What I need is you here

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by lafleurdumal

Summary

Coming back to the cottage from Shane's parents, Shane asks Ilya a question.

"When did you know you were in love with me?"

Notes

Just a quick story because this show had overtaken my brain. Slightly self-indulgent.
Title from Santana's Love of my Life.

Shane was having an out of body experience. Coming back to the cottage with Ilya, his boyfriend, after eating lunch at his parents' house had been surreal. Shane, who didn't deal well with changes, couldn't wrap his mind around everything that had happened in the last week. He had a boyfriend. His parents knew he was gay. Ilya had eaten his father's pasta and endured his mother's questioning of his loyalty. And he had done it like it was easy, like it was a given they would end up in that situation. *"I mean, yes. I thinks so, probably."*

The relief he had felt on the way back had been almost disconcerting. He had felt free to touch Ilya, to look at him as much as the road had allowed. The complete opposite of the ride over to his parents. Something in him had come loose, a muscle tension he hadn't realized had been there the whole time. They hadn't talked much, Shane hadn't been ready to put it into words just yet, and Ilya had seemingly followed his direction. But they had held hands, and taking in the sun.

Arriving at the cottage, Shane had been buzzing out of his skin. Too many things happening at once, even though they were good things. They were the best things. Ilya had taking him into his arms, whispering nonsense in his ear. Shane couldn't remember if he had spoken in English or in Russian. He just remembered that low voice, soothing and cutting through the noise in Shane's head. Ilya had taken him to the bedroom, and had very slowly taken him apart. With so much care it had brought tears to Shane's eyes.

They had made love, there were no other words for it. But that was okay, because they loved each other, and Ilya was his boyfriend. They could be tender and affectionate without this familiar sense of doom looming over Shane. For years, he had been scared of his own feelings, of showing too much of these emotions he didn't understand. He had been terrified of asking for too much, only for Ilya to laugh at him. But now, he knew. And Ilya knew. Even his parents knew.

Lying naked on the bed with Ilya on top of him idly caressing his chest, Shane was enjoying the afterglow and his new found ability to ponder calmly his new reality. His thoughts were always a whirlwind of anxiety, of 'what-ifs' and 'should-I-have', intrusive and unrelenting. His mind was not a peaceful place by any mean. When he wasn't going over his game strategies, his regimented routine, his public perception or his standing in the league, he was berating himself for his inability to connect with others the way he had seen his teammates do so easily, and he used to beat himself up over the one person he had been able to connect with in his life. But that voice had been thankfully silenced. And here, with Ilya in his arms, for once in his life, he could take his thoughts one at a time, examine them without choking on fear. They flowed through him, a tranquil river, rustling and full of life.

He thought of his mother, already making plans for their coming out, having adjusted to the news in less time than it took to drive to the cottage from Montreal. *"I am so proud of you"*. He could see his father's apologetic face about having disturbed them. He had apologized for leaving the cottage as he had, but uneasiness in the face of awkward situations ran in the family. And his father had managed to joke with Ilya by the time they had left. Shane was weightless, almost floating, despite having a grown man resting on his chest. He knew that he would soon feel the urge to clean the cottage in preparation for his parents' arrival. But the urgency was still far away.

Ilya was warm, he smelled nice and Shane loved him. He was in love with him. And Ilya was in love with him. He saw his mother's face, astonished. *"Since your rookie season?"* But they hadn't answered that question in the end. He brushed Ilya's golden curls.

"When did it start for you?" he asked quietly.

"When what started?" Ilya asked back in a lazy drawl against Shane's skin.

"When did you know? That you were…" Shane found himself hesitating to say the words. Ilya had basically told his parents that he was in love with him, and he had told him directly that he loved him, in two different languages. Still, Shane was having some difficulty saying it for Ilya, his fear of overstepping once again getting the better of him.

Ilya turned his head to meet his eyes.

"That I was what?"

The boldness of his gaze broke through Shane's doubt. The habit of a lifetime to rise up to this man's challenges.

"In love with me," Shane said finally. "When did you know?"

"Ah," Ilya responded, finally getting where Shane was going with this. "You want to know moment when we stop being lovers to become lovers, yes?" he finished, raising his eyebrows suggestively, the mischief in his voice undeniable.

"Shut up," Shane said reflexively through his uncontrollable blushing and smiling. "That word is still forbidden, remember."

"Is good word. I don't know why you don't like it."

"Can you stop arguing semantics and answer the question?"

"What is semantics?"

"I know you know this one. I have already explained it to you."

"Have you?"

"Yes."

"Then, you must have done poor job because I don't remember."

"Ilya!"

"Shane."

"Just…" Shane took a deep breath, trying not to get tangled in the fond exasperation that drove fifty percent of their exchanges. "Come on. When did you know?"

Ilya seemed to consider whether to push it further, a battle between his enjoyment of yanking Shane's chain and his newfound ability for sincerity. Shane saw the moment when Ilya decided to actually answer him. His blue eyes lost some of their humor. And having Ilya look at him with this serious expression that hid nothing was still as devastating as it had been the first time he had seen it a few days ago. Shane wondered if he would ever get used to it. He never wanted to.

"It's difficult to say," Ilya finally answered. "I pretended for a long time that it was just… being curious."

"Yeah…" Shane had also denied his own confused feelings for a really long time. Years, even.

"It was moments, here and there," Ilya continued, unhurried. "That I knew you were trouble."

"Moments like what?"

"When you folded your clothes."

"What?"

"It was so cute."

"You mean, the first time?"

"Da."

A mix of elation and disbelief swirled inside Shane's chest. Embarrassment too. He had felt so awkward taking his clothes off in front of Ilya. But excited. He had been so afraid Ilya would make fun of him, of his inexperience, of his eagerness. Which he had, of course. But not in a mean way. Never in a mean way.

"What else?" Shane asked, his voice hoarse. He had said moments. He couldn't stop now.

"When you responded to sext." He started to make a face and continued, "Maybe twice, I don't know." This was the worst Canadian accent Shane had ever heard.

"What's wrong with that answer?" Shane asked, semi-affronted. Ilya had this wonderful ability to insult him when he was complimenting him. Or maybe it was the other way around. In any case, it was very confusing. Which was why Shane was getting mad and fighting a smile at the same time.

"Nothing," Ilya responded, deadpan. "Accuracy very important when sexting."

"Fuck you."

"That was another moment when I knew. I was trying to be sexy, and you were making me smile instead. Trouble."

"Oh," was all Shane could say to that.

“Now, you. You tell me moments when you knew,” Ilya demanded, before smirking in a way that meant nothing good. “But it might be different for you. You probably fell in love with me from first sight. Is why you came to introduce yourself, yes?”

Shane flushed. “It wasn’t love at first sight, you asshole.” He paused to gather his thoughts. “I…” He remembered his vow to be honest. With Ilya, with himself. “I had no idea why I wanted to talk to you so much. You were mesmerizing on the ice. I was so used to being the best player, it was exciting to meet someone who could be on my level, you know.”

Ilya hummed. “I beat you, that day.”

“I remember.”

“Okay, so not first sight. When was moment, then?”

It was so strange not to have an answer to the question he had asked in the first place. Maybe that was why he had asked Ilya. Understanding the timeline on Ilya’s feelings might shed some light on Shane’s.

“I don’t think I have moments like you do. It was more… I had an inkling I might be different, right?” As he thought about it, he looked at the trees outside, a bright green in the sun. “But I didn’t want to think about it. I buried it so far. And I tried, you know. With girlfriends and stuff. But I didn’t understand what the big deal was. I always had to focus, I would overthink everything. It felt like failing at practice. But then,” Shane breathed out, his mind going back to that moment in the gym, the jolt of lighting he had felt when their fingers had touched, “I met you. You made my mind go quiet. For the first time in my life, I knew exactly what I wanted, like instinct. I have spent so much time trying to find that feeling with other people. For me, I think it was a slow acceptance that it was because of you.”

Shane was almost out of breath, having run a marathon in his mind. It was a level of honest introspection he rarely displayed. Finally, he dared to look at Ilya, and was not surprised to find his boyfriend’s eyes fixed on him with an intensity that seared Shane’s soul. Ilya reached up and kissed Shane softly, reminding him that this part of his life was over. Ilya pulled back, and they just stared at each other for a while, delighted to be able to do so.

Shane smiled. “Do I get another moment?”

Ilya huffed playfully. “I guess so. Let me think.” His mood became somber then. “Ah yes.”

“What?” Shane asked when Ilya didn’t immediately continue, a sudden anxiety soaring in him.

“Russia,” was all Ilya said.

But then, that was all he really needed to say for Shane to know what he was talking about. “Oh. You mean, the Olympics?”

“Da.”

Shane had been so excited initially. But then Carter had mentioned the danger for gay athletes, and Shane had gotten scared. His unease had risen when Ilya hadn't responded to his message. And then Ilya had told him to get lost, basically. Shane didn't understand how that amounted to a moment.

"Why is that a moment?"

"By then I knew you were trouble for me. You made me," he paused, clearly looking for the right word, "soft, yes? Like weak."

Shane frowned, not sure how to take this. "I made you weak?"

"Not weak like bad. But weak, like without my armor."

"Oh, you mean, vulnerable?"

"Da, vulnerable. I couldn't be vulnerable in Russia."

For all that Ilya had opened up about his family in recent months, there was still a lot that Shane didn't know. He never knew how to ask the questions without being pushy, and he still remembered all the times Ilya had cut short the conversation regarding this subject. Yet, Shane remained curious, and it was probably the right time to be discussing this.

"What was going on?" he asked tentatively.

"My father was very mad about Russian team losing. Ashamed of me. But still parading me in front of government officials. Was very bad."

"I'm sorry," he said sincerely, unable to imagine his parents not being supportive of him. "It was clearly not your fault, your team played like shit. There was nothing you could have done."

Ilya swallowed visibly and stroked Shane's face tenderly, letting his fingers speak of his gratitude. After a moment or two, he spoke. "Even though I avoided you, you were still trouble."

"How so?" Shane asked, worriedly wondering if someone had seen them talking in the stands.

"I saw Sasha that night."

Okay, so not about the stands, then. "Who's Sasha?"

"My coach's son."

It dawned on him like taking a hockey stick in the ribs. "Oh."

"Sasha was looking very seductive, and yet I wasn't interested."

"No?"

“No, I kept thinking about your boring text instead, and your sincere eyes when you asked if I was okay.”

Shane smiled through the bittersweet memory. “I was so confused. You were hot and cold with me. I had no idea where I stood with you.”

“I know. I am sorry.”

“I mean, I understand. Now. It was unsafe. And we are not very good at keeping a distance, are we?”

Ilya looked pointedly at their current position, and Shane laughed before he was dragged further down memory lane. Thinking of the Olympics made him think of the next time they had met. He found himself unable to leave that scab alone.

“What about the MVP awards in Vegas?”

Ilya pursed his lips, feigning ignorance. “What about them?”

Shane raised his eyebrows. “Oh, so there was nothing memorable about them?”

“Beside that I won MVP?”

“Yes, beside that, you asshole.”

Ilya sighed, letting go of the act. “I was still pretending that I had it under control. That it was just sex. Russia scared me, but I couldn’t stay away.”

Something unclenched in Shane at hearing Ilya say he had been scared too.

“I mean, I didn’t mind the sex,” Shane said successfully without stammering. “You know that I like it when you take control.” Ilya smiled in that sexy way of his. “But, that night, when we…” Shane was unable to finish, caught in the echo of the emptiness that had overtaken him in that elevator.

“I didn’t take good care of you that night, yes?” Ilya asked somberly, regret coating his voice.

“You didn’t get up to say goodbye. We didn’t…”

“What?” Ilya asked with insistence, intent on having Shane name his wrongdoing.

“We didn’t kiss,” Shane finally said, letting go of this private hurt and of the shame that had surrounded it. He had felt weak in that moment. He had believed Ilya unbothered by the curtness of their goodbye. It had reinforced the idea that their relationship had been based on sex alone, and that Shane had been failing by wanting more. He had been already failing morally by sleeping with his archrival, and he couldn’t even do that right.

Looking at Ilya now, the sadness in his blue eyes was glaring. It was brimming with remorse. Which was not Shane’s intention. But before he could say anything, Ilya spoke.

“I always want to kiss you. I wanted to kiss you that night, like I wanted to kiss you in Saskatchewan that first day. I was too stupid because I was too scared. If I had been brave, I would have done this.”

He leaned up and kissed Shane with an intensity that almost broke him. Shane grabbed onto Ilya’s hair to ground himself, as he would otherwise be completely lost. There was nothing but Ilya, his lips, his tongue caressing his. There was no mistaking the depth of Ilya’s love.

They eventually parted. Shane, moved enough to be courageous, whispered Russian words stolen from Ilya’s lips. The same words he had been practicing in his head ever since he had heard them. “Ya tebya lyublyu.”

Ilya’s eyes widened before he covered Shane’s face in kisses, whispering those words back, writing them into Shane’s skin until they reached his bones where they would live forever.

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