

nothing can stop this

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nothing can stop this

by [owlinaminor](#)

Summary

Maybe you could teach me Russian. It was a joke, but it also wasn't really a joke.

Notes

like every other Russian-speaker who watched this show, I was wildly impressed by Connor Storrie, especially in that phone call scene!

title from "not gonna get us," t.A.T.u.'s other famous banger. btw please look them up if you are unfamiliar, the lore is unbelievable.

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

Ilya speaks Russian.

Shane listens, pressing the phone up against his ear even though he can't understand a word. Words roll off Ilya's tongue in waves, syllables running into each other, long vowels and heavy consonants gliding like blades on the ice.

It occurs to Shane that he's never heard Ilya speak Russian before. Okay, he's heard maybe a word or two here or there, curses and demands in bed, but nothing like this. Ilya almost sounds like a different person, like his voice is in a new register. Less careful, maybe. Emotions open, not hidden by layers of sarcasm and bravado.

At the end, Ilya repeats a phrase two or three times, or maybe says the same thing in two or three ways. One of those times, he says it slower than the rest of the outpouring, weight on each syllable. It feels important. Shane closes his eyes, tries to remember it for later. He catches a sound like, *ya*, repeated a couple of times, and another like *you*.

Я тебя люблю.

Ilya finishes speaking, and Shane listens to him breathe. Heavy breaths, like they just played a point, or like Ilya's above him in bed. Shane wants so badly to be there, to hold him.

"Maybe you could teach me Russian someday," he says.

Maybe you could teach me Russian. It was a joke, but it also wasn't really a joke.

Shane keeps thinking about that phone call. He hears Ilya's voice, echoing as he does drills at practice, as he showers, as he tries to fall asleep at night. It's not even that he wants to know what Ilya said – though he does – but more that he wants to know that Ilya. The one who speaks quickly, easily, words rolling off like melting ice down the river in spring.

And Shane thinks how selfish he is, that for nearly a decade they've communicated only in one language. That it never even occurred to him, how Ilya was always translating. How he panicked about Ilya telling someone, those nights during their rookie season, when Ilya has so much to lose, too.

So Shane resolves to learn... at least something. He learned French as a kid, how hard can it be?

He downloads Duolingo, then staunchly refuses any friend requests that pop up – from Rose, Hayden, his other teammates, their wives and girlfriends. The app walks him through the letters. *Ya*, he learns, is written like *Я*. It means "I," and is also in Ilya's name. He writes it out to practice – *Илья Розанов* – then adds, *Шане Холандер*, his own name approximated in the Cyrillic characters. He tapes the slip of paper with those names to his bathroom mirror,

then immediately feels like a teenager doodling their crush's name in the margin of a notebook.

The slip of paper stays up, though. He barely remembers to take it down the day of their next game. But then, he doesn't make it back home that night anyway.

After Ilya visits in the hospital, Shane asks one of the nurses if they have any books in Russian, among the place's modest entertainment supplies for patients who aren't supposed to watch TV. Maybe a picture book for kids, he says.

He tries to be discrete, but she was the same nurse who found Ilya in his room, and he's on a lot of pain medication. She does bring him something, though: two picture books, one with cartoon representations of the Russian alphabet and another with some kind of Christmas-y fairy tale, an old man and a young girl walking through a snowy forest. That book still has a price sticker on it – it seems like the nurse wasn't too discrete, either.

He reads through the books slowly, when nobody else is in his room, sounding out each letter. A couple of pages at a time, pausing to rest whenever his head starts to ache.

And then, when he's discharged, he goes back to Duolingo. He graduates from the alphabet lessons to simple words: matching *яблоко* to a drawing of an apple, *яйцо* to one of an egg. At the cottage, waiting for Ilya's promised visit, he carefully writes out Russian labels for all of the food items in the fridge and some of those in the pantry. Every time he's cooking or grabbing a snack, he practices each word, repeating it until it starts to sound like nonsense. He spends hours on the app, too, its dings and buzzer sounds haunting his ears.

The morning that Ilya's flight is set to land, he takes all the labels down and stuffs them at the bottom of his dresser. Tells himself, Ilya can get surprised once he masters a few full sentences.

“Я тебя люблю,” Ilya says.

His voice is low, but for Shane, it echoes loud as thunder in the pre-dawn quiet. The phrase is familiar, and Shane thinks back to that phone call – is trying to remember the syllables – when Ilya says it again, in English this time. “I love you.”

And there is nothing else – the world narrows to this room, this circle of light from the bedside table, this warmth where their skin meets. The world is just Shane pulling Ilya in close, closer, never close enough, saying, “I love you, too.”

Ilya can't stop saying it. The ice has melted, and he's a lake in the spring rain, overflowing. First thing every morning, every time their faces get close, every time one of them comes.

Shane can't stop saying it, either. He asks Ilya to repeat it in Russian, tries to echo that back.

“Yah te-byah loo-bloo,” he tries, one day after lunch, curled up together on the couch.

“No,” Ilya says, laughing. “Your accent is awful. More emphasis on the vowels. *YA teb-YA lyu-BLYU.*”

Shane tries again. *“YAH teb-YAH loo-BLOO.”*

“No, you sound so – it’s like bad actor on TV.” Ilya grabs Shane’s mouth in one hand, tries to form his lips into the right shapes. *“Lyu-BLYU.* Like you’re trying to suck it off.”

Shane wants to try again, but a laugh comes out instead. “How would I say, ‘fuck off?’” he asks instead, Ilya still holding his lips.

Ilya moves the hand to Shane’s cheek, then pushes him back on the couch, starts kissing down his collarbone.

“I don’t think that’s it,” Shane says, still laughing.

Ilya kisses the pulse point in Shane’s neck, then comes back up to meet his lips. “How do you know –”

Shane bites down on Ilya’s bottom lip, then smooths it over with another kiss. “Was that it?”

And then suddenly Shane is thrown on his back, and he’s not thinking about Russian or anything else for a while.

“Shane! What is this?”

Shane walks into the kitchen, mid-towelings his hair off from the shower, to find Ilya staring at a bowl of fruit on the counter.

“What,” he starts to say, and then it hits him. He drops the towel and accelerates. But it’s too late to do anything – Ilya has already seen the sticky note reading, *“яблоко, банан, малина”* – apple, banana, raspberry.

Shane stops, a step back from the counter. Breathing a little too hard for someone who just walked fifty feet from the bathroom.

“I thought I took all of those off before you got here,” he says.

“You... wait, all of what?”

Shane sighs, drops his head in something between a nod and admitting defeat. He’s dripping water onto the wood floor. And Ilya always said he was a bad liar. “There were a bunch in the fridge. Labels, like those. And some in the cabinets.”

Ilya turns around – there’s an expression on his face that Shane can’t place. It’s almost like he’s trying to work out a difficult play, but softer, more surprised.

“Why... were there labels with Russian words all over your kitchen,” he says slowly.

Shane takes the remaining step to the counter, leans his arms out onto it and drops his head down. The marble is cool on his damp skin. “Because I’m trying to learn. I... the phone call, a few weeks ago, made me realize anything you say to me is a translation. And I want to... to hear you in Russian more. I’ll probably never be fluent or anything, but I –”

And there’s a hand on Shane’s arms, another on the crown of his head, drawing him up. Ilya’s looking at him like he hung the sun – *солнце*, he remembers – and kissing his cheeks, his forehead, his lips.

“Я тебя люблю,” Shane says, carefully emphasizing each syllable. Like he’s trying to tell Ilya – not just, *I love you*, but also, *you deserve this kind of care, this kind of dedication. I’m gonna love you like you always should be loved.*

Ilya kisses him, warm and hungry, sun on full blast. *“Я тоже,”* he says. *Me, too.* “But we need to work on your pronunciation.”

“Do you think I could go to Moscow?” Shane says later, in bed, tracing soft patterns across Ilya’s chest.

Ilya shifts to face him. The moonlight catches his hazel eyes through the window, and for a second Shane almost forgets what he just said, or maybe everything he has ever said.

“Why would you want to go there?” Ilya says.

Shane keeps his fingers moving, moving in and out in circles. He catches the raised skin of an old scar, feels suddenly, irrationally angry at whatever caused it. “I want to see where you grew up,” he replies. “Maybe meet your family.”

“Not much family there for you to meet.” Ilya ducks his head, but Shane can see him frown, feels the tension in his skin.

“Well, see where your home is, at least,” Shane says, moving one hand up Ilya’s chest, catching on his collarbone, tracing the spot where his teeth left a mark last night. “Maybe play hockey over there. See the sites, the museums, the clubs, whatever.”

Ilya grabs Shane’s hand with his own, then brings it up to his mouth, kisses it. “Before this week, I would have said, impossible. But now... *Я не знаю.*”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, you make me believe in impossible things, Shane Hollander.”

And there’s no possible response to that, really, except to kiss Ilya, pull him close, closer, never close enough.

“Maybe not for a year or two, though,” Shane says, next time they break to breathe. “Once my Russian is better.”

“*Иди сюда,*” Ilya replies, which Shane knows means, *come here*. He smirks, as he goes back in – he’ll be at full sentences in no time.

End Notes

editor's note, 1/5/26: changed Shane's question at the end to say "Moscow" because I forgot, when I wrote this in a fugue state after binging the show, that he literally had gone to Russia already for the Olympics. whoops.

also, I am working on at least one sequel/companion piece. watch this space!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!