

Don't Call Me a Stranger

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Don't Call Me a Stranger

by [bluebox_dragon](#)

Summary

It was just like the conversation about laundry the day before, and organizing the book shelf the day before that. Growing pains, his mom had said when he'd called to complain yesterday about how infuriating Ilya could be, how stubborn and particular he was. His mom had made a comment about the kettle calling the pot, Shane. Shane had found an excuse to cut the call short after that. He was not being stubborn, Ilya was.

A fight over loading the dishwasher leads to Shane learning about about Russian diminutives, and the meaning of names.

Notes

This takes place after the events of Heated Rivalry and before the events of The Long Game. Ilya has just moved into his new house in Ottawa.

I did do quite a bit of research on the topic of Russian diminutives, but I am not Russian and am much more familiar with Polish diminutives, so if anything is incorrect please feel free to point it out!!

This is completely unedited, feel free to point out any crazy typos

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

The thing about living together, after a decade of only meeting in hotel rooms and one night increments, is that there is a *steep* learning curve. Shane has enjoyed living with Ilya, the freedom to do whatever they want with no prying eyes, the freedom to fuck whenever they wanted. And the freedom to fight about the stupidest shit known to man.

“Ilya, why do you have a mountain of socks behind the bathroom door?”

“Shane, if you move mixing bowl *one more time*.”

“Where did you put my base layers?”

“Did you wash my jock with the cup in?”

So, all in all, it was perfect. A little annoying at times, Shane could admit, but there wasn't a single place he would rather be. Well, maybe he would prefer to be on the ice, but he'd prefer it if Ilya was there too.

Shane stood in the kitchen of Ilya's house in Ottawa, gesturing at the open dishwasher in front of him. They had split up dishes duty due to the late hour, with Ilya rinsing the larger items in the sink, while Shane loaded up the dishes from the table. He pulled the silverware caddy out of the dishwasher, sending three chopsticks from last night's dinner clattering down to lay among the disorganized plates in the lower rack.

Anyone with eyes would know that you can't put chopsticks in the silverware caddy, those went on the top rack with the knives. Where they wouldn't slip out into the bottom of the dishwasher. He wasn't even mad, more intrigued as to if this was how Ilya always did his dishes.

“Rozanov,” Shane started, “You can't-“

“Why do you care?” Ilya asked, cutting off Shane's criticism of the dishwasher. “Why is it such a big deal to you?”

Shane took a step back, frowning. It hadn't been a big deal, it was just a matter of efficiency. A poorly loaded dishwasher didn't clean as well, and everyone knew that. But if Ilya wanted to die on this hill?

Shane took a deep breath, it was just like the conversation about laundry the day before, and organizing the book shelf the day before that. Growing pains, his mom had said when he'd called to complain yesterday about how infuriating Ilya could be, how stubborn and particular he was. His mom had made a comment about *the kettle calling the pot, Shane*.

Shane had found an excuse to cut the call short after that. He was not being stubborn, Ilya was.

“Why do you care? I’m just telling you that there are smarter ways to load the dishwasher.”

“Oh, so you call me stupid?” Ilya snarked, “I am so sorry I’m not fucking perfect.”

And that was the last straw. Shane hadn’t *said that*, it wasn’t what he had meant and Ilya knew it. There was a particular rage that came with being misunderstood, misinterpreted and mistaken. It was a slow rage, maybe closer to panic than anything else. Shane hated it, when his words were twisted against what he had tried to say, when he couldn’t make himself understood.

“That’s not what I said, Rozanov!” And maybe Shane was yelling, or maybe he had just raised his voice slightly. He wasn’t sure.

Ilya paused where he was standing at the sink and took a single quick breath, then slammed the cooking pot in his hands down into the sink. He whirled to face Shane, looking far more pissed off than Shane thought the situation warranted.

“Why is it, Shane,” Ilya said, voice icy with anger, “That I am a stranger to you when you are mad?”

And, what?

That was not what this is about! How were they strangers, fighting about possibly the most domestic of experiences.

“What? I’m not,” Shane said, definitely not defensively, “I don’t even know what you’re talking about.”

“It’s fine, Shane.” Ilya said, all fight drained from his words and posture.

“No! What the hell is going on, you’re not a stranger and you know it.”

Ilya sighed and dried his hands on the floral towel that Shane’s mom had hung from their oven when they moved in. He reached a hand out to Shane, and Shane met him halfway, the dishwasher still open between the two of them. Ilya opened and closed his mouth a few times, still holding Shane’s hand in the air above the dishwasher. He looked nervous, unsure of what he was going to say, or possibly unsure of how to say it.

“You call me ‘Rozanov’,” Ilya said, staring at the wall instead of at Shane, “It’s just weird, that we cook and eat dinner and say I love you, and then you call me like I’m in trouble at school, like we are not, uh, the same?”

“Equals?”

“Yes. Equals.” Ilya said.

Shane had no clue what to say, they had always called each other by their last names. In fact, it had been such a big deal when they started using first names that Shane had panicked and run away. Which he was not planning to do again.

“I don’t really understand,” Shane said.

He went to move towards Ilya, forgetting the reason for their original argument still open at their feet.

“Fuck!” Shane slammed his shin against the open dishwasher door, letting go of Ilya’s hand to hop backwards a few steps.

“Fuck, ok,” Shane said, now moving to close the dishwasher, “How about we leave the dishes for tomorrow morning, and talk about this upstairs? It’s getting late.”

Ilya nodded his assent, and they made their way through the house, locking doors and turning off lights as they went. It was unlikely at this point in the night that they would leave their bed again once they got settled in, unpacking boxes and moving furniture was exhausting even as professional athletes. They moved through their night time routine without speaking, taking turns silently brushing teeth and changing into soft t-shirts and shorts.

Shane watched from the bed as Ilya finished getting settled, he wasn’t sure but it seems like Ilya was avoiding laying down. Filling up his glass of water, putting away clothes from a pile on the chair.

Shane sighed, and then pet the bed next to him.

“Come lay down.” Shane said, pulling the covers down on Ilya’s side of the bed.

Ilya followed the instruction, for once. He plopped down on the bed, and rolled so that they were laying face to face.

“Ok, I am laying down.”

“Do you want to, uh,” Shane wasn’t exactly sure how to start the conversation, “Tell me what’s going on?”

Ilya sighed, long and deep. He flopped back onto his back, so he wasn’t looking at Shane.

“I don’t know how to say,” Ilya said, after far too long of a pause.

“Like, don’t know the English for what you have to say, or you don’t have your thoughts collected?”

“Mmm, second one I think. Maybe little bit of not knowing English. I do not want to say it bad.”

“Ok, well maybe you just try, and I can help with the English?”

Ilya sighed again, somehow even more drawn out than the last sigh.

“In Russia, names are like more.” Ilya started, still staring at the ceiling, “You have more names, and there is like rules for it?”

“Ok...” Shane replied, though he had no clue where Ilya was going with this, “Am I calling you the wrong name?”

“Um, yes? Kind of? Is like for teacher or coach to call you by last name, like I have done something bad.”

Ilya paused again, mouth moving in silent words as he figured out what to say next.

“But not just that, for person with power I am Rozanov, for a stranger I am just Ilya, and for friends, or for *family* I have uh, nicknames?”

“So I need to give you a nickname?” Shane asked.

That was doable, he could come up with a nickname. ‘Ilya’ was hard to come up with a nickname for, only two syllables to work with.

“Mm, well nickname is not quite good word. Is like, there are official nicknames? Like you know what the names for a name are? Does that make sense?”

It did not. But it did mean that google might actually be able to help Shane out of this hole that he had unknowingly dug himself into. Ilya rolled over on the bed, this time bringing himself close enough place his head on Shane’s shoulder, trapping Shane’s arm beneath his weight.

“Is not big deal,” Ilya mumbled into Shane’s shoulder, “English is different, I know that. Is more that we fight, and then it hurts my feeling more than it should, yes?”

Shane squirmed his arm out from underneath his boyfriend, managing just enough space that he could rub his hand down the side of Ilya’s arm.

“It is a big deal if it hurts you, doesn’t matter the language.”

“Yes, maybe. But is a hurt we can fix in the morning, yes?”

Ilya managed to fall asleep quickly, despite the fight and conversation, but Shane found himself still awake and staring at the dark ceiling, over an hour after Ilya’s soft snoring had started up. But he just couldn’t get Ilya’s words out of his head, that he had been maybe insulting his boyfriend?

Shane slipped his arm out from underneath Ilya, inched his way as slowly as possible to the edge of his bed, trying not to wake the other man. His laptop was tucked on the lowest shelf of his nightstand, and if he was careful enough, he would be able to reach it without shaking the bed too much. A few careful moves later, he was propped up against his pillows with his laptop on the lowest brightness setting. Not that it would wake Ilya, Shane had seen his boyfriend sleep in the middle of watching a daytime hockey game with Shane’s mum shouting full volume at the referees, as if they could hear her all the way from Ottawa.

He opened his browser and typed, as quietly as possible, 'Russian names'. He browses the wikipedia page that had popped up as the first option, and then opened a new search.

"What the hell are Russian diminutives?" He whispered, barely any sound passed through his lips.

Apparently Russian diminutives are, "Affectionate, informal versions of names." And Ilya had been right, Shane had been effectively calling his boyfriend a stranger. Well, fuck.

Shane opened a third search, 'Russian diminutive for Ilya,' at least google was here to fix the mistakes that Shane had been making. He copy the list of diminutive names he had found on a Russian baby name sight, and pastes it into an email to himself. If it wasn't the middle of the night, he would have grabbed a pen and paper, but there was no light and his eyes were bad enough as is, so email would have to do.

Shane was startled awake by the entire bed shaking, Ilya was on the end of the bed grinning up at Shane from where he had presumably just jumped on.

"Ah good morning, you are awake now," Ilya said, crawling across the bed to give Shane a kiss, "You have late night, yes?"

Ilya pointed to Shane's laptop, which was now laying between them on the bed. Shane covered his eyes, he had stayed up way too late last night in his research binge, and had slept way past his usual wake up time. But, now was as good a time as ever to use the new vocabulary that he had learned last night. He uncovered his eyes, and rolled to look at Ilya laying next to him.

"Good morning, Ilyushka." Shane said, he went slowly over the name, well aware that he had likely mispronounced it.

It didn't seem to matter much to Ilya though, as he stared at Shane as if he had hung the stars, the moon, and the sun itself. Ilya's smile was brighter than the sun, if anyone asked Shane, so he supposed that if he was the reason for that smile, than maybe he had hung the sun in the sky.

"Good morning, Shane." Ilya grinned, "Ya tebya lyublyu."

"Ya tebya lyublyu."

End Notes

Kudos and comments make my day!! I love hearing what people think <3

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