

The First Pancake is Always Lumpy

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The First Pancake is Always Lumpy

by Anonymous

Summary

Last night, Ilya dreamed Shane served him divorce papers. They were making dinner when suddenly Shane pulled them out of the microwave and thrust them into Ilya's hand. This isn't working, he said. I'm divorcing you. No negotiations.

And look: of course Ilya understands that it was just a dream. The official divorce petition was a stack of sticky notes. Shane had faintly green skin and, Ilya is pretty sure, a third eye next to his left nipple. It obviously wasn't real.

But.

Notes

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

Ilya's day begins on a horrible note. He wakes up to a cold and empty bed, to the sound of his seriously annoying alarm, after a night of terrible sleep.

Well. His sleep didn't *start off* terrible. It started out with some very fun pre-bedtime activities (Ilya sprawled half off the bed with all the blood rushing to his head, Shane riding Ilya's dick with his beautiful post-summer thighs, a slightly psychedelic orgasm). Then came some very relaxing pre-bedtime cuddling, and then some very satisfying bedtime sleep. But sometime in the middle of the night, Ilya got up to piss, and after he came back to bed he had the sort of weird and deeply unsettling dream that hangs around with you all day.

Today, it was a dream of Shane serving him divorce papers. They were at their cabin, or maybe Ilya's old place in Boston, and they were making dinner when suddenly Shane pulled them out of the microwave and thrust them into Ilya's hand. *This isn't working*, he said. *I'm divorcing you. No negotiations.*

And look: of course Ilya understands that it was just a dream. He's not one of those crazy people who confuse nightmares with reality. In the dream, the official divorce petition was a stack of sticky notes. Shane had faintly green skin and, Ilya is pretty sure, a third eye next to his left nipple. It obviously wasn't real.

Ilya's gut roils with anxiety anyway.

"Good fucking morning," he sighs, and throws back the covers.

—

There's a note on the kitchen table when Ilya makes it downstairs. *Meeting Haas for early-morning training, be back for lunch. Already fed Anya, don't let her lie to you! - S*

No heart. No '*I love you*'. No XOXO.

Which is fine. It's normal. They usually don't leave little affectations like that on their notes.

Ilya's stupid heart clenches anyway.

He makes himself one of Shane's stupid green smoothies because he thinks it would make Shane happy, if he somehow heard the sound of their blender from ten miles away at the rink. Then he sits down at the table with his disgusting concoction—the thing has spirulina *and* wheatgrass, it's designed for cows—and Googles *top reasons for divorce Canada*.

Then considers all the stupid shit he's heard from straight guys about why they got divorced—including *my wife didn't give me enough orgasms* and *she didn't like what I said about her pussy after she had the third kid*—and amends his search to *top reasons for divorce Canada gay*.

He finds a listicle from a law firm. *TOP FIVE REASONS FOR SAME-SEX DIVORCE*.

NUMBER ONE: MONEY. Do you and your partner have different incomes? Different spending styles? Different financial priorities? Money can be highly personal—and highly emotional. If one partner is perceived as being less careful with money than the other, it can be a flashpoint for long-term conflict.

Ilya remembers the first time Shane saw Ilya's credit card bill. His mouth actually fell open, like something out of a cartoon. "How do you spend this much on DoorDash?" he had demanded. "There's a grocery store like two miles from your house!" Ilya's still not sure Shane knows how much Ilya has spent in his life on sports cars, but he knows he doesn't want Shane to know.

NUMBER TWO: COMMUNICATION. Your partner isn't a mind-reader, and neither are you. When couples fail to say what they're thinking and feeling, or when they fail to listen to each other when they speak, it drives an emotional wedge between them that can fester and worsen.

Fucking Canadians. They want to talk about everything. Once, Shane asked Ilya if he was scared of spiders and Ilya basically growled at him. Ilya still starts crying, sometimes, when he tries to tell Shane he loves him.

NUMBER THREE: WORK-LIFE BALANCE. Do you split chores evenly, or does one spouse find themselves taking on more of the load? Managing the mental list of domestic responsibilities can be an easily-overlooked way in which domestic labor is unevenly divided—and can make one spouse feel more like a parent than a true partner.

When they moved in together, Ilya convinced Shane to get a cleaning lady who comes once a week while the two of them are at practice, and they make most meals together. But Shane has always been the one who manages their schedules—makes the grocery list, plugs it into the little app, tracks whether they're running low on toilet paper and hand soap, reminds Ilya to pick up his medication after practice, navigates the tightrope of getting tomato sauce out of white linen when Ilya inevitably spills something on himself at a fancy gala.

NUMBER FOUR: INFIDELITY.

Nope. Ilya scrolls right on by.

NUMBER FIVE: SEXUAL INCOMPATIBILITY.

Ilya almost laughs.

So, okay. Three out of five isn't bad. Two out of five? Whatever. Ilya isn't a total failure, that's what he's getting from this list, and on the things he is failing at, he can do better. It doesn't matter, because Shane doesn't want to divorce him, because that stupid dream was just a dream, but even if he *did*, even if he was starting to maybe sometimes think about it, it will be fine, because Ilya will be better.

This husband thing, it's new to him—he had a learning curve. That's understandable. But now the learning curve is going to end, because Ilya is going to be a budget-friendly, blabber-

mouthed, domestic goddess of a husband, and Shane will realize that any reasons he could possibly have to divorce Ilya won't apply, and he simply won't be able to justify doing it.

It's a foolproof plan. Ilya puts it into motion by doing a full deep-clean of the blender, during which he cuts himself on the spinning blades and ends up bent over the sink for ten minutes, pressing a paper towel to his wound, but still. Foolproof. Ilya feels better already.

Shane shows up at the house just before noon, his hair still wet from the showers at the rink, cheeks still pink from exertion. "Hey," he says, ducking in to kiss Ilya quickly on the mouth. It makes Ilya's heart flutter, despite himself. Two years of marriage, thirteen together, and Shane can still do this to him. Jesus. "Good morning."

"Almost afternoon now," Ilya says, licking the taste of Shane off his lips. "How was Haasy?"

"Good," Shane says. "He must have done a fuck ton of altitude training over the summer, I can already tell he's going to be so much faster this year. Hey, is that lunch?"

"Yes!" Ilya gestures proudly to the pot bubbling on the stove. "I made chili! Which I have never made before, so be nice. It has canned tomatoes, because they are cheaper than fresh. And kidney beans, because they are cheaper than black beans. And more kidney beans instead of beef, because they are also cheaper than meat. Overall very cheap meal."

But instead of looking impressed, Shane just furrows his eyebrows. "Okay?" he says. "Is there a reason we're trying to cook cheaply?"

"Well—no. I just think, is good to be cheap. Remember we can survive if we have no money."

Shane squints at him, suspicious now. "Did you make a bad investment or something?" he asks. "Or did you buy another sports car and you're trying to hide the cost in our grocery budget?"

"Shane—"

"Because you can just buy a sports car if you want one," Shane says. "You make \$11 million a year, you can afford it. All I ask is that you get all the safety features. And I do mean *all* of them."

"I did not buy sports car," Ilya insists. "I do not want to buy sports car. That money is much better used for Irina Foundation, yes?"

Shane still looks a little suspicious, but he nods. "Right," he agrees, and kisses Ilya, quickly, between his eyebrows. "But you can tell me, you know. If you made a bad investment. I wouldn't be mad."

"Oh my god, Hollander, I did not make a bad investment, I am a *master* of investment—"

At which Shane snorts so loudly that he almost drops the serving spoon, and then he and Ilya get into an argument about who's a better investor that lasts them straight through the end of lunch and up to the bedroom for an afternoon delight.

Frugality: success. Success? Well, Ilya got his brain sucked out of his dick and was granted permission to buy a sports car; he's calling it a success.

They take a nap after their delight, then spend the rest of the afternoon rewatching a game from last year's Division A playoff run between the Vancouver Hardwoods and the Calgary Riders. "I'm telling you, Lucas never recovered from that knee injury last fall," Shane is saying. "Look at the way he tries to feint right there, his knee just can't take the weight and the wobble gives him away."

Ilya makes a disagreeing sound. "You read too much into it, Hollander," he says. "He is just clumsy on his feet sometimes. Anyway, even if he didn't recover by then, he may be better now, after a whole summer of rest."

"If he wasn't healed after eight months then he shot his chance for a full recovery," Shane argues. "Come on, don't you remember, the Vancouver management had him in a game literally three weeks after his knee surgery. Three weeks to the day."

Ilya shrugs. "Some people recover fast."

Shane snorts. "Oh, don't give me that, you know as well as I do that nobody recovers *that* fast. They screwed him over because they thought their legacy team were running out of chances to get a Cup, and in doing so, they self-fulfilled the prophecy."

Shane shakes a head, taking a sip of his ginger ale. He's so fucking cute when he gets riled up like this. Even though this hockey game is months old, even though Shane and Ilya have definitely had this discussion before. Shane always gets like this at the end of summers, those last few weeks before preseason starts where he's started to ramp up his training and get back in the hockey mindset, but doesn't have the long practices or games to pour himself into. He stores the passion up inside of himself instead, and eventually when the cork gets popped on the first day back at practice, it comes pouring out like bubbly champagne.

When couples fail to say what they're thinking and feeling, or when they fail to listen to each other when they speak, it drives an emotional wedge between them that can fester and worsen, the article had said.

"I love you very much," Ilya says, before he can second-guess it. Shane turns to him, his big brown eyes blinking. Doe eyes. Like a fucking deer. How is Ilya in love with a man who looks so much like an adorable little deer? "I love a lot of things about you, but this is one the best ones. That we can talk about hockey and you can match me. That you care so much."

Shane looks adorably confused. "Uh, yeah. Thanks. I mean—I mean I love you, too. I love it, too. Of course."

Ilya smiles at him, reaching across the cushion between them to twist his fingers in Shane's. Shane squeezes his fingers back and then blurts, "Are you okay? That was—very sweet, but kind of random."

Ilya shrugs, picking up his Coke can and taking a sip. "Just what I was thinking," he says. "Oh, here we go, Hernesniemi is about to get slammed, turn up the volume."

They watch quietly as Finney bodyslams Hernesniemi into the boards and Hernesniemi hits at just the wrong angle, his teeth cracking against the glass and blood seeping immediately into his mouth guard. He spits on the ice, but it just keeps pouring out of him, red and dark, and eventually he's escorted off the ice and a pause is called for the blood to be cleaned up.

"You would never make that mistake," Shane says abruptly.

"Sorry?"

Shane gestures with his ginger ale towards the TV. "Hernesniemi. He chirped Finney in the first period, then he gets cocky and forgets to track him on the ice. You wouldn't do that."

It's mostly true, but it still feels random. "Thank... you?"

Shane shrugs, cheeks pink. "Just saying what I was thinking," he says.

A smile dawns on Ilya's face, slow and crooked. "Oh," he says. "Well. In that case. Carry on, Mr. Commentator."

Shane rolls his eyes, but when Ilya scoots closer and throws his arm over Shane's shoulder, Shane doesn't resist.

Communication: success. Definitely.

—

"Ilya? Where are you?"

"In here!" Ilya yells back. There's a thump and the sound of steady footsteps and then Shane appears in the doorway, phone in one hand, frowning.

"What are you doing on the floor of the pantry?"

Ilya gestures at the many cans of beans laid out on the floor in front of him. "I am doing inventory," he says.

Shane looks no more enlightened. "Why do we need an inventory?"

"So we—know what we have! So we do not buy more of it," Ilya says. "Also, food expires. This is waste of money. And is not safe. So I find if there is expired food here, and if yes, throw out. If there is food expiring soon, I make plan for us to eat it soon. If nothing is expiring soon, I just add it to list of foods we have so next time I make grocery list I know."

Shane raises an eyebrow. “Next time *you* make a grocery list? Since when have you ever made a grocery list?”

“Since now,” Ilya says. “As of this week, it is my turn to do grocery lists. They are not your problem.”

Ilya expects relief. Maybe an eye roll, a *thank God you finally caught on*. Instead, Shane frowns. “Is there something wrong with my grocery lists?”

“What? How can there be something wrong with grocery lists? It is grocery list. It is fine.”

“Then why would you want to—“

“So you don’t have to,” Ilya says, a bit impatiently now. “You always do grocery lists, yes? It is not fair. I read online about domestic labor, not split evenly between partners, it is not good. So I take my turn now.”

Shane blinks at him. “But I like doing the grocery lists.”

Ilya pauses, a can of chickpeas in one hand. “Oh,” he says. “Well, okay. I do something else then. Do you want me to do the laundry? Or the pre-maid cleaning?” He has privately thought that the hasty cleaning Shane does every week before the maid comes to be a little ridiculous, but if Shane wants him to do it, he’ll do it.

“Ilya, I—you don’t need to do anything. You already do enough.”

Ilya shakes his head. “Not true. You do all household chores.

“Sure,” Shane says. “But you do all of Anya’s stuff. Taking her to the vet, and feeding her, playing with her, making sure she gets walked.”

“Yes, but she is my dog.”

“We’re married,” Shane says. “She’s definitely *our* dog.”

“Well, it still does not seem fair. You take care of whole house, and you, and me, and I just get dog?”

“I like it the way it is,” Shane says. “I like the stuff I do, I like the stuff you do. Do you— not?”

“No,” Ilya admits. “Or, yes, or—English is stupid. I like the way it is. I have no problems.”

Shane’s face smooths out. “Okay,” he says, with obvious relief. “Then let’s not fix something that isn’t broken, okay?” He holds out a hand to Ilya and Ilya takes it, pulling himself to his feet.

“You just want me out of your pantry, don’t you?” he asks, when he sees the way Shane is anxiously scanning the shelves behind him.

“I have a system,” Shane says without looking at him, and Ilya laughs.

Work-life balance: fail. Probably. Oh well, nobody’s perfect.

“Seriously,” Shane says, later that evening, when they’re sitting in the backyard in front of the firepit, a bonfire crackling away in the warm summer air. It’s a light brighter here than up by the cabin—all the light pollution—and not nearly as quiet, with the cars slipping through the neighborhood and the sounds of kids shrieking from a few houses away, but it’s still nice.

“Seriously?” Ilya echoes.

“You’ve been acting kind of weird all day,” Shane says. “Is everything all right? No lying.”

Ilya considers what to tell him, but if he’s going to be honest, he doesn’t have many options. “I had a weird dream last night,” he admits finally. “It was stupid, but it just made me think. That’s all.”

“Oh,” Shane says. He seems to process this for a moment. He had told Ilya once that he almost never remembers his dreams. Even on the nights when Ilya can feel him twitching in his sleep, mouthing out words into the darkness of their bedroom, he wakes up in the morning and tells Ilya honestly, *it was a great night’s sleep, I didn’t dream of anything at all*.

“Was it a dream about your mother?”

Ilya almost laughs. He probably would have been less unsettled by one of those dreams. At least he’d know how to handle it. “Not this time.”

“Oh. Your father?”

Ilya can’t help but smile. “Are you going to list every topic I could dream about until I tell you?”

Shane huffs. “Sorry,” he says. “You don’t have to tell me.”

But he looks so beautiful in the firelight, his face lit up in an orange glow. Ilya reaches forward to rub his thumb on Shane’s cheek, where there’s a tiny streak of dirt over one of his freckles. Shane’s mouth falls open like he wants to suck Ilya’s thumb into his mouth.

“I dreamed about you,” Ilya says. “You were divorcing me.”

Shane’s mouth shuts. “Oh,” he says, brow furrowed. “But that’s—I would never divorce you.”

So plain, so factual. Like a teenager: *Duh, Mom. Obviously*. “Yes, I know,” Ilya agrees, and he means it.

“But you...”

Ilya shrugs. “You can know something is unlikely and still be scared of it.”

“Not just unlikely,” Shane corrects. “Impossible.”

Ilya kisses him. His mouth tastes like his third ginger ale of the day and up close he smells like the new shampoo Ilya had bought at the drugstore when Shane’s old bottle had run low. He had grimaced at the bottle when he saw it —“What scent is sea breeze?”—but here he was, using it anyway.

“You are very romantic,” Ilya says. “Are you sure you haven’t practiced being a husband before? Some old marriage I don’t know about?”

“Shut up,” Shane says, shoving him, but he’s obviously pleased. Shane, such a straight-A student. Once, early on in their relationship, Ilya told Shane he was so good at blowjobs he thought he might be practicing them, and Shane came in about ten seconds flat. Years later, he got Shane to admit that he had, once or twice, actually practiced sucking his dildo to try to get better at managing his gag reflex. *Did it work?* Ilya had asked, charmed. *No*, Shane had admitted; *it wasn’t as big as you*. The sex that night had been spectacular.

“You know, I don’t normally like to be new at things,” Shane says. “Like, it freaks me out, to not have experience with something.”

“I know,” Ilya says softly.

“But this,” Shane says. “Being married. Well, I guess it’s not totally new, at this point. Two years. But it still feels new. And I don’t—I don’t mind, not knowing what to do. Being new at it. I prefer it this way, actually. That way, we’re doing this new thing together, me and you. You know?”

The fire spits sparks over them. Shane’s dark gleaming hair, his wide dark eyes, his smiling mouth.

“Shane,” Ilya says finally. “You have to stop. The romance—it might actually kill me.”

Shane laughs, a beautiful lovely sound. He scoots his chair to the side, just a bit, just close enough for him to rest his head on Ilya’s shoulder. His breath against Ilya’s neck, the precious weight of him, his hair ruffling the crook of Ilya’s neck. “Okay,” Shane agrees. “I’ll stop.”

Ilya kisses his forehead. Kisses his ear. Runs his hand up and down Shane’s lovely, lovely bicep. “Well,” he amends. “Maybe not forever. Maybe five minute break. For my heart, you know.”

Ilya can picture the way Shane’s smiling right now so perfectly, even if he can’t see it. “Sure, solnyshko,” Shane says, and laughs when Ilya melts all over again.

End Notes

I think ilya sounds a bit like shane in this but I left it that way bc I do think the longer you're w someone the more you adopt their habits and mannerisms and I think that includes shane's minor/major neuroses sorry ilya babe welcome to anxiety

if this sounds too similar to any other fics in the fandom, call it out, I don't want to accidentally plagiarize anything!

title is a russian idiom that essentially means 'practice makes perfect'. I love it very much and am writing it into every fic im working on

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