

## Just like her, maybe

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| Characters:      | <a href="#">Ilya Rozanov</a> , <a href="#">Shane Hollander</a> , <a href="#">Irina Rozanova</a> , <a href="#">Svetlana Vetrova</a>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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# Just like her, maybe

by [Amiera](#)

## Summary

Ilya knew sadness could kill, and it could do it quietly like it took his mother.

So he stayed charming, desirable, and useful. He never asked for reassurance, didn't get needy.

He would never admit he needed Shane. Right?

## Notes

Dialogue in italics represents Russian

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

Ilya knew he was her favorite son.

He didn't quite see it when he was a kid, but it was painfully obvious looking back.

Andrei gravitated the most around their father. He always wanted to impress their father from a young age. First born son; he was meant for big things, that was what people expected from him. But that never happened.

Ilya was the one that did big things, the one that succeeded in a way that earned their father's respect. And he was the one that Irina loved the most. Maybe that's why Andrei hated him. Ilya could understand that.

He remembered being little and his mother always hugging him, always wanting him close. His mother was his safe place; the person that understood the softness in him that he so desperately tried to bury all his life so his father wouldn't reject him.

*"My sweet child, mama loves you."*

*"I love you too, mama."*

She was so beautiful; she had the kindest smile and pretty hair.

His mama always kissed his forehead, his cheeks. It was a warmth and devotion that he never experienced past twelve, but that shaped him forever.

She was kind, the kindest person Ilya ever met. She was soft, her touch never hurt, never caused pain. His mama enjoyed music and dancing. She liked dresses, and make up; he loved getting new coats and shoes. But she wasn't always happy enough to wear them.

When she was having sad days, she liked being outside with Ilya, watching him play, breathing together in the cold and seeing their breaths in the air.

*“Mama, come.”*

Irina smiled and shook her head; she just stayed watching Ilya with a fond look on her face. Ilya remembered feeling the cold wind in his face, giggling while running around, and feeling safe just because his mama’s eyes were on him.

Those were sad days for her, but Ilya knew she still made it fun for him. She still watched him play, she still took him outside despite barely looking presentable herself. She took care of Andrei, of him; made sure they were dressed up nicely. His mama made them food, but didn’t eat herself when she was sad.

There were sad days, then there were bad days. The kind of bad where his mother didn’t get out of bed at all. Where the house felt heavy, the air thicker. Andrei sometimes made bread with meat, or bread with cheese and butter for their mother; she smiled and thanked him, but the food stayed untouched on the bedtable.

Sometimes her sadness was so overpowering that Ilya found her resting on the floor more than once.

*“Mama?”*

*“Mama is okay,”* she would whisper from her spot on the floor. Curled up and taking little space.

Ilya always laid down next to her during those moments. It was just something that he did.

*“Go play with Andrei,”* his mother would insist.

*"I want to stay with you."*

Ilya always stayed.

He stayed close to her, back to her chest and letting his mama hold him. He curled up next to her on the bed when she was too sad to get up, and he even curled up next to her on the floor. He didn't mind. But he didn't grasp at that moment that what they were doing wasn't normal.

Mother weren't supposed to be so sad that they couldn't get up from the floor. Sadness shouldn't be so heavy to carry that it literally made her unable to move from the spot.

*"I love you, mama."*

*"I love you, my sun."*

Ilya would stare at the gaps of sunlight, where his mother's vision was stuck too often. Glancing outside the window out her room.

When Andrei found them like that, he often told father. When Andrei started getting older and mama didn't make lunch, he also told father.

*"We can eat whatever; we don't need lunch every day,"* Ilya would tell Andrei to defend their mama from being too sad to cook. He didn't care about being hungry, he could eat straight from the fridge. He didn't need a real meal like his brother apparently did.

*"I can cook."* He couldn't, he didn't know how to. But for his mother, he would learn.

*"We don't cook, Ilya. She is the one supposed to cook."*

Ilya didn't understand what the big deal was. They could open a can. They could eat pickles. They could eat bread or cold meat. There was no need for a big meal every day.

But to their father, it was a big deal.

He didn't like seeing her laying down. He didn't respect or understand her sad and bad days.

*"Lazy woman."*

*"Bad mother."*

*"Bad wife."*

Ilya's chest hurt whenever his father insulted his mother like that.

She wasn't bad. She was just sad.

It was like she had something inside her ribs that made her sad sometimes. Like a flower that bloomed inside her ribcage, and made her tired when they died.

Flowers had a life span. Ilya always imagined her mother had growing flowers inside her. When they were healthy and big and colorful—she was okay. She smiled, she hummed, she danced, she got up and dressed up. Then the flowers slowly died, until they rot. Like all flowers did. So when they were dying inside his mother's ribcage, she was down. She didn't have strength, she was hurting and needed rest.

Ilya understood that.

He hated that his father didn't.

*“What are you doing?”*

Their father got home early one day, and saw Ilya on the floor keeping his mama company.

His father’s angry face scared Ilya; it got red, the veins popping out, his eyes mean. His mama never deserved to be looked at like that, with so much contempt.

*“Having your child lay on the floor like a dog!”*

He wasn’t a dog. He was her child.

*“Father.”*

But his father was focussed on his mother. He grabbed her by the arm, hard in a way that Ilya knew it hurt. He got her roughly on her feet and yelled on his face until his face was swollen.

Ilya stayed frozen on the side, watching his mama get yelled at, her arms squeezed in a tight grip. He couldn’t react; the venom dripping from his father’s mouth was suffocating; it invaded the entire home.

*“Come, Ilya.”* His father grabbed him by the arm next.

His father didn’t hurt him. He just handled him roughly, but nothing that was too much or something he couldn’t handle. Sometimes he wished he did hurt him instead of his mother, maybe that would have made a difference. Maybe if his father took his frustration more on him, his mama would still be there.

*“I want to stay with mama,”* he whispered while being dragged.

*“You have practice, you can’t.”*

He was old enough to understand that something was wrong with his mother, but he was too young to have any power to truly do something to stop it.

His mama had pills. He always saw her taking them, but never more than two at the time.

When he was little, he asked if he could try them. His mother grew very serious, and lowered herself to his eye level.

*“You will never touch those, Ilya. Those are mama’s. Made for me, to make me better. If you take them, they will hurt you, do you understand?”*

He didn’t, not at that time. But he never saw his mother so serious, so he believed her. He wasn’t allowed to touch those pills because they would hurt him.

*“Do you know you are mama’s sun?”*

They had a little mantra for before bed.

*“Yes.”*

*“Who’s mama’s sunshine?”*

*“Me.”* He always beamed during those moments.

*“Who’s mama’s moon?”* His mother kissed his forehead and then rubbed their noses together.

*“Me.”*

*“That’s right, my little tiger.”*

His mama was his everything. In a world where his brother didn’t like him, and his father was not around much, his mother occupied a lot of space. He wasn’t a normal kid, for many reasons. He always had sports and lessons and matches. Something that separated them from the rest because he never had enough time to truly bond with anyone.

He was different too, from the regular kids. Not only because of how serious he took sports. He knew it. But he couldn’t understand it until he was older and learned how to put up an act.

Svetlana was the kid that he always ran around with. The one that tugged his hand to play and made him laugh until his belly hurt.

He started playing more with Svetlana and less with Mama. That didn’t make his mama angry or upset, but during that time the atmosphere of the house got worse. His mother was quieter, smaller. She didn’t want to chat before bedtime with Ilya like she always did before.

She took more pills than before too. Ilya had always seen her take one or two, now she was taking two at a time, more than one time a day. Sometimes she was falling asleep on the couch, on the kitchen chairs. When Ilya saw her, he always made sure to help her walk to her room and get her in bed before father got home.

Father always got furious when she was asleep around the house, but the bed wasn’t so bad. It made his father sigh, and mutter angry words, but at least he didn’t drag her around.

*“Mama,”* Ilya whispered while putting a blanket on her

"Hm?" his mama barely opened her eyes, but gave him a soft smile when she saw it was him.

*"I got you to bed. You can't sleep around the house,"* he patted her hair, like she always did to him. He always mirrored the affection she gave him all his life. *"You know that."*

*"I know, my sunshine."* She opened her arms for him to lay with her. *"Forgive me."*

He lay for a moment with her, *"I don't have to forgive you, I just don't want father to be mad at you."*

His mother looked at him for a moment, cupped his face with her hand. *"Still. Forgive me, Ilya."*

Even on her bad days, his mama was so tender, so soft with him. Her arms were always open, ready for a hug; there was always love to give, and his face was always caressed by her small hands.

*"Do you forgive me?"*

Ilya didn't understand why his mother was asking for forgiveness in a way that carried so much heaviness. He saw a tear run down one side of her face and he frowned. He reached to catch it. *"I forgive you, mama."*

He would always forgive her.

When he found her, Ilya thought she was just laying on the floor, like they usually did. At first there was nothing unusual, she was curled up, looking at the window.

Ilya always got her up and put her on the bed to avoid father from getting angry, but this time he felt like getting down with her, like when he was little. Laying with her for a while.

He had gotten home from practice, and they were alone in the house. He felt like acting little until his brother and father got there and peace was ruined.

Ilya got down next to her.

Something was off.

When he touched her, her skin wasn't warm.

Ilya flinched away, then fully looked at her face.

He crawled back on the floor when he saw the look on his mother's face, until his back hit the wall. Her eyes were half-open, her skin had no color; she didn't look right.

*"Mama?"* His voice was choked.

His child brain tried to make sense of what he was seeing, of what was happening. This couldn't be happening. This couldn't be real.

He crawled back to her, daring to move away from the safety of the wall. He yelled for her to wake up, he moved her. But she was so cold, so still. He shook her gently, then harder, and panic rose in sharp waves.

It was not that she was exhausted. Her chest wasn't moving.

He remembers that he begged her, and stupidly, absurdly, thought that maybe she was coming back.

But her eyes didn't move, she didn't smile at him. Ilya held her face, feeling it cold—too cold.

*“Mama, wake up.”* He lay his face on her chest, listening to the deafening silence. There was no thump, no familiar song of his mama's heartbeat. There was just silence.

She was ignoring him, because she was no longer there.

His brain absorbed the image forever.

It never faded, it got fossilized.

There was no gentle explanation. There was silence, stillness, and the image of his mother's lifeless body. Voices filled the house that day, floating past him as he stayed underwater, unmoving.

No one explained properly. So he understood that sadness had killed her.

*“An accident.”* It was called.

*An accident? Accidents can be prevented, right?*

*Maybe he should have done something?*

*What if he had come home earlier? Would the accident never have happened?*

*What if he had noticed something? What if he had done something different?*

*"Ilya, it was an accident."* His father never talked about it with him. But sometimes Ilya grew too upset, enough that he thought his father would strike him. Enough that his heart would beat so fast he thought he was going to die.

His father was relentless criticism, cold. He represented impossible standards, he was a man that controlled, that believed strength was silence, and weakness was a failure.

*"Your mother was a weak woman,"* his father was strangely trying to comfort him.

Ilya was sobbing so hard he couldn't breathe, he felt a band in his chest. He wanted to argue against that statement.

*She was not weak!*

*She was sad, she needed help.*

*She was not weak. She was not selfish.*

But he couldn't even speak at that moment.

*"She was weak. But you are not, okay? You will get through this."* His father was being the softest he had ever been, he even held his cheek.

But they never spoke about his mother again. And it was drilled inside his mind that tenderness was weakness. That if you were soft, you got crushed like Mama did. That if you didn't harden up, the world took you out.

He lived with a crushing guilt forever. He just never spoke about it.

He couldn't stop seeing her, it was like that image was imprinted in the back of his eyes.

Svetlana was the closest person he had now, and he could barely even speak to her about his mother.

She never put it into words, she just hugged him extra hard when he missed his mother. She knew him so well that he didn't have to say things out loud with her.

*"Can you...come visit her with me?"*

Svetlana held his hand every time he visited his mama's grave. They were just two children, holding hands in the silence of the cemetery, staring at a grave and trying to make sense out of it.

*"You can cry with me,"* Svetlana always told him when his eyes got teary.

*"I don't need to cry."*

He couldn't allow himself to get sad. Sadness could kill, and it could do it quietly like it took his mother.

*"But it is okay to cry, at least with me."*

He squeezed her hand. *"I don't have to cry."*

Being too sad was dangerous. He had to be hard to endure and not become like his mama.

Svetlana would just lay her head on his arm and let him be. Didn't force him to cry, didn't force him to talk. And Ilya loved her deeply for it. They were allowed to just exist together,

in a way that he wasn't allowed to exist with anyone else yet.

When he grew up, he tried to repress anything related to his mama at first.

While becoming a teenager and young adult he developed an excellent sense of humor, as deflection. He became funny, seductive; everything was so controlled and masked. Emotion wasn't something to be expressed, it was something you monitor, you contain.

You don't let emotion control you, it was the other way around.

Ilya didn't trust sadness. He couldn't. He didn't allow himself to feel it for so long.

He didn't cry, he didn't allow himself to be sad. Because he had seen what it did.

The concept solidified in his mind, because hardness made you survive.

His father was hard, and he survived. His mother didn't.

He only allowed himself to love Svetlana deeply. Because loving deeply meant that you were at risk of finding someone cold and unresponsive one day. It meant that person could leave you in a second and your life would never be the same. Svetlana was a safe space, because he knew she wasn't sad. But he couldn't risk loving anyone else; he had to keep everyone at arm's length.

He learned that no one saves you from grief, you just have to learn to carry it quietly. That's what he did with his own grief, but he couldn't do that twice. He couldn't open up enough to endure that loss again.

Other people's despair terrified him. He couldn't handle people he cared about being sad, being hurt. He instinctively tried to fix everyone he cared about, even when keeping people at arm's length he still had loved ones. And he learned to fix, to distract, to deflect, to provide.

Sadness wasn't pain for him, it was a warning sign, a threat.

Shane represented something terrifying to Ilya. It was warmth, it was something that started to feel too close to love. To something too deep he didn't plan on letting in.

Hooking up was fun. But falling in love didn't feel like joy to Ilya. At least not at first.

It felt like danger.

At first, he convinced himself that whatever was going on with him and Hollander was chemistry. Then it became convenience, then it was habit. Hollander was easy to be around, he laughed at his jokes, he enjoyed his body.

Hollander doesn't ask too many questions, and that is perfect for Ilya. He fit into his life in a way that didn't require major rearranging. That was what he told himself for a while.

But after years, his body started betraying him. All that control started crumbling bit by bit.

His attention started to track Shane automatically. His stomach started doing weird flips when holding Shane, and he started to smile impossibly bigger. His chest began to tighten when he couldn't meet Shane. He felt wrong when Shane was distant or upset.

At first, every warm feeling Shane gave him got shadowed by fear. He felt the need to put distance. He feared that if he let himself fall into that, he'd be right back in that room of his childhood home, heart pounding.

He had trouble trusting how good it feels. How good Shane makes everything feel.

Shane started to look at him with true, open, steady affection. It made Ilya internally recoil. Not because it was unwanted, but because Shane's presence was warm, alive, and present in a way that felt dangerous. Shane crawled inside his skin, making home inside his ribs, inch by inch.

Shane started to take more and more space inside Ilya's chest. Warming his heart with just one look, drastically affecting his mood with just one action. That was too much power in the hands of Shane that Ilya was allowing. It felt reckless to allow it.

His instincts scream at him to regulate it. To keep things not serious, light. Because he had never fallen in love the way people talk about it.

The rush, the surrender. He had always put up resistance. He was fine performing for Shane; being entertaining, sharp. He made it seem effortless. Ilya always knew exactly which version of himself to offer to people.

The tease.

The flirt.

The asshole.

The captain.

The man that doesn't need anything.

But Shane stayed in a way that was different. Ilya was used to people enjoying him and wanting him; that was not rare. But Shane didn't just want the performance—he wanted everything.

Shane wanted his silences, the moments where the mask fell a little. The moments in which his eyes went distant, and things went quiet. Shane wanted to exist with him. To hold his hand. To lay together. Shane wanted to be around him even when Ilya didn't like himself. And he didn't know what to do with that.

He felt Shane's attention like it was heat burning his skin. He felt exposed, open. He had kept Shane at a careful distance; it was close enough to touch, but far away for nothing vital to be exposed and potentially wounded.

He had told himself that there was control in what they were doing. Those things were safe.

But their love didn't announce itself, it just happened, invading his skin, his bloodstream, his lungs.

His body kept betraying him. It started relaxing around Shane, he oriented his body towards Shane without thinking, without being aware of what he was doing. He started smiling at Shane, openly, not in secret. And silence with Shane didn't feel like a threat.

He couldn't really stop it. He screamed at himself to stop getting comfortable, but there was no way to stop it. So instead, he stayed vigilant.

He kept Shane closer than he would have kept anyone, but he kept things light. He stayed charming, desirable, and useful. He never asked for reassurance, didn't get needy. He didn't admit he needed Shane.

He didn't let himself imagine a future, or to even think past today. He couldn't afford that. Because imagining a future, meant imagining a loss. And he simply couldn't take it.

There were moments in which he pulled away, confusing Shane. It made him feel guilty, going cold. He never wanted to make someone feel like his dad made people feel. That coldness that confused you and made you feel like a little kid. But sometimes he had to pull away, he needed space, because he cared too much.

Because the attachment he was feeling for Shane felt like standing on the edge of a cliff.

His fear isn't dramatic. It never is. It's just constant, and quiet.

He feared that he would need Shane in a way that Ilya couldn't afford. He couldn't lean into that weakness.

And what scared him the most, is that if Shane saw all of him, he'd leave.

But he didn't. Shane didn't leave.

Shane stayed the same with him. Whether Ilya was shining brighter than the sun or being distant. He didn't punish Ilya for withdrawal, he just remained. Shane was steady, present, and unmoved by defenses that usually scared people off.

It was disorienting for Ilya.

And panic set in, because love meant a slow erosion of his defenses. Meant waking up standing inside the thing he swore he'd never enter again.

But Shane didn't feel anything like the sadness that took his mother. Shane felt solid, warm, living, breathing.

And slowly, Ilya was confronted by the knowledge that he was not only scared to lose people, but he was scared that they would see that he carried sadness.

The sadness that was deemed weak, frowned upon.

It was not despair, or collapse; no one would ever be able to see what he carried. But a sadness that was like a weight in his chest for no clear reason, a heaviness that was on him even on good days.

He had learnt not to question it, only to manage it.

It was prohibited to let that sadness in; he saw where it could lead.

He learned not to let it show. He didn't want Shane to see it, because he remembered how his father used to look at his mother when she was quiet. Irritation and contempt. Because her sadness was deemed a flaw, something that should have been corrected.

So when he felt the sadness, he disciplined it.

He kept moving. kept joking, kept performing. He kept functioning and being productive. He kept winning, being sharp, entertaining. Things stayed manageable, contained.

But inherited traits can be dangerous. And people back home always told him he looked so much like his mama. That he had his mama's eyes.

Ilya always smiled, because that was a compliment, but at the same time, he remembered so clearly how his mother's eyes looked when she stared at nothing.

Shane never demanded happiness. He never pushed.

"I love you." He felt Shane's lips brushing against his cheek, his temple.

Ilya didn't realize he'd lain down on the bed. He was looking for a charger, then the bed looked comfortable, and his bones felt heavy. He had sunk into the mattress and curled up on himself, looking outside the window.

"I love you," Ilya always said back.

He had gotten lost in thought. Lying down, and Shane lying right next to him. Slowly bringing him back from a place Shane didn't fully understand. Because Shane didn't fully

know about his mama's sadness, no one did.

Only him. It was his to carry, it didn't belong to anyone else.

Ilya thought he had been the best he could be, that his mama would be proud. But sometimes he couldn't stand to be where she could not see him.

He felt Shane's arms circling his waist, a kiss on the back of his head, the warmth of Shane's chest on his back.

Because when he wasn't loud, when he was quieter, Shane noticed.

And his brain tortured him for it.

*Stop it.*

*Don't let him see this. Don't be like this.*

*Don't let this become familiar for him.*

He didn't want Shane searching for signs without knowing what to do with them.

"You can tell me anything, you know that." Shane cradled him against his chest, kissing Ilya's hair.

"I know," Ilya muttered.

Shane loved him, deeply, openly. It was devotion, and warmth, and a love that Ilya never thought would ever be possible. And he loved Shane back, so much it scared him.

So why did his mind torture him? He had been feeling like a tall child recently. A crying tall child, and that was shameful. Something to be ashamed of.

*Please hurry, please leave me. Just leave me. I can't breathe.*

“You want forever with me, yes?” Ilya asked, trying not to let tears slip.

“Yes,” Shane answered instantly, no hesitation. “Yes, I want forever with you. I want everything with you.”

Shane gently grabbed his chin, making him look up. “Please tell me what has been on your mind.”

*I can't.*

*It's screaming at me.*

*I don't even understand it myself*

So instead of talking, Ilya kissed Shane deeply. They kissed, and held each other. And Shane held him so tight that it allowed him to breathe again.

When he told Shane about his mama, he told him he didn't want Shane to think his mother was weak.

And for a second, he realized he may be including himself in that statement.

Because he is bright, he is functional, he is funny, he is *fine*.

But his mama's sadness is inside him; he just can't let it fully inhabit him.

## End Notes

Thank you so much for reading, I would love to know your thoughts!

Kudos and comments are so appreciated <3

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