how the heart beats

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by rosycheeked

Summary

> “Worried?” said Shane. “Oh, no, I wouldn’t say I was worried. Just curious, I guess.”
>
> It was his worried voice. His thinking-too-hard voice. But Ilya was a nice boyfriend, so he wouldn’t point it out. “Curious about what, then?”
>
> “Well, like I said earlier,” Shane said. “You cried. When I…when I said I love you.”

Shane wants a debrief on the whole love confession thing. Ilya thinks Shane is nosy (recently he has learned to say this), but he is not in the habit of saying no to his boyfriend, so...feelings it is.

Notes

helloooo friends old and new,

ilya and shane have captured my heart and my soul and my imagination. love is real again. so i am back, yes, back for the foreseeable future, who cheered! i just love when they talk about their feelings :)

this fic is titled after hayley williams' song "whim," which is so ilya and shane to me. please enjoy!!!

bare feet on the concrete
freckles on your knees
searching for a bloodstain
bandages are clean
baby, take it easy
following a whim
listen how the heart beats
lying next to him

See the end of the work for more notes

“You cried,” said Shane.

Ilya looked at him. They were at the fire pit again, hip pressed to hip. Shane was looking far away, seeing somewhere else. Not trees, not glittering night sky. He was beautiful, yes, lit by the flames. Ilya thought this easily and without the usual accompanying flare of pain. A miracle. One of many in only the past few days.

Shane did not go on. Ilya nudged him with his foot, gently, then with his shoulder, harder.

“You forget your words?” Ilya teased. “Already you say so little, Hollander. Soon you will say nothing at all. Ah! I will miss the lovely sound of your voice.”

“Shut up,” Shane said.

“Finally!” Ilya crowed, because he knew this would annoy Shane further. Then he sighed. “Okay, you want to have serious conversation, yes? I will be serious.”

Shane looked at him, then. He was smiling a little, so Ilya was happy. “You don’t look too serious.”

“Not true!” said Ilya. “How do you know? This could be my serious face. Smile can be serious.”

“Uh huh.” Shane smiled a little more. This was better.

Ilya scooted in a little closer, settling in, tucking his feet between Shane’s calves. “Okay, tell me now. You are worried?”

“Worried?” said Shane. “Oh, no, I wouldn’t say I was worried. Just curious, I guess.”

It was his worried voice. His thinking-too-hard voice. But Ilya was a nice boyfriend, so he wouldn’t point it out. “Curious about what, then?”

“Well, like I said earlier,” Shane said. “You cried. When I…when I said I love you.”

“Ah, was before that,” Ilya corrected. “When you say you love me, I am crying already. Can barely see you. It is a shame, yes?”

“So you, I mean, you knew I was going to say it back, or what?” Shane asked, predictably ignoring almost all of what Ilya had said. “Why were you…I know it was a big moment, you know, for us—”

“Very big moment,” Ilya echoed, pressing a kiss to Shane’s shoulder, the closest part of him he could reach.

Shane laughed a little. “Okay, yeah, sure. So what was it, then?”

Ilya sighed. “You are so nosy, Hollander.”

“Nosy!” Shane said, playfully offended. “Who taught you that?”

“You would love to know,” Ilya drawled, “wouldn’t you?”

“Oh, come on, Ilya.”

He raised both eyebrows, playing innocent. “Shane.”

“You said you’d be—”

“Ah, serious, yes, okay,” Ilya said, waving him off. “I cry because I am big softie. I never thought you would…I don’t know. Would want me hanging around so long. Maybe you get sick of me.”

“I invited you to come to my house,” said Shane. “To sleep in my bed. To—” He cut himself off at Ilya’s expression. “Okay, fine, not just to sleep. But you get my point! What about that said casual to you?”

“Not *casual*,” Ilya huffed. “Fucking in hotel room was casual. Coming to cottage, this is real. But there is big difference between asking to spend two weeks of summer fucking at your house and asking to spend rest of our careers together, no? First one is just for now. Second one—I did not think you would want.”

“And after,” said Shane softly, his eyes finding Ilya’s, meaningful in a way that made Ilya want desperately to look away. But he couldn’t look away. “The rest of our careers and after.”

“You are crazy, Hollander,” said Ilya, voice suddenly hoarse. He found the strength to close his eyes, to turn away from Shane just for a moment. Collected himself. One day he would teach Shane every Russian word he knew, and then he would never have to fight his way through saying these things in English again. “When I am twelve, and I find my mother dead in her bed,” he went on at last, “I think to myself, ‘This is it, Ilya. You have thrown it away, you will never be loved like that again.’”

“Like what?” Shane said. Ilya was never going to be able to get out a whole story in a row again, not with all of these questions. And he was so happy about this! Another miracle.

“Ah,” said Ilya, waving a hand. “The love my mother has for me, it is free. Safe. Like when I see her, when she smiles at me, I am home. So when I saw her with empty bottle of pills, it was like somebody saying, ‘You. You can never go home again.’”

Shane opened his mouth, but Ilya was already shaking his head, barreling on. “Yes, yes, I go back to Russia. I go back many times. But it is not home. Not really. Not since my mother…” He tilted his head back to watch the sky, the wash of stars. Swallowed. The way Shane looked at him now was very heavy, like a stone in Ilya’s chest. A stone he was glad to carry. But heavy all the same.

“And I met you,” said Ilya. “Okay, I am skipping big part of the story. I run away to America, play hockey, blah, blah, blah. You know this part.”

“Yeah, I know this part,” Shane said. He was not following, Ilya could tell. Well, not yet.

“Listen. Listen,” said Ilya. “I came to America very prepared to be alone. Is lonely, no? Well, there is Svetlana, but she does not play hockey, and I already know I cannot love her the way she loves me. I have tried this many times. So all along I am carrying around this—this idea, that I will never go home again. I am lost. There is nothing for me but playing hockey, mailing money back to ungrateful family, sending text messages to my annoying rival who I fuck a few times a year. I win most of the time, so this is good enough.

“Then I fall in love with you.” Ilya’s voice cracked. The same tears Shane was so curious about, now they were back again. “I think you found me, Hollander. I think that is why I cried. Because when I was loving you, I was cursing it. Why would you want—why would you love—this?” He waved to himself, his body, too strong to house such a weak heart. “So I could not tell you. But you are saying these things, you want to spend your whole life with me—you are Shane Hollander, you could have anybody, even movie star—and I am thinking maybe there is hope after all. I know you do not make plans until you are very sure.”

Shane snorted. “Right,” he said.

Ilya threw up his hands, pretending to surrender. “Do not act like is untrue! You stayed up all night making this plan. You wake me up to tell me, ‘Ilya, next twenty years of my life for you, I will build the whole thing around you, no problem.’” He looked back at Shane again; Shane was still looking at him like there was nothing more important to look at in the whole world. “I think you would cry also, Hollander. No? If you have spent this long believing no such thing will ever happen to you?”

“Ilya,” Shane murmured. It sounded like *I’m sorry*, which Ilya hated. But he understood. If he was Hollander he would probably feel sorry too.

“When you tell me you love me too, and you hold me,” Ilya said, and he really turned and wrapped his arms around Shane, then, touched their foreheads together, “I feel it in my heart. I am home there.”

“That’s really beautiful,” said Shane quietly, leaning back, searching Ilya’s eyes for something. “I didn’t know you thought about it like that.” He touched Ilya’s face quickly, settling himself or Ilya, he didn’t know. “Honestly. That’s really fucking poetic. I’m like *home* to you? I thought—even if you’re not planning on going back to Russia, you’ve lived in Boston for years—”

Ilya scoffed. Loudly. “Fucking Boston? You are kidding with this.”

“Well, no!” said Shane, laughing a little. “Plenty of people, like, live somewhere for a while and then feel at home there. It’s not that crazy, Ilya.”

“Not that crazy,” Ilya muttered. “I am trying to tell you that in Russia, in Boston, no one knows me there, I go home to empty house. But when I see you—that is home! And you are trying to tell me I should be in love with Boston instead?”

Shane shoved him lightly. “Fuck off!”

“Eh, Hollander?”

“Hey,” said Shane, taking Ilya’s hands with his, “I love you, too, okay? I feel like…I always feel more like myself with you. Like when I’m with you, I’m all of me again, instead of—I don’t know, whatever act I put on for everyone else. You just—see me.”

“I know you,” Ilya said. “For seven, eight years I know you. Even before, I watch you play on TV, I know your moves, the way you think. Your body when you want something or when you’re scared. And you know me like this too.”

“I do,” said Shane, almost glowing with it, and kissed him. It was idle, slow stuff, not going anywhere, just two people happy to be in each other’s company.

After a few moments Shane stopped kissing back, then pulled away, eyebrows scrunched up in thought.

“Is there problem, Hollander?” Ilya deadpanned, though he knew very well Shane was still thinking about the question he’d asked before, which it was possible Ilya had not really answered. And even if he had, it was possible Shane simply had one of his many follow-up questions. He loved his *Why*s and his *How*s and his *And then*s, anyway.

“Seven or eight years means this whole time,” said Shane, sure enough.

Ilya raised his eyebrows.

“You were keeping track of my…”

“What you like, what you don’t like, what your parents like, what they don’t like, what you want, don’t want, yes,” Ilya said with a shrug. It was a lot easier to say all this in the arms of this new Shane who Ilya had told that he loved, who Ilya knew loved him. But he still had to put on a bit of a show of carelessness. Before now he had gone to a lot of trouble to make sure Shane would not know exactly what Ilya was telling him now.

“Wow. Wow,” said Shane, in an uncanny copy of his father when they’d broken the news of their relationship at the dining room table. “I think I would probably be creeped out if that wasn’t so flattering.” He laced his fingers with Ilya’s, looked down at their hands. “But…you told my parents you weren’t in love with me? You know. Back when we were rookies.”

Ilya looked down at their hands too. “Is not so simple as in love, not in love, Shane. I want you, I make you stay any way I can. I did not think that—” He had to stop suddenly to breathe. This was why he did not make big confessions. He stuck with *I love you*. Shane was the one with the speeches, the explanations. He had convinced Ilya that there was a future for him here with those speeches. It had not been enough for Ilya to see the beautiful house, his Cokes in the fridge, the lake and the woods, his lover in bed with him night and day, to imagine a beautiful life for himself. It had taken Shane’s words for him to believe.

So now it was Shane’s turn to hold him, one hand on the small of Ilya’s back, the other pressed between them, while Ilya tried to repay the words.

Ilya swallowed. “For so long, I try to replace heart with hockey,” he explained, mostly into Shane’s shoulder, where he could pretend his voice didn’t shake to say this, was just muffled

by Shane's shirt. "And you come along, put my heart back in chest. It hurts. I am not sure if there will be room. But…I love you, so there is."

Shane burrowed his face into Ilya's hair, placing a kiss there. It was soft, like a gift. Shane could not possibly know this, but Ilya's mother would do this too. Make a little space for the kiss before giving it to him.

"Ilya," murmured Shane. Now Ilya knew: this one meant *I love you, too*. It warmed him from the top of his head all the way down. Before, he had not known he was cold. For ten years he had not known he was cold. He had always thought touching Shane, fucking him, beating him at his own game, this was enough. But here Ilya did not have to do anything: he was wanted. Loved.

He let out an embarrassingly wet breath, wiped at his embarrassingly wet eyes, and was not ashamed.

"I am so lucky," he said. "And I am scared, of course. Who would not be scared? I am fucking terrified. You have already given me ten years of your life. Now you are giving me ten more! Twenty! This is unbelievable gift for me, Hollander. I was not hoping for *boyfriend*. I was hoping for—like you said. To love you and not have it fucking kill me. When I am with you it kills me—I cannot say it. When I am not with you it kills me—you are too far away. But now anytime I want to tell you—"

"Shh," Shane whispered, while Ilya choked a little on something like tears. "Thank you for telling me." It sounded like he was crying too, in that way of his where he gathered all of it in his eyes but didn't let any tears fall.

But after all these years, Ilya could hear what Shane was really saying—that it was enough, Ilya was enough. Their bodies knew and their hearts knew. Ilya could even imagine believing in a whole lifetime of this, something terrifying and difficult which had so miraculously made him himself again. Or not himself. A new Ilya, who was happy. Who was going to be happy.

End Notes

thank you for reading, i love you, see you next time which i'm afraid may be quite soon...i have already begun cooking up something else...

until then, mwah <3

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