

the trials and tribulations of love languages

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by [moonlightdances](#)

Summary

Every single example online of the love languages could fit Ilya to some degree – Shane had never thought about it before, but now that he knew, it was a problem that he didn't know Ilya's. He already wasn't fluent in Russian, despite his attempt at learning, and he refused to be behind on another of Ilya's languages.

Shane looked down at Ilya, still passed out asleep in his arms, and nodded to himself, ready to run a series of experiments until he found what worked for Ilya.

Notes

i couldn't stop thinking about how touchy ilya is and now we are here. enjoy!

Shane had never really thought about how he showed affection, nor how Ilya showed it to him. What they had worked, so there was no need to think about it further – it was the one thing Shane didn't feel the need to overthink or rationalize, so he didn't.

Then, Ilya made it glaringly obvious that it was something *he* had thought about, and Shane felt his stomach twist a bit.

“What is this?” Shane asked, accepting the mug from Ilya where he was seated on the couch with a book in his lap. Ilya bent down to press a fleeting kiss to Shane's cheek and gave a small smile before continuing on his path past the couch.

“Tea. Your throat hurts from shouting earlier,” Ilya answered, eyebrow raising like he dared Shane to argue with him. Shane had shouted at a referee earlier that day during a game when the ref had ignored an idiot rookie charging Ilya and pummeling him into the ground. His throat *did* hurt; it was rare for Shane to scream at someone like he did, and the fact that Ilya had thought about taking care of him like this warmed him just as much as the first sip of honeyed tea did. Ilya winked and left, the shower kicking on just a few moments later.

Shane sat and sipped his tea and just thought, mentally running through his relationship with Ilya. Since moving in together, and getting married, and having the dream life they both wanted where they could publicly love each other, Ilya had absolutely zero qualms about doing anything Shane asked him to. The team teased them about it – that Ilya may be the captain of them, but everyone knew Shane was really the one with the control in the end. Everyone saw when Shane said they were going home instead of out and Ilya just nodded along while taking the keys; everyone saw the way Ilya would pout just a bit when Shane refused to hug him while in their sweaty gear.

No one saw the way Ilya seemed to know what Shane needed without him even asking for it, though. The tea was just one example of a long, long list.

Any time Shane was slightly overwhelmed or overstimulated, Ilya would appear like magic to lessen the load and do anything he could to make Shane's burden lighter, anything from as simple as refilling Shane's water bottle to picking up his parents from the airport, from turning off the lights in a room to ordering Shane's favourite jeans in every color so he wouldn't need to search for them again. Making Shane's life easier seemed natural to Ilya, and Shane had no idea what to do with that information. Ilya so easily did things that made Shane feel warm inside and so very loved, and he had *no idea* what to do about the fact that Shane didn't do the same for him. So, he waited until Ilya came back, damp and shower-fresh as he sprawled out next to Shane, easily sliding beneath his arms so his head was on Shane's chest and Shane's book was resting on his back.

“Ilya.” Shane said, trying to think about how to ask what he wanted to.

Ilya hummed in acknowledgement and relaxed against Shane.

“You always do things for me.”

“The tea?”

“Well, yeah. But not just the tea. Just, in general. You do things to help me before I even need to ask you.”

Ilya raised his head, dropping his chin against Shane’s chest. “Yes. That is what being married is about. I help you and make your life easier and love you, and you do the same for me.”

“But I don’t,” Shane protested, suddenly a bit sick to his stomach. “I don’t do all the things you do.”

Ilya’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “You do not need to.”

“You don’t need to either. You know that, right? That you don’t need to do things for me for me to love you?”

Ilya pulled back, pushing himself onto his palms and looking at Shane with a hint of panic in his eyes. “Do you not want me to do things for you?”

“That’s not what I’m saying,” Shane argued, his face flushing. He put the book on the back of the sofa and brought his hands to Ilya’s biceps, massaging and squeezing as he spoke. “I just- I don’t know.”

Ilya relaxed a bit. “Shane. Answer this: do you like when I do stupid things like make you tea?”

“Well, yeah, but you don’t *need* to-”

“Stop. You like it, yes or no?”

“Yes.”

Ilya shrugged. “Then I will keep doing it. It makes you feel happy, and I feel like I am showing you how much I love you. That is all that matters.”

After a few tense seconds, Shane nodded, sliding his hands to the back of Ilya’s head and guiding him back down until he was laying on Shane’s chest again. Ilya made a sound of pure contentment and Shane felt his heart threaten to rip apart with affection, completely enamored by his husband. Ilya sank against him until he was nothing but dead weight against Shane, his breathing so slow and relaxed that Shane almost thought he’d fallen asleep. Ilya mumbled something. Shane hummed questioningly, wondering about the sound and its reason. Ilya sighed, “Love language. That is what Pike showed me.”

“What?”

“Love language,” Ilya repeated, his voice weakening with each mumbled syllable.

“What?” Shane repeated. When he was met with no response, he just sighed and continued to pet Ilya’s head; Ilya’s relaxed breathing and occasional hint of a snore confirmed the fact that

Shane was set to be Ilya's body pillow for the foreseeable future, so Shane grabbed his phone and looked up *love languages*. A common list popped up immediately – words of affirmation, acts of service, gifting, quality time, physical touch – and Shane clicked on almost every link, reading through all of it.

Acts of service was certainly *Shane's* love language – anytime Ilya did something for him, he felt so loved and cared for that it was either extremely calming and relieving or so overwhelming that Shane needed to kiss him then and there. It was the same with his parents; whenever his mom or dad did something that helped him ease his burden or just made his life easier, he knew that they really and truly cared. His mom loved quality time more than anything else, even if it was something as simple as Shane accompanying her to the grocery store; his dad was always giving people gifts, even just a pen in their favorite color that he saw and picked up.

But what's Ilya's? Shane thought.

Ilya was just...Ilya. He reveled in Shane's attention in whatever format it came, soaking it up like a sponge. When Shane praised him or reminded him how much Ilya meant to him, Ilya smiled and whispered *I love you* back. When Shane carried his bags or washed Ilya's extra jersey preemptively, Ilya made sure to thank Shane with hearts in his eyes. The list went on and on. Shane would bring back some of Ilya's favourite vodka and would get a passionate kiss in return. He'd sit with Ilya and watch one of Ilya's favorite movies, and Ilya would shower Shane with affection in return. Shane couldn't even narrow down a single instance of physical touch – Ilya was *always* touching him, sprawled across him like he was in that moment or holding his hand or leaning against Shane's side.

Every single example online of the love languages could fit Ilya to some degree – Shane had never thought about it before, but now that he knew, it was a problem that he didn't know Ilya's. He already wasn't fluent in Russian, despite his attempt at learning, and he refused to be behind on another of Ilya's languages.

Shane looked down at Ilya, still passed out asleep in his arms, and nodded to himself, ready to run a series of experiments until he found what worked for Ilya.

Test 1: Words of Affirmation

Shane needed to be subtle about this, so that Ilya didn't catch on.

"Hey," he said to Ilya as he walked into the kitchen where Ilya was cooking. Shane stopped at his side, pressing a kiss to Ilya's shoulder in greeting.

"Hey," Ilya copied in response, stirring some pasta while looking over his shoulder at Shane.

"I love you," Shane said bluntly. *Fuck*, he thought. *Not subtle at all.*

"That is good, seeing as I maybe love you too. Maybe would marry you, even," Ilya teased in response, his ring glinting under the light like it knew its job was comedic accompaniment.

“Fuck off, I’m serious,” Shane countered, scoffing in dual self-consciousness and amusement. “I love you, and I appreciate you making us dinner.”

Ilya paused where he was looking at the pasta, letting go of it slowly and turning to look at Shane with a complicated expression. “I love you, too. But this is nothing. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Ilya.” Shane insisted, lifting a hand to Ilya’s cheek and holding him as he gave Ilya a quick kiss. “I just really appreciate it.”

Ilya evaluated him carefully, studying his face for a few moments. Eventually, he nodded against Shane’s palm. “Okay. I appreciate you...appreciating it?”

“Alright, that’s it. I’m done with you.”

“No,” Ilya whined, pulling at Shane’s arm when Shane pulled away and turned to walk off. Shane let himself be tugged right into another kiss, his heart racing in his chest. When Ilya pulled back, the softness of his gaze was almost overwhelming. “I just do not know how to answer that. You like when I cook for you, and I like doing it. That’s all that matters, yes?”

“Yeah.” Shane agreed. Ilya side-eyed him for a second, double-checking that Shane was alright and just being a little weird, before knocking their foreheads together lightly the way he usually did when they had their helmets on. He turned back to the pasta, stirring it with one hand while keeping his other on Shane’s wrist where he’d pulled him back.

“Let me go,” Shane protested weakly, swinging his arm back and forth but making no real move to extract himself from the loose grip.

“No.”

“Ilya.”

“Shane.”

“Ilya.”

“Shane.”

“You’re impossible.”

“I thought I was *appreciated*. Ah, the truth comes out.”

“Oh my God,” Shane sighed, rolling his eyes in faux annoyance but moving closer so he could drop his head against Ilya’s shoulder. He’d started this, though, so he had to commit to it. “I do, though. I...value the way you make food for us, and how you always take care of me, and how hot you are, and how-”

“Shane,” Ilya cut in, sounding almost strained. Shane lifted his head and took in the redness of Ilya’s ears, the quick bob of his throat as he swallowed, and the way he seemed to be shifting in place subtly.

“Are you embarrassed?” Shane asked, the realisation slowly dawning on him.

“No.” Ilya protested. Then, “Yes.”

“Aww.”

“Shut up, Shane. Having your pretty husband say these things to you? Is very difficult.”

“Trust me, I know,” Shane countered. He *did* know – Ilya loved to talk and almost never stopped, really. Now, though, he was quiet, almost contemplative. Shane took the moment for what it was – reflection – and leaned forward to kiss Ilya’s cheek.

“I love you, and thank you,” Shane said quietly before squeezing Ilya’s hand and stepping away to begin setting the table for dinner. Words of affirmation had a positive reaction but not the one Shane was looking for, so it was on to the next.

Test 2: Acts of Service

Ilya was *tired*. That much was obvious to Shane, and more than obvious. He practically dragged his feet to the car and he blinked a little too long before answering questions. So, when they got back home, Shane didn’t even think about it. He took both of their bags from the trunk while Ilya climbed out of the car.

“I can carry my bag.” Ilya protested.

“I know,” Shane countered, completely ignoring Ilya. He carried both the bags to the door and pushed it open before Ilya reached it, stopping in the hallway to kick off his shoes and dropping the bags just before he dropped to his knees.

“Wow. So pretty down there, Shane. But I do not know if I can-”

“I’m not sucking your dick. Give me your foot.”

Ilya looked confused but listened, lifting a foot until Shane guided it to rest on his knee. Shane quickly undid the laces of his trainers, one foot after the other, before standing again. Ilya’s sleep-lidded eyes followed the movement and he swayed where he stood, visibly exhausted.

“Go take your shower,” Shane said quietly, softly. “I’ll take care of the bags.”

“I can do it.”

“I know you *can*, but you don’t need to, Ilya. Go shower and get in bed.”

Ilya nodded. “You’ll come to bed?”

“As soon as I’m done,” Shane promised. Ilya nodded again and slowly walked past Shane like he was in a trance, making his way up the stairs and to their bedroom.

Shane quickly brought the bags to their washing machine, unloading the dirty clothing and starting the cycle. He heard the shower turn on as he washed their water bottles and set them out to dry, and he heard it turn off as Shane finalised everything he needed to. He followed Ilya to their bedroom and watched as Ilya sleepily pulled on a pair of sweatpants before practically falling into the bed, stuffing himself beneath the covers and exhaling heavily. Shane didn’t even try to keep the fond smile off his face as he quickly walked to their bathroom and took the quickest shower he could; the moment he was out he threw on his favourite pair of Ilya’s pajama pants and joined him in bed. Instantly, Ilya’s arms wrapped around Shane and pulled him against Ilya’s chest.

“Thank you,” he mumbled against the top of Shane’s head. Just like that, Ilya was falling asleep. Shane pressed his face into Ilya’s neck and let himself be held; acts of service were certainly helpful to Ilya, but either he was too tired to care or it wasn’t *his* love language, so Shane’s testing had to continue.

Test 3: Gifting

Shane didn’t pick up on things sometimes; it could be hard for him to hear the unspoken things, or to see things when it wasn’t crystal clear. Seeing how Ilya stared at a bracelet while shopping for Yuna’s birthday, though, was as clear as water.

It was gold and relatively simple, just two strands that tied in a knot in the middle before separating again and looping around to a clasp. It was almost delicate, far more so than what Shane would expect Ilya to wear, but Ilya seemed absolutely transfixed by it.

“It’s pretty,” Shane commented.

“Yes,” Ilya agreed easily, looking at it through the display case. “Your mother does not wear gold, though.”

“Not pretty for her, pretty for *you*,” Shane clarified, knocking his shoulder against Ilya’s. Ilya looked almost startled when he looked at Shane, clearly caught off guard by how transparent he was. Ilya glanced at the bracelet again, like he couldn’t fully look away from it. He paused, thinking hard, before shaking his head and looking away.

“We are here for Yuna,” Ilya pointed out, stepping away and walking towards a collection of silver necklaces. Shane glanced back at the bracelet before following Ilya. It didn’t take long to find something for Yuna – she was always relatively easy to shop for and liked just about anything from anyone. Ilya talked to the sales assistant and she brought it to the register for checkout; he went to pull out his card without even blinking and Shane’s heart warmed at the easy care he had for Shane’s family. Shane saw an opportunity, though, and stopped him.

“Ilya.” Shane said, stopping Ilya before he could make it to the register. “How about you grab the car and meet me at the front? I’ll check out.”

Ilya nodded, entirely unsuspecting, and shamelessly put his hand in Shane's front pocket to grab the keys. He grinned at Shane's exasperated sigh and planted a wet kiss on Shane's cheek before turning and walking out.

"Sir? Will the necklace be all for you?"

The moment Ilya was out of sight, Shane turned back to the assistant and smiled politely. "Not quite. There's a bracelet over there that I like. Do you think we could get that, too?"

The bracelet was even prettier up close and out of the display case, and Shane couldn't stop thinking about how nice it would look on Ilya's wrist.

"You can get a charm with a letter on it attached for no additional cost. It would only take a few seconds for our jeweler to attach it. Would you like to look into that?" When Shane nodded, she pulled out a collection of gold charms in all the letters of the alphabet. For a few seconds, Shane just stared at them. Would Ilya prefer an *I* for his first name, or an *R* for his last? Maybe a *C* for the Centaurs? A different idea came to mind and Shane felt satisfaction curl in his chest.

"The *S*, please. Thank you." He said. Shane tried to calm his nerves – *Is this too bold? Will Ilya hate it? Does he want something with my initial on it?* – and smiled at the assistant. She disappeared behind a small wall with the bracelet and a faint conversation was audible before she came back and helped Shane check out. With perfect timing, another assistant returned the bracelet with the *S* attached and it was quickly packaged before joining Yuna's necklace in his bag. Shane couldn't shake the pleased smile from his face as he walked out of the store; sure, part of it was testing to see if gifts were what made Ilya bloom the way Shane did, but it also just made something in Shane happy for Ilya to have something he clearly wanted but wouldn't get for himself.

When Shane stepped outside, there was a trio of people standing around Ilya as he leaned against their car. Ilya looked happy to talk with them – *fans*, Shane realised – but he lit up the moment he saw Shane.

"Hollander," he called, pushing off the car, "take a picture with these people, please. They are funny people. Come, come."

The fans were practically bouncing out of their skin in excitement and Shane easily joined Ilya's side, pressing up against him and offering a polite smile as one of the three thanked them profusely and snapped a picture. "Thank you, Mr. Rozanov, Mr. Hollander! We'll be cheering for you this season!"

"Always appreciated," Shane answered, biting back a full grin when the guy in the group looked at him like Shane had personally delivered him to heaven.

"We do have to go," Ilya cut in, smiling but with a bite of jealousy behind his words that only Shane could pick up on. "Sorry. Thank you for your time and support."

Ilya opened the passenger side door for Shane and closed it when Shane was settled in the seat before walking to the driver's side and climbing in as well. The moment they were

driving off, Ilya groaned. “Why did I marry someone so hot?”

“Ilya,” Shane countered, shaking his head in amusement.

“That boy looked like he wanted to be me. Unfair. There can only be one me, and you cannot have a different me.” Ilya complained.

Emboldened by the gift in his lap, Shane reached out to settle his hand on Ilya’s nape the same way Ilya always did when Shane was the one driving. “I don’t want a different you. Stop pouting.” Shane threaded his fingers into the back of Ilya’s hair and Ilya looked at him for far longer than he should have while driving before returning his gaze to the road.

“This is unfair.”

Shane laughed. “What’s unfair?”

“*You*. You are hot and you say things like that so *of course* fans want you.” Ilya was really almost pouting and Shane’s heart felt like the affection inside of it was about to bubble over. “Maybe I need to practice fighting.”

“You do *not* need to learn how to fight.”

“No, not learn how. I know how. I need to *practice*, Shane, in case someone tries to steal you.”

“I literally have a wedding ring, Ilya. No one’s stealing me.”

“You don’t know that,” Ilya countered, side-eyeing Shane. “When we get home, I will order a...punching bag? Yes, that is it. Next day delivery.”

“Or,” Shane began carefully, pulling lightly at the back of Ilya’s hair, “you can look at the gift I got you and then behave so I can ride you.”

Ilya was quiet for a long moment and Shane watched his face as Ilya processed what he said. “*Yes*,” he said after a few seconds, sounding almost strangled. “Much better plan.”

Shane laughed again, so relaxed and enamoured by his husband that it was uncontrollable. The drive to their place was short, but Ilya still made it there faster than expected. Shane didn’t even pay attention to the speedometer; he was too busy watching Ilya. As soon as they pulled into their garage, Ilya practically teleported out of the car to drag Shane inside the house, grumbling about kissing him the entire way. He was a man on a mission and everything from slipping off his shoes to opening doors seemed like a grave personal offence to him. When they made it to the living room and Ilya’s lips connected with Shane’s jaw, only the desire to see Ilya react to his gift kept Shane from giving in. He pushed Ilya back and Ilya sank against the couch with a wild grin on his face, his eyes fixed on Shane entirely.

“Gift, remember?” Shane said, steadying his racing heart as he grabbed the small box out of the bag and set the bag down. He straddled Ilya’s legs and settled down, Ilya’s hands settling on the outsides of his thighs, before presenting the box to him.

Ilya looked between Shane and the box a few times with a confused expression before taking it, slowly pulling off the top. Shane heard Ilya's breath hitch when he realised what it was, and Ilya looked completely entranced. Slowly, Ilya pulled it out of the box and set that to the side to better hold the bracelet in his hands, the golden *S* resting against his fingers as he thumbed at it.

"For Shane," Shane explained.

"No, really? Wow, I never could have guessed." Ilya replied sarcastically, though the true sarcasm was a bit lost in Ilya's bewildered expression. Then, more gentle, he asked, "Put it on?"

Shane obeyed, thumbing open the clasp and taking Ilya's hand to wrap it around his wrist. When it closed, Shane turned it so the intertwined golden knot and *S* were facing Ilya. Shane had already put a ring on Ilya, but this felt like a *claim* – everyone who looked at it had no choice but to see an initial that wasn't Ilya's and would, inevitably, connect it to Shane in a matter of seconds.

"Is it good?" Shane asked, looking up at Ilya nervously. "If you don't like the *S* or you don't like it at all, I can return it. I just thought-"

Shane was cut off by Ilya pressing their lips together tightly, Ilya's hands running up Shane's sides before wrapping around his waist tightly, almost clinging to him. "It's good," Ilya whispered against Shane's lips. "I love it. I love *you*."

"That's good," Shane countered, bringing his hands up to Ilya's jaw and holding him as he Ilya tried to steal the air from his lungs. "It would be awkward if you didn't love me."

Ilya drew back, breathless and a bit confused. "Yes? Why?"

"Because I love you, too."

Somehow, Ilya simultaneously melted and his eyes darkened. "The other part of your plan needs less clothes, I think."

Shane rolled his eyes. "Alright." He said, trying to get up, but unable to move with Ilya still wrapped around his midsection. "Ilya, you have to let me get up. I need to stand if we're going to the bedroom."

"No," Ilya protested, leaning forward to kiss Shane's neck. "Here."

"We're *not* fucking on the couch."

"Why not?" Ilya argued, mouthing at Shane's neck and doing a *really* good job at distracting him. "We have before."

"Because my parents are coming over tomorrow morning, Ilya." Shane countered. Still, he sank against his husband, easily distracted and very weak for him, until the idea of his parents coming over and somehow *knowing* reentered his mind. Shane pulled back, ignoring the groan Ilya responded with as he stood.

“Ilya.” Shane said firmly.

“Okay, okay,” Ilya answered, standing with a dramatic sigh. “You hate me.”

“Right. I hate you, so I put gold on your wrist.” Shane scoffed, playing along.

Ilya was the one to pause the joyful air, surprisingly. “Hey.” He said, drawing Shane in by his hand and lifting a hand to run his thumb over Shane’s freckles and cheekbone. “I love it. Thank you, Shane.”

Shane flushed. “I saw that you liked it. You didn’t need to deny it. Are you sure you’re alright with the S?”

“Yes,” Ilya insisted. “My favourite part of it. Maybe people will flirt with you less if I show it off everywhere. They will know *you* picked *me*, so they have no chance.”

“Ilya?” Shane prompted, his heart racing in his chest at the blatant possession.

“Yes?”

“Bedroom, remember?” Shane *needed* Ilya.

“Oh, I remember.” Ilya countered, bending down and lifting Shane up with no sign of a struggle, tossing him over his shoulder.

“*Ilya!*” Shane protested, his face bright red as he hung over Ilya’s shoulder. Ilya just laughed – free and joyous, delighted and turned on – and Shane resigned himself to his fate as Ilya marched them down the hallway. At least, at this angle, Shane could see Ilya’s ass while feeling the cool metal of the bracelet against his calf where Ilya held him.

Test 4: Quality Time

Shane had been stumped on how to pursue quality time with Ilya to test his theories when it seemed like all they did was spend time together. Shane *loved* it – after so many years of seeing each other a couple times a year, and sometimes only for a few hours, spending almost every waking moment with Ilya was a blessing. It did, however, make it difficult to figure out how he was going to test Ilya’s reaction to spending time together. It was normal, and a part of their everyday lives, so it had to be something special.

Everything Shane thought of had its counter. It couldn’t be a small date, because Ilya took him on those often. It couldn’t be a few days at the cottage, because that was already their place to spend time together. It couldn’t be them having an evening together at home, because that was already their everyday.

The idea of a vacation popped up and Shane knew instantly that it was what he wanted to do. Ilya had been obsessed with the Aurora Borealis for the past few months; it was unfortunate that the best season to see them was hockey season, but Shane found a break in the schedule where they had four days off. Four days was nothing, really, and wouldn’t give them much

time for much else, but Shane was willing to take what he could. He coordinated with Coach Wiebe about being gone for those days and received enthusiastic approval, and he asked his parents to check on the house while they were gone. Shane booked the necessary accommodations and flights, as well as the tour and guidance that he would need, and held back from spilling the secret to Ilya until the day their flight left.

“I cannot wait to go home,” Ilya groaned as he stepped out of the locker room where Shane was already sitting.

“Well, hopefully you can wait a little bit longer.” Shane countered, standing up and rolling his eyes when Ilya took Shane’s duffel bag, tossing it over the shoulder that his own wasn’t hanging on. All around them, their interested teammates looked over at them; only Wiebe knew their plans, and Ilya and Shane rarely did anything except hang out at home, so it was easy to see why they were interested.

Ilya’s eyebrows furrowed in confusion. “Where are we going?” He asked, clearly expecting an answer like *Mom and Dad’s* or *the grocery store*.

“Alaska,” Shane said instead.

“*Alaska?*” Ilya asked, his mouth dropping open and his eyes widening in shock.

“Alaska?!” Their teammates cut in. Shane shifted underneath their gazes and cleared his throat.

“Yeah,” he began. “We have the next four days off, and it’s not like you can see your Northern Lights from here. Well, not all the time. Figured you might want to see them up close.”

“I didn’t pack.”

“I did. The suitcases are already in the car.”

“The flights, the hotel-”

“I already handled it all, Ilya. There’s two first-class seats and a cabin with our names on it, so can we go? Please?”

“Did anyone else forget they’re, like, rich?” Bood whispered amongst the quiet. “Like *really* rich.”

Ilya promptly dropped both of their duffel bags and tackled Shane into a hug, curling around him like he could meld their bodies together if he tried hard enough. Their teammates hooted and cheered for them while Shane’s face flushed and he let Ilya plant happy kisses all over his face. Later, Harris sent him the video and promised not to post it unless they wanted to. Shane watched it over and over on the flight and Ilya grinned at him the whole way, so very excited for the trip that he had an almost boyish energy, like a child that was promised a trip to Disneyland.

They landed safely, and made it to their accommodation after a long shuttle ride, and everything went off without a hitch. Shane let Ilya fuss over him and make sure he was bundled up properly as their guide brought them to the observation point, and he took almost endless photos as Ilya watched the Aurora Borealis dance across the sky. Pure, unbridled joy spread across his face as he held Shane against his side.

“Thank you,” Ilya whispered to him, his nose pink from the cold. Delight shone through his eyes and Shane had never seen him look so beautiful.

“It’s no problem. You wanted to come.” Shane had answered.

“No. Thank you for being here with me. For listening to me and loving me,” Ilya said. Shane reached up and rubbed gloved thumbs at the corners of his eyes.

“You can’t cry here, Ilya. Your tears might freeze.” Shane laughed, feeling his own eyes get wet.

Ilya held his face in return, his warmth spreading throughout his gloves and onto Shane’s face as he ducked down and gave Shane a kiss. It wasn’t their first, or their last, or anything in between, but it was one of Shane’s favourites of all time.

When they were back in their cabin, Shane freshly showered after mindblowing sex and a day he’d never forget, he scrolled through his pictures and waited for Ilya to come back from getting them some food. He found some of his favourites, including a picture of them kissing that a stranger had kindly sent to them and one they’d posed for where Ilya is wrapped around Shane from behind with a crazy grin on his face. Shane compiled them all into a post on his Instagram, hesitating for just a moment with the same drive for secrecy that he let himself live in for so many years, before hitting post. Usually, he’d wait to leave the location so crazy fans didn’t find them, but it would have to take a lot of drive to get to upper Alaska and find them.

Just on time, Ilya came back from the kitchen with a plate full of snacks for the both of them; still completely naked and entirely without shame, he set the plate down and launched into bed next to Shane with a loud laugh.

“What are you doing, sweetheart?” Ilya asked, cuddling up next to Shane and kissing his bare shoulder.

Shane showed his phone screen where he’d tagged Ilya, the picture of them kissing under the Northern Lights reflecting back up at them. “Reminding the world I love you. In case they’ve managed to forget, somehow.”

Light of my life and the Northern Lights, the caption read. Shane watched Ilya read it and was instantly brought into a deep kiss, Ilya humming against his lips.

“You are so sweet today. Did I do something? Did I forget a date?” Ilya asked, confused.

“No,” Shane countered slowly. “Just thought you deserved something nice like this.”

Ilya's arms tightened around Shane and he made a pleased sound, burrowing against Shane as close as he could. "You are my something nice. As long as you are here, it's good."

"Are you telling me you wouldn't have liked this trip if you took it alone?" Shane scoffed, daring Ilya to disagree.

"No, I would like it still," Ilya agreed. "But it would not have been as good. I love you."

Shane murmured an *I love you* back against Ilya's lips and Ilya took it as his cue to feed Shane all the snacks he could. When Shane eventually cut him off, all Ilya did was nuzzle back against him and whisper about how they could spend their next day curled up together, nothing to do except spending time together. Shane nodded and sprawled across Ilya, full and warm and spending some quality time with his husband.

Test 5: Physical Touch

Ilya was a glutton for contact. Shane had known this since the beginning and really should have assumed it would be Ilya's love language. All Ilya did was touch him, all the time, at any given moment. Shane had to smack him away at times just so he could get things done. Ilya's favourite pastime was to spread himself across Shane and nap, coiled around him like Shane would disappear if Ilya wasn't attached to his every limb. He kissed Shane at every opportunity and hugged him at every other. It was like they had a magnet embedded in their hips that always brought them back together, over and over again.

It wasn't until Hayden, of all people, pointed it out, though, that Shane really stopped to think about it.

"Shane."

"Yeah?"

"You know I love you, man, right?" Hayden asked, almost tentatively.

"Yeah...?"

"And you know you're, like, my best friend?"

"Jeez, Hayd, where is this going?" Shane asked, looking at him with a perplexed expression.

"I think you and Ilya have a problem." Hayden said finally.

Shane looked down at Ilya, dead asleep on top of him and with his arms down Shane's hoodie sleeves, the front unzipped so that Ilya could be entirely pressed against his front. His legs followed Shane's so he was, literally, touching every piece of him that he could, his face buried in Shane's neck while he slept.

"I don't know if I'd call it a *problem*-"

"It's a problem." Hayden cut in firmly. "Like, I love Jackie more than anything. But I would never try to climb inside her clothes like this, or her into mine. This is fucking weird, dude."

Like, he should be able to sleep without needing to merge you two together like some freaky movie.”

Shane frowned and pressed a kiss to the top of Ilya’s head, Ilya shifting in his sleep. “He’s comfortable like this.”

“Yeah, and I’m comfortable naked as the day I was born but I’m still wearing clothes.” Hayden countered. “I know he’s obsessed with touching you but isn’t it a bit much? I think I’d file for divorce if Jackie was all over me like that all the time.”

“Well, we’re not you and Jackie.” Shane argued defensively, though even he could admit Hayden made a good point. Ilya *was* touching him all the time, and Shane revelled in it, but it must have looked strange to others. “Are we going to watch this game or talk about my husband?”

“Watch the game.” Hayden answered, though it took him a moment to drag his eyes away from Ilya. “But Rozanov is fucking weird, dude. Just wanted to make sure you remember that.”

Shane laughed lightly, stopping quickly when Ilya shifted like he was waking up. “Yeah, Hayd, I know. I married him.”

“Still doubt your state of mind, sometimes, if it led you to Rozanov.”

“*Hayden.*”

“What?”

Shane rolled his eyes and leaned back against the sofa cushions. “I was an impressionable young teen, I guess. He made an impression.” Shane could hear the fondness seeping out of his own voice.

Hayden stayed during the game they were watching and Ilya woke up at the end, carefully extracting himself from where he’d looped around Shane long enough to say goodbye to Hayden. The thought stayed in the back of Shane’s mind though: Ilya loves touch, but why does he love it so much?

He supposed there didn’t need to be an explanation, really; he loved when Ilya did things to make his burden easier, not for any specific reason other than it made him feel good, but it felt different with Ilya’s almost compulsion to touch Shane. Shane moved through his routine and made dinner, deciding he’d ask about it over food. When Ilya set the table and sat down with Shane, his time came.

“I’ve got a question for you.” Shane said the moment they were seated. He felt the corner of his mouth tick into a smile when Ilya’s foot found him under the table, two socked feet pressing together while Ilya started to devour his rice. Ilya looked at him with a waiting expression and Shane took a deep breath.

“You really like touching me.” Shane began, instantly feeling the need to clarify as a panicked look entered Ilya’s face. “I like it. I love it, actually. I like the physical contact, even if I need to get you to focus when we’re around others, sometimes.”

“Okay.” Ilya answered, still anticipatory.

“But is there a reason for it? Not that there needs to be, of course, I just- it feels like more than just wanting to touch me, you know?”

Ilya froze, swallowing the food in his mouth and hovering his spoon over the food. He looked worried, and Shane hated having put the expression on his face.

“Sorry. We don’t have to talk about it.” Shane offered, even though it now clearly seemed like something they *did* need to talk about.

Ilya shook his head and set his spoon down, taking a quick drink of water before clearing his throat. “I did not really have a lot of touch, for a long time.”

When he paused, Shane took the moment to outstretch his hand and intertwine his fingers with Ilya’s.

Ilya continued. “When my mother died, I did not get another hug until...some time when you hugged me, I suppose. My father would not touch me. My brother would not touch me. Svetlana and Sasha would, but for sex. I just always wanted a hug or kiss or touch; now I can do that with you, so I do.”

Shane felt his heart break a bit.

“I can stop, if it’s too much.”

Shane’s heart *shattered* and he stood up quickly, walking around their small table to sit on Ilya’s lap and pull him into a hug. “It’s never too much, Ilya,” he reassured. “I like it, remember? And I like that you like it.”

Ilya nodded and hugged Shane tightly for a moment before releasing him. Reaching around him to fiddle with his food before bringing a spoon of rice and chicken around for Shane to eat. Shane accepted the bite of food, even though he huffed at it.

“You don’t need to feed me,” Shane argued.

“No, no. This is good. We both win. You get to eat, and I get to touch you. I help you, you hug me – we are all happy.”

If only Hayden could see us now, Shane thought as he accepted another bite of food, laughing at the idea of it. Ilya raised an eyebrow. “Hayden thinks we have a problem.”

“Hayden has many problems. I do not think he gets to comment on ours.”

“Be nice,” Shane scolded. “He thinks we touch too much.”

Ilya looked down at where Shane straddled his lap, their entire fronts pressed together and Ilya's arms wrapped around him. "Really." Ilya said in response, completely monotone, "whatever could have given him that idea."

Shane laughed and dropped their foreheads together; Ilya just leaned into it, brushing their noses together and collapsing into the contact. "Do you think it's too much?" Ilya asked after a moment.

"No. I think it's the right amount for us, and that's all that matters."

Ilya *beamed* and Shane knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that it was the right thing to say. It also seemed to be all the permission Ilya needed to take to touching Shane at every given moment over the next week. He was plastered to Shane's side during practice, and he held Shane in his arms while they talked with his parents on a picnic, and he held Shane's hand throughout the entirety of a press conference without a care in the world. Pictures went viral online of Ilya kissing Shane's face – his forehead, his lips, his cheeks, his nose, his chin – and it was like more popped up every day, even when they didn't go anywhere and the pictures had to have been old. Even though Shane was a bit uncomfortable with the attention, he still appreciated the fact that they could do this and that everyone could know they were together.

The best part of all of it was that Ilya seemed to glow under the freedom, getting even happier when Shane leaned into Ilya's affection. With all of Shane's tests, he'd doubted Ilya's response to it because he'd been happy every time. He realised, slowly, that he'd been in contact with Ilya at each, and that his reactions had all paled compared to when Shane did something as simple as hold Ilya's face in his hands and kiss him gently. It seemed to take Ilya out at the knees, and Shane loved the pure smile he got in response each time. Nothing seemed to make Ilya happier than Shane just holding his hand, so Shane resigned himself to never letting it go. Ilya grinned when Shane leaned his head on Ilya's shoulder, so Shane ignored the pressing comments from interviewers and continued to rest against his husband. Ilya never looked more relaxed than when he was spread across their bed with Shane on top of him, so Shane let himself act as a blanket and curled up on top of his personal furnace.

Ilya deserved the best, and if an amount of touch that concerned others was his version of the best, then Shane would shower him in it.

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