

too foreign for home (too foreign for here)

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by [TessaTheDreamer](#)

Summary

"Shane Hollander was learning Russian at an infuriatingly fast pace. Ilya predicted that the already bilingual man, who had no accent in either English or French, would exceed Ilya's own Russian skills in no time and rocket to intimate familiarity with the musical vowels and soft lilts of his native language. Which would be made even easier for Shane by the fact that Ilya hadn't spoken a full sentence of Russian in over two years"

Ilya freaks out about forgetting Russian. He finds comfort in Shane.

Notes

I love Ms Rachel Reid but she hinted at Ilya's tough relationship with language and did nothing with it in the Long Game so that's why I'm here. I am not Russian so please excuse me if the russian bits aren't entirely correct.

this takes place sometime at the beginning of The Long Game, but I also made it fit with the TV show canon, but also don't look into it too hard

Title from Diaspora blues by Ijeoma Umebinyuo

Thank you daylightisviolent for beta reading!!

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

*"So, here you are
too foreign for home
too foreign for here.
Never enough for both." - "Diaspora Blues" by Ijeoma Umebinyuo*

Shane Hollander was learning Russian at an infuriatingly fast pace. Ilya predicted that the already bilingual man, who had no accent in either English or French, would exceed Ilya's own Russian skills in no time and rocket to intimate familiarity with the musical vowels and soft lilts of his native language. Which would be made even easier for Shane by the fact that Ilya hadn't spoken a full sentence of Russian in over two years when he last talked to Svetlana.

He'd been busy, between the foundation and Shane and training. And unlike the Raiders, his new team had no Russian speakers at all. Shane tried his best, inserting Russian into their conversation, but it was like talking to a toddler: one or two word sentences with a golden retriever smile to match when Ilya understood and responded with a full sentence he had to translate for Shane to understand. It didn't have the nuances of native conversation, the words an adult man knows and uses. The slang and curses and casualness.

He found himself intimately more familiar with English, finding a life within it that Russian did not possess. He spoke it day in and day out, with Shane, his teammates, with strangers, and with Shane's friends and family. Even his dreams had switched languages.

Ilya was dreaming of his mother again. She was sitting at the lake by Shane's cottage, her hair whipping in the wind. Not her usual place, but maybe that'd make her easier to convince. Ilya approached from behind timidly. She turned before he reached her, her hand raised to hurry him along.

"Come, sit with me, Ilyusha," she said in Russian, the diminutive of his name bringing tears to his eyes.

He took her hand and sat at her side, trying to look at her face. She turned away. All he saw was a curtain of hair.

"Come to the house, mom," he said, in English. "Shane would love to meet you."

The hair shook.

"Ya tebya ne ponimayu, synok," she said. I do not understand you, son.

Ilya searched for the Russian words to repeat his plea. He tried to form the words in his mind, but they slipped away the same way English used to. Now, English had settled comfortably into his mind, while Russian swam further and further away.

"I'm sorry," he said, and in the dream, his words took on a Canadian accent. Like Shane's.

His mother's head started to turn, the tip of her nose appearing in view—

Ilya woke up to Shane by his side in bed, a small book in his hand, practicing Russian vocabulary under his nose.

"*Dobroye utro, moya lyubov*," he said when he saw Ilya awaken, adjusting the glasses on his nose.

Ilya grumbled under his breath, pissed off at Shane's perfect pronunciation. Usually, he found Shane's attempts at Russian endearing and extremely attractive. He was learning a whole language for him, goddamit, but he was tired and frustrated. He tried to think of a passive aggressive retort that Shane wouldn't understand, but his groggy mind automatically went to English.

"Perfect fucking accent," Ilya mumbled, smushing his face into his pillow.

He woke up tired and heavy. And angry. Mostly at himself.

"Are you okay?" Shane asked, pulling off his glasses and placing them on his bedside table.

Ilya grunted into the pillow. It would only make matters worse if Shane's next sentence was in French. Instead, he leaned down to Ilya and kissed the back of his neck, wrapping his arm around Ilya's shoulders.

"Am fine," Ilya said, his English still possessing that Russian tinge, no matter how much he practiced and spoke it. "Did not sleep well."

"I'll make us coffee," Shane said.

Ilya rubbed his eyes, gathering enough energy to sit up. He watched Shane leave the room, heart coming back to life. He couldn't be angry at the man he loved for something that wasn't his fault. It was Ilya who couldn't talk to his mother in his dream. It was Ilya who moved to Canada where everyone around him could communicate only in English.

Through the utter exhaustion, he pulled himself out of bed and trekked to the kitchen, where Shane leaned on the counter with a cup of coffee in hand and another in front of him, the milk and sugar already added. Ilya smiled and took the cup, the warmth seeping into his hands a comfort he badly needed.

"What's wrong, Ilya?" Shane asked, concern contorting his features into the likeness of an adorable puppy.

Ilya shook his head. "Just a nightmare, don't worry your head about it."

"I will worry about you. Always," Shane said, snaking his hand into Ilya's, "How would you say 'I'm here for you' in Russian?"

Ilya gulped down a sip of coffee. It was early and he struggled to switch away from English.

"*Ya...*" he started. "*Ya tebya...* I don't—"

He swore under his breath, his voice choking. He couldn't remember. How could he not remember?

"I don't— I can't—"

Shane's face in front of him suddenly became very blurry. Maybe he needed glasses just like Shane did. He definitely needed a new brain. His was faulty and lazy and dumb. His father would scold him if he could see him, how he'd dissatisfied his nation. If he knew Ilya had become more comfortable in English than in Russian.

He felt Shane's arms wrapped around him.

"It's okay, Ilya," he said, "It's okay, I can just look it up. It's fine."

Ilya shook his head. He wanted to say something, wanted to say *No, I should know this, I should be the one to tell you this*, but no words came. He sank into Shane's shoulder. The last time he'd seen Moscow, Alexei had been there, and though he hated his brother, Ilya wished he'd call, even just to yell at him. He missed Russia. He missed Moscow. Though mostly, through all of it, he missed his mom.

"I'm sorry," Ilya mumbled into Shane's shoulder. "This is dumb. This is very dumb."

"This isn't dumb," he said, "Talk to me."

He let Ilya step back and wipe the tears off his cheeks.

"I feel like I'm forgetting Russian," he said, and it sounded ridiculous because every word was drenched in his accent. He didn't hate it, often joked about how sexy it was, but he didn't like how dumb it made him sound.

"How...?" Shane started, then trailed off to let Ilya finish explaining.

"And I worry," Ilya said, wondering whether he'd be able to confess this in Russian. If he'd find the words. "That I will know neither Russian or English in the end. I will be foreign in both worlds."

Shane's eyebrows knit together. "Ilya..."

He reached out a hand and let Ilya take it.

"Your English is so impressively good," he said. "It's amazing how comfortable you've become with it."

Ilya let his head fall.

"At the cost of my Russian," he said, "It has been so long since I spoke it."

"I'm learning—"

"I know. I love it. But you are not fluent yet, though you will probably become so very easily, Mr Polyglot." Ilya let himself laugh. "I don't want to lose my Russian to learn English. I don't want to keep Russian but not know English. But I don't know how to balance the two wants."

"What about your friend, Svetlana?" Shane asked, "I know my French gets worse when I don't see J.J. in a while. How often do you two talk?"

Ilya shook his head. "Not much. Not since I left Boston."

"Call her."

"I can't."

"You don't have her number?"

"I do, but... She will make fun of me."

The statement left Shane silent with a puzzled look.

"When I cannot remember a word or say something wrong, she will see I am becoming dumb in Russian and she will laugh."

"Isn't she in the same boat as you, though?" Shane asked. "She lives in America, after all."

"No. Somehow she is perfect at the language. Polyglot like you." Ilya collapsed into Shane's embrace again. He felt so tired, no amount of coffee would help. All he wanted to do was to crawl back into bed. He knew his mother must have felt this way, too. Which only made him miss her more. Miss the way his mind worked when he spoke Russian. Sharper, somehow, more confident. He understood his thoughts more. Maybe he could figure out why he was so sad if he could speak about it in Russian.

"Call Svetlana," Shane said, wrapping his arms around Ilya and planting a kiss on the top of his head. "Even if she judges you. You can't regain what you've lost without bravery and mistakes. Like training a sprained ankle back after rest. It will hurt and it will be tough in the beginning."

"But it will return to its full strength," Ilya added.

In the warmth of Shane's arms, the prospect of talking to Svetlana didn't seem as scary as before. The night's dream had started to fade away.

"I will call her," Ilya said, then kissed Shane's jaw. "But not before I make you beg for me in Russian until every word is perfect."

End Notes

you can find me on tumblr @jimjimenezzz :))

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