

Your Life in Him

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Your Life in Him

by [MoonlitInsomniac](#)

Summary

“Hi Irina.”

Ilya feels his blood still in his veins. His vision almost immediately blurs at the sound of his mother’s name falling so gently from Shane’s lips. Shane rambles something, almost to himself, before:

“I’m Shane. Shane Hollander. And I’m in love with your son, Ilya.”

Ilya’s breath catches, heart lurching in his chest, fluttering almost painfully as the realization hits him: He’s introducing himself to her.

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or Shane talks to Ilya’s mom, Ilya overhears.

Notes

Sometimes I like to write sad things, my apologies.

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

The kitchen is warm, the kind of warmth that comes from too many appliances running at the same time and the setting sun. Shane is finishing washing the leftover dishes from dinner, his sleeves rolled up as he rinses off the last plate. Ilya is leaning against the counter, phone and socks in hand, already dressed for his late night slot at the rink. He mutters to himself as he clicks on his phone to skip the song that floated through their speaker.

He's had a late night solo practice every week for as long as Shane can remember. Ilya has always said it's because he likes to be able to focus on what he feels he needs to fix, doing drills until the motions feel right again. But Shane imagines it's also a bit therapeutic for Ilya, who likes occasional alone time. It must clear his head; just him and the ice. He can go as fast as he wants, and doesn't have to stop or shift around anyone. He can shoot the puck over and over until the tension in his shoulders melts away. He can connect to the speaker and play all of his strange music without anyone saying anything. He smiles faintly, imagining Ilya on the ice, blasting music, lost in the motion of it all.

Shane finds Ilya's strange taste in music a bit endearing. He moves away from the sink, grabbing a hand towel to dry his hands. He leans against the counter, letting the warmth from the setting sun seep into his shoulders, and listens as Ilya's playlist shifts again. One second it's a major pop hit, upbeat and bright, and the next a quiet indie band that Shane is sure only Ilya has ever heard of. On occasion, a Russian song will drift through. Normally Ilya skips them, but today he lets it linger. Shane notices a brief flicker in Ilya's expression, a softness around his eyes, a tiny tightening of his lips. As if the music had brushed against a memory; a thread of home, faint and delicate as it floats through the air. Ilya hums along quietly, just for himself.

"Late ice tonight?" Shane asks, as he finishes drying off his hands. He already knows the answer, but words always feel better than silence to him.

"Mhm," Ilya responds, bending to put his socks on, his fingers brushing the floor as he pulls them up. "Starts at nine."

Shane hums in response, plopping down at the kitchen table. "Extra late tonight."

"Was the only slot available, I can cancel if you want."

"No," Shane replies easily. "It's not a problem, we don't have any plans. Plus your backhand has been a little weak lately, you need the practice."

"Ah," Ilya smirks, weaving around Shane and pressing a kiss behind his ear. "Asshole."

Shane laughs, the sound low and easy, shaking his head. "Can you put the dishes away for me?"

"Mhm. Anything for you." Ilya moves slowly, almost lazily.

Shane lets his eyes follow him, noting the familiar motion, the effortless way he occupies the kitchen. Ilya smoothly starts putting away the dishes Shane had washed. Shane sits back in

his chair, noticing the way Ilya's shoulders tilt when he reaches for the upper cabinet, his soft hum barely audible over the Russian song. It's the kind of moment that folds around them like a blanket. Shane lets the warmth of it settle in his chest.

"I don't think I've ever heard this song. Did you just find it?" Shane asks, tilting his head slightly.

"No, is very old. My mother used to listen to it." Ilya's fingers linger on the edge of the cabinet for a moment, brushing lightly against the wood.

"Oh," Shane says softly. "It's nice."

Ilya hums again, low and barely audible. "It's sad, the words. She liked sad music."

"Yeah?" Shane murmurs, turning towards Ilya in his chair, hands resting lightly on the table.

"Mhm," Ilya says, stacking a plate into the cabinet. He pauses, then his shoulders slump just slightly. "She told me happy songs made her nervous. Maybe because they didn't make sense to her. Is funny because to me, she was always smiling... Well, not funny, it's sad. I wish she was happier."

"Me too," Shane says softly, swallowing. He keeps his hands still on the table, like moving might break the fragility around them.

"She was sad her whole life, and I had no idea until I found her," Ilya continues, voice unstrained though his face tightening briefly at the memory. "She wrote a note before she did it. I was not supposed to be home early that day, but practice got canceled."

Shane freezes mid-breath, afraid that even the smallest sound might shatter something in Ilya, making him crumple under the weight of it all. They had never spoken about his mother like this. Shane had always assumed she was a sacred topic, something Ilya kept just for himself, so no one could ever take her from him again.

"I should not have read the note, but I didn't know what it was," Ilya murmurs, resting his hands on the counter now. His gaze drifts to the rapidly fading sunlight outside, shoulders still slightly slumped.

Shane doesn't move, he can't. He feels as though all the blood in his body has been replaced with stone. He wants to run over and scoop Ilya up. He wants to take the memory of his mother's lifeless body, the words in her note, and erase them from his memory. Leaving him with only the good to remember.

Though, if he left Ilya with only the good memories of his mother, the ones where she was truly happy, he imagines he wouldn't leave Ilya with many memories of her at all. And perhaps that's why Ilya keeps all of his memories of her to himself, so she stays his to hold; exactly as she was when she was alive.

"She... she wrote that she had nothing to show for her life," Ilya says, voice low, careful. "No accomplishments. Nothing she could leave behind. It's sad she thought that."

“It is.” Shane swallows, his breath tight in his chest. He doesn’t say anything else because he isn’t sure what else he *could* say. It isn’t necessarily the conversation that makes his heart ache, though it is unimaginably sad, it was how casual Ilya’s voice is. He speaks as if this is something that happens to everyone. Like he has played it over in his head so many times that it’s become mundane.

Ilya sets the last plate in the cabinet and rubs the back of his neck, a small habitual gesture. Shane is well aware of the ways Ilya self regulates, and that has always been one of them.

“I wish she could have met you,” Ilya says. He smiles so gently, as if he’s picturing the moment the two would meet, and Shane’s heart absolutely shatters. “I think she would have liked you. She would have been glad I found someone who treats me right.”

“I wish I would have met her too.” Shane desperately tries to hide the lump in his throat as the song finally fades out.

Ilya tugs lightly at the curls at the base of his neck, and smiles. Except this time it’s tight and pained; as opposed to the gentle, hopeful smile he just wore. As though reality had barged in and melted away the image of Shane and his mother in the same room.

Ilya glances at the clock.

“I should get going,” he murmurs, moving to pull his jacket from the hook by the door.

The last of the sun spills across the kitchen floor, catching on the dust that drifts lazily through the air. Shane nods watching the familiar motions, the effortless way Ilya slips into routine even after a conversation like this. He pushes himself up from the chair and moves closer to the door.

“Don’t forget your gloves,” he says softly. “It’s cold out.”

Ilya nods, shrugging his shoulders into the jacket. “Okay.”

He lifts his bag, then pauses to pull his gloves from the drawer. He glances back at Shane with a small, warm smile as he slides them on.

Shane steps forward just as Ilya moves toward the door. “Come here,” he murmurs.

Ilya’s face melts into something soft as he steps in. Shane wraps his arms firmly around him and Ilya hums as he rests his chin gently on Shane’s shoulder. The tension melts from Ilya’s shoulders as Shane rocks them ever so slightly, kissing the side of Ilya’s head.

“I’ll be back soon,” Ilya says when they pull apart.

“Text me when you get there?” Shane asks.

“Of course.” Ilya presses a quick kiss to Shane’s lips, then turns toward the door.

The door clicks behind him, and the house feels emptier. Ilya’s phone disconnects from the speaker as it connects to his car, leaving the room quiet. Shane settles back at the table,

letting the silence press in around him. The house is still, but the weight of the conversation lingers.

Shane finds himself wishing he could have met Ilya's mother. That she was still alive to see the man her son has become. He wishes he could tell her how extraordinary Ilya is. He wishes he could ease some of her sadness, even now.

Shane pushes back from the table, the weight of the silence in the room becoming too much. He makes his way past the living room, desperate for fresh air, and slides open the back door. The cold air hits him the moment the door moves; sharp and unforgiving. He doesn't bother with a coat, needing something to shake loose the tightness in his chest. The sun had finally fully set and he can faintly see his breath from the cold. He steps onto the deck, the boards creaking faintly beneath his feet, and lets himself breathe in the night air.

The stars are scattered across the sky, bright and distant, endless. He leans on the railing, staring up. The cold seeps into him as he tries to let the weight of everything settle into the night instead of his chest.

He would do anything to talk to her; even just for a minute, even if she said nothing in return. He just wants her to hear him. He sighs and stares up at the stars again. And then slowly, almost without thinking, he breathes out the words:

"Hi Irina."

His voice is low and careful, almost swallowed by the night.

"I know you have no idea who I am, so you're probably really confused." He lets out a small, breathless laugh, more exhale than sound. "And you probably don't speak much English, so maybe this is useless. But I think maybe... maybe I should say it anyway."

Shane leans on the railing, gripping it lightly, letting the cold bite at his fingers. He steadies himself, clearing his throat and strengthening his voice, as if he were with Irina face to face.

"I'm Shane. Shane Hollander. And I'm in love with your son, Ilya."

He pauses, letting the words hang in the cold night, giving the wind a chance to carry them to her. He exhales slowly before speaking again.

"I just wanted to introduce myself, because I never got the chance to meet you. I wish I had." His throat tightens around the words. "I would've told you how fantastic of a job you did with him." He finds himself smiling gently at the sky.

"Ilya told me about his dad; about how he wasn't good to him." Shane swallows, feeling the ache in his chest deepen. He keeps speaking, letting the words out like small, careful breaths. "So I know, all the good in Ilya, all of it came from you."

He feels tears start to prick at his eyes as the wind blows to remind him how cold it is.

"And there's *so much* good in him, Irina. He's-" Shane shakes his head, searching. "He treats me like I built the world for him. Like I'm something precious."

He blinks hard, the burn behind his eyes sharp and immediate. He hates that the first time he's speaking to her, he's crying. He wishes he could be steadier, stronger; so she'd know he can be that for Ilya.

"He told me how sad you were sometimes. How you felt like you didn't have any accomplishments. Like you didn't leave anything behind." Shane's voice drops, fierce in its sincerity. "But Irina, if Ilya is your only life's work, then my god. *What a gift you gave the world.*"

A tear slips free before he can stop it.

"So I just wanted to say thank you. For giving me Ilya." His voice wavers. "He's everything to me. I love him so much, I don't even know how to breathe without him. I don't know who I'd be without him." He can't help the way his voice cracks. "Maybe you felt like you didn't do much with your life. But you did *everything* for mine."

He drags in a shaky breath, the cold filling his lungs all the way down. For a moment, in the still of the night, it feels like she's listening. He lifts his voice slightly, unwilling to waste it.

"You were *so brave*. You loved him so much, and he knows that. He carries it with him." Shane smiles weakly, then steadies himself again.

He looks back up at the stars, jaw trembling.

"I just want you to know he isn't alone. And as long as I'm here, he never will be. *I promise you.*" His voice breaks completely now. "I will keep him safe. No one will ever hurt him again. Not while I'm around."

A small sob shakes through him as fresh tears burn against the cold.

"I swear to you, I'll treat him with all the love and kindness you ever hoped he'd have. I love him so much." He wipes at his face with the back of his arm, breath coming uneven as he forces himself to settle.

"Thank you, Irina. Truly, if there were any way I could repay you for letting me love him, I would."

He focuses his attention on the brightest star in the sky, sure that is where she would be.

"I hope you can rest easy now. You deserve that."

He lets his head drop below his shoulders and leans against the railing a moment longer, letting the cold wrap around him and the words settle into the air. The night is still and somewhere in the quiet, he knows his words have landed, even if only in the stars.

He breathes in deeply, shivering as if he's just now registering the chill of the night, and finally pushes himself away from the railing. The deck creaks under his weight as he steps back inside, the warmth of their home hitting him like a soft wave. A shiver pulses through him at the drastic change in temperature.

He runs a hand over his face as he shakes his head. The thought of a hot shower, of the steam and water chasing away the cold that's seeped into his bones, feels urgent and necessary. The second he gets into the bathroom he turns the knob of the shower. He lets the water run for a while before getting in. He allows himself to just stand under it, letting it soak into him and warm him from the inside out.

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The car rolls to a stop as Ilya pulls into a parking spot. Luckily, the rink is only a ten-minute drive from their home, so he has plenty of time to make a playlist of the songs he wants to listen to tonight. He tosses the car into park and pulls his phone from his pocket to text Shane that he's arrived. It buzzes the second it's in his hand. A notification from the ring camera lights up his screen: *Back Deck motion detected.*

Curious, he taps it open.

A live feed pulls up. He can see Shane on their deck, settled against the railing. The cold night air swirls around him, and his breath is visible in the faint light of the porch. Ilya furrows his brow, incredulous. Did Shane not just tell him to wear his gloves because it was cold? And here he is, standing outside with nothing but short sleeves on.

Ilya can hear the wind brushing against the microphone, an almost imperceptible exhale. He presses open the section of the app where he can speak through the camera, because he will be damned if that man doesn't go get a god damn coat on.

Then Shane speaks:

"Hi Irina."

Ilya feels his blood still in his veins. His vision almost immediately blurs at the sound of his mother's name falling so gently from Shane's lips. Shane rambles something, almost to himself, before:

"I'm Shane. Shane Hollander. And I'm in love with your son, Ilya."

Ilya's breath catches, heart lurching in his chest, fluttering almost painfully as the realization hits him: *He's introducing himself to her.*

His fingers curl around the edge of his phone, knuckles white. A warmth blooms in his chest, mingling with a tightening that makes it hard to breathe. He can feel the faint hum of the car under him, the cold brushing against his face, and yet all of it fades to the edges.

Ilya swallows, careful not to make a sound, though Shane wouldn't hear him anyway. His stomach twists lightly, a strange ache of awe and tenderness. He doesn't move. He doesn't speak. He barely even exhales, afraid that if he so much as shifts, the moment will be stolen from him. He just listens, heart racing.

“I just wanted to introduce myself, because I never got the chance to meet you. I wish I had. I would’ve told you how fantastic of a job you did with him.”

Shane is standing there in the cold, his voice low and careful as he tries to reach her; even across the impossible distance of years, the distance of death. The idea that Shane is telling his mother *directly* how much he admires her makes something flutter painfully in his chest. God Ilya hopes she’s listening.

“Ilya told me about his dad. About how he wasn’t good to him. So I know, all the good in Ilya, all of it came from you.”

Ilya feels his stomach hitch, almost nauseous; a sharp catch that makes him press the phone closer to his chest to steady himself. Shane’s voice is so soft and gentle. It sounds exactly how Ilya imagined it would sound if the two had met in person. It’s sweet and intimate. So intimate that Ilya knows he shouldn’t be listening. The words were only meant for his mother to hear, but he just can’t look away.

“And there’s *so much* good in him, Irina.”

A tiny sob escapes his throat at the sincerity of the words. His heart feels both too big and too tight. It dawns on him that this is likely the first time anyone has ever spoken like this to his mother about him. The only time she has ever heard him be referred to gently, lovingly. The only time anyone has ever seen his worth outside of her own heart.

“He told me how sad you were sometimes. How you felt like you didn’t have any accomplishments. Like you didn’t leave anything behind.”

A hollow ache spreads throughout him. Shane’s voice is strong, but still impossibly gentle. Every word is deliberate, as though he’s trying to wrap her in care with his words alone. The mention of her sadness sparks something sharp in Ilya’s chest, a mingling of grief and reverence that makes his breath stutter. He swallows hard, heart pounding at the way Shane speaks to her; not with pity, but understanding. The thought that Shane is honoring her struggles, acknowledging them gently, is almost too much.

“But Irina, if Ilya is your only life’s work, then my god. *What a gift you gave the world.*”

And hearing that *is* too much.

It breaks him.

The words fall around him like sunlight through glass, sharp and warm all at once. His chest heaves, his stomach flips. The air feels suddenly too thin, as though the world has shrunk to the curve of Shane’s voice.

Shane called him a *gift*.

The thought is so wild, so *impossible*; something far too beautiful to be connected to Ilya. His heart flutters painfully, as if it were some sick joke he accidentally overheard. But Shane’s

voice is nothing short of sincere. Each syllable is tender and deliberate, threaded with a love that makes Ilya's chest ache.

Tears spill freely now, hot and relentless. His breathing turns ragged, his body shuddering with each inhale. Outside of his mother, no one has ever loved him. Not like this. Not enough to name him something valuable, never mind speak it to the sky in hopes that she might hear.

It's all too much.

A trembling overtakes him, starting in his chest and rippling all the way down to his toes. His phone slips into his lap. He folds forward, forehead pressing against the steering wheel, shoulders caving as the sobs tear out of him. It's deep and guttural.

And for the first time in his life without his mother, he knows he's loved.

"So I just wanted to say thank you. For giving me Ilya."

Ilya presses his fist to his mouth, biting down as if that might hold him together. No one has ever wanted him around. And Shane is shivering out there in the cold, thanking his mother for creating him.

"He's everything to me. I love him so much, I don't even know how to breathe without him. I don't know who I'd be without him."

The words hollow him out and fill him all at once. Ilya squeezes his eyes shut, chest aching with the weight of it all. With the certainty in the way Shane speaks of loving him, like it isn't a choice he made, but a truth he lives.

"Maybe you felt like you didn't do much with your life. But you did *everything* for mine."

The words land heavy and final, like something settling into place. Ilya's breath stutters. A quiet broken sound that he couldn't stop if he tried, escapes him.

Everything.

Not *something*. **Everything.**

His mother's worst fear, spoken aloud and answered without an ounce of hesitation. Not dismissed, not softened; Completely *undone*. The ache in his chest splits open, raw and devout all at once. Shane isn't trying to comfort her, he doesn't need to. He's telling her what he knows to be true.

Ilya curls in on himself, fingers moving to dig into his legs like an anchor. The thought that his existence alone could have been enough, *enough to give her a life that mattered*, crushes him. It feels as though, for the first time, the question she carried with her didn't echo unanswered into the dark when she went.

It ended here.

"You were *so brave*. You loved him so much, and he knows that. He carries it with him."

Ilya lets out a sound he doesn't recognize, somewhere between a breath and a sob. His shoulders shake as the words sink in, settling deep in his bones. He presses his forehead harder against the steering wheel, eyes squeezed shut. Images flicker behind his eyes: her hands in his hair, the way she hummed while she cooked, the softness in her voice when she said his name.

God, how he missed her voice.

He has spent so long being afraid that those memories were all he had left of her love, thin and fading. But Shane's voice doesn't treat it like something lost. He treats it like something alive. Like it's something Ilya has been walking around with this whole time; like she was never gone.

His heart aches, full and burning, like something inside him has finally cracked beneath the weight of it all. He thinks, distantly, that if she can hear Shane, then maybe she will believe she didn't leave a failure. Maybe hearing someone outside of Ilya telling her she was brave, will make her believe it.

"I just want you to know he isn't alone. And as long as I'm here, he never will be. *I promise you.*"

The word promise cleaves straight through him.

Ilya's breath hitches, sharp and instinctive, his body reacting before he can catch up. Alone has been the constant since her death; threaded through every room and every year after. Even when surrounded by people. Even when his name is shouted from the stands, when he's celebrated for what he can do on the ice.

Alone had always been there, unforgiving and still.

"I will keep him safe. No one will ever hurt him again. Not while I'm around. I swear to you, I'll treat him with all the love and kindness you ever hoped he'd have. I love him so much."

Something in Ilya caves completely. He presses his palm flat to his chest, as if to keep his heart from splitting apart, and melts back against the seat. His body feels unbearably full, like there's no space left for anything beyond Shane Hollander. He finally drops his head to look back at the video. He watches Shane on the ring camera, short sleeves in the cold, breath fogging in the night air, voice steady as he makes vows to the sky. Hoping, desperately, that she can hear.

"Thank you, Irina," Shane says softly. "Truly, if there were any way I could repay you for letting me love him, I would. I hope you can rest easy now. You deserve that."

The feed ends, and suddenly the only sound filling his car is his own ragged breaths. The rink lights hum faintly outside the windshield, distant and fluorescent, like another world entirely. Shane is inside now, hopefully warming up from the cold.

Ilya drags a hand down his face, palms still shaking. His body feels drained and energized at the same time. He has no idea what to do with the feeling. He tries to even out his breathing,

but a long, low whine escapes his throat.

He tilts his head back, eyes fixed on the ceiling. Shane's words still ring in his ears, echoing against every corner of his chest:

If Ilya is your only life's work, then my god. What a gift you gave the world.

There's so much good in him, Irina.

He desperately wants to call Shane. To tell him something that would make him feel as loved as he just made Ilya feel. Something that would settle into Shane's chest and live there forever. But no combination of letters could ever carry the weight of what Shane just said aloud.

So he sits, immobile. Listening to his own heartbeat and the faint rush of wind brushing against the car.

After a long moment, he exhales. Glancing over at the clock, he realizes only has 5 minutes to get inside. Reluctantly, he forces himself upright. He shoots Shane a text simply saying he's at the rink, before checking his reflection in the rearview mirror. He wipes at his face until he looks at least passable, and grabs his bag. He pushes the door open, the crisp night air biting at his cheeks, and steps out into the cold.

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The room is dark except for the silver wash of moonlight spilling across the sheets. Shane's head rests against Ilya's chest, warm and steady. His fingers tracing lazy, endless shapes over the curve of Ilya's stomach. Ilya can feel every small motion, the weight of him, the soft press of his hair against his skin; it makes his heart stutter and tilt in ways he can't control. He leans down, pressing a feather-light kiss to the top of Shane's head.

Shane shifts just enough to press his lips against the cross that rests over Ilya's heart. The touch is impossibly slow and sweet. Ilya feels his breath catch in his throat. Every nerve in his body is ablaze. His heart stutters, races, and aches all at once. The world narrows to Shane's warmth, the gentle press of his lips, the tiny motion barreling through the quiet room.

Ilya's features soften, lips parting slightly, eyes half-lidded. He feels his love for Shane swell, vast and trembling; uncontainable. His hands move almost of their own accord, curling into Shane's hair. He draws him closer and presses a kiss to his forehead. His heart thrums in his chest and his breath seems to get lost in his throat.

"She would have loved you," he whispers.

End Notes

I live for comments so pls feel free to tweet me what you thought :)

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