

Speak to me in your mother tongue

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](https://archiveofourown.org/works/76118046) at <https://archiveofourown.org/works/76118046>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Heated Rivalry (TV)
Relationship:	Shane Hollander/Ilya Rozanov
Characters:	Shane Hollander , Ilya Rozanov
Additional Tags:	Mutual Pining , Misunderstandings , (obviously, this is the mutual pining misunderstandings show) , Love Confessions
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2025-12-21 Words: 3,034 Chapters: 1/1

speak to me in your mother tongue

by [woodlands](#)

Summary

He doesn't put much faith in luck as a concept. He doesn't believe in guardian angels, barely believes in the god whose cross he wears around his neck. The only invisible force watching over him is his own goddamned sense of self-preservation.

He shrugs. "Oh, is like Russian swear. I don't think there is a good word for it in English."

or, Bilingualism is Hard When You are Bisexual, Impulsive, and Very, Very Stupid

Notes

i know fuck all about hockey, and i haven't read the books. do they play hockey in memphis? is there a guy named otis on ilya's team? who knows honestly!!!! and also. who cares!!!!

anyway, russian dialogue written in english is italicized and underlined. hopefully it doesn't get too annoying—i couldn't think of another way to differentiate it from italicized words in english.

Ilya doesn't mean to say it.

It feels horrible on the way out, scraping sickly up his throat, pulled from his lungs by rough-spun cord. When it hits the air between them, it blisters.

It's happening again. Fuck. Fuck. Months of trying to take it back, trying to swallow the name down into himself again. Months of deleting his texts without sending them, of intentionally getting himself caught by paparazzi with a different girl every week, months of nonchalance and business as usual and making himself look away as Sha— as *Hollander* folds his sweatpants carefully in the dim light of another Boston hotel room.

Fuck. And now he's opened his fucking mouth again, even though he knows better.

But Hollander doesn't pull away. Doesn't even seem to have noticed, really—he's still panting over him, one hand on Ilya's chest to hold himself up, eyes trained on the wall above the bed, unfocused.

"Are you—" says Ilya, unsure.

Hollander blinks, licks his lips, looks down at him finally. Hums a questioning note at him, still coming down from his orgasm.

"Nothing," says Ilya. He rests a hand briefly on Hollander's hip before he nudges him off, rolls sideways and up from the bed so he can toss the condom in the bathroom trash. He knows without looking that Hollander's already getting dressed again, probably still a little dazed, sweat still cooling, hair still mussed.

They don't linger over this anymore, and that's Ilya's fault—another fuckup to add to a list that stretches back years.

It's so quiet now that when Hollander swallows and sighs Ilya can hear it from across the room. "Well. See you later."

"Yeah," Ilya says, turning to look at him. Trying to find something in Hollander's face that'll tell him what his next play should be. But there's nothing, just the dispassionate, friendly-polite look Hollander gives him these days, the same one he wears at press conferences. He isn't trying to hide a reaction— Ilya would know. He's just—there.

One more quiet moment while Hollander slips into his sneakers. Then: "Good to see you, Rozanov."

"Of course it was good for you to see me," Ilya scoffs, carefully careless. The hotel rug is soft under his feet as he crosses it, steps into Hollander's space, presses him back firmly into the wall. "And it will be good for you in Memphis, next week. Maybe I will eat you out before I fuck you. If you want." He's still wearing just the one sock, and the hotel room is kind of cold, but Hollander's body is warm when Ilya presses close, feigning a confidence he doesn't feel.

“Maybe,” Hollander says. Lets Ilya kiss him for a moment, two, before he pulls back. “I gotta go.”

“Right. Yeah.”

“I have to...” But he goes in for another kiss, just a quick one, before he’s out from under Ilya’s hands and halfway to the door.

It’s too much, sometimes—the kissing, the gentleness when it happens. He knows that Hollander doesn’t hook up or do one night stands, doesn’t go home with strangers he meets in bars or clubs the way Ilya does. Maybe he hasn’t thought about it much, about what that usually entails, or what it doesn’t. Ilya tries not to feel guilty about how much he likes that Hollander doesn’t play by the usual rules of hookup culture.

Hollander has his fingers on the door handle, but then he pauses, and turns around towards Ilya and the bed. Stands there. After a moment: “What did you say, before?”

So he hadn’t missed it, then. *Fuck you*, Ilya thinks, suddenly and fiercely furious, throat dry. *Fuck you if you think I’m going to say it twice.*

But he’s got years and years of practice at not betraying what he’s thinking, so he leans against the desk with his hip and says, “When?”

“Earlier. When we were—” Hollander cuts himself off, swallows. “You said something. In Russian.”

Ilya inhales sharply, then breathes out slowly, shakily. Clenches his jaw to try to steady himself while his mind races.

He doesn’t put much faith in luck as a concept. He doesn’t believe in guardian angels, barely believes in the god whose cross he wears around his neck. Things happen because people make them happen. The only invisible force watching over him, making him say *moya yupov* and not the English *my love* while he bucks up desperately into the man above him, is his own goddamned sense of self-preservation.

He shrugs. “Oh, is like Russian swear. I don’t think there is a good word for it in English.”

Hollander chuckles halfheartedly, his lips quirking up into a polite, awkward little smile. “Ah. Okay. Night, Rozanov.”

“Good night, Hollander.”

Ilya’s sense of self preservation is a fickle fucking bitch. “*So good for me*,” he mutters into the small of Hollander’s spine, crawling his way up the expanse of freckled skin so he can

suck a kiss into the back of Hollander's neck. "*Nobody else even comes close.*"

"Stop that," hisses Hollander, and when Ilya immediately lets go of him he groans and leans back towards him and says, "Not—keep touching me, that's good, just. Stop with the Russian. 'S fucking rude."

"Not rude," he says. "Not my fault you don't understand."

Hollander tries to roll over, and Ilya presses down on him bodily, because he loves the way Hollander always gives in, eventually. For a minute he stays where he is, rutting slowly against Hollander's perfect fucking ass, mouth open at the warm crook of his neck, unable to think about much except which position he wants, how long he can draw this out. Then he says, "Up, *sweetheart*," and tugs Hollander up with him, wanting to move things to the edge of the bed so he can get him on his knees.

And Hollander goes willingly, even if his mouth has fallen open in annoyance. "You're such an asshole. I don't talk to you in anything other than English—"

And isn't that an idea, Ilya thinks. Hollander moaning in French while they fuck, using words Ilya can't hope to understand. The thought sends a delicious curl of heat down Ilya's spine.

"I called you bossy," he says, "And you called me asshole, so we're even."

"That's—"

Ilya grins, "Speaking of assholes. I'm gonna—"

"Yeah—"

"Is this okay?"

"Yeah—fuck, Rozanov. Yeah."

—

He gets bolder. Another way of looking at it: he's getting stupider. Pushing to see what he can get away with, how much he can confess into Hollander's skin, before something gives.

They don't talk much, not anymore. Hollander's texts are all business now, no chirping, no flirting. Date, time, location. Maybe a "good game tonight" if he happens to watch. Once, he sends a photo of a dog outside of his apartment building, then follows it with a "Sorry, meant to send this to somebody else". Ilya spends awhile glaring at the photo, the stupid open-mouthed grin on the dog's face. Somebody else.

Rose isn't in the picture anymore, as far as he can tell, but that's the extent of what he knows about Hollander's love life, which is fine. It's not like he needs a play by play. They don't

talk, and they aren't exclusive, and they fuck. And it's fine.

It's fine, *he's* fine, but none of this explains why he can't keep his mouth shut.

"Sweetheart," he says, the Russian comfortable on his tongue in a way English never manages to be, *"Let me see you. I want to see your pretty face."*

Hollander doesn't turn to look at him, because he doesn't speak Russian, and because he's got his face buried in the pillow, moans muffled. So Ilya adjusts his angle a little, grinning when Hollander tilts his head up and back, eyes squeezed shut. "Good?" he asks in English, reaching to sink a hand into Hollander's dark hair. Hollander's yeah is barely audible, slurred with pleasure.

It's getting dangerous, he knows. Still, he's being careful. And he can't seem to bring himself to stop.

—

There's something off with Hollander tonight.

Ilya wouldn't normally consider himself observant—he's never really cared enough about much outside of hockey to pay attention. Sveta used to threaten to buzz her hair off just to see how many days it would take him to notice. She says she thinks it's a defense mechanism, and she won't say against what.

Hollander slips into the hotel room quietly, as he always does, but when the door is shut Ilya can tell from his posture that he's thinking about saying something, trying to work out the words in advance. He's always such a careful man. The antithesis of Ilya Rozanov, who has only ever been careful about—well, this.

"What," he says, letting the single English syllable hit the air of the room, blunt.

"No, nothing," Hollander says. He shakes his head, brow furrowed, and then toes out of his sneakers, lining them up carefully against the wall by the door. One of Ilya's sandals lies upside down near the desk, the other somewhere in the bathroom. Conversationally, he says, "I ran into Otis in the elevator."

"Oh, shit. Did you tell him you were here to get fucked by the best player in the league?"

Hollander's smile is dim, but still, it's there. "Shut up, you asshole. No. We talked about the game, and he got off a few floors down."

Ilya tuts, crowding Hollander up against the desk. "Too bad. I bet he would think it was hot. I think he would jerk off about it."

“Oh my god,” complains Hollander, but he’s already pulling at the hem of Ilya’s shirt, so he can’t be too annoyed. Ilya runs his hands up Hollander’s neck, watching his face, trying to gauge whether he can get away with any more of this. The lighting in here is dim, but he can still see a flush beginning to work its way across Hollander’s freckled cheeks. Oh yeah.

For a minute, he leaves it alone, focusing instead on getting Hollander out of his stupid brand promo sweats, dropping them on the desk in a pile while Hollander’s too distracted to protest. Then, after he finishes laving a kiss to the skin behind Hollander’s ear: “I think he would want to watch, if you offered.”

Just as he’d hoped, Hollander groans in what starts as annoyance but comes across more as very, very turned on. “I swear to god, Rozanov—”

“He can sit there, in the chair, watch you suck my cock—”

“Jesus christ.”

“See how you want it so bad, how good you look, how much you—”

Hollander kisses him, open-mouthed and sloppy, but if he thinks it’ll be enough to distract he’s about to be disappointed. Ilya lets himself focus on the wet slide of Hollander’s tongue for just a moment before he pulls back and runs his hand up Hollander’s jaw. “Sweetheart, sweetheart,” he says, pushing two fingers into that sweet, warm mouth, “Easy, darling. We have time.”

He’s hoping for a moan from Hollander when he nuzzles up his neck, mouth open. Instead, Hollander pulls back, and Ilya’s fingertips slide wetly across his cheek as he pushes away from the desk and out of Ilya’s arms. “Hey,” Ilya says, “Where are you—”

“What did you just call me?”

A dull sense of unease begins to roil in his stomach. “What are you talking about, Hollander.”

Hollander is pulling his shirt back on, looking furious. His movements are abrupt, and tense. “I thought I just wasn’t spelling it right, that Google Translate couldn’t— but you really are that much of an asshole, aren’t you?”

“What? I—”

But Hollander’s voice is loud, angry, sharp in the room that just moments ago was syrupy warm, soft. “You didn’t have to make fun of me about it,” he says, stepping back into his sweats, “You could have just kept ignoring it, or—I don’t fucking know, broke it off if you— but you didn’t have to—”

“Hollander!” Ilya is starting to think he’s having some kind of waking nightmare, fingers still wet from Hollander’s mouth, skin still alive with the feel of Hollander’s hands, the rest of him feeling suddenly and sickeningly hollow. Hollander looks like he’s about to flee again, just leave his sneakers here and run. It’s the worst kind of déjà vu. “What the *fuck* are you talking about!”

“Lyoo-beemaya,” Hollander says.

Sweetheart, pronounced badly, but unmistakably, in Russian.

Oh, *fuck*.

“I looked it up,” Hollander continues, watching him, his eyes so dark, posture upright and rigid, like a toy soldier, “You kept saying it. When we—And I thought I’d just misremembered, or spelled it wrong, because you’ve made it very clear that you—“ and all the time he’s been speaking his voice gets worse and worse, and it doesn’t seem like there’s anything Ilya can do to stop it. “Sweetheart in Russian. Right? And you said it in English to what. Rub it in?”

“I do not know what that means—“

“To, to underline it, I guess. To make sure I knew. Real nice, Rozanov.”

He takes a step forward. “Shane,” he tries, because he still hasn’t learned his goddamned lesson, apparently.

A tight, bitter shake of the head from Hollander. “Don’t. Shut the fuck up. Don’t do that right now.”

Ilya can’t think of a single thing to say, but he tries again anyway, wanting to get this back under some kind of control. “Listen to me. Listen. Stop, do not put your shoes on, let me—“ He tries to get between Hollander and the door, then changes his mind, not wanting to trap him, wanting him to decide on his own to stay. “It is not what you think, Hollander, it really isn’t.”

Hollander glares at him, mouth turned down almost into a snarl. But he doesn’t move, and he doesn’t say anything more.

“Do not run away from me again,” Ilya starts, hands up between them like he’s trying to gentle some kind of wild horse, “I cannot explain if you run away. You have to let me explain.”

But the words won’t come, in English or Russian. Hollander takes a step backward, shaking his head.

“Fuck. Fuck! Okay, wait—“

“Have a good game tomorrow,” Hollander says quietly, turning to the door, “Don’t text me.”

“I mean it,” he spits, voice strangled, heart racing, “Okay? Every time, I mean it. In Russian because I—fuck—I have to say it, but I can’t—you ran away, when I said your name. You ran away from. From me. You said my name, and then you left me and I’ve been trying to be alright with it, to be—I don’t know how to do this anymore, we broke the rules—“ He stops, swallows hard, hands lowering helplessly in a pleading motion. He switches back to English. “It is not—making fun of you, or, or teasing. It is... safer when you do not understand what I say when I say these things.”

There is a look on Shane's face now that Ilya can't parse, his mouth still turned down. He looks like he's chewing on the inside of his cheek. The silence sits heavy between them, so that Ilya can hear the soft sound of Shane's thumb and forefinger rubbing together, a tic he's had for years that surfaces when he's trying to keep himself calm.

Then he sighs, and rubs a hand over his face. "I don't know what to say to that."

"You do not have to say anything. Just—" and he doesn't want to say any of this out loud, feels like he's flaying himself open, but he makes himself do it anyway, "Can you just stay." He swallows. "Please."

It's the "please" that does it. Shane seems to soften, just enough. He looks away and then back again, thinking, then says, "Okay."

Ilya wets his lips. "Okay."

They stand like that for a moment, suspended. Then Shane moves, stepping around Ilya. When he turns, Shane has climbed into the bed, his large frame somehow small against the white sheets. He's got the covers pulled up to his waist, and he's still wearing the tee shirt he pulled back on moments ago. He must see a question in Ilya's face, because he tilts his head at the empty space next to him, an invitation.

Ilya doesn't have to be told twice. He climbs in next to him, careful not to touch.

"I thought you knew," Shane says quietly, "That I. That this is more than just sex, for me. I'm not good at hiding things. So I thought you knew, and had decided to be cruel."

"No. I did not know this."

"Yeah." Shane's hand flexes against the comforter. "I think—"

"*I love you*," Ilya says, helplessly. Then, again, in English: "I love you. I did not want you to leave my house, I did not want you to stop saying my name, I did not want to be cruel. I'm sorry."

"Ilya," Shane says, and here on this hotel bed, close but not touching, it sounds like a confession of his own.

—

"You pronounce like shit, by the way," Ilya says, later.

"Hmm?"

"Lyubimaya. You pronounce like gloobahmoo. Is so embarrassing."

Shane chuckles, too comfortable and half asleep to get riled up. “Oh. Okay.”

“I am just saying. I do not think I can fuck you again until you speak Russian better. Everyone will think I am so lame.”

“You *are* lame,” Shane says, and Ilya rolls over onto him, pretending to try to push him off the bed, while Shane laughs into his shoulder, loose-limbed and lovely in his arms.

“Better to be lame than boring,” he says when they settle down again and Shane is sprawled out next to him, grinning.

“What’s the difference?”

“Shut up, Hollander,” Ilya says, twisting so he can press a kiss to Shane’s temple, his eyelid, his nose. “*I love you, more than I’ve ever loved anything else*, but shut the fuck up.”

Shane smiles. “What does that one mean?”

“Maybe I will tell you someday,” Ilya says, and means it.

Something to look forward to.

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