

Talk About It

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Talk About It

by [some1_around](#)

Summary

“You will not be so nice when we beat you,” Ilya told Shane Hollander, holding onto his hand, not letting him pull away. Not yet.

But Hollander’s brow furrowed, not in anger but in confusion. “Ah, um, sorry,” Hollander said. “Merci. My English is bad. Worse... than you. Maybe slower?” And he leaned in, like that would help him understand.

Ilya’s eyebrows rose, and his smile widened.

Or, Ilya Rozanov grew up in Russia. Shane Hollander was raised in France. When they first meet, neither of them can speak English very well. Somehow, it’s easier to understand each other when words aren’t getting in the way.

(Stand-alone remix of “I’m Reading Your Lips (You’re Speaking My Language)” but this time neither of them are native English speakers, and learning a new language is sort of like falling in love, if you think about it.)

Notes

This idea wouldn’t let me go so I rewrote the first episode and it’s been languishing on my computer for a week so I decided to publish it as is, so this is just an episode 1 reimagining (some book timeline mixed in). All Russian is translated but some of the French is not because this is from Ilya’s perspective and he doesn’t understand it (and I still do not speak French or Russian, sorry!) Italicized sentences are translated Russian and French, it should be clear which is which: untranslated non-English language is not italicized.

Title from Emma (my favorite Jane Austen), Mr Knightley’s iconic, “I cannot make speeches, if I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more.”

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

“Um, Ilya—Ilya Rozanov?”

Ilya glanced up, more interested in his flickering lighter than the hesitant voice calling his name.

The boy who had spoken put his hand on his chest. “Shane Hollander,” he said, but of course Ilya had already known that. “Hello.”

Team Canada’s prodigal captain. Ilya had been hearing his name for months, and as curious as the countless comparisons had made him, he had not expected to meet Hollander before they stepped out onto the ice together. He was focused on his cigarette and had not been prepared to have a conversation in English. Even as he accepted the hand extended to him, Ilya decided that he did not care about this pretty, flushed boy in a stupid hat. Blankly, he offered a remote, “Hi.”

Hollander’s response was spoken slowly. Ilya watched him closely, watched the shape of his mouth form words. He shared an accent with several of the other Canadian players, distinct from the American English that Ilya had been learning. It made them all slightly harder for Ilya to understand, but Hollander spoke so carefully that he could still parse his meaning. Ilya bristled preemptively despite this; although he did not like it when people just assumed he could speak English, it enraged him when they spoke slowly and drawn-out, as if they were talking to a child or a stupid person just because English wasn’t his first language. “I wanted to introduce myself,” Hollander said in a measured cadence. “You are a wonderful player to watch.”

It still took Ilya a moment to translate his words. He had been learning English for years, preparing to escape Russia for a career in the NHL, and it pissed him off how difficult it still was to understand and formulate a reply in the moment. “Yes, I know,” he said, not bothering to translate a longer or more articulate response. He wondered if Hollander was out here because he thought he could shake Ilya’s concentration, disrupt his routines or intimidate him. If he believed that, he had another thing coming. As if Russia’s Ilya Rozanov could ever be bullied around by this awkward boy with freckles.

Hollander laughed awkwardly, scuffing his shoe on the ground, but Ilya did not fill the silence that sprouted between them. Finally, Ilya successfully lit his cigarette. He saw Hollander eyeing it—Ilya was used to such looks, which he got from all the overcompensating subpar athletes on his own team—but Hollander did not comment on it. “Em, I wanted to meet you.” He was watching the end of the cigarette, or watching the smoke. Or watching Ilya’s mouth. Ilya, despite himself, felt a frisson of interest.

The freckles....

“Okay,” Ilya said. Hollander turned and leaned against the wall beside him. His cheeks were pink. Ilya wondered if it was from the cold or from embarrassment, but he wasn’t sure he knew how to ask that question in English. *Pink. You are pink.* He turned the words over. *Your face is red. You are...* Flushed. What was the word for flushed? He couldn’t remember. Was there a better word than pink or red? *Rosey-cheeked beneath freckles*, but he didn’t know any

of those words. Didn't know how they would come across, or if Hollander would call him a slur in response.

Not that he could have voiced them, anyway. He was here with Team Russia. Ilya pursed his mouth and blew smoke into the sky. Against the grey winter clouds, it disappeared almost immediately.

He glanced to the side. Hollander was biting his lip—that was *red*, Ilya thought, trying to formulate his thoughts in English. His cheeks were *pink*, but his lips were *red*, chapped, bitten. Ilya expected him to ramble, but he did not. He watched Hollander fidget with his hands, his pockets, the zipper of his coat.

Hollander apparently could not find the words he wanted either. He stood up, brushing himself off unnecessarily, and held out his hand for a second handshake. “Good luck in the tournament,” he said, still picking his words slowly. It was a good thing, though, because his accent was almost indecipherable to Ilya, regardless.

Ilya felt a flash of irritation. “You will not be so nice when we beat you,” Ilya told Shane Hollander, taking his hand and holding onto it, flexing just enough to feel the tendons on the back of his palm. Not letting him pull away. Not yet.

But Hollander's brow furrowed, not in anger but in confusion. “Ah, um, sorry,” Hollander said. “Merci. My English is bad. Worse... than you. Maybe slower?” And he leaned in, like that would help him understand.

Ilya's eyebrows rose.

“You are Canadian, though?”

“French and Canadian, both,” Hollander said. “Québécois *and* French, I mean, yes? My father is—um, like... ambassador, but not so high? Government job. We travel.” He looked embarrassed. Ilya shrugged, not quite understanding what he meant, and Hollander glanced away. “French is my language,” he said simply. “I always do just French in Québec, but now, with hockey....”

“Russian is mine,” Ilya said. “But I try to learn English.”

Hollander smiled, friendly and fragile. “Yes, me too, I try very hard to learn,” he said, and Ilya could hear how strong his accent was now that he knew to pay attention. Not the same as the other Canadian players—different, more pronounced, not North American at all. He also heard how Hollander tripped over his words and realized that his earlier sentences must have been practiced and memorized for precision, and Ilya's smile widened. He finally remembered to drop Hollander's hand, idly noticing that Hollander hadn't pulled away either. “What did you say?” Hollander asked. “I did not understand. Please, say again?”

Ilya straightened.

“We,” he repeated slowly, “will beat you.” He held out the hand not holding his cigarette and poked Hollander in the chest, through the thick layers of his winter clothes. “You will lose.”

Hollander's face changed, a disbelieving grin taking over his pretty red lips. "Oh, I see," he said, laughter infusing his voice. "You are un asshole, oui?"

Ilya grinned. "Da."

"Well, no, you are wrong," Hollander said, knocking Ilya's hand away with a smile. Ilya liked the way he pronounced every single word. "We will beat you. You are losing."

"Oh, really?" Ilya asked, his turn to laugh. "Prove it, Hollander."

"Yes," Hollander said, rolling his eyes. "We will. Good luck."

"Udachi," Ilya purred, translating his well-wishes into Russian.

Hollander's eyes lit up with understanding even as he continued to back away. "Bonne chance." The heavy door clanged shut behind him, but Ilya imagined he could hear the French echoing across the dim parking lot.

"Bun-shunce," he tried to echo quietly, but it didn't sound anything like Hollander had.

He stubbed his cigarette out on the wall. His lungs felt warm.

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Canada's Shane Hollander had dual citizenship in France, Ilya learned that night, clicking through poorly written, sparse articles about the new WJC wonderboy. He was born in Canada but raised in Lyon, France, until he returned to Québec at fourteen to join the more robust Canadian hockey youth leagues, where he quickly shot up the ranks. His mother had been raised deep in French-speaking Québec, and his father's family was a mix of Québécois Canadians and French-speaking Europeans. Hollander had been homeschooled from that point on, like many promising young athletes, and had never attended an English-speaking school.

He could barely speak English, in fact. He might have been worse at it than Ilya.

"See you at the draft," Ilya said quickly, smirking in the handshake line after he proved himself—proved himself to Hollander, and proved himself to everyone who had expected Hollander to be better than him.

Hollander looked perplexed. Ilya had spoken too quickly, and he could see, in the brief moment they were next to each other, that Hollander had not understood him. The Team Canada defenseman behind Hollander laughed. "Dude, don't even try—he doesn't fucking speak English," smiling at Ilya like they were sharing a joke. "Good game."

The boy moved on too quickly for Ilya to deck him. He was surprised by how fierce the urge was, even after the game, even after winning on the world stage, and soothed himself with the knowledge that the boy would not be joining them at the draft—not that summer, and not ever.

Still, he wanted to hit him.

Ilya would have to tamp those thoughts down. If he was joining the NHL, he would need to build a thicker skin about people making fun of his language skills.

(And Ilya was happy to ignore the possibility that he was actually just angry about someone making fun of Hollander. Ilya was *very* happy to ignore that little niggling thought.)

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They met again at the draft. They were not the only non-English speaking draft prospects present, with dozens of potential players from the European leagues present as well, but despite that, Ilya sought Hollander's eye specifically in the middle of a loud intercom announcement said in quick, crackling English.

Hollander returned his look with a baffled shrug. Ilya felt a silent kinship with him for a moment until he noticed the two people, undoubtedly Hollander's parents, standing beside him, including his beautiful mother, who seemed to be translating for him. He felt a stab of dark jealousy, of virulent bitterness, and Ilya tore his eyes away.

"What are they saying?" Grigori asked Ilya in Russian, waving an irritated hand beside his ear as a low whine of feedback cut through the speakers. *"Come on, quick with it. Or have all your English lessons been for nothing? A waste of my money?"*

"No, Papa," Ilya said, turning his eyes away from Hollander. He had to focus. He had a job to do.

Hollander would only distract him.

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They did not need words that night in the gym, and that was a blessing.

They barely spoke at all, and yet they understood one another perfectly. Exhaustion, stress, interest—all displayed clearly in the humid air between their open mouths.

Panting breaths. Sweat. The touch of fingers on a plastic water bottle.

But when Ilya said, "More," Hollander obeyed.

Ilya watched him drink and licked his lips.

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"I will see you next season," Hollander said to him proudly the next time they were in the handshake line after Canada had taken back a victory at the WJC. He over-pronounced the clearly practiced words and his smile was broad and proud, transparently pleased with himself.

Ilya raised an eyebrow. *Next season.*

He didn't want to wait another ten months before he saw Hollander again.

And Alexei had asked him for twenty thousand dollars, none of which was going to be spent on Ilya's baby niece, he was sure. Which meant that Ilya would also be footing the bill for daycare and formula and outfits constantly outgrown. So, a lot of fucking money.

Ilya passed Hollander by without a word in response. He didn't see the asshole kid who had mocked Hollander's English the previous year. He probably hadn't been selected again, his tiny career already fizzled out. Ilya, despite the crushing loss, smirked.

Ilya needed to work. He needed to make money. He needed—he *wanted* to see Hollander again. He wanted to hear his foolishly practiced English and his pretty accent.

Mostly, he didn't want to go back to Russia so soon.

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They covered Hollander's perfect freckles with makeup for the commercial shoot. Ilya wanted to sneer at the foolish director and costume designers. Clearly, they had no idea how to sell their own product.

"You look pretty," he told Hollander anyway.

He did. He looked very pretty. Annoyingly so.

Hollander's nose scrunched. "You are also wearing—" Hollander started, then faltered. "Um. What is the word...? For face...?"

Ilya laughed. "Makeup," he said.

"Oh." Hollander looked embarrassed. "Right. Yes. I knew this."

"You should remember the word," Ilya said. "You will probably have to wear a lot of it soon. I hear you signed with Reebok, no?"

If not for the makeup, Hollander would have been blushing. Ilya was sure. "Yes, I did."

"Congratulations," Ilya drawled. "But how will you ever remember your lines, though?"

It didn't matter, he thought to himself. With Hollander's beautiful face and his enchanting accent, he could probably speak nothing but gibberish and still attract hordes of admirers with a single flutter of his long, straight eyelashes. He could be a model if hockey didn't work out.

Hollander frowned. "I have a very good memory," he insisted.

Ilya laughed at him.

He wasn't lying, though. Even with the makeup, even without his freckles, Hollander looked very pretty. Especially when he was laughing, smiling with Ilya. Especially when he was staring with frightened doe eyes, water pouring over his shoulders, sneaking glances at Ilya's body, his ass, and his cock. Especially when his mouth dropped open when Ilya took himself

in hand. Especially when he fumbled his shoe nervously and gave Ilya his room number without question and admitted, “I might answer.”

Especially then.

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“I thought you might chicken out.”

“What?” Hollander asked, mouth pursed, eyebrows lowered. “You say—chicken? *What?*”

Ilya laughed as he walked around Hollander, circling him until he could crowd Hollander back against the wall. “Your English is so bad,” he snickered.

Hollander frowned. “I know,” he muttered, hands rising to touch Ilya’s biceps despite the teasing insult. “I am trying. I have lessons, but it is going so slow. I work, but-”

“I know,” Ilya interrupted easily, pushing him into the wall. “I know. Is unfair. That’s why they send me back to the WJC instead of playing first season with the Raiders after draft—say I need to learn more. I think it is bullshit.”

Hollander, Ilya realized, adopted the same expression when he was trying to translate English that he had on the ice during their games. He was so focused, so intense. Locked in. But on the ice, Hollander was confident and graceful, and off the ice, struggling to parse a sentence (and it stroked Ilya’s ego to know that he challenged Hollander wherever they went, and that his English was at least nominally better for the time being), he looked... insecure. Embarrassed.

“Oh,” Hollander said after a moment’s delay. “They wanted me to win a world tournament.” Ilya loved the way he landed on each syllable of the final word. Hollander flashed him a smile. “And I did win, so...”

“Oh, I think you are the asshole,” Ilya said, shoving him a little more firmly against the wall, reveling in the way his aggression only made Hollander soften. He pressed a little firmer, just to feel his tense muscles relax and let his hands slide up to rest lightly on his broad shoulders.

He kissed him. It was easy. Ilya liked the way their mouths moved together, warm, pliant. When Ilya pushed his tongue into the back of Hollander’s mouth, trying to taste the pretty French accent on his rear molars, Hollander moaned.

“Have you ever,” Ilya asked when he managed to pull back, “with a guy?”

“Non.”

Ilya held his chin and pulled his face up to him. He could feel Hollander swallow where his pinky finger grazed his neck. “But you want to?” Simple words. Easy to understand, and important to say.

Hollander sucked his thumb into his mouth.

Ilya let him and pushed a little deeper, feeling the warm wetness. Pressed against each other, he felt the moment when Hollander's knees went slack and he tried to drop down, and Ilya quickly pressed against him harder, pinning him to the wall. "No, no, not yet," he purred, pressing hard on Hollander's sumptuous tongue, then sliding his finger out. He tapped Hollander's chin, smearing saliva on it, and Hollander whined and arched, his eyes black and glossy, and Ilya couldn't look away. "Tell me," he said. "Tell me you want me."

"Non," Hollander whined, and Ilya wanted to breathe in his sounds forever. "Non, s'il te plaît—ah, sorry, sorry, please—"

"You lose your words," Ilya said. Awed.

"I—yes, yes, sometimes," Hollander said, squirming.

"Why?" Ilya asked.

"Why—why I lose words?" Hollander asked, breath still a little quick, but his eyes lost some of their haziness as they continued speaking.

"Yes. Tell me why. And then maybe I let you get on your knees for me if you are good, okay?"

His breath stuttered. Ilya watched him. Hollander's chest moved, heaving, then settled. "It is not that I don't *know*—I am very good at reading English, writing it—but I... I get nervous?" he admitted, glancing down and then up quickly, waiting for Ilya to mock him. Ilya did not. He watched the shifting of Hollander's eyes and leaned in a little closer. "I get nervous my grammar is not perfect, so nervous that I forget a word, and... it is so embarrassing to grow up here sometime and still not speak like it. I get embarrassed," he repeated, flushing.

Ilya couldn't resist him. He pressed his lips to Hollander's ear, feeling the warmth of him on the fragile pink skin, and breathed, "I think you are pretty when you are embarrassed."

He kissed him again.

Ilya shrugged off his jacket, then braced one hand on the wall above Hollander's head as he pushed him into it. Hollander's skin was warm through his thin shirt, and his lips were soft, hot—they parted like butter beneath Ilya's firm pressure. His entire body was supple padding, pliable and giving, over hard muscles. He felt good pressed against Ilya. Firm, and solid, but so, so soft. His lips more than the rest of him, which opened like slick, melted butter. "Fuck, Hollander."

Their shirts came off and it was even warmer, skin to skin. Hollander was already panting. Ilya slid his fingers over his smooth, almost hairless chest, and cradled his face so he could feel Hollander's plush lips with the pads of his thumbs. Just as easily, they slipped back inside, feeling his wet mouth, his tongue. Hollander opened his mouth for him.

"I want you," he mumbled around Ilya's fingers.

Then Hollander slid to his knees and Ilya didn't stop him. Ilya pressed his hands to the wall and tilted his head up as Hollander's mouth slid over the tip of his cock. It was a talented mouth, if inexperienced. Ilya huffed quietly to himself, then slid one hand down the wall to cradle his head.

Brown eyes, blown black, dewy, looked up at him, already desperate for approval, and Ilya groaned low, enjoying the sensation of air vibrating in his lungs.

"Oh, stop, stop, stop," Ilya said embarrassingly soon, sliding his hands to Hollander's shoulders.

Hollander bounced back up without hesitation, an easy, athletic glide to his feet. "Was that bad?" he asked, incongruously anxious.

Ilya scoffed, kissing him quickly to taste the musk on his lips. "Too much, too good," he purred, his English slurring on Hollander's tongue.

They did not really need words after that.

Hollander arched into him, leaning off the wall. So eager. So Ilya led him to the bed.

They were more than capable of basic communication, and some things still needed to be voiced: *What do you want? Does this feel good?* He couldn't tease too much anymore, though, the unimportant words slipping away.

With one hand on Hollander's hips and the other gripping the soft, malleable flesh of his chest, it was like reading sign language. Or like telepathy. He didn't need his eyes or his ears to know what Hollander was saying. He didn't need a dictionary either.

"Oui, oui." *Yes, yes, please, more,* Hollander panted. "Putain de merde." *Holy shit, I want this, I want you,* he whined, pressing his chest into groping fingers. "Oh, criss, Rozanov, criss." *Jesus Christ, that feels good,* he moaned, hips wiggling against the grip that held him down. "Tabarnak! Pars, je vais jouir!" *Fuck, Rozanov, you need to pull off, I am going to come,* he warned breathlessly, wanton, rough hands scrambling over his shoulders, through his curls, never yanking or shoving but blatantly trying to make his intentions clear even when English words abandoned him.

It was wonderful to understand Hollander like this. Ilya wanted more.

He did not pull off. He held Hollander to the bed and listened to the mixed profanity spilling from his lips, swallowing around him. His mouth was better occupied like this, Ilya thought, a little deliriously turned on even though he had just come. He could feel his cock twitching against the bedsheets as he swallowed Hollander's come, taking him deep inside, filling his mouth with him as meaningless words glanced off his ears until he pulled away.

"Je suis tellement désolé," Hollander panted. Ilya chuckled against the smooth, lightly furred skin of his inner thighs, pressing a kiss there before he slapped his hand on Hollander's firm, muscled stomach and flopped over to lie next to him. "I mean—I mean, sorry, sorry, I am—"

Hollander really did lose his words when he was nervous. “I don’t mind swallowing,” he said, and then, because he was curious and because he was becoming quickly obsessed with Hollander’s mouth, he kissed him.

Hollander did not shy away from the taste of semen on Ilya’s lips. He pushed back, apologetic pleas silenced. Ilya turned further, pressing him into the mattress, pushing his tongue deeper, deeper. Hollander’s spit tasted thick and neutral, and the shared taste of them, on both their tongues, merged into something dirty and earthy and real.

Better than the taste of English words, at least. Like this, they seemed to understand each other perfectly.

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Months passed. The memory stayed recent.

“Shane Hollander,” Ilya said, sliding up to the center of the ice. He liked standing there with Hollander. It felt like they were beneath a floodlight, a spotlight, the very center of the universe. All eyes on them. “Will you disappoint them?” he drawled, his lips over-shaping the name, his tongue flicking against his teeth around the mouthguard.

Hollander blinked hard behind his visor, plush mouth opening in a mew of confusion. “Quoi?” he murmured, the French half-slurred.

Ilya’s grin widened. “Your English is still so fucking bad,” he snickered.

Hollander scowled. “Fuck off,” he pronounced carefully.

And maybe it was just to spite Ilya, but a second later, when the puck dropped, Hollander won the face-off.

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Hollander won their first face-off and their first game.

They did not meet up afterward.

Ilya tried to comfort himself with the knowledge that his English was still better than Hollander’s, but it didn’t matter much when all the Montreal journalists could interview him in his native language.

“I’m happy with any goal I can get,” read the subtitles accompanying Hollander’s quick, melodic French, sweaty or freshly showered, his dorky hair hanging across his forehead. Half the players in the league were Canadian, maybe of them from Québec, so Ilya had become accustomed to hearing the accent of Québécois speakers like the journalist holding her microphone in Hollander’s face. He thought Hollander’s accent was much prettier, but maybe that was an unfair judgment. Ilya had heard that accent whimpering and begging for him, after all. Of course he liked it better. *“I’m here for the team. I’m here to win. I don’t care about the details.”*

Such a polite answer from such a polite boy. Ilya wished he didn't want to replace Hollander's generic sweatshirt with one of his own, an oversized hoodie that would hang off his shoulders and show just a tempting sliver of his collarbone.

"Perfect Hollander," he muttered to himself, ignoring his phone, the insulting texts from his brother, and the pleas from his teammates to go out and forget his woes. He didn't want to leave the bed.

The subtitles ran on a delay from the footage. The journalist asked Hollander a question and a confusing expression flickered across Hollander's stoic, polite smile. His lips dropped for a second, his composure broken.

Ilya frowned.

"And what do you think about being compared to Tiger Woods and Serena Williams?" the subtitles filtered in on the journalist's side first.

Ilya immediately rolled his eyes. Of course Hollander was already being compared to legendary athletes less than half a season into the NHL. Hollander was already answering the question in his pretty French, and Ilya frowned.

He couldn't read the expression on his face, couldn't decipher the hesitation in his voice through the delay and the language barrier, but something about the question had made Hollander falter, and it wasn't just his humility.

"I don't really think about stuff like that. I'm just happy to play hockey for the Metros."

Nothing else. No answer to Ilya's question. *"Mr. Hollander,"* he said to himself in Russian, wishing that the NHL would provide translators for him so that he could have even half a shot at seeming as put-together, as refined and intelligent. He felt jealous and bitter, only partially because of the game he had just lost. *"How does it feel to be perfect?"*

The journalist suddenly switched to English, casually showing off the easily bilingual culture of Montreal, as if English wasn't a terrible and impossible language to learn. Ilya sneered. "And how is studying English going?" she asked. Hollander blinked, thoughts visibly whirring behind his eyes, and then he smiled. Media trained. Perfect. Ilya was pretty sure all his teeth were still original.

"It is going well," he said, still with that smooth, lovely accent that made him sound romantic and worldly instead of like a cartoon villain. "I spoke more of English as a child with my Canadian grandparents, and it has finally started to come back to me. Trust me, my teammates and my mother are more than happy to help me practice."

Ilya sneered. Hollander had probably practiced that answer in the mirror as well—he had not been half so eloquent that night on the ice.

"And he gets to be interviewed in fucking French," he muttered, turning the TV off.

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“Ready?” Ilya asked Hollander as PAs leaned across them, fixing their collars and testing their microphones as they sat before the assembled press for their first upcoming All-Star game.

Hollander winced. “I hate doing press,” he admitted. “At least in Québec, they let me do it in French.”

“Oh, I know,” Ilya said, and winked.

They began.

“Ilya, you said you would hit fifty goals this year. You’ve had twenty-eight so far, and we’re in the middle of February. Are you still thinking of a fifty-goal campaign?”

Ilya thought he understood the gist but hesitated, mind automatically turning over the last few words. Hollander twitched, and Ilya tapped the toes of their shoes together beneath the table. “Yes.”

“Shane, the same to you. You scored thirty-one goals so far. Any chance you want to speculate for us on how the rest of this season will turn out for you?”

Ilya exchanged a knowing look with Hollander halfway through the question, trying not to roll his eyes in front of twenty cameras. Journalists all spoke like they were dying to get their questions out as fast as possible, racing to get the words out of their mouths. “No chance, no,” Hollander said, smiling, and the reporters obligingly laughed at his boring answer.

Hollander tapped his shoe back.

The next reporter’s words blurred together, quick and stumbling. “A question for Ilya first, but it’ll be the same for Shane,” he began, and then Ilya lost track. He could recognize individual words but he could not see the man’s mouth behind the dozens of white lights, and his brain stalled. He felt a flush beneath his collar as the reporter kept going, and Ilya’s brain struggled to link his current flow of words to the start of his sentence.

Then he stopped speaking, and Ilya had no idea what to say.

He had been so eager to play in the NHL, where all the best hockey players in the world went. He had also been eager to leave Russia. But he wished, in an ideal world, that he could have left Russia without leaving his language.

Hollander’s foot pressed firmly against his.

Ilya glanced at him, wondering if he was doing any better. Hollander was already looking at him, eyebrows raised. Ilya smiled and shook his head, shrugging his shoulders ambivalently, an ease falling over him. At least he was not alone. If perfect Hollander also did not understand, then Ilya wouldn’t look so stupid.

“Câlice,” Hollander muttered, then leaned into the microphone and said, “Excuse me, but can you say it again? Slower?”

Ilya laughed. “I also do not understand. Sorry.”

The assembled reporters chuckled politely. The man who had asked the rambling question seemed a little chagrined as he repeated it—with far fewer words, blessedly. After they had answered, a reporter in the first row perked up, raising her hand. Hollander gestured to her and she immediately burst into quick, easy French. Ilya watched Hollander perk up and laughed again. “Any Russian for me?” he asked the rest of the reporters, earning another roll of laughter.

Hollander handled the rest of the interview in smooth French. It was funny, Ilya thought. He seemed so confident in French and so nervous in English. Or, rather, he was nervous all the time, but whoever had trained him to respond to the press had trained him in French. His perfect, polite, calculated answers didn’t seem to translate well all the time.

Now and then, Ilya leaned in with joking comments: “Same,” and “I am always saying this,” and, “He’s quoting me.” But it was a relief not to actually have to translate or pretend he understood their convoluted, quick questions.

They stood together and obliged to the requests for pictures of them shaking hands. “We are still rivals, I suppose,” Ilya drawled to Hollander. “Think this will change anything?” His hand was warm. He remembered where this hand had been.

Ilya watched the blush creep up his cheeks. Hollander didn’t respond, but Ilya still felt the phantom pressure of his shoe pressed against his.

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Ilya watched Hollander and Hunter chat from his own bench. He could hear the English that flowed between them, Hunter’s prominent New York accent easier for Ilya to understand after a year in Boston, and the songlike cadence of Hollander’s voice. He could not make out the substance of their conversation over the noise of the arena, but they talked through most of the skills competition, quick and interspersed with laughter.

Ilya’s eyes narrowed.

At some point, he supposed, Hollander really had improved his English.

He just preferred to talk to Hunter, apparently.

Ilya stuck his tongue out at Hollander when he glanced over.

Hollander rolled his eyes.

“One-two-two-one,” Ilya murmured to him, skating past. If Hollander could sit there listening to Hunter drawl for an hour, he could figure out what Ilya meant, too.

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“Get on your knees.”

Hollander clearly understood that.

He obeyed so easily. Ilya was thrilled to bury his cock in his warm mouth, to be wrapped up in a tongue that had only hours ago spoken for him before a bevy of incoherent questions, and Hollander seemed as eager to give pleasure as Ilya was to receive it. He tried to keep his hands away from Hollander's head because he didn't trust his self-restraint to stop him from latching on and riding his throat, but Hollander was looking up at him like he would allow it without complaint. Like he wanted Ilya to slide into his throat until he could feel his vocal cords from the inside out.

"Fuck," Ilya panted, tipping his head back until it collided with the wall, trying to shake those deranged thoughts loose. He ran his hands down his own neck and found Hollander's hand, braced on his chest, just beneath his pendant, and interlaced their fingers.

Ilya loved kissing Hollander with the taste of himself on his tongue, but he didn't want to come in his mouth again. Or not yet, at least.

He picked Hollander up, his weight noticeable but not a hindrance to Ilya, and Hollander buried his face in the tilt of his neck and squeezed. His hard cock, pressing through sweatpants, was a firm and eager tease against Ilya's stomach. His own cock pressed against the rough fabric of his jeans as he carried Hollander to the hotel bed and tore his clothes off with eager assistance. He laughed when Hollander's eyes followed the discarded trail, fingers twitching as if he might just get up and fold them.

To distract him, Ilya put his mouth on Hollander's cock and luxuriated in the spew of obvious profanity that followed. Hollander was not half as crass on the ice as the majority of the league, but in bed, pretty French and Québécoise curses fell from his lips like dewdrops.

Ilya kissed his way back up his body, encouraging him to turn over on his stomach, loving the feel of his cock pressed to the firm, round muscles of Hollander's ass as he lay half on top of him. "Don't be too loud," Ilya whispered into his ear, taking the lobe between his teeth. "If you start gibbering in French, it will be very obvious who I have in here."

"Fuck off," Hollander managed in English, his breath hitching when Ilya's fingers trailed down between his cheeks.

"Do you ever touch yourself here?"

Hollander did not respond other than to whine.

But Hollander was growing tense, so Ilya stretched up, relieving some of his weight. "You are scared?"

"No," Hollander snapped, muscles going even tighter. He would have to crane his neck to meet Ilya's eyes, and he didn't attempt it.

"No, is okay," Ilya said.

"Shut up," he snapped. "Fuck. I'm—I use—I don't know the word."

“What word?”

“Is a sex word.” Ilya’s grin crept wider. “Gode?” Hollander finally suggested in French, as if it were a question Ilya was capable of answering. “Godemichet?”

“Am I supposed to know your dirty French words?” Ilya asked, pressing their faces cheek to cheek. “Describe for me, please.”

“No,” Hollander said stubbornly.

“Then I think you are saying that you are slut for butt sex,” Ilya hazarded recklessly. “You sleep with all the French boys. You are-”

“No, shut up!” Hollander said, but when Ilya slid his first finger inside, he gasped and arched into the touch. “Is like—plastic toy thing,” he panted into his forearms. “For—for pleasure.”

Ilya paused, delighted. “Dildo?” he suggested.

“I do not know, I already said!”

“Dildo or butt plug,” Ilya hummed. He wished he had lube. Hollander was tight as a drum. “What color? Come on, Hollander, colors is, like, language lessons first week of class. Is big? Big or small? Do you leave it inside or ride it like a cock? These are easy words, you should know the answer!”

But Hollander’s eyes were screwed shut in pleasure, and Ilya didn’t want to tease him anymore.

He kissed his ear. Then the corner of his jaw. “Do you want?” he asked, moving his finger gently in and out.

Hollander took a minute to answer. “Not here.”

“Something to look forward to, then,” Ilya grinned, and Hollander did not object. He did clench down on Ilya’s knuckle, though.

Again, it was easy to let their bodies do the talking.

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Before their next game in Montreal, Ilya texted “Jane” for the first time.

I need your address.

Good. Simple, short, clear words. Not even Hollander could misunderstand him.

Hollander must have had a similar idea, because he responded with a succinct, *No*.

And Ilya was so stupid that it made him grin. *Fuck off. Give me your address. I know you want it.* Nothing from Hollander for two minutes, which was as long as Ilya’s patience lasted.

Our flight back to Boston is same night as game, he texted. I will not have time afterward.

Good, Hollander answered right away.

Good? Is that what you really think Hollander?

Hollander responded with a street name and a numbered address. That is the back alley of the building. Text me when you are nearby and I will let you in so no one sees.

Ilya rolled his eyes (of course Hollander texted in full sentences), but he was already on his feet, grabbing his jacket off the armchair in the corner of the hotel room.

Cliff, an older player on the team with whom Ilya roomed at all their away games, glanced up. “Going somewhere, rook?” he asked with a smirk.

“Duty calls,” Ilya sang, strutting toward the door.

“You have a curfew,” Cliff said.

“Cover for me, okay?”

Cliff scoffed and, before the door shut, called, “At least wear a condom, for fuck’s sake, rook!”

Ilya laughed.

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“You will murder me.”

“What?” Hollander looked baffled even as he hauled Ilya into the dingy stairwell and shoved him up against the wall. “I can never understand you—you speak so fast and with your accent.”

Ilya laughed in his face. He liked the way Hollander’s arm was braced across his chest and he pushed into it, closer. “I think I distract you,” he purred. “I think is your fault. You blame English, blah, blah, blah.” He took Hollander’s ear between his teeth, the delicate lobe, and bit. Hollander held very, very still, but he shuddered. “I hear your interviews. You are so polite, so sweet. Yet around me, I think, I make you lose your words.” His hand found the front of Hollander’s pants, cock already growing hard. “Does it still embarrass you?” he breathed, nose tucked into the short, sweet-smelling hair at Hollander’s temple.

His tongue flicked out and traced the rim of his ear.

Hollander shuddered again. “You are—rude,” he said, clearly disgruntled. Ilya laughed again, and Hollander pouted. “Upstairs,” he ordered, using his substantial strength to yank Ilya off the wall and shove him toward the stairs.

They raced each other up, fast enough that they were both out of breath when they stumbled into Hollander’s apartment, but it was fine. They didn’t need air because they didn’t need

words.

By the time Ilya pushed into Hollander's body for the first time, they were both too out of their minds with pleasure to manage any English at all.

Ilya touched Hollander's face. He wanted to press the pad of his thumb to the thin skin of his eyelid and press, just to prove how gentle he could be. "Ty idealen," he murmured. *You're perfect.* Hollander blinked his eyes open. "Is still good?" he asked, pretending he had spoken in Russian by accident. "Still okay?"

"C'est parfait," Hollander gasped, head tilting back. "Um, um—yes. Yes, very good."

Ilya kissed him. "I told you it would fit."

Hollander murmured something that sounded like all vowels, smooth and shiny, like tumbled rocks. Ilya arched his back so he could kiss Hollander's throat and press his lips to the vibrations in his neck.

+++

Hollander won the Rookie of the Year Award, which they had all known he would. Yes, Ilya's performance had been exceptional, but Shane Hollander was untouchable. He was perfect. Ilya was not.

His speech was eloquent and careful and practiced, in English, of course. His accent sounded no stronger than most of the other Québécoise players. He talked about gratitude and hard work and Ilya had to fight off a sneer at how disingenuous it was. Who had written it for him, he wondered. Who had practiced with him to pronounce his 'h's, his 'th's? Who was telling him to take his voice away?

Ilya did not want to celebrate such a hollow victory, so he escaped as soon as he could.

Hollander found him on the roof anyway, walking up to him with slow, heavy steps. "It's, uh, very high," he said as he joined Ilya at the railing.

Ilya gave him an incredulous look, and Hollander winced. But internally, Ilya's heart raced at his clumsy, foolish English. He was conditioned to love it by that point.

"Wow," Ilya drawled. "And people say you are the smartest in the league?"

"Shut up," Hollander said, already so red. "I am very smart in French."

"Da," Ilya muttered, turning back to face the city. "I know the feeling."

"Do you?"

"Yes," Ilya said. "But you made a good show of it with your big speech. Sounded very... rehearsed."

"I did rehearse," Hollander said, landing hard on the *re-*. "What, did you not?"

“I did not win,” Ilya said, “so I think we will never know.”

“It could have gone to either one of us.”

“It went to you.” He wished he had a cigarette. Hollander would probably complain about the smell. Ilya realized that if it meant this night would not end, and he did not have to board a plane to Russia in the morning, he would listen to Hollander complain in any language for hours. Forever. “Probably because you are the type to rehearse grateful acceptance speeches and I am not.”

Hollander did not respond right away. Ilya was forced to look back at him and saw the confused lines on his forehead, the hazy, drunken distance in his eyes. “Sorry,” Hollander murmured, flushed and pretty. “Your English... you speak so fast.”

Hollander was the only person who ever complimented Ilya’s English. “Thanks. You do much better when you aren’t so drunk. I am more used to it than you.”

Hollander just hummed. Ilya did not care enough to fill the silence.

But Hollander somehow brought up exactly what he was thinking about. Telepathy, Ilya supposed again.

“I am going to France,” Hollander said. “With my grands-parents, in Lyon. You are to Moscow?”

“Yes,” Ilya said tersely.

Hollander shifted. “Still far apart,” he said quietly. “I guess probably we will not see each other until next year. Next season.”

“No,” Ilya said quietly. “No, we won’t.”

Hollander’s fingers flexed on the railing. This was the drunkest Ilya had ever seen him. He cleared his throat, though the sound was nearly lost beneath the high-altitude wind. “Tu vas me manquer.”

“I don’t fucking speak French, Hollander,” Ilya snapped.

“I know,” Hollander said. “I do not speak Russian.”

They stared at each other.

Ilya pushed off the railing and grabbed the lapels of Hollander’s suit. He pushed and pushed until he had Hollander against the wall, their mouths together, sounds swallowed into each other’s stomachs.

Better than words. It was so much easier to do this than stumble side-by-side, trying to explain themselves in a language that didn’t feel like home.

Shoving his tongue in Hollander's mouth made more sense than trying to use it to speak words.

And Hollander let him, for a while. Not just their mouths, but their hands, grasping. Hollander put one hand on the nape of his neck and the other on his jaw like he wanted to hold Ilya in place forever, like they would not soon be boarding separate flights to Europe but to different countries. Ilya slid his hands down to Hollander's waist, beneath his jacket, fingers grasping expensive fabric and pushing up, up, wanting to get at skin. It was better when they were bare. When nothing could come between them. He wanted it so badly—he wanted Hollander, wanted to speak a language they both knew intrinsically, a language known only by the two of them.

Hollander's fingers were firm. They caressed him, held him, pushed him back and stopped Ilya from kissing him again.

Ilya opened his eyes. The colorful lighting from the city below cast an ambient glow on Hollander's profile, catching the strong, straight line of his nose, but most of his face was shadowed by Ilya's head. Their foreheads touched.

"What—" Hollander managed, then broke off.

Where are your pretty rehearsed speeches now? Ilya wanted to mock, but honestly, he didn't have the words either.

Let our bodies talk, he wanted to beg him. *They do it so well. They are fluent.*

Even in the dim light, he could see Hollander's freckles.

He tried to kiss him again, but Hollander held him away.

"Anyone," Hollander panted, "anyone could see. What are you thinking? What are you *thinking?*" he demanded, suddenly angry, like they weren't still pressed together.

"I'm thinking that I don't care if they see because I want you so badly," Ilya told him. He said it in Russian. It felt good to admit, to say, knowing that he would not be understood.

Hollander's eyes narrowed. He opened his mouth. Fittingly, he answered in French, quick and cutting, and the tirade filled the air around them without penetrating through Ilya's ears.

But he heard, or imagined that he heard, the subtext beneath language.

"Let me have you like this," Ilya said, meeting his eyes, pretending that this was a real conversation. *"Let me have you. Let me do what I want to you before I have to go home and I don't get to have anything anymore. I want you. Do you want me?"*

"Oui, oui, et moi—" Hollander cut himself off with a brisk click of his tongue and looked away. "J'ai tellement peur et tu fais comme si tu ne savais pas pourquoi."

Ilya touched his cheek. *"Why can't we understand each other?"* he asked.

“It does not work like that,” Hollander said, finally in English. Ilya’s breath caught, thinking for a moment that Hollander had understood him. And maybe he had, but not because he knew Russian. Hollander’s eyes, so close to Ilya’s, flickered down to his Adam’s apple, and Ilya swallowed. “It does not work like... this.”

“Like what?” Ilya asked, just to be an asshole.

Hollander shoved him away, pulling out from his pinned position between Ilya and the wall. Ilya wondered if Hollander would kiss him after shoving him like that, really take charge, if just for the night. Ilya would have welcomed it. Welcomed it all.

But Hollander let go. It was summer, and the night was warm, but Ilya felt the chill Hollander left behind.

He turned and walked away silently.

“See you next season,” Ilya called. He kept walking. “Hollander?” He had to try. “Au revoir, Hollander.”

The words sounded awful in his accent. Alone in the shadows, he winced at himself, wishing he could take it back.

But Hollander stopped.

He looked over his shoulder, the light catching on his beautiful profile, and Ilya’s heart thudded in his chest like a siren alerting him to danger, but it was far too late for warnings.

Hollander cleared his throat. “Do svidaniya, Rozanov,” he said, just loud enough for the words to carry, and Russian sounded so beautiful with his French lilt that it hurt a little less when he turned and walked away, disappearing just like he had in Saskatchewan through a heavy metal door that clanged shut behind him. Silence fell.

Ilya tilted his head back, resting the crown of his skull on the concrete wall he was leaning against. There were no stars above him, not in the city.

He pictured Hollander’s freckles instead.

End Notes

As both their English improves, I imagine that they would more closely follow canon than “I’m Reading Your Lips,” but if you have any ideas or scenes you thought of, let me know in the comments, i’m always inspired by them and I might continue some day! I hope this little rewrite was fun to read. I’m extremely endeared by writing about language, as you can probably tell lol. (Also, if it wasn’t clear—Shane’s English is actually much better than portrayed here, he just gets completely tongue-tied around Ilya and reverts back to French.)

Edit: Thank you to Frogg and tryskelyon (airwine) for tips on the French!

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