

Too Much Ain't Enough

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Too Much Ain't Enough

by [isuiji](#)

Summary

“Say something.” Ilya asks “in Russian. For me.”

Then softly, carefully, he does. “Я всё ещё скучный.” *I'm still boring.* He tried to add humour to it. But he doesn't know if it reached.

Still, Ilya's breath catches. “Oh.” He says like he's just been handed something precious. “You're perfect.”

Or, Shane had been learning Russian the whole time.

Notes

I don't speak Russian, so sorry in advance.

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

Rozanov talks too much. Which Shane does, *at first*, find surprising. Upon their first meeting in Saskatchewan, Rozanov was all eyes, calculating and ready. But by the time they got drafted, by the time Ilya was pressing Shane down into the mattress, his words hitting the skin on his neck, Shane realised that Ilya likes to talk to fill the silence.

Not in English - he barely bothers with that - but constantly, incessantly, like silence is something he refuses to give oxygen to. From the media pen to the ice, whether he's shouting insults, chirping, or skating past, his mouth is always moving.

Their first game as rookies goes as expected, it's all heat and speed and collision, the kind of game that leaves Shane buzzing hours later with nowhere to put it. Although he seems to always find himself using Ilya to burn off any adrenaline left.

Ilya chirps at him - something short, clipped, barked out with a grin. And every single time, Ilya makes sure Shane notices him. Shane still wins the face off, *of course*, out of spite, but Ilya is on his heels, rushing after him, spitting out an obvious insult. He doesn't need to understand Russian to know it; it's in the bit, the grin Rozanov gives him as he gets closer and closer to Shane, trying to steal the puck. Shane grins, always happy to get a reaction out of him.

Shane doesn't understand a word of it. But he remembers the sound of it. It's not even the insult itself that sticks. It's the rhythm. The way Ilya's tongue wraps around the foreign syllables, how the words end harsher than they start. *The way Ilya makes it sound.*

Later, in the locker room, Shane catches himself repeating it under his breath while he unties his laces. Not meaningfully, not carefully. Just the shape of it. He stops when he realises what he's doing.

It's stupid, he thinks.

Rozanov doesn't stop - *of course not, it's his language*- but still, he doesn't stop. He speaks more English now, but Russian still slips through. When they're on ice, when he's holding Shane down, whispering into his neck, moaning out phrases that Shane can't understand but can feel.

They're playing against each other again, and they're both in their elements. It's fast and tight, both level on scores. Shane was stuck on the bench for a moment when he watched Ilya collide with the boards, he shouts out a sharp swear in Russian.

Ilya didn't celebrate wildly after he scored the winning goal. He never does. He just skates past the boards, glances toward Shane, and smiles. Not big, not cocky cocky but smug and flirtatious.

Shane's jaw tightened. Just wait, he thought, eyes tracking Ilya as play reset. I'll get you back.

“Jesus,” one of Shane’s teammates mutters. “You alright, man? You’re staring a hole through Rozanov.”

Shane tore his gaze away. “Nothing,” he said shortly. “Just... sick of hearing him talk.”

That’s not true, but the truth of it, the truth of knowing that he likes Ilya talking, the sounds he makes, has him lying.

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He watches Rozanov. He watches his tape, studies him, how he moves and skates. He uses his hands to study Rozanov, following the outlines of his body, following his veins, feeling the heat of him.

He finds himself always watching Rozanov during warmups every time they play. He finds his eyes falling to his mouth. Notice how his jaw tightens around certain sounds, how his voice flattens when he's pissed. It's probably nothing. Shane tells himself it's nothing.

He noticed it most along the boards. Ilya got checked hard, slammed shoulder first into the glass, and immediately barked something sharp and furious in Russian. It wasn’t the first time. It wasn’t even the fifth. The words came out rough, clipped, clearly not meant for anyone’s benefit but his own.

He didn’t know what the words meant, but he knew they were curses. He could hear it in the shape of them, the bite. Russian sounded harsh when Ilya swore. And yet somewhere in the back of his mind, something starts lining them up anyway. This one is longer; that one is familiar, that one said when Shane steals the puck from him, that one when he falls to his knees for him.

It happened every time. Another hit. Another Russian curse. It's pattern recognition, and Shane is good at patterns. but still, Shane feels irritation coil tight in his chest. It wasn’t jealousy. It wasn’t. It wasn’t even really about Ilya. It was about not understanding.

He hated that feeling more than anything. Hated the way it made him feel slow, shut out, like something was happening just beyond his reach. Hockey was a game of information—who knew what, who saw what first. And here was Ilya, casually wielding something Shane didn’t have access to, like it didn’t matter at all.

Pausing the tape, he pulls his phone out, more out of habit than intent. He opens a browser. What language does Ilya know- *he already knows*.

He stops, deletes. He should lock his phone and turn it off. Instead, he types in the sound he remembers from the ice, spelled wrong, probably. The search hesitates, then fills in the gaps for him.

A translation appears. Shane reads it once. Then again, slower; ‘дерьмо’ der'mo. Shit or bullshit is the translation. He reads it in his head, then rereads it.

It's not important. It doesn't change anything. Still, he lets the word sit there for a moment longer than necessary, like he's checking the weight of it.

He locks his screen.

When Shane gets up to complete his nighttime routine, he stands in front of the bathroom mirror. The light is harsh and unflattering.

He says the word out loud. Дерьмо дерьмо дерьмо.

It comes out wrong. He adjusts, tries again. The second attempt is closer. The third is better.

He watches his mouth in the mirror, the way the sound shapes itself. It's different from English. More deliberate. Less forgiving.

"What are you doing, dude?" he mutters to himself in judgment and turns the light off.

In bed, the room dark and quiet, he stares at the ceiling. His brain refuses to settle, circling the same small thing over and over, not the game, not the score, just the sound of a language he doesn't know.

He tells himself it's nothing. Just a detail. Just something he noticed.

Eventually, he falls asleep.

The word stays with him.

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Months later, Shane and Ilya are in the same city. They plan to meet at Shane's hotel after his game, and it all goes to plan. It's simple. It's not rare for Ilya to slip into Russian when they fuck. When he's consumed by pleasure, it slips out. Shane, admittedly, loves the sound of it, the way Ilya's mouth moves when he speaks it. He kisses him hard that night. All bite and tongue and *more more more*.

Ilya mutters something. He's standing at the end of the bed holding Shane's legs up as he stares down at him. Ilya just looks at him, eyes raking over him, up and down, before muttering out the same word "красивый". Shane doesn't comprehend it at first, but the same word gets repeated again and again. When Ilya's hand is wrapped around his cock, moving at a slow agonizing pace, when he's out of breath and leans down to kiss him, the same word gets repeated. Shane, in pleasure, tries to mouth it silently to himself, but he opens his mouth to speak, but Ilya's hand finds his nipple, and a moan breaks through. Fuck.

He forgets about it. It's not until Ilya has left his room that he finally decides that he needs to get up. He showers, brushes his teeth, and stares at his reflection longer than necessary. His lips are red, and he looks debauched despite the shower. He stands, looks, and says the word he'd heard 'красивый'. He says it softly and slowly, kra-siv-yy. It feels wrong in his mouth. Heavy, like it doesn't belong there. He spits, rinses, and turns away from the mirror.

He refuses to look up the definition, however tempting it feels.

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The next season comes, and it happens again. Different season, different cities, the same voice.

Rozanov leans close, face to face, breaths fogging between them. He says his room number. Then, he says something Shane has definitely heard before. The same word, or close to it. The ending is identical. Shane feels the recognition click. He doesn't know where he remembers it from, nor the meaning, but the recognition sparks something within him, and he can't help the smile that rises on his face. Ilya wins the puck first, and Shane sprints after him.

Later, alone, he tests it. Just once. Quiet. In the privacy of his own head. He knows he recognises the word, and thinks he can unravel the meaning. And that? That bothers him more than not knowing would.

When they meet up later that night in Ilya's hotel room. Shane can tell when Rozanov is insulting him or teasing him versus when he's just talking. There's a lift to his casual voice, a looseness. It's the same in both Russian and English. Shane files that away, too.

He doesn't think of it as learning. He would never call it that. Learning implies intent, effort, and time spent reaching towards a goal.

This is just exposure. This is just being observant. This is just Shane being good at what he does.

It was at 2 a.m that night, when Shane found himself still awake, that he opened his laptop, the glow of his screen casting shadows across the room. He opened a new tab and began to type.

He typed it casually. Then deleted it. Then typed it again.

How to say 'fuck off' in Russian?

It was stupid. He knew it was. Petty. Immature. He almost closed the tab immediately. But when the results came up— foreign letters, unfamiliar shapes— he stared at them longer than he should.

The word stared back at him, unfamiliar but compelling

He scrolled, his eyes scanning the words until he found what he was looking for. He tapped the audio icon and listened. Once. Twice.

Отъебись.

The Russian phrase, harsh and biting, shot straight to his brain. He read it aloud, the syllables feeling foreign in his mouth, almost like a challenge.

Ot'yebis.

Quietly, barely moving his lips, Shane repeated it. His tongue twisted awkwardly around the sounds, unfamiliar yet strangely satisfying. It felt strange in his mouth—different sounds, different muscles—but not wrong. Not hard. The word rolled off his tongue more easily than he expected.

“Whatever,” he muttered, and closed the tab.

He didn’t write it down. Didn’t bookmark the page. Didn’t tell himself he’d remember it. He did anyway.

He clears his history and puts his laptop down on the nightstand like it might betray him if he doesn't. It doesn't mean anything, he tells himself. It's just a word, an insult.

Outside, where traffic continues, the season continuing, games go by, Shane closes his eyes and lets the sound of Ilya's voice, deep and teasing, fade back into memory. Where it belongs.

For now.

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After months of silence between them, Shane and Ilya finally reunite. It's some useless award ceremony, but they both have to be there. Shane remembers being in the bathroom. Overheating, hot and needy, and yet he wanted to grab Ilya by the shoulders. He wants to shake him and shout “fuck off, fuck off, fuck off,” in Russian so he could hear and him. So he could understand and fucking feel it, but he doesn't. He doesn't.

He doesn’t even say it later when he's hard, ready, and leaking, and *fuck*, Ilya is such an asshole.

Ilya says something teasingly as he kisses his way down Shane's body for the first time in months, which is followed quickly by a muttered Russian word, and Shane can't reply; nothing comes out but breathless whimpers and holy fuck-

Words leave him completely. Probably for the best.

Shane tries not to think about the Russian swear words in the back of his head that float around.

Morning practice goes as normal. Drills, laps, the usual corrections barked from the boards, Shane instructing his teammates. Shane listens, adjusts, and keeps his head down. When a pass slips by his stick, he exhales sharply through his nose and resets.

Normal.

It isn't until he's back in their locker room, sweat cooling on his skin, that it happens.

And it's so stupid.

He drops his phone. *Fucking lily*. Shane bends down to grab it when he hits the bench with his shin, stupid, and the sound comes out of him without planning. Without being scheduled.

“Блять” - fuck. It was quiet, like it had been breathed out. It's barely there, but still Shane freezes. It slipped by on memory alone. He knows it's his fault, for repeating in his head as he tries to fall asleep, the way Ilya says it, when he's sweaty and tired, when he's annoyed. When he's just been hit or lost the puck. How different it sounds when Ilya says it.

Nobody reacts around him. The room keeps moving, voices overlapping, someone's music starting up. He straightens slowly, his phone in hand, and waits for someone to look at him, to throw an accusing glare at him. They don't.

He sits down, giving his pulse time to steady. The word lingers, unfamiliar and oddly precise. It had fit the moment better than anything else he could've.

That bothers him more than the slip.

On the plane that same week, he's heading to a game, Shane takes his usual seat by the window. Headphones in, though nothing is playing. He opens his phone and scrolls past his notifications without reading them.

He downloads a language app.

He doesn't think about it. He just taps *install*, then locks the screen like it might accuse him of something.

Ten minutes later, after an internal battle and the subsequent declaration that nothing bad will come from this, he opens the app. The app asks him to choose a language. He selects Russian without hesitation.

His first lesson is slow, painfully basic. Shane tries not to be impatient but finds himself tapping through it faster than intended. He's not - he's not trying to learn, just to gauge the sounds.

The seat beside him gets occupied by Hayden, who glances over. “Watcha doing?” he asks, “texting someone...?”

Shane doesn't look up, “No.”

“Sure looks like it.”

Shane shrugs. The conversation dies quickly, as it usually does.

He puts his headphones back on and replays the pronunciation guide, listening closely. The voice is flat, mechanical. Not like Ilya's. That's fine.

That same night, Shane stands in front of his hotel mirror. He repeats what he remembers from the app. A basic greeting. Simple phrases. He's not good at it yet. His pronunciation is off. He corrects himself without frustration, the way he would with anything else that requires repetition. He tells himself it's just temporary. Just something to focus on. Something to fill the quiet.

It became something more than just curiosity. It was something for him.

Later that season, while his teammates celebrated the win in the hotel bar, Shane stayed behind. Alone in his room, he pulled up his language app and exhaled at the familiarity of it. He's leaning against an unfamiliar hotel bed, with his glasses on. He finds himself wanting to learn more, small words, phrases, simple things to start with. He had no plans to make it known.

No one needed to know.

But as his fingers glided over the screen, he found himself repeating the Russian words over and over in his head, and the strange satisfaction of it felt deep.

A month goes by, and he gives in and buys himself a notebook. It's bland, and the cover is plain. He keeps it at the bottom of his bag, under his spare socks and tape. He studies on the road, between games, in the narrow spaces of time that don't belong to anyone else.

He finds himself looking up phrases at random, not bothering to save them, but always coming back to them. Mouthing them out, fully focused on it. He listened to beginner Russian podcasts while he worked out; his language apps drained his phone battery as he so often found himself between practices, using them when he needed the hockey world to slow down just slightly. He'd split his free time between running through basic words and phrases, seeing what he could remember, and the other half was firmly dedicated to texting Ilya.

This newfound dedication, however, has consequences.

A muttered word when he misses a shot. Another time when he drops his keys. Nothing loud enough to register. Nothing anyone questions or even hears.

Shane doesn't tell anyone. He doesn't even think of it as a secret. It's just something he does, like stretching before practice or icing a rib after a particularly rough game.

It's... routine.

One night, scrolling through his phone, he lands short on a clip— an interview. Shared and reshared. Ilya again, answering questions in Russian this time, relaxed and off guard. Shane bookmarks it without thinking, already ready to study the way his mouth moves.

Shane listens, replays it once, then twice, before he realizes he's allowed the video to loop one too many times, getting distracted by the entirety of Ilya. He closes the app quickly and sets his phone facedown on the nightstand.

He lies there in the dark, hands folded on his chest, and exhales slowly.

Fuck.

He and Ilya are playing each other again. Shane finds himself missing Rozanov's touch. As he watches Ilya race down the ice, head down, all fierce. He finds himself wanting to trace his mouth with his fingers as he barks orders at his team.

It's all patterns you see.

Shane notices it the way he notices everything – subtle, repeated, impossible to ignore once they've logged themselves into his brain. Boston's defenseman Marleau favours his left side. A goalie drops early, a winger hesitates before cutting inside. Ilya swears when he gets hit into the boards. Not every time, not dramatically, just a sharp burst of Russian, usually low and fast like it's torn out of him before he can stop it. Shane doesn't know what the one he shouts out in front of him means - not really - but he recognises them now.

When Shane is finally on the ice, facing Ilya, he's excited: no one is more fun to play against than him. He races down the ice, shoulder against shoulder here, a smirk there. Shane is close enough to hear it clearly this time. He scored, Ilya raced to stop him, shouting at his own defensemen to do their jobs. When he hears a furious word in Russian after the puck hits the back of the net, they're one up now. Shane's brain lights up. *That one. That one he knows.*

He doesn't know the meaning exactly, but he knows when it's used. Frustration. Anger. The kind of word you throw at the universe when it's not listening.

Later, when Shane's dragged by teammates to celebrate their win, Shane finds himself muttering the word under his breath in the corner of the club's booth. It's quiet, barely a sound at all. He opens his notes app and writes what he heard down. Ready and waiting for his brain to decipher later. No one notices, and that almost makes it better.

-

Shane is controlled. He's disciplined. Knows when to smile, when to nod, and when to speak. It's the same with Russian. He knows the rules now; he knows that this is his alone. That it needs to be kept behind closed doors - at least for now.

It's accidental at first. Casual, even. But it's becoming integrated within him. A Russian swear when he drops his card on a hotel hallway, another when he's down to his last protein bar. He keeps his voice low, the words folded into themselves, private and contained.

He can be private and contained.

It's weird, Shane finds, that the more he learns, the more he finds himself picking up and recognising how different Russian feels compared to English. English is loud. It has expectations and interviews and questions he doesn't want to answer, and locker rooms full of voices talking over each other. English demands things from him, demands performance. Russian doesn't. Russian is something he keeps behind his teeth.

It's comforting, *weirdly*. He starts looking up things more often. Things outside of what his apps tell him. Not just swear words, hockey terms, or basic phrases and verbs. He watches a postgame clip of Ilya answering a question in Russian and finds himself pausing and rewinding, listening again. And although he gets distracted by the sweat glistening on his skin, the smile he had after winning a game, Shane finds himself utterly addicted.

He downloads another app. Then another. It's still not a *thing*, he tells himself. Just curiosity, just killing time. And he knows it's deeper than that, but he's not ready to face that head-on yet.

But soon, killing time becomes scheduled time. Shane would usually find himself opening his phone first thing to see what he could remember, but that was just to fill in the time before he had to get up.

Now it's scheduled into his day. Twenty minutes in the morning, longer at night, where he would open his notebook and begin writing. A textbook ordered online, tucked into the back of his drawer like contraband. He practices in front of the mirror as he waits for his water to heat up to wash his face, shaping his mouth around the unfamiliar sounds. He even finds himself correcting himself.

He finds himself watching Russian movies on flights, subtitles on, volume low in his headphones. The language washes over him. He finds himself obsessed with it, utterly compelled by it. It's dense and contained, and even when he doesn't understand the words, he understands the feeling.

Controlled. Contained. Focused. Calm.

He liked the way Russian makes his brain slow down and lock in.

He's playing against a team that should be an easy win, but they're struggling. Shane misreads the timing, collides with a defenseman, and skates away irritated, swearing in Russian as he skates away. The phrase “Ты шутишь, что ли?” slipped out under his breath before English could even catch up. His mouth guard makes it look like she's grumbling.

He doesn't even realize he's said it till his brain catches up with him and oh. Huh. Calling it contained now feels... wrong.

They text. All the time. Sometimes late at night or when a text got a particular reaction, Shane would write them down, say them out loud, and study them. It was - *in a totally normal way* - a way to feel closer to Ilya, to feel like he understood him.

He had a section at the back of his now worn notebook of phrases he'd heard Rozanov say. He doesn't remember all of them: sometimes they're said when Shane had his mouth around Ilya's cock, and he couldn't comprehend anything, can only hear the muted Russian words as he bobs his head. But what he does remember, from their private moments - their texts through to seeing him mouth something out on the ice, Shane files it away. Repeat and repeat in his head until he's alone, where he can look it up.

There are a couple of weird ones. Those that make him laugh because Ilya is intelligent. And his insults follow that well.

Shane's a good listener. Even when Ilya's mouth is wrapped around him. But he still short circuits. His brain filters out words and phrases and just focuses on Ilya. When he's told to roll over or get on his knees, it's mostly out of want of understanding, of knowing Ilya and what he wants. He hears him, sometimes, other times not so much. He's fully present, but he's so overwhelmed with pleasure and want that everything evaporates from him.

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He finds himself watching the Stanley Cup final with his teammates when Ilya wins it, and he's not jealous - well, only a little - but he's so proud, he tries not to smile too wide as to alert his teammates, but he can't help a small one. He studies Ilya as he cheers with his teammates. His eyes are wild, with a rare but beautiful big smile on his face. He looks stunning.

Shane continues to sit there as Boston is handed their trophy, he hears Ilya scream 'for you mama' in Russian - *he thinks* he's not great at listening yet. He files it away to maybe ask later - but it seems too personal. Too real to ask yet.

That night, after sending a congratulatory but innuendo message to Ilya, he lies awake for several hours. He realises that he doesn't know much about Ilya. Despite learning that language, which is not for him, really, *really, really* - he doesn't know Ilya all that well. Yes, he knows him on ice, studies him in the dark at night, but truthfully there's a barrier that not even a language can break, and gosh, it shouldn't ache as much as it does.

But still, that territory of unknown grows wild, and soon the apps and videos and rewinding Ilya's interviews aren't enough. It's late, and the sheets feel itchy against Shane's skin, almost heavy and isolating. He's on his laptop, staring at nothing.

He'll blame it on sleep deprivation, but he signs up for a tutor, his heart thudding harder than it should.

He picks someone with good reviews and one important detail in their bio: 'Russian only instruction'. Simple and to the point, perfect.

The first session is brutal. He stumbles through introductions, pronunciation shaky, and grammar muddled. And Shane is overrun with relief that the women can't see his face. He hadn't wanted to give up the chances that the tutor knew him. Not yet.

His tutor, however, is patient, amused, and gently corrects him without ever switching into English.

Nearing the end of his lesson, after Shane asks, "Can you teach me some, uhm, swear words? Please," he switches into English, not wanting to have to put the poor woman through his broken attempts.

"Teach you swear words?" she asks, leaning forward in her chair, getting closer to the screen, clearly intrigued, "Is that going to be useful to you? It seems..." she trails off and the words go unsaid.

"Yeah, I know, but this is for personal... use." She raises an eyebrow but indulges him anyway.

After that, the lessons become a fixture. At the same time. Once a week, bi-weekly if time doesn't permit. Always late at night. Shane schedules them like workouts. Non negotiable.

No one knows. Nobody needs to know.

For a while, things stay like that; he's content with it. On planes, he's glued to his phone, headphones in, replaying phrases, drilling vocabulary until it's memorised and understood. His teammates begin to notice, of course.

Despite Shane never being the most sociable person, he's not usually on his phone either.

"Hey dude," one of the sat, leaning over, "texting your girlfriend or something? You look really busy there."

Shane doesn't bother looking up, "something like that," he mumbles out vaguely.

His teammate laughs, "Sure, probably the same girl as last time," at the same time someone rattles, "damn. He's committed."

Shane shrugs, despite not listening to him, his eyes still on his screen, his thumb already moving again, translating a sentence for the third time just to get the word order right.

"Is it this lily girl still?" Hayden comes over to whisper to Shane, curiosity burning in his eyes. Shane tries not to freeze, tries not to curl away. So instead, he just shakes his head, not in disagreement or in agreement but in exasperation, "fuck off." Shane laughs out. It's shallow, but Hayden just bumps his shoulder before getting back up for his own seat.

He doesn't correct any of them, though. It's easier to let them misunderstand; people do that anyway. No one asked him what he liked. They just assume he doesn't.

Later, when turbulence hits, he mutters a soft Russian curse that he learnt from his tutor, and the tension in his shoulders eased almost immediately.

Contained? Maybe not, but it's controlled. It is.

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It doesn't feel like an obsession. It feels like discipline, but also it's just nice. Shane still tells himself he could stop anyone. This is just something he enjoys, something to fill in the space, the time, to satisfy his brain. He does not examine why Russian specifically holds his attention. He doesn't think about the way his chest tightens when Ilya mutters out words he still doesn't know into his ear, into his hair as he delicately removes his clothes. Doesn't think about how his focus narrows when he recognises a phrase without subtitles.

He definitely doesn't think about Ilya— well, not that much.

He starts reading more in Russian. At first, it's generic. Grammar blogs, short articles, and simple sports coverage meant for learners. He likes it, he likes the structure of it, the way he can track his progress line by line. Then, one night, he finds a Russian article at the bottom. Clicks on it with the intent to see if he could understand any. It's just practice. Just exposure.

He spots Ilya's name halfway down the page. '*Илья Розанов*,' because obviously, he's the second best player in the league. Shane's eyes try not to linger on it, trying to just scroll past. But he rereads the sentence with his name in it. Just to check his comprehension. The Russian is dense but manageable. He understands most of it without translating it word for word, and that realization sets something heavy in his chest.

shit.

He closes the tab immediately after. "I'm not learning you," he says aloud to the empty room. The words make him feel unwell and on edge. He doesn't need to say the name out loud to know. Fuck. fuck. The words feel defensive even to his own ears, "just the language." The room doesn't argue.

But when he turns onto his side and murmurs a Russian word into the desolate room, he realizes what he's said. Ilya. He repeats it over and over again.

And, well. Fuck. It's moments when Ilya puts his clothes back on and leaves that Shane thinks what the fuck is he doing. But it doesn't stop him. It never has.

—

He worries at first, when swear words become so familiar that he's afraid he'll slip up in front of Ilya. He's worried that he'll whimper out a fuck when Ilya's inside him, when he holds Shane's hands above his head, he stresses that he'll fuck up and that Ilya will hear him, and... he doesn't let himself think that far.

But the fear soon slips away. As soon as he lays eyes on Ilya, as soon as his hands sneak up his shirt, his brain slips into peace. Into the quiet. Moans break free, a please here, a more there. Ilya makes the words disappear, makes the worries and stress leave him, just momentarily, and that is peace.

Russian really starts to live inside Shane. Beyond second nature now. He begins using mirrors religiously. He doesn't even pretend it's incidental. When he finds himself spending summer break alone, not even Ilyas texts to entertain him, he spends hours sitting in front of a large mirror. He mouths words silently, watching the way his lips move, the way his jaw tightens around unfamiliar consonants.

It becomes deliberate.

He sits, his phone balanced on his knee, a pronunciation guide playing softly. He repeats after it, pausing and rewinding as always. He watches his face as if it belongs to someone else. He evaluates it the way he would game footage.

Again. Wrong. Again. Closer.

He records himself for the first time without really planning to. He's heard his attempts at Russian before, in his soft swears in his broken tutor lessons. He taps the record button, says the sentence once, stops, he plays it back, and with a grimace winces immediately. It sounds too flat. Too English.

Delete.

He records again; this attempt is better but still not right. He listens carefully, comparing it to the native speaker. Something is still off. The rhythm, maybe? The way he's holding the tension in the wrong place.

Delete.

He records himself five times before he allows one to last longer than ten seconds, without grimacing in failure.

He hates his accent. Not in a dramatic way, but it feels inefficient. Like how it changes all the time, he wants familiarity. He knows how it's supposed to sound—he can hear it clearly in his head—and the gap between that and what comes out of his mouth irritates him in a way few things do.

So, he works harder.

He isolates the sounds and drills them in, letter by letter, sound by sound. Let's his jaw ache and his tongue become heavy and numb. He practices until the mirror begins to fog slightly from his breath.

And the hard work pays off, he catches himself thinking in Russian. What was once fragments and short thoughts turns into sentences.

A verb when he's lifting weights. A clipped curse when he misses a shot, even a quick 'fuck' when Ilya comes out of the shower, wet and all, smirk and bite. He finds himself thinking 'enough' and 'it'll be fine, just take a breath' neutral and safe phrases when he needs to reset and breathe. English is still there, but Russian is also there, present and demanding attention.

The realization comes without panic, surprisingly.

-

He's waiting for his tutor online; it's 10 pm now, and whilst waiting, Shane stares into the blank dark screen. Bored, he repeats the same phrase under his breathe 'Я говорю немного' he says again and again.

His voice sounds different in Russian. Lower. More contained. It doesn't soften around the edges as much as he does in English.

He thinks *–briefly* –that he understands why Ilya never rushes when he speaks. The thought unsettles him; he doesn't even realise his tutor is now ready and waiting.

His tutor notices his improvement before Shane really does. "You're thinking less in English first," she says during a session, "that's good."

Shane nods, focused, "It feels quieter." And god, it shouldn't feel like a confession rhythm, but it does, it makes the rhythm of his heart increase, but, he shoves it down, instead shifting his focuses to the rythum of Russian. it really is a way to escape.

She hums in agreement, as if that makes sense.

It's an hour of a gruelling, brutal pronunciation lesson, when she pauses and studies him through the screen –he's shown her his face, never his last name, never mentions hockey.

"You are very disciplined," she says. "Most would lose interest by now."

Shane shrugs, "I haven't..." A moment of silence goes by before he clarifies, "lost interest i mean."

She tilts her head and asks, "Why?"

The question hangs between them. Shane looks away from the screen, jaw tightening and eyebrows knitting together.

He hadn't prepared an answer. "I don't like not knowing things," he decided.

She nods, slowly, accepting it and moving on.

Shane doesn't know why his chest feels tight afterward.

His chest doesn't relent to its tight position, but he winds down. Shane is cosy, in soft clothes, glasses on, his Russian notebook in front of him, he's waiting for Ilya. They had said they'd call that night. He skims his notes, but nothing sticks. He's full of weird energy.

He's staring at complex motion verbs, a really annoying Russian rule, when his phone finally rings. He throws his notebook into his bedside drawer as he turns to grab his phone and accepts the call.

It's a FaceTime. Involuntarily, Shane's mouth turns into a smile. Ilya is holding his phone up, walking around, and it's so stupid and silly, but Shane's heart increases. It doubles in size when Ilyas is around.

He forgets he's wearing his glasses, Ilya makes some snide remark about it, his eyes flicker up and down the screen, clearly watching Shane's every move. Probably seeing the heat that's now making its way onto his cheeks. Ilya smirks, and like always, Shane feels like words are beneath him. He wants to jump through the screen and hug Ilya. Wants to wrap himself around him.

He opens his mouth to say something, but nothing comes out. Not English, not even Russian. Instead, he somehow finds himself on all fours minutes later, moaning loudly, his hand holding Ilya out above his head, always in view.

After, Shane thinks about looking up the word for I miss you. He's come across it, of course, said it indirectly, but the finality of saying it now, when he's alone, Ilya gone, feels like too... much.

By the time Shane is winning game after game for his team, the language has started slipping into his body more than his thoughts.

He counts reps in Russian without realising he's doing it. He starts recognising slang in interviews he uses to study.

It's not pride, but it feels damn close.

It gives him relief, too. Russian has become a place where he doesn't have to be perfect. Where precision matters more than impression, where he can be wrong without anyone watching. English still belongs to everyone else, it's still his, but Russian belongs to *him*. Shane can't really explain it, can't translate the feeling, but it feels sacred. ;

Alone in his apartment, once he's finally back in Montreal, he's in his home gym cleaning it up in preparation for tomorrow's home game. He drops a weight accidentally. The drop

makes a loud bang, which he's sure he'll wake to find an email of complaint from a neighbour. He lets out a phrase that is... not polite. It comes out sharp, and he freezes.

Not because of the swearing, not because of the language it was in, but because it didn't come with an English translation. He understood it without needing to translate it. It's weird. It feels weird.

He exhales slowly, sets the weight down where it should be, and stands up straight. He fixes his posture, straightening his back and forcing the tension out of his shoulders to relax.

“Спокойно”, he says. *Calm down.*

The word settles immediately. And yeah, that's when Shane realises that yes, he is learning Russian, but it's more than that now, he's not just learning it anymore. It's something he's using, it's something that makes existing feel safer.

Shane really realises it's automatic, practically unconscious now - *his* Russian. When Ilya picks up his ringing phone, he only hears greetings, but he doesn't need to focus; he's blissed out and pliant, and he still understands the words.

He feels bad that he heard it. Feels bad that he understood it. But he reasons with himself that it's fine, he didn't overhear anything private. It's fine. It's controlled, and it's his.

The studying isn't automatic – that's deliberate, scheduled. It fits into his days. What is a surprise is the way Russian slips out when he's not paying attention.

He spills his smoothies, “какой беспорядок,” he mutters *what a mess*. It's immediate. Accurate. He pauses, breathing shallow for half a second. He doesn't correct himself. There's no point. It did its job.

The bleed through becomes bigger than before. There's no way for it not to. But words turn into phrases into sentences. He finds it's especially bad when he's tired.

At practice, he's skating on a few hours of restless sleep, he fires a wide shot that should've been clean, “да ладно,” he mutters, skating a tight circle to reset.

His teammates hear the tone, not the language or the word. Shane had always talked to himself on the ice—quiet, clipped, and focused. This doesn't register as new to him. It's just Shane being Shane. His teammates, who spend a second studying him, like he's a foreign object, get bored and turn away. No one would ever want to study Shane, he thinks.

The new advancement isn't loud. It's not disruptive. It doesn't cost him his control. If anything, it sharpens him. The Russian words arrive faster than English now, short and contained—not always, but enough to notice. It fits neatly into moments of frustration without spiralling into anything bigger.

English has too many edges, it feels too much, and other times not enough. Russian feels cleaner, less burdened.

When something goes wrong, Russian is there to let him acknowledge it and move on. That's all.

He's sitting one night in a hotel, they've had to reschedule due to the time difference, but Shane finds himself in familiar territory.

The tutor – Elaine – notices, “You swear like a native speaker now,” she says, amused. “Not polite, but very natural.”

Shane exhales through his nose. “That wasn't... the goal.” *What the fuck even was the goal?*

“Maybe not,” she says, “but it means you are thinking less and reacting more, that's good.”

Good. right.

After the call ends, Shane sits at the edge of the bed, phone still in his hand. He doesn't feel proud. He feels... exposed. Like something that was supposed to be internal has crossed a line.

He considers pulling back. Cutting the schedule down. Keeping Russian strictly to study time.

He doesn't.

-

On the road, the language follows him everywhere. Of course. Airports, buses, hotels. He mutters phrases under his breath. They're stuck in traffic heading to a game. He's cooped up at the back, two seats to himself, muttering out what's on the screen underneath his breath.

Hayden, at one point, glances over, “You good, man? You've been talking to yourself.”

Shane blinks, “Yeah.”

Another butts in, “In what language?” the guy jokes, “sounds intense.” The others laugh with him.

Shane shrugs, not making eye contact, trying to send them away through vibes alone, “just thinking aloud.”

They laugh once more, louder this time, before the moment passes.

Shane can admit that he gets overwhelmed. Often in fact. When too many things are happening at once, sometimes it's as simple as the light hitting wrong, or too many voices at once. Sometimes it is simpler. Like this.

Like the close call when he was content sitting on Ilya's couch, blissed out. Ilya takes a phone call out of the room before he comes back and dumps himself close to Shane, their feet fighting where they meet on the floor. "How's your father?" Shane asks, and he regrets it, of course.

"Ah, you speak Russian now." Ilya questions. And Shane for a second flounders, because yes, well, no but sort of - *it's complicated*. His brain is speeding at an ungodlike pace. For a second, he goes blank before his mouth opens with an excuse.

Simple. Safe. "I know the word for father." And Ilya looks at him, his gaze grazing over his lips for a second, his face shifting slightly into a look that makes Shane feel hot under. He shifts slightly to try to relieve the tension, to move away from Ilya's gaze before he falls to his knees and begs in Russian.

It's a close call, though.

Like Ilya saying his name, Shane saying it back. It shouldn't have freaked him out. But it did. And for a while, he was running on adrenaline, only half aware of what he was doing. Rose was a mistake – in the nicest way. She's nice, a lovely person, and beautiful. But not in a romantic way. It's both eye opening and terrifying. Things felt wrong with her, and he felt so bad for it. Running his hands over her, and yet all he could think about was Ilya. How Ilya's skin was warmer, how he was more muscular and harder, and fuck. Rose, though, was lovely. It was hard; he went home and cried, but it was nice to have someone who knew. He thought about telling her about the Russian. But to say that out loud to her felt like too much, too soon. It wasn't right.

When he was with Rose, his Russian became second place, at least outwardly; it still ran rampant through his head. But he was terrified. Of so many things at once, it was becoming a knot in his gut.

One night, alone, his tutor corrects him mid sentence,

"You're holding back," she says. And she's right on so many aspects, Shane wants to cry.

"What?" Shane blinks

"You speak like you're afraid someone will hear you," she gently replies, and yeah, Shane has to blink several times so his tears don't fall. The observation lands uncomfortably.

"I'm- just being... careful."

She studies him for a moment before nodding, "Careful is not the same as quiet."

After the call, Shane sits alone in the dark, his laptop now dead. And for the first time, Russian doesn't calm him. It tightens around his ribs instead.

He stops everything. He, Ilya, and even Rose don't see each other for a while. Somehow, that makes everything worse. Shane goes back to playing games, running drills, and answering questions. Everything looks the same from the outside. *Inside?* Inside, there's a constant low awareness, like his brain is listening for something that isn't there yet.

He catches himself becoming acutely hyperaware, editing his reactions and swallowing Russian words before they reach his mouth. Trying to reset in English instead, even when it feels clumsier.

It takes effort. He doesn't like that.

He goes a week of cold turkey. Not studying, no tutoring. It ruins his schedule, which is annoying, but he only lasts a week and a bit - pathetic really.

The tension gets to him, though. He opens a textbook late at night, intending to skim a page or two. Instead, he falls into the familiarity of it, the familiar rhythm of it, the way he's solely focused on it. He drills pronunciation and vocab for hours. He rewrites sentences. He pulls up interviews and listens to them without subtitles.

He rebooks his lesson.

She seems to be able to read Shane well. "You stopped for a bit," she says. Not accusing but observant.

Shane nods, "Yeah."

"Something changed?"

Yes. no. maybe. He considers lying. "It all feels close now."

She raises an eyebrow but doesn't press. Just nods slowly, like it explains everything.

"To continue, you must be careful or very brave." Shane doesn't think he's being either, but it's nice to hear.

After that, he tightens his schedule. He adds time and increases the difficulty.

Shane apologises to Ilya. He deserves that much from him. Because he was an ass for walking out on him after he made such an effort to make Shane feel comfortable and important.

He sits beside him on a hotel bed that's a little lumpy. Their arms skim each other, and they talk. It goes... well, all things considered. Shane had thought this conversation through so many times, but when he was sitting there, Ilya's heat beside him was almost too much. He tells Ilya that he's gay and that he's sorry, and that he really feels things for Ilya. Like feelings *feelings*. And he knows it's hard and forbidden, and they'll have to hide, but he wants him.

He's opening up and blurting thoughts he had been thinking for years and years. And he imagines turning around to Ilya, holding his hand, and just spouting something out in Russian.

The words don't matter, but the confession, the conviction of realising that *holy fuck* he's been learning Ilya's language for what seven years ish? And he's about a second from doing that, but then time skips, and he's holding Ilya in his arms, wrapping around him like a koala as he cries, and Shane decides not today. Soon, but not today.

Because Ilya was crying, his family had fallen apart, and in that moment, Shane wanted to scream that he would be his family. But he doesn't, instead he wraps his arms around Ilya tighter, protective. It's nice, being in his arms. And Shane mouths out the word, head placed on Ilya's shoulder so he can't see, ты для меня всё, *you are everything*.

fuck.

—

Looking back, Shane doesn't know why he does it. Doesn't know why he tells Ilya that he can vent in Russian. He doesn't know why. Well, he does, of course. Ilya was in pain. Unable to convey it in English, but he needed it out. And if that was to Shane, then he would give him that space. As soon as he tells Ilya he can talk to him in Russian, as soon as he says he might not understand him, but it would be good to get it out— he wants to *die*.

Because he knows he will be able to understand. He's been at Russian for years now; he knows, he knows his stuff. Not fully, but it was there, present. It's only in the few seconds before Ilya agrees that he realises that, *oh fuck he knows Russian good*. He knew it really, really well.

He thinks about telling Ilya that it was a stupid idea, but the exhale he hears from Ilya, the release of breath and subsequent tensions shut Shane up.

And Ilya begins.

Shane is, honest to god, having a major fucking breakdown. He moves his phone away from his face, not wanting Ilya to hear how his breaths have become quicker, sharper.

He feels like he's just betrayed Ilya. Like he's getting him to open up, privately thinking it's safe and free when it's not. It is, Shane would never tell anyone anything. But still, a feeling of betrayal, of guilt coils tightly in his chest.

He thinks about putting his hands over his ears so he doesn't hear, but that feels shitty too. He'd told Ilya he would listen. He doesn't want to betray that. But...

His dilemma does not ease. He's working himself up into a full blown panic attack when Ilya finally stops. Shane, realising that Ilya is done, says something, but he doesn't remember what he said, doesn't really remember anything that night.

He didn't listen in; he was so in his head he barely picked up a few words. The words for father and brother come through, Svetlana too, but none of the details.

He breathes a sigh. He feels like shit. Like utter, utter shit.

That night, he's lying once again alone in bed, his left hand thrown to the other side of the bed, rubbing over where Ilya should be. And he realises. He realizes he needs to tell Ilya. Needs to. Has too.

And he does plan to follow through and tell Ilya, so he invites Ilya to his room as soon as he can, that night after they play each other, through a text, all teasing. It's been a while since they've seen each other, too long, really. He's facing Ilya, waiting for the puck to drop, the whistle to blow, and the crowd to roar. And it does. It feels good; nothing feels better than playing up against Ilya. It's fierce, but it's fun. And it's all going to plan until it doesn't. A bad hit from the side from Marlow that Shane is a second too late to realise, and he goes down. hard.

He doesn't remember much from it. Doesn't remember the initial hit. Just the pain after. How the lights that made him wince, the throbbing headache that made people's voices sound like they were underwater. His shoulder ached with every breath. He remembers hearing Ilya's voice shouting, not the words, just the tone. He heard a few Russian swear words breathed out with such intention and pain that he felt like he had been transported back to their rookie days. It makes him want to smile, but his face says no.

The medics are talking to him, but all he's thinking about is Ilya. Ilya Ilya Ilya. He tries to get to him, tries to tell someone to tell Ilya that he's fine, but his thoughts are swimming, and he's unsure if he's even speaking English at this point, whether Russian has come through, or if it's just gibberish.

The next time he wakes, he's in the hospital. Lying on a bed. He feels floaty and soft around the edges. Like everything in reach, and then everything really is in reach because Ilya is there. Holding his hand softly, flushing a hand across his cheek, and thinking about blurting everything out, but he hadn't prepared enough for his dopey brain to align. So he says the next best thing.

"Come to my cottage." his head is going over and over, saying please, please, please. He's sure that at one point it comes out in Russian. The closest one to English, how you say it in text messages—Плиз, *please*. It's not conspicuous. Sounds like someone on happy amounts of morphine would speak. And as Ilya says, "maybe." 'Maybe' somehow still manages to soften Shane's heart. It's close. It feels close.

-

Shane is sitting in the middle of the long table, just after being knocked out of the chance to win another Stanley Cup. The press room smells of overpowered coffee and sweat. Shane sits at the table, his shoulders squared, ready and waiting. The remnants of the game still hum under his skin. Adrenaline coursing through him. It's leaking now, though, and he's so tired his vision is blurred at the edge, and he has to blink to refocus them.

He answers questions on autopilot. Short, polite, and boring. That's what he's good at. They ask him. Shane gives them exactly what they want and nothing else.

Then someone says Ilya's name. It's always like a stone dropped in water.

“Can you talk about how you feel leading up towards playing Rozanov again, especially after the last hit you took with them?” the reporter asks. Neutral voice but sharp eyes. “He seems to get under your skin.” The question doesn't seem relevant. Shane won't be playing Rozanov for months now, but anything for a reporter to get a good article.

Hah. If only they knew. Ilya doesn't get under his skin. He thrives under it.

Shane exhales slowly through his nose. He's tired. He played too many minutes. Been hit too many times. He hasn't had enough sleep in days, and his brain is running half a second behind his mouth, and that's all it takes.

“He's relentless,” Shane says, tone even. “He doesn't stop pushing, he's always pressing, always—” and English falls short. And like so many other times before, in private, behind weights and textbooks, it slips by.

He pauses for barely a second, hardly noticeable, trying to search for the right words. One that fits the feeling exactly.

And without thinking, without choosing, he says, “—он никогда не отступает.”

The sentence lands clean. perfectly conjugated with no noticeable accent.

Silence.

It's not dramatic at first. Just a hitch, blink. A moment where everything in the room settles. The once loud noise of reporters shouting to get their questions answered first had dulled down to silence.

The reporter's eyebrows knit together, and Shane has to swallow around the lump forming in his throat.

“I'm sorry,” she says slowly, “you just answered in...Russian.” Shane feels it like a physical thing. His stomach drops, his pulse spikes.

There's a brief, horrifying moment where his mind goes completely blank, like static flooding a channel. No Russian, no English, no even broken French.

Fuck.

He recovers fast - years of media training kicking in - but not fast enough to undo it.

“Yeah,” he says, shrugging one shoulder, forcing causality into his voice. “I’ve picked up a few things.”

A murmur ripples through the room. Head tilt, more phones go up. Someone coughs. Another reporter leans forward.

“Picked up?” they repeat. “You sound fluent.”

Shane's jaw tightens almost imperceptibly. “I play hockey,” he says. “You hear a lot of languages.”

It's not a lie. Just not the truth.

They don't press. They move on, but the shift, the tone doesn't recover. They're curious now. Shane keeps his answers short so he can get out as soon as he can,

-

Ilya sees it in a hotel a couple of cities away.

He's half dressed, phone in hand. Scrolling absently while his pasta grows cold. He almost skips the interview- he's heard Shane talk a thousand times. Flat tone and safe answers.

Then he hears his own language.

Clear. Unmistakable.

Ilya thumb stills. He rewinds. Watches Shane's mouth form around the words.

“он никогда не отступает“
Never backs down.

Ilya stares at the screen, something slow and electric uncoiling in his chest.

This is not a phrase you *pick up*. This is not a phrase you say by accident unless it lives somewhere inside of you already.

He watches Shane's face as the realization hits him, just a flicker, but Ilya knows well enough to catch it. He's spent hours studying Shane's face. The way his shoulders tense. The way he walls himself off immediately.

“Oh,” Ilya murmurs, smiling to himself. He replays it again. Focuses on the pronunciation, the rhythm, and the ease. There's no mockery in his expression. No amusement.

Only interest. Only delight. He switches his phone off and leans back against his sofa, staring at the ceiling like he must be handed a secret he was never supposed to know.

“Shane,” he says quietly, to no one at all, and smiles.

Before he knows what he’s even doing, he’s in a car, heading with only one place in mind.

-

The clip is everywhere by the time Shane gets home hours later.

He doesn't search for it. He doesn't need to. He knows exactly where it went wrong the moment his brain reaches for precision instead of safety. He showers, changes, and sits on the edge of his sofa and stares at the carpet like it might give him instructions.

Idiot, he thinks.

A buzzing comes from his phone. He hesitates, wondering who it's going to be. He doesn't want to have to think, doesn't want to have to explain himself.

It's Ilya. He considers ignoring him, but he doesn't. He never does.

He presses the accept button.

“Hey”, Ilyas says, like this is normal. Like Shane didn't accidentally crack himself open on live TV.

“hey” Shane answers.

There's a beat. They don't talk right away. He hears muffled sounds from Ilya's side, but he doesn't have the motivation to ask about it. So the silence stretches—not hostile, just loaded. Ready and waiting.

“I watched your interview,” Ilya says eventually.

Shane nods only to realize that Ilya can't see him. This throat feels tight, “yeah.”

“You were very eloquent,” Ilya continues, tone mild but kind.

Shane exhales through his nose, a humourless breath. “I didn't mean to.”

“I know.”

That's what breaks it. Shane laughs, once short and sharp and disbelieving. “Do you?”

He can imagine Ilya tilting his head to study him. “Tell me,”

Shane opens his mouth to defect. To joke. To shut it down like he always does. Instead, what comes out is quieter. “I didn't even realise I switched,” he admits. It's a goddam fucking confession. “It just... happened.”

Shane hears an engine shutting off, “You didn’t translate in your head?” Ilya asks, “You thought in Russian?”

Shane stills.

“That’s not something you *pick up*,” Ilya adds gently. “That’s something you practice.”

The word hangs between them. Practice.

Hours, months, years of dedication.

He sinks further into his couch, exhausted. He scrubs a hand down his face and into his hair and stares at the floor.

“I didn’t tell anyone.” He says, “wasn’t planning too.... Except you. I was going to tell you.” His voice trails off.

“How long?” Ilya asks.

Shane hesitates. Lying would take more energy than he has left. “Years.”

Silence.

“You learned my language,” he says slowly, like he’s testing it, like he expects Shane to butt in and tell him it’s all a lie. “...for years.” His voice lowers.

Shane flinches at that. “It wasn’t—I mean, it wasn’t *for you*.”

silence again.

He hears a hard knock on his door. “Hold on—“ he gets up to open it.

There’s Ilya. His expression is unreadable. “Then why Russian?” He asks, walking himself in. Shane hears it through his phone, too. He takes a second to hang up before he looks up, and Ilya is there.

Shane closes his eyes. Allows himself a minute to breathe, Ilya in.

His guard is down. He had never rehearsed this part. This part he doesn't have words for in any language.

“I don’t—I don’t like not understanding. Especially you. I—“ he trails off. Words cracking.

“I don’t like being on the outside of things. Well, I don’t mind, but this, I- I don't know... You just always sounded so sure. Like the words belonged to you.”

Ilya moves closer, they’re chest practically touching.

“Shane.” He says forth, his hand coming up to his chin. “You didn't just learn words. You learned me.”

Shane shakes his head, instinctive “I didn’t, I don’t want you to think I’m—“ he stops. Swallows “—obsessed. Or mocking or trying to be something I’m not.”

Ilya's expression changes now, something warm and intense and unmistakably sincere.

“Do you know what it is?” he asks, leaning forward to place a quick, soft kiss on his head. “When someone learns and studies your language for years in secret? Secretly? Alone? *For years?*”

Shane doesn’t answer; he just stares into Ilya's eyes.

“It's devotion,” Ilya says. Like it’s that simple. “Whether you meant it to be or not.”

Shane feels vulnerable. In a way, he doesn't want to be seen.

But Ilya gives him such a beautiful smile that he can’t help but give a small smile back. “I thought you’d be...disgusted.” He admits.

Ilya just smiles wider in response to “Shane.” Both hands come up and are placed around his face. “I am *undone*.”

Shane doesn’t say anything. He tries to just focus on the happiness and the adoration on his face. The eight of his hand on his face, Ilya's thumb brushing up and down his cheek.

“Say something.” Ilya asks, “In Russian. For me.”

Then softly, carefully, he does. “Я всё ещё скучный“. *I'm still boring*. He tried to add humour to it. But he doesn’t know if it reached.

Still, Ilya's breath catches.

“Oh.” He says like he’s just been handed something precious. “You’re perfect.”

Later that night, when they're in bed together, Shane's head is placed on Ilya's chest, his hands running through his hair as Shane traces random shapes into Ilya's bare skin. They're both naked and in need of a shower, but the thought of moving away from Ilya even by an inch wasn't exactly enticing.

“What is your plan,” Ilya asks, “with media shitstorm?” he clarifies.

Shane stops tracing his shapes, “shitstorm?” In truth, he hadn't looked online yet.

“Eh, I exaggerate, but they are very annoying. Asking lots of questions.” Ilya responds.

He moves Shane's head up as he leans down to kiss him. Short and sweet. Before taking a hand into his own, Ilya's bigger ones.

“I'm not sure yet. Are we still on for the cottage?” he asks, his voice soft.

Ilya, to answer his question, flips Shane over until he's beneath Ilya, who has now decided to commit an attack on Shane. He leans down and plants kisses all over his face until Shane can't help but laugh, before Ilya kisses him again passionately, leaving his chest heaving when he puts his forehead to Shane's own.

"Of course. 2 weeks Just us. Sounds..." he fades off and laughs before dumping his body weight on Shane's, and boom. Motherfucking pillow fight to the death.

They do get to the cottage, of course, by the end of that week, their feet are up, having fun. The media surprisingly didn't care much for Shane's slip-up. They had more important and juicy news now that the season was up. Fans tweeted about it, of course, theories and such making their rounds, but for the most part, it was contained. Rare, but Shane wasn't about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

It was fucking delightful. Just him and Ilya. Alone. Kissing whenever they want, holding hands constantly. Free.

It was perfect, and it was so close to being perfect, until he found himself sitting in front of his parents, one of whom had just witnessed him making out with his 'rival.'

It was mortifying. Overwhelming.

"So, you're saying you'd move to Ottawa for Shane?" Yuna, Shane's mother, finally asks. Staring Ilya down as politely as she can.

"Yes, of course. He learn Russian for me, so i move for him." And Ilya seems to realize he's said too much as he quickly puts a hand over his mouth. *See? always talking.* He turns to Shane and mouths sorry, but Shane just waves him off. It's fine. Not helpful, but it's fine. I mean, he's overwhelmed. But it's fine. Might as well get out all the secrets.

"Ilya, not helpful," Shane replies. Ilya's hand comes to his knee under the table, rubbing it softly. Grounding.

Silence. Shane's parents look at each other. Once, then again, before Yuna leans back in her chair. In defeat, almost. Shane considers it a win.

"Shane? You what?" his father asks, there's not really an expression on his face, his eyebrows are raised in disbelief. In curiosity. Shane's not sure, but he seems relaxed, and that allows him to breathe a little calmer.

"Nothing. It's nothing." Shane simply says.

Ilya doesn't seem to agree; he's shaking his head. "No. It's everything. Your son is a romancer. I feel serenaded but not with songs." He's smiling, a short look of pure love as he glances at Shane quickly.

His parents seem to witness it as they turn to each other and give one another a small secret smile. Like, *huh, wow, holy fuck, and it's okay* all in one.

“So you learned Russian for... Rozanov. That's what happened in front of the media the other day... gosh.” Yuna says.

“Huh,” his dad follows.

“I'm sorry. And for the record, it wasn't for.. Rozanov, just you know—” his head tilts as he trails off. But they don't push for further explanation. The conversation moves on, and despite the whirlwind of the day, Shane does feel relief. People know. The important people know.

2017 August WORLDSports NEWS

Ilya ROZANOV AND Shane HOLLANDER NON-PROFIT ‘IRINA FOUNDATION’ CHARITY

Hockey players Ilya Rozanov and Shane Hollander have come out with their joint goal of raising awareness and money for preventing suicides under their ‘Irina Foundation.’ It's stated that a summer camp will be set up for this.

In an exclusive interview, we asked the question that fans and reporters have been dying to know.

The first question asked Shane Hollander, “So that's where the Russian came from, huh?”

Shane can't help but laugh because if only they knew. *If only*. “Right, yes. Ilya never shuts up. I picked up a lot.”

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End Notes

Honestly, i had a vision and that execution of that vision was not met despite the fact I've been staring at this work for a near month. Sorry. But I wanted to start the new year a fresh. oh i also wrote - nearly done in which that shane and ilya both speak russian- at ottawa -when playing against Montreal as they just absolutely destroy them
if spelling mistakes do tell, autocorrect is annoying and sometimes when I forget english word I write it in german (and forget to come back) lol.

Happy new year :)

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