his initial post, she offered him her phone number, saying that he could text her instead if he had other questions about Russian and Russians.

She didn’t expect to hear from him, but somehow she was happy to have made the offer.

A week later, when she received a message from an unknown number asking for a translation of yet another badly transliterated endearment, she was genuinely delighted when she wrote back “Gen?”

“If you mean, am I genuine_metal_45, then yes. Please don’t start calling me Gen.”

“OK, I’ll save your number in my phone as pretty boy”

Pretty Boy: WTF

“I don’t know what else to call you… unless you prefer kitten?”

Pretty Boy: “God, no. You can call me Jay”

“OK, Jay. You can call me Lana”

Jay continued to text intermittently, mostly asking for translations of random words of Russian.

Jay: “this is kind of random, but I was wondering if you know any good places to get Russian food. I travel around a lot, so it doesn't need to be a specific city or anything”

“Russia is pretty good for Russian food”

Jay: “thanks smart ass”

“Seriously, I don't even know where you live or travel. You know I live in the US, but does that mean you want places in the US? Somewhere else?”

Jay: “US or Canada would work”

“NYC has the best Russian food in the US. Are you going there any time soon?”

Jay: “Yeah, in the next month or so”

“Ok, so…” Svetlana was in her element, developing a plan for not only where to go but what kinds of foods would both be most appreciated and would travel well.

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“Hey how'd it go? Did your man like the Russian food you brought?”

She wasn't sure exactly when the big date was–Jay was extremely vague about his exact schedule–but she was pretty sure it was either last week or the week before.

Jay: “the food was really good. He definitely liked it. But… I think we kind of broke up”

Svetlana desperately wanted to point out that situationships don't get breakups. But she wanted to hear the rest of the story even more.

“What happened?”

Jay: “it was kind of a lot. Too much. I don't know. It's hard to explain. But I left. The first time he asked me to stay, and I left”

“You mean you ran away”

Jay: “I guess. Yeah. You remember I told you this whole thing is really complicated? I can't explain it without doxxing both me and him, but trust me, you wouldn't believe how complicated it is”

“So it was too much and you ran”

Inexplicably, Svetlana thought about the way Ilya looked when she teased him about Jane. The way he mostly looked defensive, but with a tiny flicker of something like excitement or… hope. She wasn't sure if she was thinking of Jay like that, or his unknown Russian. Or both of them.

Jay: “Look, half the time we were talking, he was going on about all the women he fucks. He's fine without me. He won't even miss me”

“...are you trying to convince me or yourself?”

Jay: “I don't know what to tell you. But I won't really have a reason to text you anymore and I didn't want to ghost you”

“No, no, no! I am invested in this soap opera now. I want updates. Especially when you get back together with your Russian”

Jay: “yeah right”

After that, Svetlana didn't have high expectations for hearing from Jay again anytime soon, if ever. So she was pleasantly surprised to see a text from Jay just a couple weeks later.

Jay: “I don't know if you really wanted updates, but I met someone”

“OMG! Tell me everything! Is he Russian, too??”

Jay: “well, first, she's a woman”

“Are you bi? For some reason, I thought you were gay”

Svetlana watched the three bouncing dots for so long that she started to think he wouldn't answer. It didn't seem like that difficult a question to her but it seemed she may have struck a nerve.

Jay: “I just don't like labels. I don't understand why everything and everyone has to be labeled. Bi, gay, whatever. I like who I like. Why does that have to define me... I'm just me, ok”

Her eyebrows shot up. That really seemed like she hit a nerve. Unless she was reading too much into it.

“Ok, Mr No Labels, tell me all about this woman”

That unleashed a flood of description: how sweet she was, how easy to talk to, how fun, how charming, how he didn't feel awkward with her… it was only later that Svetlana realized that he had only briefly mentioned her looks and hadn't said anything about their chemistry.

When he texted again a few weeks later to say that they'd broken up, she was only surprised that he was continuing to keep her updated.

Svetlana was watching highlights from the prior day's All Star game when Jay texted again.

Jay: “So I might need more translation help from you again”

“OMG, did you and your Russian man get back together???”

Jay: “yeah, kind of”

“So are you finally admitting it's not a situationship?”

Jay: “not really. I mean, it sounds like this would fuck up his relationship with his family if they knew”

“What they don't know won't hurt them”

Svetlana glared at Ilya’s front door, where she’d been waiting for an excessive amount of time. OK, maybe it’d been two or three minutes, but that was certainly excessive when he

was supposed to be expecting her.

She'd rung the bell multiple times and could hear it echoing within each time. He was probably in the yard, though she couldn't fathom why he'd be there where he couldn't hear the doorbell when he knew she was coming. She'd agreed not to let herself in unexpectedly a few years ago when he was startled and got all shitty about her waiting to surprise him after his game was canceled.

But he couldn't exactly argue that this was unexpected when he knew perfectly well that she was coming over. With that in mind, she entered her code on the front door lock to let herself in and headed directly toward the yard.

As expected, Ilya was sitting out there, apparently on the phone, his back to the door. She slid the door open quietly. He deserved to be startled for leaving her waiting.

"Yes, of course, мой капризный котенок (moy kapriznyy kotenok)."

Svetlana stopped short. She never thought she'd hear Ilya of all people using such a ridiculous endearment for anyone.

Her phone buzzed in her hand. Reflexively, she turned it on to see a text message from Jay.

"What does capreesnee mean???"

She had just started to type the word cranky in response, when she froze as unexpected pieces clicked into place. Within the space of a few seconds, "Jay" had asked her to define a word that she just heard Ilya say in conversation… almost certainly a conversation with his beloved "Jane".

"Tell Jay hi from me." She spoke firmly, her voice loud enough that Ilya broke off mid-sentence.

"Svetlana! I'm going to change the code on my front door if you're going to let yourself in whenever you want." Most people would have thought that Ilya looked annoyed or even angry, but Svetlana could see the panic at the back of his eyes. He was trying to distract her.

Moving quickly, she grabbed Ilya's phone from his hand, glancing at the screen to confirm that the call was with "Jane". She tapped to change the call over to speaker mode, while ducking away from Ilya's desperate grab to reclaim his phone.

"Jay! It's Lana! Apparently we have a mutual friend." Ilya groaned in response to her words, and while the other end of the line remained silent, Svetlana continued, "мой капризный котенок means my cranky kitten. Also, Ilya is annoyingly in love with you. You should stop calling it a situationship."

She feinted left then ducked right to avoid Ilya's continued effort to get his phone back.

"Svetlana, what are you talking about?" Ilya seemed confused enough that she wasn't sure he was processing the fact that she'd just told Jay that Ilya was in love with him. Before she

could either answer his question or point out that he might be missing the key point, Ilya continued, “Situationship?? Is terrible word. I do not use such terrible fake word!”

She could hear a shaky breath on the other end of the line, so she swatted at Ilya’s arm in a silent order to be quiet.

“Lana? Svetlana?” the voice on the other end of the line didn’t wait for confirmation before continuing, “oh, god, you were supposed to be some stranger I’d never meet face to face, not Ilya’s best friend!”

“Ilya, do I get to meet ‘Jane’ now?” Svetlana smiled sweetly, her smile only widening when Ilya started muttering a truly impressive string of Russian expletives.

“I still don’t know what is happening.” Ilya threw his hands up in frustration before continuing, “Котенок, she doesn’t know who you are, and she doesn’t have to.”

Svetlana felt her eyes narrow at that. Why would she know who “Jane” is, other than the man that Ilya had so clearly fallen for?

Svetlana heard another sigh from the other end of the line.

“Can she keep a secret?”

“She is right here and can speak for herself!” Svetlana snapped.

“I’m sure you would say that you can keep a secret, but I’m asking Ilya.”

“Yes, she keeps secrets well.” Ilya sounded resigned and had seemingly given up on getting his phone away from Svetlana until she was ready to give it back. Seemingly wasn’t good enough to get her to move closer to Ilya, but she stopped moving around so much, though still ready to jump away at the slightest move from Ilya.

“Jane? Are you going to tell me your real name?” Svetlana was still shuffling around mental puzzle pieces, trying to solve the mystery that she hadn’t known was in front of her for so long. She’d thought that Ilya was only hiding that his beloved Jane was a man, not that there was a bigger mystery there.

“Uh, yeah, my name is Shane Hollander. I play for–”

Svetlana and Ilya spoke over him at the same time.

“Do you seriously think I don't know who Shane Hollander is?”

“Котенок, she knows who you are. She thinks you're hot.” Ilya gave her an unimpressed look while sharing her opinion.

“...Thanks? I guess?”

“Well, Shane, I may owe you an apology for thinking that you were being overdramatic about how complicated the situation was. But luckily for you, I am very talented at sorting out

Ilya's chaos.”

“MY chaos? Is Hollander’s chaos too. Maybe more his.”

“No, it's not,” Svetlana and Shane said at the same time.

After a moment of surprise, Svetlana started to smile. This was going to be fun.

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