and I became hypnotized by freckles and bright eyes, tongue-tied

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and I became hypnotized by freckles and bright eyes, tongue-tied

by XOLove47

Summary

After meeting Shane Hollander, Ilya Rozanov decides that he needs to learn the English word for freckles. It feels important.

Or, five times Ilya secretly fixated on Shane's freckles and one time he said something.

Notes

I saw a post on Threads that said Ilya would have had to look up the word for freckles at some point and this plot bunny was born.

See the end of the work for more notes

i.

All Ilya Rozanov wanted was a few minutes to himself. Away from his teammates, away from his coaches, away from organizers trying to speak English to him. The cigarette in his hand was just an added bonus.

Apparently, though, that was too much to ask because someone was currently walking towards him.

But when that person stuck his hand out and introduced himself as Shane Hollander, his interest was piqued.

He wasn't sure what he expected the Canadian phenom to look like, but it wasn't this.

Shane Hollander was wearing a toque, black hair peeking out slightly. Ilya sized him up and proudly noted that he was taller than the other player.

But what truly caught his eye were the spots that dusted his cheeks like stars, the *vesnushki*.

He tried to keep up with what the Canadian was saying, but English words were jumbled in his head. So he stuck to mostly monosyllabic answers, just to be on the safe side. He realized that this probably made him seem like an asshole, but considering he was an asshole that wasn't really a problem.

Still he must have scared the other boy off, because Hollander just shook his hand again and started to retreat.

Ilya couldn't help himself, "You will not be so nice when we beat you."

Hollander's eyes brightened at the challenge. "Not gonna happen."

*

Later, in the handshake line after Russia had, in fact, beaten Canada, he couldn't help chirping in Hollander's ear, "See you at the draft."

He smiled to himself. He'd never admit it to anyone else, but the promise of seeing Hollander again was almost as exciting as the prospect of being the first overall pick.

Almost.

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ii.

Ilya smiled as he walked into the small hotel gym and saw Hollander pedaling on one of the exercise bikes.

He had just been hoping to expend some of the excess energy he had built up before he went to bed, but this was so much better.

Draft day had been a lot. Being chosen number 1 was exhilarating but had quickly been brought back down to earth by his father. He had thought that maybe this would be the thing that would finally make his father proud of him, but no. He was still disappointed that he wasn't going to be playing in the KHL. Of course, that wouldn't stop either him or Alexei from drawing on his American salary.

At least this time next year, he'd be far, far away from both of them.

He straddled the bike next to Hollander and began pedaling, matching his speed.

Hollander finally looked over at him and kicked into a higher gear. Ilya racketed it up another notch. This continued for a few minutes, until they both gave up, chests heaving.

The pair collapsed on the floor, facing each other. Ilya raked his eyes over the other man hungrily.

The workout had left Hollander flushed. The light sheen of sweat made his *vesnushki* shine brighter.

Talking with Hollander was surprisingly easy, despite the language barrier. The league seemed intent on playing up the rivalry, but in these quiet moments, he thought maybe Hollander was the one person who could maybe understand him, given the chance.

Was that curiosity in Hollander's eyes? He could feel the other man's gaze on him as he swallowed a gulp of water.

He noticed that Hollander didn't have one of his own. He held out the water bottle, offering a sip. Hollander shook his head, declining. But Ilya just shook the bottle— and this time Hollander agreed.

There was a spark when their fingers brushed, as he handed him the bottle.

The air remained charged. He thought maybe he detected something that looked like hunger in Hollander's eyes, as they drifted down, settling briefly on his bulge. He filed that away in his mind for later.

When Hollander passed the bottle back, their fingers brushed again.

Ilya couldn't help himself, he took the last swig of water and winked at him.

Maybe Hollander wasn't so boring after all.

*

Back in his room, he hopped in the shower. He had pushed himself harder than he intended to in the gym, thanks to Hollander. He was sweaty and gross (and okay, maybe half hard).

As he stroked his cock, an image of Hollander, flushed and sweaty, *vesnushki* stark against his skin, popped into his head. He came hard against his hand.

A towel slung low on his hips, Ilya plopped down on the bed and grabbed his phone from the nightstand. Pulling up Google, he typed “vesnushki english” into the search bar.

Huh.

Freckles.

He turned the word over in his mind. English was a strange, often ugly language. But this word, he liked. It was… cute.

His next thought came to him, unbidden.

Just like Shane Hollander.

Oh yeah, Ilya was in trouble. Good thing he liked trouble.

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iii.

It was perfectly normal to suggest to a brand that you film a commercial with your rival, so you can have an excuse to see him again before the season starts.

That was what Ilya kept telling himself anyway.

The morning had been hectic, full of things like wardrobe and make-up and boring conversations that he only half-understood (or paid attention to).

So the first time he got to see Hollander was when they skated towards each other for the first take.

Looking at the other man under the bright stage lights, he was horrified to note that he couldn’t see his freckles. He assumed they were caked under the make-up that had been forced upon them both.

“You look pretty,” Ilya complimented.

Because he did. Even if the make-up covered up his beautiful freckles.

Hollander clearly bristled at being called pretty, but it was just objectively true. In fact, he might be the prettiest man Ilya has ever seen.

The director kept having them repeat the face-off, barking nonsense like “more intensity” at them, but with each take, it felt more and more ridiculous.

Once that first laugh escaped past Ilya’s lips, it was like a dam had broken and he couldn’t bottle it back up. Hollander’s laughter mixed with his own and he felt a not-small amount of pride at getting the professional and buttoned up Canadian to break.

The director gave up and called cut, saying they had what they needed.

*

Unfortunately, the director had kept him behind to film a few more solo shots (probably as a punishment, Ilya grumbled), so Hollander had beat him to the locker room. He could hear the shower in the distance, so he quickly stripped so he could join him.

Walking in the shower, the first Ilya saw Hollander's firm ass. It was better than he had imagined (and he had imagined it more than he cared to admit over the past year).

Turning to face the other man, he was relieved to see that water had washed away the make-up and the little spots that he had become so obsessed with were once again visible on the other man's cheeks.

Ilya could feel Hollander's eyes on him. The direct violation of locker room code was the first real indication that maybe he felt this pull between them too.

Then Hollander snuck another glance and had the audacity to fucking blush, making his freckles pop even more.

This was the point of no return. Anything up until now could be brushed off, dismissed as teasing between rivals.

But Ilya wasn't known for backing down from a challenge— or denying himself pleasure.

So he grabbed his cock and gave it a firm tug. He kept stroking it, as he maintained eye contact with Hollander.

The other man was transfixed. Ilya could see the naked want in his eyes, until suddenly he turned away, embarrassed.

"Not here."

That wasn't a no.

Ilya stayed behind to… finish. He did so quickly not wanting to miss his chance with Hollander.

Still, by the time he entered the main part of the locker room, Hollander was fully dressed again.

Pity.

Hollander was sputtering that they should just forget what happened in the showers.

"Is that what you want?"

"For sure."

He really was a terrible liar. His face, with that blush and those freckles, was too expressive for his own good.

“What’s your room number?”

“1410.”

Ilya grinned at how quickly he responded. He pushed him further, posing a hypothetical where he came to his door at 9:00.

“I might open.”

“I might knock.”

*

Hollander opened the door, looking nervous. It was cute.

He really thought Hollander might chicken out.

Ilya lightly guided him to the wall, pressing him up against it.

“This is such a bad idea,” Hollander said.

He didn’t disagree, but he couldn’t bring himself to care.

He grabbed his face and pressed a kiss to his lips, soft at first but it quickly got hungrier, more desperate.

Ilya pulled back to shed his jacket, and soon after his tank top. Hollander’s shirt came off at some point as well.

And then Hollander surprised him— he dropped to the floor, pulled his cock out and began to suck him off.

It was sloppy and Hollander was clearly inexperienced. But the sight of him on his knees, looking up at Ilya with those eyes and his stupid, beautiful freckles glowing in the warm light of the hotel room more than made up for any shortcomings in his technique. It was too much, too *good*.

He pulled him back up to his feet and gave him a kiss.

Hollander definitely made him curious.

This was going to be fun.

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iv.

“I should go.”

“Or you could stay.”

Ilya had been planning this all week, waiting to mention it until after sex when Hollander was pliant and happy.

This thing had been going on between them for years, but they had never spent more than a couple of stolen hours together.

But their schedules had finally aligned to let them possibly spend the night together and Ilya was going to seize it.

He kissed and cajoled, until Shane relented.

“Okay.”

“Okay.”

He smiled and pulled him into a spooning position, settling in for a nap.

*

Waking up with Shane in his arms felt like a dream.

From this vantage point, he could almost count the individual freckles on Shane’s cheeks.

He’d be content to stay here for the rest of the day, but then Shane’s eyes fluttered open.

It felt like a privilege to get to see him like this after so many years. Something precious.

“I’m hungry,” Ilya whined.

“For what?” Shane teased.

The answer was both. Always. But food first.

“For food, you pervert.”

*

Eating together was rare enough. Sharing a meal that he had cooked was uncharted territory altogether.

Ilya watched Shane carefully, trying to gauge whether he enjoyed it. He wanted him to feel comfortable here. With him.

After they were done, Ilya pulled Shane back towards him, laying his head on his chest.

They didn’t cuddle. It was another luxury they usually couldn’t afford. It was too soft, too familiar.

It was also really, really nice.

Ilya played with Shane's hair, softly carding his fingers through his tresses. He dropped a kiss to the top of his head.

When Shane began to take an interest in the tent that was starting to pitch in his sweatpants, it should have felt like moving back into safe territory. But even this felt different. New.

Shane tugged off the black t-shirt he had borrowed from Ilya and moved to straddle Ilya.

After all this time, Shane knew exactly what he liked, what buttons to press.

But Shane, the man who hated messiness, holding out his hand for Ilya to spit in and slick their cocks together was something else entirely.

The friction felt too good and his brain short circuited. The name passed his lips accidentally.

"Shane."

He had started referring to Hollander in his head as Shane a while ago. He was bound to slip up eventually.

But then, Shane moaned back, "Ilya."

His eyes flew open. Hearing his first name from Shane's mouth for the first time sent a bolt of electricity through him.

Shane's freckles, those beautiful freckles, were mere inches from his face. He nuzzled Shane's cheek with his nose, completely blissed out.

And then of course, everything went to shit, because Ilya wasn't allowed to have nice things. And Shane was the *nicest* thing.

Shane bolted up and fumbled with some excuse about a morning practice he had forgotten about.

"Hollander."

Maybe if he used that name enough he could erase the Shane that had slipped past his lips—and go back to the way things were.

"Hollander."

Please don't go.

Stay.

His unspoken pleas fell on deaf ears. Hollander was

And, Ilya was alone. Again.

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v.

Ilya stood in the doorway of Shane's hospital room, the door closing with a click behind him.

He had barely slept the night before. He kept refreshing Twitter for any scrap of news. Waiting until visiting hours had been torture.

But here Shane was, alert and apparently, mostly okay.

"Ilya!" Shane exclaimed.

He looked so happy to see him. He was also, apparently, high off his ass. So he couldn't exactly be trusted.

His emotions were so all over the place that he stumbled over asking how Shane was feeling.

"Concussion and a fractured collarbone. Out for the playoffs, but…" Shane trailed off.

"Could have been worse," Ilya finished for him.

"Could have been worse," Shane confirmed.

Shane noisily gestured towards Ilya, wanting him to come closer. He crossed the room to his bedside and Shane instinctively grabbed his hand.

Shane looked so small laying in the hospital bed. The bruises on his face somehow highlighted his freckles, making them stand out on his pale skin.

"You scared me."

That admission in and of itself was scary. It meant that he cared.

He couldn't help himself. He reached out and softly brushed Shane's cheek, those beautiful freckles, with a tenderness that he didn't usually let himself show.

Shane was apologizing for not texting him the night before. Ilya brushed him off, he had nothing to apologize for.

"Willyoucometomycottagethissummer?" Shane asked, blurting out the question all in one breath.

He rambled on about how private the cottage was and how much fun they would have.

That was the problem. He knew they would. But to get a taste of what could be and then have to go back to stolen moments and clandestine meetings would be hell.

"Hollander, you know we can't do that."

But god, he wanted to.

He couldn’t bring himself to say no, but he couldn’t say yes either. So he took the cowards way out and said maybe.

The nurse coming into check on Shane gave him cover to retreat before he could say something stupid. Like that he loved him.

Shane was okay, that was enough for now.

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vi.

The whole ride to Shane’s cottage felt like he had fallen into one of his dreams.

They had never driven in a car together in the almost 10 years that they had known each other.

Ilya smiled. There probably would be a lot of those little firsts during this trip.

The enormity of this step that they were taking, spending two uninterrupted weeks together, hung in the air between them.

Ilya kept sneaking glances over at Shane in the driver’s seat. After years of late night hookups, getting to see Shane in full daylight was something he’d never get over. His freckles almost glowed.

“Thank you for inviting me.”

Shane took his eyes off the road for a second to look over at him, a nervous smile on his face.

“I'm glad you're here.”

“Me too, but also, like, terrified, yeah?” Ilya confessed.

It felt good to finally put words to it.

Shane continued to explain that his plan to keep his parents away involved telling them he was on a silent retreat.

A true, unbridled laugh was ripped from Ilya’s lungs, breaking the tension in the car.

“Does that sound fake?”

“It would, from anyone but you,” he said, a fond smile spreading up to his cheeks.

He suddenly had this overwhelming need to touch Shane. Ilya grabbed Shane’s hand from the gearshift and interlaced their fingers.

Ilya had touched Shane countless times, knew his body intimately, but this, holding his hand in his lap somehow felt more real, more intimate than all of those touches combined.

*

The cottage felt like Shane. It was bright and open and the complete antithesis of the dark hotel rooms they had spent so much time in.

He could tell Shane was proud of what he had built, but also so nervous. The result was that he prattled on about groceries and wells and a whole host of other things that Ilya didn't care about at the moment.

Ilya crossed the short distance between them and cradled Shane's face in his hands. He brushed those freckles softly with his thumbs before leaning down and pressing a kiss to his lip.

Shane guided them over to the couch.

In between kisses, Shane was explaining that he might not last, that he hadn't been with anyone in months.

"Same." Ilya reached for Shane's waistband, impatient to get in his pants.

But he was stilled by the look of pure joy that bloomed on Shane's face when he read between the lines of what Ilya had said.

It wasn't that big of a deal. Ilya hadn't wanted anyone besides Shane for a long time.

(It was, in fact, a very big deal.)

*

Ilya had fucked up by bringing up marrying Svetlana. He knew that by the unshed tears currently swimming in Shane's eyes.

But he could fix this. Ilya pulled himself up into a seated position so he could look at Shane in the eye.

"I have this problem. I like women, yes?"

"Yeah, I know," Shane grumbled.

"And everywhere I go, I'm surrounded by beautiful women. And they love me."

"Sounds rough."

Shane still couldn't see where he was going with this.

"Yes, it is. Listen. These women, they're so sexy and fun," Ilya paused. "But I am always thinking about this slow fucking hockey player with beautiful freckles. And a weak backhand."

Of course, the weak backhand comment was what Shane responded to. But Ilya saw a soft shy smile on his lips as he finally started to get what he was trying to say.

“I am always wishing these women were him,” Ilya confessed. “It’s a terrible problem, no?”

“Do you want that problem to go away?”

Shane still seemed unsure.

“I don’t ever want that problem to ever go away.”

The admission hung in the air, until Shane begged him not to marry and that they could figure something else out.

”Okay.”

It was easy to agree. It’s not like Ilya *wanted* to marry anyone else.

*

Later, Shane had moved from the other side of the couch to tuck himself next to Ilya, his head laying on his chest.

Ilya raked his hand through Shane’s hair, not unlike that afternoon on his couch before everything went to hell.

“You really like my freckles?”

Ilya tilted Shane’s chin up, so he could look him in the eye. “Like? I think I called them beautiful, no?”

“I can’t imagine why. I’ve always hated them.”

“No, no, no, Shane. I don’t believe this. I have been, umm, obsessed with them since I met you. I had to look up the word for freckles, that is how obsessed I was.”

To punctuate his point, Ilya lightly, reverently caressed Shane’s cheek.

Shane still looked unconvinced. “But why?”

“Because they’re, how you say, stunning? They take my breath away. Because they’re a part of you,” Ilya shrugged. “I think one day, I’d like to kiss each one. Count each individual freckle.”

“You’re ridiculous.”

Ilya bit back the retort that rattled around in his brain.

But you love me anyway.

“Maybe I start now? We have time, no?”

Ilya climbed on top of Shane, bracketing his body with his arms.

“One.”

Ilya dropped a soft kiss to the freckle highest on Shane’s cheek.

“Two.”

He pressed another kiss to his face, this one to the top of his nose.

“Three.”

Shane blushed, “Ilya…”

Ilya sighed dramatically, “You make me lose track. I’m going to have to start again.”

Ilya went back to lazily kissing Shane’s freckles, but he soon got distracted by the other man palming his cock through his pants.

The task at hand abandoned, the two men raced towards the bedroom, shedding clothes along the way.

Counting Shane’s freckles will just need to wait until another day.

End Notes

Heated Rivalry has gotten me back to my fangirl roots and dusting off my ao3 account. But I haven't written anything in almost two years, so I hope this wasn't too terrible!

I'm on threads/IG @inmyromantasyera if you want to come chat about Heated Rivalry with me.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!