

Easy to love

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by [soul_wanderer](#)

Summary

"Wait till you have kids
that behave just like you.
But I did.
I did have kids that are just like me.
And I realized
how easy it was to love me"

Ilya and Shane have a son. Ilya realizes that loving him is the easiest thing he's ever done.

Notes

Based on my original post on tumblr: <https://soul-wanderer.tumblr.com/post/804357723227570176/ilya-rozanov-would-be-without-trying-to-be>

Because I couldn't not turn it into a gut-wrenching but sweet fic, so here you go - hope you enjoy it!

PS: I'm just really very soft for Ilya with children, okay? He'd be an incredible dad.

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

*"Wait till you have kids
that behave just like you.
But I did.
I did have kids that are just like me.
And I realized
how easy it was to love me.
How easy it was to be kind,
to not belittle and humiliate.
I have kids that are just like me,
but they will never feel my heartbreak."*

The first thing Ilya noticed was the sound.

It was a familiar sound, one that had shaped their lives for almost three years now, and he's not sure he'd ever get tired of hearing it.

Laughter - sharp and bright, punctuated by little breathless huffs of effort as their son ran across their lawn with the reckless confidence only a three-year-old who had never learned to be afraid of falling could possess - drifted from the backyard inside, to where Ilya was preparing his coffee before moving outside to supervise their son.

The grass was still a little damp from the morning, but Callen didn't seem to mind, kneeling on it, closely inspecting a bug that must have caught his interest, before moving on to the next best discovery, carefree and easy, soft blond curls bouncing with the movements, creating a golden halo in the morning light.

Curls that reminded Ilya of his husband winning the weeks-long discussion about who they wanted to be the biological father of their child. Not that it mattered in terms of love, but Ilya had known right from the start that this would be a losing battle for him, but it was one he lost happily and willingly, after seeing the overwhelming and fierce kind of love and joy the thought of a mini version of his husband had given him.

Ilya sat down on the back steps, elbows easily resting on his knees, hands wrapped around his mug of coffee, warm and comforting. He watched, focused, like nothing else in the world mattered right now – and if you asked him, it didn't, because nothing compared to the joy their son was experiencing on a daily basis, or the way his world slowly expanded with each new discovery he made.

Their son - small, loud, endlessly curious - existed in a world that felt impossibly soft to Ilya. A world that was void of raised voices and angry words that felt entirely too sharp and dangerous for a child. A world where love was steady and uncomplicated and was given easily with no strings attached.

Sometimes the contrast hit him so hard it felt like the air was knocked from his lungs.

He remembered, unbidden, how fear had once lived in his body. How it had made itself at home inside his chest, how it had taught him to recognize the slightest changes in the tone of his father's voice, in the expressions on his face, taught him how to brace for impact the second he identified disappointment or anger.

His father's temper had been a thing to be afraid of, a thing to look out for, a thing to avoid at all costs. His mother's voice, in contrast, had always been as careful as her smiles had been tired. She had tried, so hard, had fought, for so long, and then one day she had simply been gone, leaving behind a silence that screamed louder than anything else ever had in Ilya's life.

Ilya had been twelve when he had found her. Old enough to understand, young enough to believe, deep down, that he should have or could have done more to protect her. Even when he had hardly been able to protect himself back then, no matter how hard he tried to be the perfect son.

For years, he had been terrified of becoming that man. Terrified that cruelty could be inherited like the colour of his eyes. Terrified that anger was something that was buried deep inside his bones, just waiting to come out and destroy everything he had worked so hard to build for himself.

That fear had been the hardest part of talking about children with Shane.

At first, they had avoided that topic entirely, afraid it might actually tear them apart if they weren't on the same page about it, or if they opened up about their respective fears.

When it became unavoidable, with both of them on the brink of retiring, they were honest with each other, with each of them terrified in different ways. Shane had been concerned about the logistics, had spent countless nights researching, had needed time to sit with the idea, to imagine it until everything clicked into place for him. Ilya, on the other hand, had gone quiet, his feelings internalized, his thoughts bringing up memories he had never wanted to touch again.

What if he hurt them without meaning to?

What if he slipped up, just for one second?

What if loving them wasn't enough?

What if history repeated itself no matter how hard you tried to fight it?

Shane had listened. Really listened. Had never once rushed him or dismissed his fears or tried to argue them away. They had been there before, with Ilya being worried about his depression, the same thing that had taken his mother from him too soon, afraid the same might happen to him. He had been a steady, calming presence then, and again when they were discussing the possibility of children.

"You're scared because you care. Your father never really did", Shane had told him. The truth had stung, briefly, but Shane had been right, and somehow, that had been what it took to be brave enough to take that first step and all the steps that would follow.

Now, Ilya watched their son trying to kick his ball into the small goal they had set up, giggling like no worry in the world could ever touch him, and something in Ilya's chest

ached, not with fear, but with a quiet, devastating tenderness.

Callen was, in many ways, nothing like the boy he used to be.

Still, he saw flashes of himself in the way their son concentrated so intensely on small tasks, brow furrowed, tongue caught between his teeth. In his stubborn streaks when he really, truly, very much wanted something, anything, really. In his fierce attachment once he decided someone belonged to him, the same kind that had kept him in Shane's vicinity all those years ago. He was, in small, unmistakable ways, just like Ilya.

And loving him was so easy it almost hurt.

Behind him, the door opened and closed softly. Footsteps, quiet and familiar, crossed the deck to join him. Shane didn't announce himself, he didn't need to, years of familiar rhythms etched into their bones, becoming muscle memory.

He settled down behind Ilya, close but careful, as if checking for consent without words, something that had become almost obsolete but was still appreciated.

Then, when Ilya didn't tense up, his arms slid around his waist, warm and solid, chin resting on Ilya's shoulder.

They sat like that for a while, relaxed and calm, watching their son get frustrated at the very uncooperative soccer ball, but never once giving up anyway.

"You're thinking again," Shane said eventually - a quiet observation, not a challenge.

"Always," Ilya huffed a quiet laugh, something between amusement and something more fragile, "He is very...busy today."

"Mmh," Shane hummed in response, watching their son make full use of their expansive backyard, something that had been important to both Ilya and Shane when they had looked for a home to start a family in.

"That's one word for it", Shane smiled, something gentle settling down in his voice, adoring how much of Ilya he could see in Cal when he was running around like this, all laughter and joy.

Another stretch of silence followed, but Shane didn't push. He waited, because he knew Ilya would speak when he was ready, and he never held it against him when he didn't fill the silence with words.

"I was thinking," Ilya eventually continued, voice low, a little rough around the edges in a way that Shane was familiar with now.

"About how afraid I was. Before he was born. And after. That I would end up hurting him. Like my father did to me", he let the words linger, let them settle, leaning into Shane for comfort when his arms tightened around him just a little, grounding, reassuring.

Shane simply kept listening, having learned a long time ago it was best to not interrupt Ilya when he was sharing parts of himself – his presence was enough, keeping Ilya steady when

emotions were making him feel anything but.

“I thought... if I had a child like me, then maybe I would understand my father more,” Ilya swallowed, “That maybe it would be hard. That I would feel anger, or frustration, and it would come out all wrong.”

He looked down at his hands, curling them into fists, before slowly uncurling them again, like no anger could ever reside in them when their son was around.

“But he *is* like me. He is loud, and wild and stubborn. So stubborn”, a fond laugh slipped out just thinking about this, “And it is not hard. It is-” He searched for the right words, “Easy. To be gentle. To not be loud and mean. And...so easy to love him.”

Shane shifted slightly, pressing a kiss to the curve of Ilya’s jaw, then stilled again, holding space for Ilya’s feelings without trying to interrupt.

“I look at him,” Ilya continued, eyes never leaving their son running around the yard, “and I think, if this is how easy it is to love him, how easy it is, to love a child like that, then maybe-”, his voice cracked, still trying to wrap his head around this unspoken realization, “maybe it would not have been so hard to love me”.

The words landed between them, quiet but profound. Shane didn’t point out the tears in Ilya’s eyes, didn’t make him feel small or fragile. Simply held those feelings, with him, never for him, knowing Ilya needed to work through them himself.

“He will never know fear,” Ilya said softly, “He will never feel my anger. Will never think love means pain. And sometimes that makes me happy,” his voice faltered, “Sometimes it just makes me grieve.”

Shane kept holding on, letting the weight of it all sink in. Allowed himself to feel some of his husband’s grief, because some nights the sadness about Ilya’s childhood still quietly consumed him, too.

“You are nothing like him,” Shane said at last, quiet but firm, “and Cal is proof of that.”

Ilya softly nodded but didn’t speak up again just yet.

“Remember last week, how you told him to not play with his ball in the living room and asked him to take it outside?”, Shane recalled the memory, still fresh in his mind.

“And of course he didn’t listen. I mean, he’s *three*. And he’s just like you when you’re told No. Like it’s a challenge”, Shane couldn’t keep the amused grin off his face, but it quickly turned into something softer, fonder.

Even Ilya couldn’t help but smile a little, „He broke the stupid expensive vase”. He had teased Shane about it. Of course he had. Stupid expensive vase. Shane had told him to fuck off, for old time’s sake, but had grinned anyway.

“He broke it. And you didn’t yell once. You didn’t even get upset. Just picked him up to get him out of harm’s way and told him that you never liked that vase anyway”, Shane was very

clearly amused now, but underneath it the love he had for Ilya was evident.

“Did me a favour”, Ilya joked, eyes softening, body slowly relaxing again as the heaviness of the moment wore off.

“Of course,”, Shane snorted, “I wouldn’t be surprised if you had told him to do that”, he returned the banter, and was met with a half grin, half smirk in return.

“But that’s who you are. Gentle. Loving. Kind. And it’s almost annoying *how* good you are at this some days,” Shane was openly smiling now, the kind of smile that reached his eyes the way Ilya loved to see.

“Jealous, Hollander?” Ilya grinned, but there was no bite to it.

Before Shane could come up with a witty reply, they were brought back to the present by their son tripping over his own feet and landing on his butt, stunned for half a second before bursting into a bright giggle that was loud enough to startle a bird sitting on the fence. Ilya laughed too, helplessly, the sound pulled out of him before he could stop it.

Shane smiled against his shoulder.

Ilya closed his eyes, soaking up the ease of the moment, before hearing small feet approaching rapidly, opening his eyes and arms, catching Cal easily, with a smile on his lips.

Cal grinned then, a soft, happy, “*Papa*”, escaping his lips as he caught his breath. A simple word, once holding so much weight, reclaimed, each time it had come out of their son’s mouth, rewritten until it had conveyed nothing but love.

Then, their son let his whole weight rest against Ilya’s chest, turning soft and calm, like all the safety and love was to be found in his father’s arms. Because it was. Because Ilya had never shown him anything else. Because he would make sure that’s all he would ever know.

“I am not my father,” he whispered then, more to himself, but caught by Shane, nonetheless.

Shane’s arms tightened around both of them then, solid and warm.

“No,” he easily agreed. “You’re a really good dad.”

And for the first time, with their son in his arms and his husband holding them close, Ilya believed it without feeling the need to argue back.

End Notes

Briefly considered expanding this with Shane's struggles regarding fatherhood, but didn't want to dilute Ilya's experience. If I feel up to it, I might at some point write a companion piece with Shane processing parenthood as a neurodivergent parent.

Also, I got this whole fictional universe planned, including Scott and Kip and their kids, mostly for my own pleasure, but let's see if this becomes something more at some point, depending on the general feedback.

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