

Tape to Tape

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Tape to Tape

by [mcshrug](#)

Summary

Shane Hollander has chemistry with his new American linemate. Montreal fans are thrilled. Ilya Rozanov is not.

Notes

Trying out Ilya's perspective. Set, as always, in the era of yearning and unresolved feelings.

Shane Hollander has a pretty new linemate.

Ilya had seen the trade notification, last week, when he scrolled past the Voyageurs' post on Twitter. The kid is young, and tall, with curly hair and a big toothy smile. Ilya had snorted at his Texas hometown having some funny-sounding name and kept scrolling.

He hadn't realized then the kid was going to be playing on the Voyageurs' top line. For God's sake, he's a *kid*.

But there he is, moving into the offensive zone opposite Hollander in the highlight playing on the phone one of the Bears defensemen is holding out in front of where Ilya is sitting half-dressed in his locker room stall.

The American's a good skater, for a big guy.

The highlight shows a two-on-one rush, with just one defenseman skating backwards between Hollander and the American. When the kid slides the puck to Hollander, it clicks like a magnet onto Hollander's tape. The defender jabs his stick at it, tries to smack it away from Hollander.

Hollander spins away from the poke check. He doesn't even look over his shoulder as he drops the pass behind his legs, right in front of the net.

The kid is already there, as Hollander must have known he would be. He wrists the puck top corner, faster than the goaltender's glove can rise to meet it.

1-0, Voyageurs, and the game clock says it's been less than thirty seconds since puck drop.

Varkov, who is leaning against the side of Ilya's locker with the hand he's not using to hold the phone out, says in Russian, "Tell Coach he's got to match me up with them tomorrow. There's no way Sebin is keeping up with *that*."

Hollander is jumping into the kid's arms. He's big. He hefts Hollander up. Hollander's skates are still dangling above the ice when the rest of his teammates pile in around them to celebrate.

"Rozanov." Varkov snaps his fingers in front of the phone. "Are you listening to me? That top pairing Coach's been running, these fast little fuckers in Montreal will kill them. Are you going to tell him? Are you going to tell him it should be me and Feller matched up with that first line for the road game?"

"I'll mention it," Ilya snaps, pushing Varkov's hand away. "Get out of my face."

"Show him that highlight. The American is a problem."

"It wasn't even that good of a goal," Ilya grumbles, turning away, grabbing for the remainder of the pads he'd been halfway through putting on when Varkov had stormed up to his stall and shoved a Voyageurs highlight reel in his face. "It was Hollander doing all of the work."

*

Twitter has noticed that Shane Hollander has a pretty new linemate.

Ilya discovers this in bed later that night, under his comforter in the dark, with his phone glowing inches from his face. He's still moist from his shower. The pillow is getting damp beneath his wet hair.

The Voyageurs account has been posting regularly about Hollander and the American, and it's not just hockey highlights. There's a shot of the two of them playing sewer ball in some concrete arena hallway. There's a clip of them sitting side-by-side on stools in front of a grey backdrop, holding stacks of index cards the caption says feature questions from fans.

Hollander looks small in the preview, the way he's perched on that stool with his feet tucked under him, especially compared to the way the American kid is stretching his long legs out.

Ilya clicks play.

Hollander is smiling, a small, genuine grin that makes the corners of his eyes crinkle up, as the pretty American lifts up a card and reads a question asking whether they start taping their stick blades at the heel or the toe.

The American lowers the card, starts talking while gesturing animatedly at Hollander.

The video isn't subtitled. The American speaks very quickly. Ilya can't quite parse what he's saying. He gets the gist— Hollander is a perfectionist, Hollander cares too much about his stick tape— but can't piece some of the words together in a way that makes sense.

Hollander must be able to. Whatever the American is saying is making him laugh.

Ilya frowns. He reaches out a finger, scrubs back along the video timeline, and watches the American answer the question again.

The American, when describing how quickly Shane goes for the tape between periods, says something about a "beeline." A one point, when Hollander tries to interject, the American holds out one hand and says, "Slow your roll."

"Your roll," Ilya mouths. He pages away to Google and starts typing.

They both turn out to be idioms. They seem all but nonsensical, but they'd somehow made Shane laugh.

Ilya hates English idioms.

He pages back to the video and watches, again, as Hollander chuckles so forcefully it rocks him back on his stool. It hadn't even been that funny, really.

Ilya can't remember if Hollander's ever laughed like that around him.

The comments below are full of heart-eyed emojis and requests for *more of these two please!!!*

Ilya closes out of the video, frowning. Impulsively, he pulls up his list of recently dialed calls, taps at Svetlana's name.

It must be very early morning, in Russia, but she still picks up on the fourth ring. "Hello."

"Why aren't you in Boston?" Ilya asks.

Svetlana laughs. There's a distant thumping, somewhere behind her. Then the sound of a door shutting, and sudden quiet. "Because the clubbing is better in Moscow, obviously. Why? Are you missing home?"

"Fuck, no," Ilya says, rolling over in bed to stare up at the dark ceiling. "You're still out?"

"Yes, old man," Svetlana says. "You're in bed?"

"Morning skate tomorrow."

"You should be asleep. You're traveling to Montreal tomorrow, aren't you?"

"Yes," Ilya sighs.

There's a crackle, probably from a cigarette being lit. A long pause. Then Svetlana exhales into the phone and says, "What's wrong?"

"I'm sick of English," Ilya says. "I don't want to speak English ever again."

Svetlana says, "I've told you before, you're too hard on yourself. Your English is fine."

"It's the idioms. I fucking hate their idioms."

"I learned a new one the other day," Svetlana says. Ilya can hear her take another drag. He pictures her outside whatever nightclub she'd been in, leaning against the building with her cigarette between her lips. She might be cold; she probably hadn't bothered to grab her coat before she'd stepped outside. She exhales, then says in English, "Don't kick me while I'm down."

Ilya frowns up at the ceiling, says in Russian, "I don't get it."

"It means, don't hurt me while I'm already hurting," Svetlana says. "You say it when someone's rude to you when you've already been crying, or something. I like it. It's kind of evocative. Makes me picture booting someone in the ribs."

Ilya's lip quirks. "Sounds like fun."

Svetlana says, "You're the captain. Make those fuckers learn your language."

“They wouldn’t even learn Russian if they played in the KHL,” says Ilya. “They’d just assume everyone speaks English wherever they go.”

“Probably,” agrees Svetlana. “Imagine how bad their accents would be if they did try to pick it up, though. Fucking Americans.”

“Fucking Americans,” Ilya agrees, maybe with a little too much energy behind it. “And why do they speak so fast, anyway? What’s the rush?”

“You know that you’d get better, if you practiced more.”

“Oh, come on.”

“I’m just saying. You don’t even really try to understand everything, sometimes. You always say generic shit in your interviews, no matter what they’re asking.”

“Everyone does that.”

Svetlana says, in her fucking perfect English, “Gotta get pucks in deep. Gotta get shots on net.”

“*Everyone* fucking says that.”

“Yeah, but the Americans actually know what they’re being asked before they answer with bullshit. Don’t pout. You know I’m right.” She pauses. “They’ve got that American winger playing for Montreal now, right? On Shane Hollander’s line?”

Ilya narrows his eyes up at his bedroom ceiling. “I heard about that.”

“I saw an interview with him the other day,” Svetlana says. “He’s a really fast talker.”

“Haven’t heard.”

“He’s not too hard on the eyes, either.”

Kicking me while I’m down, Ilya thinks. “Get back to dancing,” he says. “I’m going to sleep. Don’t stand around outside without your coat.”

There’s another crackle as Svetlana sucks on the cigarette. She sounds like she’s either trying not to cough or suppressing a laugh when she says, “Sleep well.”

The phone beeps twice, and Ilya’s alone again in his silent bedroom.

Ilya closes his eyes. His pillow is cold against the back of his neck. His mother had never let him go to bed with his hair wet. It’s something Ilya thinks about every time he falls asleep like this.

*

Shane Hollander’s pretty new linemate is even taller in person.

Ilya can tell, even during the warmups in Montreal, even when the American kid is skating all the way on the opposite side of the ice, that he's at least a head taller than Ilya.

The American puts a half-hearted shot on Montreal's empty net, then slows to a stop beside where Hollander is folded into a frog stretch in front of the left face-off dot. He gazes down, says something to Hollander.

Hollander looks up at where the American is looming over him.

Ilya can't tell, from here, if Hollander is smiling.

Ilya frowns, then turns his back to the Voyageurs' half of the ice to fold into his own frog stretch. He's been having a nagging issue with his hip, lately, a catch in the muscle that gets worse if he doesn't stretch it out before he skates.

Levshunov glides slowly by, comes to a stop beside Ilya. He's a rookie, a call-up from the farm team who probably wouldn't be in the league if it weren't for injuries, and he's odd and too skinny and a bit shy, but at least he's fairly Russian. Not completely Russian, because he's lived in Canada since he was a kid, or something, but fairly Russian.

His Russian is at least perfect when he asks Ilya, "Are you going to fight Hollander?"

Ilya looks sharply up from his stretch. "What?"

Levshunov shrugs, leans on his left skate to stretch out his opposite leg. "Don't you hate him? You keep glaring at him. I was just wondering. I thought maybe you two had already agreed to it."

Ilya shakes his head and folds back down. "No, I'm not fucking fighting Hollander," he tells the ice beneath him. "He's way too soft to drop the gloves, anyway. Go finish your warmups."

*

It's Hollander against Rozanov for the opening faceoff.

Hollander is smiling more than usual, as he skates up to the other side of the dot. "Hey," he says. He's gotten pretty good at speaking through his teeth, without giving any broadcast lip-readers anything to work with. "Are you still coming over later?"

"Focus on game, Hollander," Ilya says. And then he leans down and loses the draw.

That allows Hollander to hit the puck back to the pretty American, who immediately bursts forward to carry the puck over the Bears' blue line.

"*Fuck*," Ilya spits, and spins to throw himself after Hollander, who already has a step ahead of him as he follows his linemate into the Boston zone.

The American is all but certainly going to pass it to Hollander. He's going to try for a give-and-go. Ilya knows he will, because he's seen it on about a million Voyageurs highlights. He

puts his head down, tries to get himself between Hollander and the puck.

Ilya hadn't been expecting Hollander to turn. Hollander turns anyway.

Suddenly he's in Ilya's path, and Ilya can't halt in time to stop his knee from smacking into the back of Hollander's leg.

Hollander loses his footing. He goes down hard, his stick flying out of his hands as he hits the ice, slides along it on his side until he bumps into the boards and is brought to an abrupt stop.

The ref already has his arm up when Ilya skids to a halt, three feet away from where Hollander is still curled on the ice.

They haven't blown play dead yet. It's a delayed interference penalty. The Bears haven't touched the puck to get the whistle.

Out of the corner of Ilya's eye, he can see the Voyageurs goalie sprinting out of the net on the other side of the rink, so that Montreal can get their extra skater on.

Ilya is distantly aware that he is needed, that he should move, that he should defend. He is equally aware that he's staying so still it's like his skates have suddenly become stuck deep in the ice.

Hollander slowly raises his head from his arms.

That's when hands clamp down on Ilya's shoulders.

Ilya gets spun around, then, away from Hollander. He looks up into the snarling face of the pretty American just as the whistle finally blows.

"*Fucker,*" the American kid spits, and punches Ilya in the face.

Ilya hadn't seen it coming. He nearly goes down right then and there.

But he manages to stay on his skates, lets the momentum of the punch wheel him around, checks while he's spinning to see that Hollander is already up, that he's getting back to his own feet without anyone supporting him.

Ilya doesn't have time to sigh in relief. He's busy stripping off his gloves, tossing them aside, and turning back to the American.

The kid is fucking *huge* this close up, Jesus. He can't even meet Ilya's eyes to scowl at him without bending his head down first.

"Fuck," Ilya says in Russian. "What are they fucking feeding you kids in Texas?" Ilya doesn't even bother trying to reach up and get at the American's face. He instead ducks the next swing the American takes at his cheek, then darts in to get a fist into the right side of the kid's ribs.

He's not quick enough to dodge the American's follow-up punch into his mouth.

This time, Ilya sees stars.

He's not aware that he's hit the ice until he blinks his eyes open and finds himself looking up at the lights winking in the rafters of the arena.

Ilya's face is throbbing. His mouth feels hot and swollen. He licks his lips, tastes blood, and gets his elbows onto the ice to slowly heft his torso upward.

There's a ref over him, then, shouting, asking something in rapid-fire English.

Ilya can't locate the meanings of any of the words, right now. It's like that big Texan fist had punched them right out of his head.

"I'm up. I'm getting up," he says, but when it comes out of his mouth, he realizes it had been in Russian. He gives up, then, and waves the ref off, shrugs away one of his teammate's reaching hands, clambers back up to his feet on his own.

There's something wet on Ilya's chin. He wipes at it, then looks down to see red splattered across the front of his jersey.

"Come on, Rozanov," the ref says. He gets a hand on Ilya's elbow, steers him toward the penalty box.

Ilya looks over at the Montreal bench as he's skated slowly by. Hollander is nowhere to be seen.

The pretty American is being guided into his own penalty box opposite Ilya, throwing himself angrily down onto the bench inside. Ilya steps into his box, then turns and raps his gloved hand against the glass between him and the kid as the door swings shut behind him. "Hey," he shouts.

The American turns and glares at him.

"What happened to Hollander?" Ilya calls.

The kid glowers at Ilya through the glass. "What do you think? He's getting checked for a concussion."

Ilya nods stiffly. Then he sits down on his bench and stares out at the ice without really seeing it.

*

Shane returns to the ice midway through the first period, to thunderous applause from the same Montreal crowd that's been booing Ilya every time he touches the puck.

*

Sitting in his stall after the game, shirtless and holding an ice pack up to his jaw, Ilya pulls out his phone and unlocks it with a clumsy left-handed swipe.

One voicemail from his brother. No new texts from Jane.

Ilya taps his fingers against the side of his phone. He wonders what the etiquette is, here.

He is struck by an absurd image of turning to his teammates and asking for advice. *Hey, he'd say. You have any semi-regular hookup invitations? Well, have you ever knocked them off their feet so hard they had to meet up with a concussion spotter afterward? If so, do you think the invite would still stand?*

Marleau, passing by Ilya's stall, reaches down to clap him on the back. "Don't look so worried, Rozanov," he says over his shoulder. "You'll get him next time."

Ilya shakes his head. "If I grow five feet, maybe."

The phone in Ilya's hand buzzes. Ilya looks sharply down, sees a new text at the bottom of the thread with Jane. *I'll be home around 10*, it says.

The rush of relief is so sweet it makes Ilya's palms tingle. He clears his throat, to try and stop it from showing on his face, before getting up and grabbing his towel from where it's slung over the door of his locker.

*

Ilya thinks the voicemail from his brother is a bit unreasonable, the first time he listens to it in the back of the Uber.

Then he pulls the phone away from his ear, opens up Twitter, and finds the replay of his fight with the American.

His brother's scathing tone feels a little less unwarranted, once Ilya's seen the clip.

It's bad from the second it starts. It couldn't be more obvious that Ilya's out of the play, once Hollander is down. The Voyageurs still have the puck, and Ilya's standing there staring down at Hollander like he's forgotten he's in the middle of a hockey game.

And then the fight— Jesus, *fight* would be a generous word for it. It's clear from the first punch that Ilya never stood a chance. Ilya's hit doesn't make the American budge. He barely even has to cock his arm back to get enough momentum for the punch that drops Ilya to the ice.

Maybe Ilya's brother had been right about the Bears needing to strip the 'C' from his jersey.

The comments below the clip are nothing short of thrilled.

Defending his bby's honor, one says, followed by a string of heart-eyed emojis. Ilya pages away to plug the phrase into Google, scowls, and returns to the thread.

Hoping for a slow and painful recovery, another says, followed by a prayer-hands emoji.

Ilya frowns, taps on that second commenter's profile picture. It's an image of Hollander and the American, arms around one another, hugging as they celebrate a goal.

Ilya's lip curls.

The driver clears his throat. Ilya looks up and realizes he's outside Hollander's apartment building. He's not entirely sure how long he's been sitting in the back of the parked car, glowering down at his phone, since they arrived.

*

Shane's smile drops the second he opens his front door and sees Ilya. "Whoa," he says, before standing aside and motioning for Ilya to get in past him.

Ilya steps into Shane's front hall. He toes off his sneakers, pushes them with the side of his foot into the neat row of Shane's shoes lined up beneath the coat rack. Then he turns to see Shane, who has just finished locking the door behind him, staring open-mouthed at Ilya's face.

Shane's eyes are wide when he asks, "Are you okay?"

"Yes," Ilya says. He probably should have checked his reflection, before he knocked. From Shane's expression, he wonders if his bottom lip has split open again. "Are you?"

"Yes, yeah, I just got the wind knocked out of me when I fell," Shane says, shaking his head. "He really got you, huh? Come on, I can give you an ice pack."

"I do not need ice," Ilya says, although he finds himself following Shane into the kitchen anyway.

He leans against the counter, crosses his arms over his chest as he watches Shane bend down to root through the freezer. Shane's in black sweatpants and a white t-shirt. Ilya watches his back move through the thin cotton. He would bet Shane's put on some weight, probably all muscle, since Ilya last saw him out of uniform.

"You are really okay?" Ilya asks.

Shane straightens, holds out a blue ice pack. "Yes. Here," he says. "Maybe it'll help with the swelling. Was your coach mad?"

"Mad I lost fight? Or mad I lost game?"

Shane says, "Mad you stopped going after the puck. I saw the replay. We almost scored on that delayed penalty."

Ilya had known perfectly well what Shane meant. "Yes," he says. "But he couldn't yell, not too much. Is bad for team, to yell at captain."

Shane nods. "You had a pretty good game otherwise, though," he says, with a small grin. "That spin-o-rama you tried in the third would've been *sick* if it'd gone in."

Shane's always in a better mood when they hook up after he's just won a game, but Ilya has rarely seen him looking more chipper. It's enough to make Ilya grit his teeth.

He manages to make himself relax enough to loosen his jaw, but not enough to stop himself from saying, "Are you happy?"

Shane hesitates. Ilya hates the way Shane so visibly thinks through what he's going to say before he says it to Ilya, sometimes, like he's trying to figure out how best to tiptoe around a subject without hurting Ilya's feelings.

Ilya knows it's his own fault, for not being able to handle heavier steps.

Shane eventually lands on, "Happy about winning?"

"Happy about your boy defending your honor," Ilya says.

Shane's eyebrows lift. "My boy," he repeats.

Ilya's fingers tighten around the ice pack. "You play well together," he says, stiffly.

Shane smiles. It's a ridiculous smile. It spreads so wide across his face it would be fair to say he's beaming. "You're *jealous*," he says.

"Am not," Ilya snaps.

"You are *so* jealous."

He looks so excited about it you'd think he's some detective who just solved a big case, not a guy doing what is essentially some simple math. "No reason to be jealous," Ilya says anyway. "Have plenty of obnoxious Americans in Boston."

Shane is still grinning as he steps around the counter and beckons for Ilya to follow. "Come on," he says.

Ilya leaves the ice pack there as he follows Shane to his bedroom.

He pulls his shirt off as he perches on the edge of Shane's neatly-made bed, then raises one eyebrow as he watches Shane turn and start stripping in front of his dresser. Shane usually likes a little more prompting than that, before he starts getting naked. "You have plan?"

"Yeah," Shane says. His back is to Ilya, but Ilya can see the blush spreading over his cheeks in the mirror hanging over the dresser. "I have something in mind."

Ilya gets his hand on the duvet behind him, watches Shane step out of his pants. It's difficult to feel anything but content when he's looking at Shane's tight ass and his muscled thighs, at his narrow waist and his smooth skin. He can already feel his anger fading to the point where he's starting to feel silly that he'd been angry at all.

That happens to him a lot, around Shane.

Ilya lifts his feet from the carpet, yanks his pants off each leg, then tosses them aside before shuffling further back on the bed. His hand, reaching onto the duvet behind him, lands on something hard.

He looks back to see what he's touched. Then he smiles and fishes a pair of black-rimmed glasses out of a fold in the comforter.

Ilya pinches his fingers around one of the arms, turns to dangle the glasses in front of him.

Shane, who has just finished folding his clothes on top of the dresser, turns and looks down.

One of the best parts of seeing Shane naked is getting to track his blush from his cheeks all the way down to his chest. "Give me those," he says, and tries to snatch them out of Ilya's hand.

Ilya grins as he darts them away from Shane's reach. "Did not know you wore glasses," he says.

"Just to read," Shane says. His second swipe is halfhearted. Ilya doesn't have to try that hard to keep them away.

Ilya smiles, then lowers the glasses, holds them out again. This time, he gestures for Shane to take them. "Put on, please," he says.

Shane gives him an unimpressed look. It would have been more effective, had it not been for the blush staining the smooth skin beneath his freckles.

"Is okay," Ilya says, and gives an encouraging bob of his outstretched hand. "Can still do plan. Just do with glasses."

There's a shape Shane's mouth makes sometimes, which is technically a frown, but which bobs at the corners like it's just barely avoiding turning into a smile. Ilya knows he's won when he sees it, even before Shane reaches out, takes the glasses, and puts them on his face.

Then he lowers his hands and looks down at Ilya, naked, blushing, frown shaking at the corner. "Happy?"

Ilya says, "Yes." He means it. It's hard not to be. It's always nice, to look at Shane without clothes, and something about the way the bottom rim of the glasses is pressing into his freckles is already getting Ilya hard. "Okay. You can do plan, now."

Shane gives up on the frown. "Oh, can I," he says. And then he climbs up onto the mattress, gets his knees on either side of Ilya's thighs so that he can settle, naked, into Ilya's lap. Ilya's hands automatically come up to grip the soft flesh at the sides of Shane's hips. "You're so bad at getting bossed around."

"Is okay," says Ilya, giving Shane a squeeze. "You are very good at it."

Shane gets his hands up, wraps them around Ilya's jaw so that he can angle Ilya's face up toward his. "I was thinking."

“Yes.” Shane looks so fucking good in those glasses that Ilya would have said yes to just about anything he said, in that moment.

“I like that you’re jealous,” Shane says.

“Am not jealous,” Ilya says, but it’s rote. It’s not like he’s doing a particularly good job of pretending it’s true. He leans up and tries to close his mouth over Shane’s.

Shane’s hands tighten on his cheeks to hold him back. He looks down at Ilya through the lenses of the glasses and smiles. “If you give me a hickey, I’ll let him see.”

Ilya’s mouth drops open. “*What?*”

Shane tips his head to the side. His thumbs smooth twin arcs over Ilya’s cheeks. “Do you know what a hickey is?”

“Yes,” says Ilya. He swallows. “Like love bites.” He is getting so hard it’s making him feel slightly nauseous.

Shane’s throat bobs. He nods, slowly. “You can do it where you want,” he says. “And then he’ll probably see it, in the locker room. I mean, it’s not like he’ll know—you know. But he’ll at least know a little. Would you like that?”

His eyes are very earnest, behind his glasses.

“Would I like that,” Ilya repeats. And then he gets a grip under Shane’s thighs and heaves him upward, tosses him like a wrestling opponent onto the bed.

Shane goes, belly-up and laughing breathlessly, bouncing once against the mattress before Ilya is on him, pinning him down, throwing his thighs over Shane’s hips, planting his hand in the center of Shane’s chest.

He looks down at Shane, then, stares at where the glasses have been knocked askew on his face. “Where I want.”

“Yes,” says Shane. His pupils are blown. His chest is starting to move faster.

Ilya looks down to where he can see the smooth skin over Shane’s pec twitching with the pounding of his heart.

When Ilya leans down and puts his mouth there, he feels it start to beat faster against his lips.

Ilya latches his mouth tight over the warm skin.

The suck is long, and slow, and *deep*. Shane starts twitching against him halfway through. Toward the end he gets his hands up and scrabbles at Ilya’s back, less like he’s trying to push him off and more like he’s trying to find a handhold.

Ilya feels his lower lip split again on the final pull.

It makes a sound like a suction cup being unstuck, when Ilya releases Shane.

Ilya pulls back, panting, and stares down to see a bruise in the perfect shape of his mouth already blooming over the swell of Shane's pec, just above a smear of Ilya's blood.

Looking at it makes Ilya feels like someone's just grabbed his balls and squeezed tight.

Ilya grunt and ducks back down. He fastens his bloody mouth back to the skin just between Shane's pecs.

Shane gasps, like he hadn't been expecting it, this time. He doesn't stop Ilya, though. He just grunts and shudders and squirms against the duvet.

Shane tastes good. He feels good. He's warm in Ilya's mouth. Ilya detaches only to get another mouthful, gets his lips just under the swell of Shane's opposite pec and sucks hard, his nastiest love bite yet, one that lasts until Shane is bucking his hips and audibly grunting above him.

Ilya releases Shane and rises, breathing hard. His lower lip feels hot and swollen. He's not sure if it's blood or saliva he can feel smeared over his chin. He plants both hands on either side of mattress beside Shane and looms over him.

Shane grabs at Ilya's face with both hands. His fingers are shaking slightly against the edges of Ilya's jaw. He's very red, beneath the glasses laid crookedly over his pretty face. "Please let me suck you," he croaks.

"Yes," Ilya groans.

"Up here," Shane says. His tone is urgent. He lifts his hand from Ilya's cheek, slaps at his own chest. "Come here."

Ilya swallows. He rises to walk his knees up the mattress on either side of Shane's body until he's straddling his torso. He looks down, then, to see Shane's eyes shining brightly behind the glasses.

"Are you sure?" Ilya asks.

Shane opens his mouth.

Ilya feels the absurd impulse to pause and give thanks to God.

He rises, reaches up to brace a hand against the wall behind the headboard. Then he reaches down and gets a grip around the base of his dick.

Shane's lower lip looks fat and red. It feels soft, when Ilya taps the head of his cock against it.

Ilya bites his lip. His teeth sink into the split as he slowly, carefully, feeds his dick into Shane's mouth.

Shane's eyes are half-shut beneath the glasses. He tips his head back, like he's trying to straighten his throat, like he's trying to make it easier for Ilya to slide his dick inside.

Ilya releases his own lip from the bite. He licks blood off his teeth. He leans slowly forward, gets his elbow to the wall, slides deeper.

Shane's nostrils flare. His eyes pop all the way open as he strains to take it. Ilya can see them starting to water behind the glasses.

Shane chokes, a little, and for a moment that sweet spot at the back of his mouth, right at the entrance to his throat, squeezes tight over the head of Ilya's dick.

Ilya's fingers spasm tight around the base. He shudders, pulls back, drags the head over Shane's tongue again.

He reaches down, then, and gets his free hand around the side of Shane's face. He presses his thumb into the side of Shane's jaw until Shane's mouth falls open.

Ilya slides back even further. He settles the head of his dick back onto the swell of Shane's lower lip. Gives himself a slow, shuddering stroke upward, until the side of his fist bumps into Shane's chin. "I make plan, now?" he growls.

Shane's hot breaths are gusting over the head of Ilya's dick. There are fat tears trembling on his bottom lashes.

"I want to come *here*," Ilya says. He slides his thumb from the edge of Shane's jaw, traces it up the side of Shane's mouth and along his cheek until it bumps into the bottom of his glasses. "Okay?"

Shane's chest shudders beneath Ilya's spread thighs. He tilts his head further. He closes his eyes.

Ilya's hand speeds up. His fingers bump into Shane's chin again, and again.

Shane's tongue is shaking, when he touches it to the wetness gleaming on the head of Ilya's dick.

Ilya's grip convulses around his cock. The head throbs against Shane's lower lip. It's easier for Ilya to speak in Russian, when he's this close to the edge. "You're incredible," he pants down at Shane. "You're perfect, for God's sake, how am I supposed to, oh fuck, *fuck*—"

Ilya's dick pulses against his shaking fingers, into the press of Shane's tongue. Ilya pulls back, his fist tightening on the downstroke, and blurts come onto Shane's lips, over his cheek. Paints it over his freckles.

Ilya gasps. His cock spasms.

The final streak hits the edge of Shane's glasses.

Ilya lets go of the wall and collapses down onto Shane, so suddenly it must have startled him, because all of his breath leaves his lungs in a *whoof*.

Then Ilya raises himself up, leverages his torso up from Shane's, but only enough that he can get his hands around either side of Shane's face and lean in again.

Shane's eyes are closed, his expression beatific. The come on his face is gleaming in the lamplight.

Ilya licks hotly across the streak painted over Shane's mouth, tongues the splatter from his cheek, his freckles. He pulls back, swallows, then leans up to suck at the edge of Shane's glasses.

Shane lies placidly beneath Ilya, quiet and shut-eyed, until Ilya dips down and starts licking over Shane's mouth again, just for fun, this time. Then Shane cracks one eye open and says, words muffled by Ilya's tongue, "Am I clean?"

Ilya pulls back, studies Shane's face. Shane's lips and chin and cheek are shining with spit, as is the right lens of his glasses. Ilya takes his thumb, massages some of his saliva into Shane's freckles. "Clean," he confirms.

Shane opens his eyes all the way. His pupils are dilated behind the spit-smeared glasses. "I'm so hard I feel like I'm gonna die," he says, faintly.

Ilya plants his hands on the mattress and hefts himself away from Shane's body. He looks down at where Shane's neglected dick is already leaking onto Shane's stomach. "Good," he says, and reaches for it.

Shane whimpers, a little, at the first touch of Ilya's hand on his dick. Then he regains his voice enough to croak, "How is that *good*?"

The slide of Ilya's hand isn't smooth enough. Ilya retracts his fingers, brings them up to cup under Shane's chin.

Shane's cheeks work for a moment. He leans forward, spits froth into Ilya's palm.

Ilya shoves his hand back down between them, curls it once more around Shane's dick. "Is good," he says, and pulls upward, one slick, tight stroke that leaves Shane twisting against the duvet. "Because, if you come hard enough, you hit love bite."

Shane makes a wounded sound. His hips buck up into Ilya's grip.

Ilya tightens his fingers, pulls faster, harder. Leans down to peer through the spit-smeared glasses into Shane's eyes. "Maybe you think about this," he murmurs, "when you show the American."

Shane's eyes roll back, just slightly, into his head.

Ilya folds himself down. He licks over Shane's gasping mouth, tightens his grip so that he can feel each pulse of Shane's cock against his fist.

Shane is too shivery to kiss back, at first. He gasps open-mouthed into Ilya's grin for a long moment before he can gather himself enough to close a weak kiss around Ilya's lower lip.

Ilya slows his hand to a stop, thumbs gently over the head just to make Shane twitch beneath him. Then he pulls away, sits back on Shane's thighs, and looks down to study his handiwork.

He feels a slow smile creeping across his face.

Ilya reaches down, places his thumb over the streak of come staining the hickey he'd sucked into the tender skin right between Shane's pecs. "You did very well," he says. "You came very hard."

Shane cranes his neck up from the pillow. There's blood on his open mouth. He watches, wide-eyed and still breathing hard, as Ilya massages slow circles into the bruise.

*

Beautiful, fastidious, predictable Shane gets fussy, afterwards.

"Is fine," Ilya says, reaching for the glasses. "Can get paper towel."

Shane snatches them back and glares at him. "You have to use a microfiber cloth on glasses," he scolds.

"Okay."

"I have a special spray, too."

"Of course you do," Ilya says.

"The lenses will get scratched, otherwise."

"Yes, I am sure. Hey." Ilya catches at Shane's arm as he gets up to rise from the bed. "Thank you," he says, sincerely.

Shane looks down at him. The bruises on his chest are already deepening beneath the smears of his come and Ilya's blood.

Ilya is delighted to see the flush creeping back in beneath his freckles.

Shane says, "I'm just gonna go shower, okay?" He hesitates for a moment before leaning down to buss a chaste kiss over Ilya's lips.

Once Shane is gone, Ilya leans back in bed, stretches until that cramp in his hip pops out. Then he gets to his feet and pads naked out into the kitchen to find something to drink.

Shane has an unnecessarily fancy sink, lined with multiple faucets seemingly equipped with varying capabilities. Ilya pokes at a few and is delighted to find one that dispenses sparkling water, only to locate a glass, fill it, and discover he actually doesn't like sparkling water at all.

Glass re-filled with regular plain tap water, Ilya ambles naked through Shane's apartment, pads through his living room and eyes the books on the shelves. It looks like a lot of nonfiction, but there's a section of broken-spined spy novels Ilya is intrigued by.

Shane has left one book out on the coffee table in front of the couch. Ilya glances down at it as he wanders by.

The title tells him it's a Russian phrase book for beginners.

Ilya blinks. He stares at the cover for a moment. Then he settles his glass on the coffee table and leans down to pick up the book.

When he tips it forward to look at the top of the pages, he sees there's a bookmark sticking out from about the halfway mark.

Ilya opens the book, flips through. There's an introductory vocabulary section, followed by lists of basic phrases spelled out in phonetic English.

There are pencil marks around some of these phrases. Words circled, here and there, sometimes accompanied by exclamation points or question marks. Underlines, beneath some of the pronunciation tips.

Ilya closes the book so quickly he almost shuts his fingers inside.

It's like someone's just splashed him with cold water, like he'd just opened his eyes from sleepwalking to find himself standing naked in Shane Hollander's living room next to a fucking book of Russian phrases for beginners.

Ilya drops the book back on the coffee table and looks up to stare numbly at the dark television, which is sitting quietly on the TV stand across from the couch. There's a single Montreal pennant pinned to the wall behind it.

Oh, fuck, what had Ilya said to Shane?

You're perfect was surely not something that had made the list of common phrases.

But then, as Ilya was coming— as his vision had started to sparkle, as he'd leaned forward to watch the head of his dick pulse come onto Shane's tongue— What had he said then? What had he said out loud? He'd barely been able to hear himself over the rush of blood in his ears.

"Hi," Shane says.

Ilya looks up to see Shane standing in the threshold to the living room. His wet hair is dripping onto his forehead. He's wearing sweats, but no shirt, and he has his hands stuffed uncertainly in his pockets.

Shane coughs, pulls one of his hands out of his pocket, sweeps it forward like he's indicating the coffee table. "We have a Russian rookie this season," he says. "Thought it might be nice to put in some effort."

Perfect captain Hollander, speaker of English and French and Russian, too. Ilya clears his throat, but his voice still comes out a little bit more hoarsely than he'd have liked it to when he speaks. "Very nice," he says. "Is hard, sometimes, when you are only one."

"I bet," Shane says, softly. "Sometimes I wish— I wish you and I could really *talk*, you know? Just, like. Fully. In the same language."

Ilya frowns. "You want talk, call American teammate."

Shane gives him an unimpressed look. He reaches up with one hand and taps one finger twice against the hickey already turning purple over his heart.

Ilya forces himself to look away. "Is okay, anyway, Hollander. We do not need talk. This is what sex is for, yes?"

"Maybe," Shane says. His tone is even, but when Ilya looks back, he sees Shane is frowning. "Do you want to borrow pants?"

"No, will grab mine," Ilya says. As he passes Shane, he says, "Should dry hair. It's cold."

It feels less normal now, than it had moments ago, to walk naked through Hollander's apartment.

As Ilya tugs his clothes back on in Hollander's empty bedroom, he thinks again about those marks underneath the pronunciation notes. The lines had been drawn almost perfectly straight. Ilya imagines Hollander leaning over the book, his glasses slipping down his nose, concentrating on not letting his pencil wobble.

Ilya emerges from the bedroom to find Hollander in the kitchen, once again digging around in his freezer. His hair looks spiky, now, and a little less damp, like he'd scrubbed it with a towel. "I should go," Ilya tells Hollander's back. "Team expects me at hotel."

Hollander turns. He has a different ice pack in his hands, this time, a white one wrapped in paper. "You can take this," he says, and extends it.

Ilya hesitates.

"It's disposable," Hollander says. There's a determined set to his jaw, like he's expecting to have to talk Ilya into it. "You don't have to bring it back, or anything."

Ilya can feel the corner of his mouth twitch into a smile. He reaches out, accepts the ice pack. "I look good?"

Shane eyes him critically. After a moment of evaluation, he says, "You look like you just lost another fight."

"Ah, Hollander," says Ilya, pressing the ice pack to his face. "Don't kick me while I am down."

Shane walks him to the front door. Ilya can sense, throughout the entirety of the journey down the hall, that Shane is gearing himself up to say something.

Sure enough, when Shane reaches out and gets his hand on the latch, he doesn't flip it right away. He takes a deep breath. Then he turns to Ilya and says in Russian, "Bye bye."

His pronunciation is atrocious.

Ilya feels his face split into a grin. He leans forward, grabs Hollander by the sides of his face, and plants a messy kiss on Hollander's mouth.

He knows, as soon as he pulls back, that it was too chaste. It wasn't the way they usually kiss. There was no tongue.

Ilya's dick hadn't even been hard.

Ilya drops his hands from Shane's face and steps back. He wipes a quick thumb over the blood he'd accidentally smeared under Shane's lower lip, then looks away, because he is too much of a coward to see what Shane's expression looks like.

"Bye bye," Ilya echoes, in Russian. Then he turns and flips the latch himself, pulls the door open, gets himself out into the hall before he can say any other common phrases Shane might recognize.

*

Ilya is on the elliptical in the Bears facility for a post-practice cool-down, two days later, when his phone buzzes against the plastic tray on the front of the machine. Ilya, legs pumping beneath him, reaches for it.

There's a text from Jane on the screen. *That was so embarrassing.*

Ilya leans forward, gets his elbows on the handlebars so that he can pull up the keyboard and send a question mark in response without breaking his rhythm.

The text pops up instantaneously, like Shane had been waiting for Ilya to respond so he could send it. *Everyone saw the hickies.*

Ilya's right foot slips.

His shin bangs painfully into the pedal before he gets his hands around the emergency stop tag under the handlebars, yanks it free, and circles his left foot to a slow stop as the machine dies down. By then he's already texted back: *Send pic.*

Shane doesn't respond right away. Ilya's already left the cardio room and scrubbed off in the showers, is standing in front of his locker with one towel around his waist and another in his hair, by the time his phone buzzes again.

Ilya looks to one side, then the other. Checks that there's no one else nearby his stall. Then he clicks to open the text.

It's taken in front of a mirror. Shane is standing in front of a row of sinks in what must be the bathroom at the Voyageurs facility, holding the phone out awkwardly in front of him, frowning down at it like he's concentrating on getting the angle right.

He's in pads and uniform pants, from the waist down. His hair, damp with sweat, is plastered to his forehead.

He's shirtless. There are three livid mouth-shaped bruises sucked into his chest.

Ilya immediately regrets not waiting until he was alone to open the text.

He places the phone down in his locker. He takes several deep, steadying breaths. He sets his face into a grim expression. He raps the fading bruises on his knuckles against the side of his locker stall, hard enough to hurt.

It's barely enough to distract him. Ilya keeps thinking about the photo as he gets dressed, anyway.

The problem is, it's too easy to imagine it, Shane shirtless in the Voyageurs locker room with that blush beneath his freckles and that determined set to his jaw, fighting the urge to cover himself with his hands as he straightens and turns his bare chest toward his pretty American teammate.

He knows, with complete certainty, that Shane had really made himself do it, just because Shane had said he would.

Ilya looks up, then, peers around the locker room to see who's around. It had been an optional session, today, but there are a few other guys still lingering. When he spots Levshunov getting dressed at his stall across the room, he stands and strides determinedly over.

Levshunov looks up from where he's tying the laces of his sneakers, blinks when he sees Rozanov looming over him.

"How did you get so good at English?" Ilya demands in Russian.

Levshunov looks slightly alarmed. He glances over his shoulder, as if checking there's not someone squeezed into the stall behind him who Ilya might be talking to instead. Then he turns back to Rozanov and says, "I moved to Saskatchewan when I was fifteen."

"Yes, yes, I remember," Ilya says impatiently. "And now you're really good at it. So, how did you get good? Is there a book, or something? Maybe an app?"

Levshunov finishes tying his shoe, lets his foot fall down from the stall. "I'm sure there are books, and apps. I don't know. I mostly got better when I practiced with my host family. They didn't speak anything else. I didn't really have a choice but to get better. You'd probably get better, too, if you practiced more." He switches to English, and damn him, it sounds effortless. "You're already pretty good, but we could practice if you wanted."

"Fine," says Ilya, shortly.

Levshunov shrugs. “Just if you want to.”

“Yes, yes. I want to.” Ilya turns to go. Then he thinks for a moment, turns back around, says, “Thanks.”

Levshunov shrugs again. “You’re welcome.”

Ilya returns to his stall. He picks up his phone. He texts, *Looked fun to cum on those. My turn next time?* And then he locks the phone and tucks it into his pocket. He hums to himself as he grabs his sweatshirt and wrestles it on over his head.

He’s still tangled in the cotton when he feels his phone buzz against his thigh. He smiles, big and wide, into the fabric, where no one can see.

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